

# New pasts, presents and futures: time and space in family migrant networks between Kosovo and western Europe

Carolin Leutloff-Grandits

For many families in Kosovo, migration is an integral part of life. This is true even if they do not themselves migrate but, rather, seem 'stuck' in a village such as the one in south Kosovo where I conducted fieldwork between 2011 and 2013.<sup>1</sup> In fact, in this village, and throughout almost all of Kosovo, there is what one might term a 'culture' of migration. Every person has close family members who are living or have lived abroad, often for decades. This 'culture of migration' has changed through the years, in response to external and policy transformations. These have been drastic, including starkly modified European border and migration regimes as well as Kosovo's own changing societal and political situation, particularly after the end of war in Kosovo in 1999. All of these changes have affected not only experiences of border crossing but also household and family relations within the village.

Male labour migration has formed the basis of the household economy throughout rural Kosovo since at least the 1950s. While before 1960 migrants from Kosovo had travelled primarily to Turkey and Belgrade, in the 1960s they began to migrate to western Europe as so-called *Gastarbeiter* or guest workers. There, they functioned as an 'outpost' of the village household, supplying the family at home with aid in the form of remittances (Reineck 1991; von Aarburg and Gretler 2008).

With the rise of ethnic tensions between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo in the 1980s, and especially with the intensification of this conflict after 1989, economic spurs to migration were reinforced by political concerns. The escalation of the conflict in Kosovo resulted in the relocation of women and children to Western countries. The collapse of socialism in most eastern European countries and the end of the Cold War, which changed the power geometry in the world, also affected the movements of people in Kosovo. As of 1992, trans-border mobility was restricted to those seeking asylum or family reunion. Accordingly, the migration of women and children resulted in the partial dissolution of the complex, patrilocal households in which a married couple lived with their married son(s), or several married brothers. These complex households had been widespread, especially among Albanian families in rural Kosovo (Hockenoes 2006). When the war ended and the United

Nations (UN) assumed administration of the area in 1999, the opportunity to migrate became even more restricted and was now largely limited to those seeking entry to Europe for family completion or to marry.

In this chapter, I explore how migrants and their family members in Kosovo experienced the crossing of borders between Kosovo and western Europe and the effect this crossing had on family relations and visions for the future. As my material will show, polity borders are not only spatial demarcations that delimit sovereignty and create divisions between citizens and non-citizens but function also as temporal boundaries, linked to different social orders and their varying modes of imagining time and space. I will examine how border crossings are linked to (and change) conceptions of family time and the family member's individual life course. Are migrants able to synchronise their experiences with those at home, creating a joint family perspective on two sides of the border? Or can border crossings be seen as 'travel in time and space', altering locations and creating different pasts and futures for those who travel abroad and for those who stay at home?

In order to answer these questions, I focus on migration to Germany and Austria from a village in south Kosovo during three different periods: before the 1990s, during the 1990s, and after the end of the 1998–99 war in Kosovo. My sources are biographical interviews and participant observation of village family life, gathered in the course of long-term social anthropological research carried out in south Kosovo's rural region of Opoja and in the migrants' destination countries. By interviewing several household and family members living in the Kosovo village and abroad, I was able to take a translocal approach. This allowed me to explore the impact migration had on the village's families and their relatives abroad, and what border crossing came to mean to them. In the following, I have concentrated mainly on the perspective of five male villagers whose fathers migrated in the 1960s and 1970s, and who themselves migrated in the 1990s.

First, I will provide a theoretical discussion of border crossings, their impact on notions of time and space, and what this means to the maintenance of family relations across polity borders. I will then discuss what borders meant in family relations before and during the 1990s; this is followed by an analysis of family relations and the different meanings of the border after the war. Finally, I conclude by exploring the meaning of cross-border marriages.

### Theoretical frames

When one celebrates a birthday, it becomes clear that one does not conceive of time as a linear connection between the past and future. Rather, it is a multifaceted and multi-dimensional phenomenon involving individual (biographical) time, family (generational) time and historical (social and political) time. While a birthday marks the individual's biological age, it may not say much about the different roles a person assumes during their life. Family time, by contrast, says something about

one's role within one's family of origin and family of procreation, while historical time affects both individual and family time through their connection to overall social, economic and cultural changes (Hareven 1982). Individual time, family time and historical time are thus closely linked, for most individual transitions are related to family transitions, and both mirror historical time.

Moreover, concepts of time differ. Modern societies build above all on a linear conception of time; each event is unique and fits into an unalterable linear order. Although links between past and future exist, 'their relationship is neither implicit nor readily predictable' (Halpern and Wagner 1984: 230, 232). The present is seen as imperfect, but progress and growth will, supposedly, create a better future (although the same factors may also obstruct improvement). This linear concept of time, when combined with the idea of progress, also leads to a spatial-temporal 'ranking' of different societies. Some may be seen as more advanced, while others are lagging behind. This makes the polity border, which divides societies by territory, a timeline, as well.

The family, by contrast, dwells within cyclical concepts of time. Here, the past and future are strongly linked, events are predictable and sequential, and they reconstitute the social structure (Halpern and Wagner 1984: 233). The family is often recurrently sanctioned by life-stage rituals such as birth, marriage and death. These form (or are, at least, expected to form) more or less stable coordinates within the family and the community.

