



The Migration and Wellbeing of the Zero Generation:

TRANSGENERATIONAL CARE, GRANDPARENTING AND LONELINESS AMONGST ALBANIAN OLDER PEOPLE

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WHO ARE THE ZERO GENERATION?

- Following Nedelcu (2009) the zero generation are the (left-behind) parents of first-generation migrants
- The first generation are migrants who leave to go abroad as adults
- The second generation are the host-country-born offspring of the first generation, or may be home-country-born but taken abroad by their migrating parents when very young (eg. before starting school)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **What happens to the zero generation when the first generation migrates?**

This leads to three more specific follow-on questions which correspond to the three main empirical parts of the paper:

- **What are the immediate reactions and coping mechanisms of the left-behind zero generation when their adult children move abroad?**
- **Under what circumstances are they able to become active agents in the migration process by following their children abroad?**
- **What are the ongoing positive and negative consequences of the zero generation's migration abroad in a context of ageing, intergenerational relations, and a possible return to Albania?**

KEY CONCEPTS

This research is set within a complex conceptual terrain which includes the following interlocking processes and phenomena set within the case of Albanian migration, mainly to Greece and Italy:

- **Social geographies of ageing in an Albanian patriarchal context**
- **Transnational and transgenerational care; care as a multi-directional process; the notion of older people as care-givers rather than care-receivers**
- **Wellbeing as a multifaceted phenomenon made up of economic, social, physical health and emotional dimensions, both objectively and subjectively evaluated, and culturally embedded (Wright 2012) – specific focus on grandparenting, loneliness, and inter-generational tension**

THE ALBANIAN EXPERIENCE OF MIGRATION

- The most 'intense' emigration of any European country in recent decades: 1.4m Albanians live abroad, cf. 2.8m in Albania
- Spatial concentration in two adjacent countries – Greece (600,000), Italy (450,000), plus UK (50,000+) – leading to a compact geographical transnational space
- 'Irregular' nature during 1990s, followed by regularisations in the main destination countries in late 1990s and early 2000s
- Dynamic evolution to a long-term settled, family-based migrant population; rapid growth of the second generation
- Alongside mass emigration has been large-scale internal migration towards Tirana: interlinkages between the two phenomena (Caro et al. 2014; Vullnetari 2012)

METHODS: FOUR PROJECTS

- Project 1 Albanian migration to the UK and its impact on communities of origin in Albania. Interviews with first-generation migrants in London area (n=26) and with parents of migrants and with other older village and town residents in northern and central Albania (n=46). Fieldwork carried out in 2002-03. See King et al. (2003).
- Project 2 Research on the transnational care of the parents of migrants. Interviews with older residents (n=38) in four villages in southern Albania and with first-generation migrants in Thessaloniki, Greece (n=23). Fieldwork in 2004-06. See King and Vullnetari (2006).
- Project 3 Research on remittances sent from Greece to Albania. Interviews with recipients of remittances in three villages in southern Albania (different from those in Project 2) including many zero-generation parents of migrants (n=25) and with migrant remittance senders in Thessaloniki (n=20). Fieldwork in 2009-10. See Vullnetari (2011).
- Project 4 Research on first-generation migrants (n=30) and zero-generation older migrants (n=24) who had followed their migrant children to Italy. Main focus on social relations and feelings of loneliness. Fieldwork carried out in the Italian region of Marche in 2013. See Cela and Fokkema (2014).

STAGE 1: OLDER PEOPLE LEFT BEHIND

- **Albanian society, and especially the older generation, was unprepared for the scale and the suddenness of the mass migration of the younger generation in the 1990s**
- **Many parents ‘lost’ all their children to migration, either abroad or internally**
- **Led to the sudden fractioning of Albanian families across the generations**
- **Migrants’ irregularity, until the late 1990s/early 2000s, made it difficult to visit ‘home’ or for the zero generation to visit their children and grandchildren abroad**
- **‘Orphan pensioner’ syndrome – left behind ‘like stones in the middle of the road’ (King and Vullnetari 2006, 2009)**
- **Receiving remittances improved their material quality of life, but did not fully compensate their sense of being abandoned, which was often acute, even pathological**

VOICES: EMOTIONALITY VS. PRAGMATISM

- **‘Please, I can’t talk about this [separation from her children] because I will cry... I can’t talk about it, I can’t cope with it’**

(Mynefe, F64, 2004, village in southern Albania, living with her husband on their own for ten years: one son and a daughter in Thessaloniki, both with their new nuclear families, another son in Tirana)

- **‘I have fourteen members of my [extended] family in the UK and I am happy for them, I cannot complain. Of course, if you asked me, I would like them to come and live here. But here, there is no place where you can eat, or work, and the house is not yet finished. Where is the father who doesn’t want his children close? But what do I want my children here for, if all they can do is wander around the streets, without a job and without a house. It’s best for them to stay where they are, in England’**