Individual time, seen as a life course, is, again, often constructed as linear. Birth, marriage and death are (more or less) unique events from the individual's perspective. Nonetheless, the individual's life course is linked to family time. Even idealised (personal) futures often contain anticipated life-course stages (e.g. marriage and procreation) that may be seen as cyclical elements involving replication of the past (Halpern and Wagner 1984: 233). Furthermore, individuals are seen as having certain obligations towards both their family of origin and family of procreation. For these reasons, people often try to synchronise their life course with family time. They take the family into consideration in conceiving of their future, which may lead to overlapping or conflicting goals during the course of their lives. When they take up a new role in their life, they try to harmonise it with the roles of other family members. This has an impact on generational relations. Individual time is, finally, also linked to historical time, as the timing of life transitions is affected by historical change.

As soon as people cross polity borders, they enter new contexts of time and space. One can assume that migration demarcates a turning point in life, a moment in which migrants take up a new role. However, people respond to new societal and historical conditions within the framework of the social networks in which they are embedded, even when the framework is stretched across geographical locations and borders. In fact, transnational studies have confirmed that migrants who physically cross polity borders often maintain multi-stranded relations with

acquaintances at home. They create a deterritorialised, transnational or translocal space which cuts across nationally demarcated borders, spaces which unite migrants and those at home. Despite being physically on different sides of polity borders, and over great geographical distance, migrants often retain an active part in their local village space. This locality is thus re-created 'translocally' (Massey 1991). However, migrants may transgress a state border 'trans-temporally' as well. They not only construct a transborder locality but also a time-space with which to fill it.

Family ties across borders, earlier life experiences and imagining and remembering traces of alternative time-spaces all allow migrants to contest the hegemonic spatial temporal order imposed on each side of polity borders and their border regimes. These need not be purely conservative, of course: migrants may also contest their home's family time, creating new visions for their families.

The families at home may also create new mental maps (and clocks). After all, they are connected to both the alternative time-spaces of migrants and to international media. Appadurai (2005) introduced the concept of social imagination, which dissolves a person's fixed position in a given physical place. Such imagining may be created by media and other forms of communication. The new time-spaces that then emerge can be shared by migrants, by those intending to migrate, and those who intend to stay at home. Like the time-spaces of migrants, they are able to challenge polity borders; they can interact with, confirm or contest polity borders at multiple individual, social and cultural levels.

The family provides a special unit of analysis when studying the interaction of different time-spaces engendered by the act of border crossing. For migrants as well as those at home, the family may be an anchor, used to synchronise individual experiences on either side of the border. But the family may also be a source of conflict. The family itself must be reproduced through social imagination, actions and practices, reaching, in the migrants' case, across vast geographical distances. This active 'family making' deserves special attention, with focus on different strategies, such as emotional exchanges, financial support or the creation of 'marriage-scapes' as means of linking individuals across polity borders. Border crossing may, thus, also challenge, promote and modify the spatial-temporal order of the family.

### 1960–90: experiencing and transgressing borders within a family time-space

Large numbers of Kosovo Albanians began migrating to western Europe in the early 1960s, when socialist Yugoslavia concluded labour recruitment treaties with Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Numerous men from Kosovo migrated for economic reasons; there was little employment in Kosovo because of a recent surge in population and the fact that rural areas lagged behind in the implementation of socialist modernisation (Schmitt 2008). Economic migration continued after western Europe officially ended labour recruitment in 1973, following the global oil crisis and resultant economic recession. Socialist Yugoslavia's special position

as a non-aligned country allowed people from Kosovo – then Yugoslav citizens – to travel to western European countries with ease. Assisted by relatives already in place, Kosovo-Albanians (and many other migrants from socialist Yugoslavia) would migrate and search for a job, often successfully, as their cheap labour was still in demand in many economic sectors. This also applied to many migrants from the south of Kosovo, who went to Austria, Germany and Switzerland from the 1960s on. As a 50-year-old migrant I interviewed said in retrospect: ‘At that time there were no borders, but there was enough work.’<sup>2</sup>

The migrants remained an integral part of their home village and family, at least in a functional sense. Their continued membership in multiple, patrilinear organised households, which had been widespread in this region before the 1990s, transgressed spatial borders and blurred the geographical boundaries of the village. Before the 1990s, the bulk of labour migrants were men with families at home in the village. Their fathers had often arranged their marriage with a woman from the region, either before or during migration. But the men had left their wife and children at home, in the joint households headed by their father, brother or uncle (see Pichler 2009 on Albanian migrants from Macedonia, Reineck 1991). The migrant men sent a considerable portion of their salaries home to their fathers, who disposed of it; the patriarchal, authoritarian order of village, family and community life remained uncontested. In fact, the migrants reaffirmed their membership in the patrilocal household and the local community. These arrangements even contributed to the ‘freezing’ of patrilocal household structures and values (Reineck 1991).

The time-space shared by migrants and their family members at home was further reinforced by the former’s cyclical visits. Working hard abroad, migrants visited their families at least annually. This changed the yearly rhythm in the villages, for the migrants’ visits were the climax of the year. Since migrants mostly visited during the summer months, family festivals such as weddings and circumcisions, which centred on the village and stressed the cyclical nature of family time, were increasingly scheduled for summer. Cyclical family time-space was also maintained by the plans of many migrants to return ‘home’ someday, to the place they had left, the place to which they belonged and for which they longed (von Aarburg and Gretler 2008). Saving money was central to their life abroad – an abstemious present of postponed consumption, the money invested in a better future at home.

For migrants, life abroad was also experienced as disrupted time. They lived apart from their family and had to care for themselves. They had to manage the transition from small face-to-face village communities to the anonymity and complexity of life in large towns. A large majority worked in blue-collar jobs, with low status and, often, difficult conditions. Many lived in barracks, shared with acquaintances. Many directed their life towards the family at home. They consumed only very moderately, in order to save money to send back; what little spare time they had was usually spent with other migrants rather than with people from the destination society. In at least one respect, they lived under inverted gender norms. Gendered usages

prevalent in their village communities were changed: for instance, the men often had to clean, wash and cook for themselves. Thus, although the men directed their lives towards the (still very patriarchally organised) village, their life worlds differed in several important respects from those whom they had left at home.

When the men visited their homes in Kosovo, they often did not talk much about their experiences. This was in accordance with a view of the future in which their children would not join them abroad. The future of the family was at home, in Kosovo. The money they sent was used for the necessities of everyday life, for building houses and educating children. Their financial contributions and the consumer goods they brought home from abroad, such as washing machines and other household equipment – uncommon in the villages in Kosovo at that time – were meant to improve living conditions at home. Their children were to be spared the sacrifices they themselves had made for the sake of the family (see also Reineck 1991).

However, in these holidays at home, there were often difficulties in synchronising the perspectives of those who had stayed at home and those who had long been abroad. The lack of common everyday experiences made it difficult to communicate and to create common dreams and ideas of the future. Migrants, for example, had not seen their children grow up; holidays were often too short to create unstrained emotional relations between fathers and children and between spouses. Although strongly attached to their homes as the places to which they belonged, migrants had difficulty transforming this emotion into actual relations, into ‘ways of being’ (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). This further impeded the sharing of life perspectives, creating disparate time-spaces. ‘I went into another world’, as a 60-year-old migrant, who had worked in Austria from the early 1970s, put it. The time-space gap between migrants and those at home also appeared in the narrative interviews of villagers who had been children before the 1990s, when their fathers had been abroad. Agim, born in the mid-1970s, explained to me that his father, who had moved to Germany in the early 1970s, had remained a stranger to him during his childhood. He had come home once a year for two to three weeks at a time, but was then busy meeting other relatives, working the farm, and so on. When they finally came closer to each other towards the end of the visit, the father had had to leave again, and the relationship cooled. Ylber, born in the early 1970s, also remembered that his father had been abroad during his childhood. Ylber did not complain about this, as he had had very close relations to his grandmother, with whom he shared a bed. By contrast, he perceived his father as German, with different cultural habits, scarcely belonging to his family.

Nonetheless, the products their fathers brought home made a great impression and influenced the ways the future was imagined by their children and by village youth, reinforcing the respect felt for migrants. As Ylber put it, he thought that the migrants, including his father, came ‘from planet Mars’ or ‘a land of honey and milk’. He reminisced:

In every third house there was someone abroad. And we went to this house and asked when they would come home. We wanted to see them. When they came for a visit, we would come to visit them in the evenings. We received biscuits. The one who came from Berlin was like an astronaut for us. A pilot. We thought that there was Berlin somewhere outside, within an empty space. Then he came home and brought the first television. And I asked myself how is this possible, how is it possible that humankind is creating something like that?

Ylber joined most of the young villagers in dreaming of a future in which they could own and consume Western products, ranging from sweets or 'original' Marlboro cigarettes to televisions. Some even thought about migrating to Western countries. However, their fathers mostly disappointed them, as they did not want their children to move abroad. Alban, whose father was in Austria, had always wanted a Swiss army knife:

Every time my father returned from Austria, I asked him if he had bought a knife for me, but he always said that the knife-seller had died. To this day, I feel the need to buy such a knife as soon as I enter a flea market in Germany. I have a whole collection of them at home. It is like I need to overcome my longing for it while I was a child.

That their fathers often ignored their wishes did not stop the children from dreaming; it only worsened their personal relations. They dreamt of going to western Europe in order to achieve material prosperity and a better life for themselves. In fact, despite labour migrants' attempts to direct their life towards their homes, despite their sending back remittances and paying many cyclical visits, the common time-spaces shared by migrants and many villagers were increasingly challenged. Older migrants saw their future back home, while many young villagers dreamed of a better future in western European countries.

### Asylum and family reunion migration as challenges to family time

In 1989, Kosovo's autonomy was annulled. Simultaneously, Albanians were pushed out of public institutions, discriminated against and suppressed. In 1991, when socialist Yugoslavia dissolved into bloody wars in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albanian men feared being drafted into the Serbian-dominated army, as well as prosecution and violence. They urgently needed to get out of the country. Political motives for outmigration were added to economic ones. At the same time it was increasingly difficult to cross the border between Kosovo and the European Union (EU), as European border regimes tightened after 1992 and the Yugoslav passport lost its function (Fassmann and Münz 1996; Bauböck and Perchinig 2006). Suddenly, the border became a solid membrane for Kosovo Albanians as well. Migration into western European countries was restricted to those applying for family reunion or cross-border marriages, or those who were able to cross the border without documents, whereupon most applied for asylum.