(Fatos, M68, 2002, village in northern Albania)

STAGE 2: THE ZERO GENERATION MIGRATES

- Regularisation has two effects on transnational dynamics: (i) it enables the mainly male primary migrants to settle long-term, reunite their nuclear families, or start/continue their families abroad, leading to rapid growth in the second generation, and (ii) it creates a better legal position to visit home and host visiting parents
- Zero generation, especially the physically able ‘young old’, become active participants in travel and migration, joining their children abroad, virtually always following the son
- Very important is to recover their sense of purpose and emotional wellbeing through active grandparenting: ‘the sugar of the sugar is sweeter’

STAGE 2: THE ZERO GENERATION MIGRATES

- **At the same time, both through care of grandchildren and home maintenance (cooking, cleaning, washing etc.), the zero generation are active care-givers, not vulnerable care-receivers: these roles are highly gendered**
- **The key purpose is to enable both first-generation migrants to work and earn**
- **Zero generation enjoys better access to health services than in Albania**

POSITIVE VOICES: GRANDPARENTING AND SUPPORTING THE FAMILY ABROAD

- **‘When the second daughter was born we decided to bring over our parents (husband’s parents), because we would not make it financially with the income of my husband. The childcare services here are expensive; nearly 360 Euros per month, just for half a day and often the children get ill there. So we couldn’t afford it. Our parents were young at that time, free of duties and eager to see us, so we decided to apply for family reunification’**

(Miranda, F38, first generation, Marche, Italy, 2013)

- **‘We came to Italy to raise our grandchildren – so far, seven grandchildren. Our children worked all day long and there was nobody to take care of their grandchildren. We endured a lot of sacrifices coming to Italy in order to help out. Our children were able to settle down and put some money aside because we helped them by taking care of the grandchildren’**

(Bardha, F73, zero generation, Marche, Italy, 2013)

NEGATIVE VOICES: LONELINESS, ILL-HEALTH, INTER-GENERATIONAL CONFLICT

- ‘Gradually, over the years, we started to stay longer [in Italy], about five months a year. Then, in 2011, when my husband got sick, we stayed here for good. Our sons decided it was better to stay here. If we were still healthy, we would not have come to stay for good; I would live in Albania, in my own house, with my little pension [...] Here I cannot exchange two words with anybody, only good morning and good evening. In Albania I always met someone, even when I went to buy bread, always had a chat... I miss the friendships, people who came to see me, to take coffee together. Here I don’t have people of my age to spend time with... We need our children to introduce us to other people, but they’re busy, they don’t care, they have little time for this’

(Agetina, F83, Marche, 2013; two sons and three daughters, all living in Italy)

- ‘Here, up to now, we don’t have a pension so we have to ask our children [for money]. They would give us whatever we want but we don’t ask. They’re already making a lot of sacrifices for us and they have their own financial problems. We cannot ask them money for a bus ticket to go downtown. Having friends means going to a bar, taking a coffee, one time you pay for them and next time they pay for you. But without money what can we do?’

(Stavri, M84, Ancona, 2013; son and daughter living in Ancona, Italy)

STAGE 3: STAY PUT, BACK AND FORTH, OR RETURN TO ALBANIA

Reassessment of the wisdom or practicality of staying abroad, or returning, in the light of changing family circumstances, ill-health, and inter-generational tensions:

- Nostalgia for their place of origin and their old friends and neighbours (ref. Agetina quote, previous slide)
- Fragility of legal status to stay long-term, especially if economic crisis leads to unemployment of the first generation and therefore inability to renew residence permit (Michail 2013)
- Grandchildren grow up and no longer need caring for
- Inter-generational tension and cramped living arrangements – tension especially between first-generation wife and mother-in-law
- Some ‘older old’ zero generation may be forced to stay with their (youngest) son as this is his ‘duty of care’; others, who are physically able, may ‘retire’ back to Albania; or try to travel back and forth as ‘flying grandmothers’ (Baldassar and Wilding 2014)

VOICES: FAMILY VS. HOME

- **‘There are good doctors here, but are there medicines against the sadness of being far away from home? We [older folk] talk about how lucky we are to live so close to our family and at the same time so unlucky to live so far away from our homeland. I miss communism: we were poor but we were all close and lived together. This migration first took our hearts away from us, then our souls. I miss everything from Albania: my home, my old furniture, my neighbours, my church, chatting and gossiping with friends. I miss going to my husband’s grave. Of course, when I was in Albania I missed my sons and grandchildren, I have more family members here in Italy, but this is not my house; when you get older, you are comfortable only in your own house’**

(Milika, F83, 2013, Marche, Italy)

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thank you

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