During this crisis, numerous 'guest workers' fetched their dependents. They applied for family reunion with their sons and, to a lesser extent, their daughters and wives. This was an emergency measure, done only because their dependents needed a safe place. Many sons reacted with ambivalence. Some unreservedly welcomed the opportunity to go abroad, for they had dreamt of the 'Golden West' and the life they could build there. But others had wanted to complete their education in Kosovo and to build a life at home, a future dream brutally interrupted by political factors.

The fact that sons (and, sometimes, other family members) were now united with fathers with whom they had not had a chance to develop a close relationship also caused friction. Ylber recalled going abroad in 1991, a few days after his seventeenth birthday. He took a train together with his father, who had been living in Austria since 1973 and who was returning from his yearly visit home. He remembered that he had been a smoker, but could not confess this to his father, as this would have been disrespectful. Smoking secretly in the train, he realised that he was running very short of cigarettes. After they arrived in Linz, he got up very early in the morning in order to buy cigarettes somewhere. He described the experience:

I tried to remember my way and when arriving in a supermarket, I only said 'cigarettes', as I did not speak a word of German. Someone then gave me a packet of Marlboros. I wanted to pay, but I did not understand anything. He said something, but I do not know what, I only realized that he gave me the cigarettes and went away. It was a packet of Marlboros. To smoke Marlboro was a dream for me. Everyone wanted the best.

In the many cases in which only the sons joined their fathers, the men had to manage a household without women. The father, who worked full-time, had very little time to care for his sons and often little understanding of their needs and sorrows. This often led to conflicts, as it did with Agim, who was 14 when in 1991 he joined his father in Berlin, somewhere he had always envisioned his own future. However, in the shared male household, problems between Agim and his father became overwhelming and two years later, after a series of conflicts, Agim moved out and found shelter in a shared flat owned by the youth welfare council. He remained there until he finished school and began work, when his salary made it possible for him to rent his own flat. In retrospect, Agim maintained that his father had not supported his outmigration, not even in the 1990s when most other migrants had sent for their families in order to save them from the ethnic conflict in Kosovo. With this, the father had undermined the unity of the family.

Other young migrants could not count on applying for family reunion and thus being able to go abroad, either because their father had already come home, or because he had never migrated in the first place. In such cases, youths faced crossing borders as undocumented or illegal migrants, a very difficult endeavour. As one migrant said: 'The way to Germany was very long, very expensive and very



risky.' But even then, border crossing often remained a family affair, at least in part. Undocumented migrants were often supported by relatives who organised their trip and paid the human traffickers who were to bring them over the border. Alban, for example, crossed the Hungarian and then the Austrian and German borders as an undocumented migrant in 1994. He had had the help of his wife's relatives, who paid the traffickers a few thousand deutschmarks. His father-in-law then took him in until he applied for asylum and was placed in a refugee barracks.

Like Alban, most migrants who could not legalise themselves via family reunion applied for asylum as soon as they reached their destination. The application was followed by a long administrative process in which migrants often had to wait for years for a decision on their right to stay. For many, this period was an insecure, empty waiting time. Asylum seekers had no right to work, no right to continue their education and no right to leave the country, let alone a right to visit their relatives at home. Instead of finding a safe haven, a better future, so often associated with migration into the 'Glorious West', migration created a 'no-time' for some of the migrants, a life without a foothold.

The asylum seekers' enforced and prolonged absence from home put great pressure on kinship relations. A 45-year-old woman told me how the man she had married in 1991 migrated abroad soon after their wedding. He applied for asylum and so could not return; husband and wife had no personal contact for years. The household in Kosovo did not have a phone, and the letters he wrote were addressed to his parents, as this was a sign of respect.

Family relations were also strained because asylum applicants did not have the right to summon family members, which meant they could not rescue their spouse and children from the tensions in Kosovo. Even after they had been granted a residence permit, some lacked the economic security that was the precondition for acquiring permission for family members to join them. As a result, many families were reunited only after many years, if ever.

In some cases, attempts to reunite the family were prevented not by legal barriers but by relatives at home in Kosovo. Some parents, for example, opposed the outmigration of their son's wife and children, arguing that they did not want to be left alone and needed their daughter-in-law to care for them. Genc, now 50, left Kosovo for Austria in 1991 using his Yugo-passport. Soon after, the Yugo-passport was declared invalid and Genc stayed on illegally. He worked hard and saved money to pay for traffickers to bring his wife and children to him. However, his father intervened because Genc's brother was soon to marry and Genc was expected to pay for the wedding, something he could not have done had he spent the money on traffickers. Anyway, his father argued, his parents needed their daughter-in-law at home to clean and cook, as well as to prepare for the wedding.

In other cases, family reunion remained incomplete. Even at best, reunion could add to the burdens the migrants experienced in the destination countries. Suddenly they had to support a whole family and find schooling and a home for their children.

Dritan, for example, who had left Kosovo in 1986 at the age of 24, brought his wife and his two sons (aged 13 and 15) in 1995. He said the time of family reunion had been a happy time, as they were finally together again, but also a very difficult period. He was pressured to earn much more money than he had earned before, as his family's living costs were considerably higher in Austria than they had been in Kosovo. In Kosovo, his family owned a house, whereas in Austria he had to pay rent. He was forced to work as much as possible, and had almost no time for his family. For his sons, Dritan said, this period was still more difficult. They had to go to school without speaking German; their parents could not give them support, as the father was too busy working and the mother was helpless herself. Furthermore, he had left his daughter, 10 years old at that time, with her grandparents at home. On the one hand, he had not wanted to deprive his own parents of her company; on the other, he would have had to find and finance a larger flat. In order to apply for a family reunion, the migrant had to show that his flat was 'sufficient' to house all arriving family members. In this case, as in many others during the 1990s, migration was a highly ambivalent process; reunion with some family members often meant that other family members were left behind.

People worried about those who remained behind in dangerous, economically depressed Kosovo. Many migrants remained strongly home-oriented. They tried to put money aside to send home to their families, parents and (male) siblings. In the 1990s, this was done irrespective of whether the migrants managed to bring their spouses and children or not. The ethnic conflict and the flight from Kosovo were experienced as a time to show solidarity with those at home; individual aspirations were subordinated to meeting the needs of the crisis. This homogenised the experiences of migrants. Many prioritised solidarity on a family level; the escalating ethnic conflict also strengthened national unity and promoted political activism. Living far from home, without being able to make direct contact, enhanced many migrants' patriotic feelings. Many believed in the Albanian cause and nation. They helped finance parallel Albanian schools and hospitals in Kosovo, as well as the military expenses of the newly founded Kosovo Liberation Army. Such activities allowed migrants to create a common national time-space that transcended polity borders. They believed in the future of Kosovo, in a highly patriotic, not very pragmatic sense. Those who did not save money to send to relatives at home or who disregarded their familial bonds were considered 'lost' to the community (Dahinden 2005).

### After 2000: the difficulties of creating new futures here and there

The military engagement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Kosovo in spring 1999 ended Serbian dominance there. The social conditions in Kosovo were profoundly changed. Under the protection of the United Nations (UN), Albanians could now enter the administration (again). The need to build

state structures created many new jobs for Kosovo Albanians and encouraged some migrants to return earlier than planned. Albanians – at home as well as abroad – were initially very enthusiastic about Kosovo's future. However, this enthusiasm soon waned. Migrants who had been immobilised abroad pending a decision on their asylum application returned for the first time after many years to a situation that was much worse than they had imagined. Alban, who had been abroad for six years, told me that he had been very impatient to return home but was completely disappointed after his arrival. He found his parents' house in very bad shape. Everyone was older; everything looked poor and run-down. After having been welcomed by his relatives, he withdrew to his room and cried.

Although migrants and villagers joined in massive efforts to build houses and businesses, the region's internal problems persisted. For years after the war, the production sector continued to be underdeveloped, unemployment and corruption remained high, and state social services were extremely meagre. Meanwhile, social stratification inside Kosovo increased, as some families gained economically from the post-war transformation, while others suffered poverty and insecurity due to the area's very high unemployment rates – especially in economically marginalised regions such as southern Kosovo. Many Albanians from rural Kosovo, at home as well as those visiting from abroad, believed that Kosovo was not moving forward as hoped for; it had come to a standstill. Alban's brother Dritan, who had been a refugee in Germany for seven years and who had returned voluntarily in 2001, said: 'I tried to live in Kosovo, but it is impossible. The system does not let us live there. There is no work, no money, no life, and no freedom. For this I have not returned.' In 2003, soon after he returned, he gave nearly ten thousand euro to human traffickers in order to move his whole family abroad. However, once there, his family's asylum applications were turned down, because Kosovo was now considered a safe place for Albanians. Others who managed to cross the border with the help of traffickers remained abroad as undocumented migrants, sometimes for years, a condition of crippling insecurity. The border regime had become even harsher for Kosovo Albanians after the war.

The declaration of Kosovo's independence, announced by the Albanian government in February 2008 and since recognised by more than one hundred countries, did not change this. Kosovo is still the only country whose residents need a visa to enter almost all European countries (visa-free travel is only possible to Albania, Montenegro and Macedonia); it is, consequently, more marginalised than ever. This means that Kosovo's time-space status has dipped below even that of its erstwhile 'rival' Serbia, for whose residents EU visa requirements were lifted at the end of 2009. I often heard villagers and migrants discuss this time-space ranking: Kosovo, they said, was at least twenty years behind western European countries and its future was very uncertain. The Kosovo border to western Europe, now more than ever difficult to cross legally, was seen, also, as a timeline, dividing 'modern' countries with promising futures from Kosovo, which was perceived as falling far behind.

Even worse, it was a place that would *never* reach the future to which its residents aspired. As Ylber said to me (as 'a German'): 'Do you know, it will take very long. This part here has been created by God, and it will never be like the Germans want it to be.'

Many middle-aged and elderly migrants joined villagers in thinking that Kosovo had been a better place before the late 1980s. Ylber, for instance, told me that socialism had offered more opportunities than did the current regime: pupils like him had received university scholarships, and those with good education had been able to find good jobs. In post-war Kosovo, scholarships were few and meagre and 'you need to be a thief in order to receive a job', as one university-educated villager put it.

With the passing of time, migrants gradually changed their relations towards their home and destination country. Those who had secured permanent residency rights said that they could not relinquish the opportunity offered after having waited for so long and endured so much. Those who had not yet brought their children to join them but who could do so now did so – this time without their parents protesting. Others envisioned staying abroad for their children's sake, for they had adapted to the new language and environment much more readily than their parents. Migrants hoped for a better future, if not for themselves, then for their children, in a country which offered more social security and greater life prospects than did Kosovo. Alban, for example, said that he remains a Kosovo Albanian in his heart, but that he wants to stay in Germany because of its welfare state, which he regards as 'European' and which gives him and his family the social security they increasingly lack in Kosovo. Should Kosovo's state ever improve, Alban said, he would return, but he has no faith in this. Alban's wife said that their only daughter, who is 5, might never want to return, in which case they would remain with her as the most important person in their lives.

This attitude involves tacit reorientation, from a future in the home village towards a future in the country of immigration. It also entails a transition from belonging in a complex family based on values of patrilocality and seniority to being abroad in a nuclear family centred on children. This was a new spatial positioning. It changed social and temporal coordinates, putting those at home at the lower end of the scale, prioritising those abroad. The new ranking also found expression economically. As Alban, who had migrated in the 1990s and who had held refugee status for many years, put it: 'I do not save as much as I did earlier, but I do not mind. I need money for my daughter. She says, "I want this and this." She wants to go to McDonald's and she needs clothes and she wants toys.' He is thus living more in the here and now and less in a future 'at home' in Kosovo.

However, when migrants decided to opt for family reunion in the destination country, and thus a possible future abroad, many realised that they had lost irretrievable time while waiting (for residency permits, labour permits, etc.), years they could never recover. Further, many suffered from low economic and social status. Alban and Agim, for instance, were both more or less long-term unemployed; they

lived off social transfer payments and kept busy by doing smaller jobs on the side. The combination of social transfer payments and temporary jobs was a relatively dependable, even respectable income, but offered no chance for social advancement. This was very frustrating. Agim felt that he had, in part, suffered discrimination from the German authorities and citizens, which made him angry; while Alban felt marginalised and was pessimistic about his future prospects.

Ylber was better off, as he had a permanent job at the railway company. He also did weekend jobs to increase his income. He complained, however, that his life was a bit boring. The days looked all the same, without much time for anything but work and family obligations. At weekends, he and his family would shop and visit relatives, but they were all very much looking forward to their home visit to Kosovo, where they could relax and have a good time in the circle of relatives and friends. In Germany, Ylber experienced the time-space of his destination country as being governed by a temporality that was secure and materially rewarding but cold, dull and boring. Times 'at home', in Kosovo, by contrast, were adventurous, exciting and emotionally warm, although also full of insecurities and inadequacies.

Despite practical considerations which made a future abroad attractive, many migrants still invested in housing 'at home' in Kosovo. Indeed, post-war Kosovo was characterised by a house-building boom. The new houses were often built in Western styles, in order to symbolise the migrant family's modernity and progress. At the same time, building a house confirmed a cyclical notion of time. Houses express migrants' sense of belonging and membership in the local community, as well as incarnating the migrant's dream of returning 'home'. Building a house symbolised their presence despite their absence. The house linked the village to their personal migration experience, in a spatial-temporal sense. Migrants stressed the fact that they built their house(s) for their son(s), so that sons would remain connected to the village and to their fathers' relatives and thus to a place that was associated with home. The house constituted a spatial-temporal bridge for the migrants' sons.

The building of houses 'at home' also redefined family relations, and questioned household configurations and notions of solidarity with those 'at home'. As in other parts of rural Kosovo, customary law decreed that each brother should receive a more or less equal share of his parents' landed property and housing. However, if a complex household with two or more brothers was divided before a migrant brother started building his house, the migrant's house was often larger and nicer than the houses of his brothers. Unsurprisingly, household divisions in combination with outmigration could adversely affect fraternal relations. Those at home felt both envious and puzzled as to why the migrant brother was now, after household division, diverting money that had formerly gone to them into house-building. The migrants themselves were critical of this type of behaviour. As Ylber put it,

It was much, much better when I and my generation were young. There were better times for this country. You could hardly imagine building a house for yourself and

abandoning your brother, for example. This happens often here now. Today, this is normal ... I think a lot about Kosovo and I ask myself what has gotten better since the time I left.

The division of the household often left the brothers at home insecure and vulnerable, for they could no longer count on regular remittances. At the same time, it increased the need to send an additional person from the at-home household abroad, despite the legal difficulties that stood in the way of this, especially after the war. At that point, family reunion and marriage constituted the few options left for those seeking to migrate legally. Many villagers sought to marry their sons (and, to a lesser extent, daughters) to someone living abroad.

Sometimes, complex households remained undivided after the war. Migrants, accordingly, still belonged to the joint household of their parents and/or brother(s), even if they obviously maintained nuclear households in their destination countries, and also exerted sole control over the money they earned. In many cases, however, such migrants continued to support their relatives, at least their close relatives, in one way or another. In some cases, migrant brothers financed the building of a house with several floors for all household members at home. Others even financed the building of identical houses for all their brothers, which were often placed next to each other, in a chain. Such identical houses were seen as a visible expression of the unity of brothers, the column of a strong and successful (patrilocal) family. But in the new millennium, even supportive practices of this sort were open to critique.

This happened to Genc, who had left Kosovo during the 1990s and who had had his wife and sons (then 14 and 16 years old) join him in 2005. Although Genc's father had died at that time, Genc and his younger brother did not divide their common household in the village. Instead, some years later, Genc invested in renovating the common household's home, inhabited, at that time, exclusively by his younger brother, his wife and two sons. The brother was long-term unemployed, and the children in school. Genc viewed this positively. He explained that his home village is the place where his heart is warm again and in which he needs to invest. At the same time, he criticised aspects of the situation; he feels, to some degree, like a visitor in his own home. Furthermore, he complained that his chances of supporting his brother were limited, as he had to finance his family abroad.

More generally, migrants used investment in houses to re-create ties they had disrupted through outmigration and the relocation of family members. They tried to create a common family space, which could serve as a refuge from the challenges and the disappointments they experienced abroad. It was also to provide for the continuation of the (male) family line. However, this was not easy. It was increasingly unclear how migrants were to interact with brothers who had stayed at home and who had their own families. It was not possible to join their brothers in a common vision of the future, not even after investing in that future by building a joint family house or even two (or more) identical houses at home.

In this situation, several migrants linked their vision of the future to children who had either been born abroad or, in many cases, been brought there, often when in their teens. The future of the children suddenly became the decisive factor for the fortune of their parents. The parents' own vision of the future had faded; they now hoped to fulfil themselves in the life project of their children (see also Schiffauer 1991). Their children were the ones who would become economically successful in the destination countries; the children were also given the task of maintaining a bridge to parental homes in Kosovo.

Migrants tried to support their children's efforts in both directions. During their annual visits home, they took their children with them. Spending a lot of money on family gatherings and festivities during these weeks, they were happy whenever they felt that their children were also developing a sense of Kosovo as their home.

### Upside down: repositioning the village and creating new family bonds

Relations between villagers and migrants were also challenged by the technical achievements of the information technology era. These transformed life in the village, not least by shifting the clear-cut spatial-temporal hierarchies between places like Kosovo, and 'the West'. In the years preceding the war, most Kosovo villages had few, if any, telephone connections. By the end of the war, nearly every household had one or several mobile phones, a television, and – especially important – a computer with internet access. The latter enabled village youth to connect to global youth culture without themselves moving physically, unimpeded by polity borders. It helped generate and form images of the good life and of the future to which they aspired. Village youth used Facebook to create their own internal chat-forums, circumventing the village's established age and gender barriers. Young people, especially young women and girls, began wearing 'Western' outfits, the tight jeans and shirts which could be bought in the flourishing sector of Western-style shops in nearby towns, or which had been brought as presents by visiting migrants. Villagers could now keep in daily contact with those abroad by using Skype, Facebook or Messenger (see Levitt 1998; Peleikis 2003; Appadurai 2004; Leutloff-Grandits and Pichler 2014).

Middle-aged migrants living abroad met these changes with astonishment and criticism. Instead of celebrating the fact that villages were 'catching up' with what could be termed 'global modernity', they expressed a rather conservative view of these changes. They said that village girls showed too much skin and were too familiar with men and that this was a sign of degraded morals. As Ylber put it: 'Today you will not catch a boyfriend as soon as you do not use make-up and have Messenger. But you cannot move the clock back.' Others complained that the pace of change in Kosovo was faster than it was abroad, and that the changes were not always for the better. According to Alban: 'It was healthier in former times. People cared for each other. They cared for the elderly and the ill. Today, no one cares for them.'

But villagers could also be critical of migrants. Some villagers claimed that (at least some) migrants behaved in an uncultured and primitive fashion. I was asked several times why 'we' (as 'Westerners') seemed unable to improve and 'cultivate' their relatives abroad, for they did not seem to change for the better. For example, I was told that when entering Kosovo by car, migrants would immediately start throwing their waste out of the car windows – something they did not do abroad. While in Kosovo, they would allow themselves to ignore legal prescriptions like speed limits, norms they accepted abroad, and would indulge in problematic, disrespectful behaviour, especially concerning gender norms. They did this, ironically, while commenting adversely on the weak rule of law in Kosovo and criticising the 'uncultivated behaviour' of the locals themselves. Other villagers, conversely, found migrants too 'Westernised', particularly when it came to moral standards. Their outfits were seen as a marker of degraded morality. While it was more or less accepted that young women in the village might wear miniskirts (even if many did not), a visiting migrant teenager in a miniskirt easily provoked negative comments: the skirt was interpreted as a sign that she was dating boys, or would like to, and thus had low moral standards. Young migrant men with earrings and fashionable hairstyles were likewise condemned as womanisers, and hence unreliable marriage partners for young village women.

Nonetheless, the images and ideals of Western lifestyles fed young villagers' desire to travel abroad to a better more modern life, as well as the material security which many Kosovo families lacked. Young men and especially young women felt trapped in their village and in Kosovo as a whole. They missed relative gender equality, opportunities for education and/or for employment. Kosovo was seen as restricted, backward, lagging behind. The future was abroad.

Accordingly, both village boys and girls were attracted to the idea of marrying a migrant, even if there was substantial criticism of how some migrants behaved. Most sought to marry someone who had migrated when a child or teenager, or who had been born abroad but still had 'roots' in Kosovo. This type of trans-border marriage became one of the few ways open to those who wished to build a future that linked their own village to a 'better world'. Their parents, who were eager to help their children find a good partner, supported this. They used their connections to relatives abroad (via Skype and/or face-to-face contacts during migrants' home visits) to search for a suitable son- or daughter-in-law.

In many cases, their enquiries were met with sympathy, as many middle-aged migrants wanted to marry their own children to partners from home. In other cases, the young people got to know each other during summer visits, when Kosovo villages turn into sites of happy socialising and celebration, as the streets fill with new cars with foreign number plates. The numerous weddings, often between villager and migrant, lavishly held during the summer in the circle of hundreds of relatives and other guests, became a major site for migrants and villagers to socialise and seek out attractive partners. In this way, interfamilial and intergenerational bonds



could be re-established across polity borders without involving material flows from migrants to villagers.<sup>3</sup> Cross-border marriages opened up a 'marriage-scape', which created (a hoped-for utopia of) joint, villager-migrant temporal space. Here, polity borders furnished incentives for new forms of solidarity, exchange and communication. The certainty that migrants would come home once a year to enjoy themselves and relax also affected the village's temporality. Every summer, for a few weeks, the village was suddenly upgraded to modernity. In so far as Kosovo then became the destination for masses of returning migrants, the hegemonic hierarchical spatial order of Europe was challenged. Kosovo was, for a few weeks at least, no longer marginal.

### Conclusion

As has been shown, translocal Kosovo Albanian family relations have changed rapidly during the last few decades due to changing border regimes and migration patterns. The different views, positions and linkages that are created between villagers and migrants include different concepts of space and time, past and future. These are brought into play and even nurtured by the experience of polity-border crossing, which structures both the view of 'home' and of the migrants' destination countries. These views, positions and linkages reflect the interaction between historical perceptions of time and individual as well as family concepts of time, which are embedded not only in visions of a linear past and future, but also in cyclical repetitions. Border crossing may thus challenge and reconfigure the balance between different temporal conceptions, be they on the level of the individual's life course, the future of the family, or the general socio-political situation. This redirection of ideas of time and space means that border crossing may also contest the hegemonic time-spaces which polity borders supposedly enforce. The crossing of polity-borders puts family relations under very special constraints but also creates very special opportunities when they are over east-west borders (with their strict time hierarchies).

Until the 1990s, male migrants tried to sustain a cyclical notion of time, which reconnected them to the family and the village community and committed them to a reconstitution of the social order while investing in their future at home. However, they often also experienced a 'ruptured time' abroad, distancing them from family members at home. This was even more the case when their sons directed their gaze towards the West and saw their future increasingly as being abroad. During the 1990s, many migrants sent for their sons as a response to the intensified ethnic conflict and tightened EU borders. This resulted in a situation often contrary to their former plans and vision.

After the war, in the new millennium, when Kosovo did not go through its hoped-for transformation and border crossing from Kosovo to western Europe became even more difficult, those migrants who had managed to obtain a residency permit in a EU country planned for their own and their children's future residence

abroad. More than ever, the polity border symbolises the line between modernity and backwardness. However, many migrants remain oriented homewards, seeking to integrate their children into cyclical family time, in order to create a future vision that they can share with the family. They want their children to establish emotional ties to Kosovo and to choose a villager as a marriage partner, a desire reciprocated by many young village men and women, who increasingly imagine their future abroad.

By retying family bonds, especially through cross-border marriages, solidarity can be re-created, and hierarchical differences and fractures transcended or even reversed. In the summer months, when trans-border marriages are celebrated in the circle of kin, the village functions as the temporal centre that gathers together translocal kin networks, and is sometimes even seen as a site of accelerated modernisation. The border is thus not only a line of separation, but also a mechanism for bringing relatives on both sides together, in the creation of multi-faceted relations and ties.

While the acts of migrants and villagers are influenced by their position on this side or that side of the polity border, they use these borders for their own constructions of past, present and future. They can take these borders 'seriously', using them to divide the culturally normal from cultural 'Otherness'. Or they can circumvent and disempower polity borders by creating shared migrant-villager time-spaces. The fact that people do not relate to the border only as individuals but within a network of kin and acquaintance creates overlapping networks of border-crossing time-spaces that both shape and promote, but may also weaken, cross-border ties.

### Notes

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- 2 All interview citations are from fieldwork and have been anonymised for reasons of privacy.
- 3 Not all children of migrants in the 1990s like to return on 'home visits' or feel happy and at ease 'at home'; and not all married or wanted to marry a partner from Kosovo. Nor were all marriages with regional partners free from conflicts.

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