

Julie Vullnetari and Russell King, *Remittances, Gender and Development: Albania's Society and Economy in Transition*. London and New York: IB Tauris, 2011. Pp. 232. ISBN: 978-1-84885-487-1.

Although there have been several studies of Albania migration and remittance patterns in the past two decades, and even on gender and migration and on gender and development, the authors claim to have explored new ground by bringing the gender aspect of remittances into the equation. They quote World Bank figures that find by 2010, 1.5 million Albanians were estimated to be living abroad, mostly in Italy and Greece.

This study focuses on the Korçë region (the largest administrative district in south-east Albania) which borders on to Greece. It is an area which, under Communism, had provided employment for women in food-processing and garment production; men in the region were employed mostly in construction. Migration from this area is inevitably primarily to Greece, where they constitute about two-thirds of the total non-EU 'non-ethnic Greek' immigrant population. In Greece, and more than half the migrant population. The authors carried out 350 household questionnaires mainly with women concerning family biographical data, home ownership, access to services, information about financial remittances and decision-making. They outline various ways in which transnational households maintain their family cohesion across borders, in spite of Greece's 'draconian' immigration regulations which never allow more than a two-year residence/work permit, and resulting exploitation, discrimination and exclusion.

The authors trace varying perspectives on migration-development through five decades, from the optimism of the 1950s, through neo-Marxist pessimism of the 1970s-80s, to greater optimism currently. Arguments for optimism are that migration is a route out of poverty, and a stimulus to development through remittances. Against such optimism are arguments that such remittances may hinder gender development, that these remittances are often spent on 'unproductive' purchases, additionally that returning migrants bring no useful skills back with them. After almost half a century of extreme anti-migration enforcement, Albania's sudden release of widespread emigration in the early 1990s gave an early illusion of a solution to unemployment. This was not balanced by any kind of protection for those Albanians who chose to emigrate. However, the desperate the early migrants were totally uninformed about what actually was available for them outside the country. The authors give

a clear and concise outline of the pyramid crisis of 1996–7, commenting that the memory of it is only slowly fading (p. 176).

Although agriculture employs sixty percent of Albania's labour force, it produces only a fifth of its GDP. The authors debate which point is the optimal one where migration gives the most advantage in terms of development, and stress that it is important to take into account the role of internal migrants. Albanian family cohesion as well as patriarchal hierarchy ensure that emigrants fulfill social obligations with remittances; this in turn affects the families' well-being in the home country, in multiple ways, through enabling improved diet, education, family rituals and social status ensuring psychological well-being. Albanian male migrants primarily make remittances to their parental home, whereas women's remittances tend to be on a much lesser scale; if to her own relatives these are made as one-off small gifts.

In studying gendered remittance processes Vullnetari and King investigated who sends and who receives the remittances, what types of remittances they are, who makes the decisions about them and what conditions affect those decisions on amounts, frequency and utilization in Albania. They find that such labour is Albania's most important export, and that 2004 was the peak year for migrants' remittances to Albania.

In discussing women's limited mobility, the authors mention that they feel trafficking is insufficiently researched, and has been exaggeratedly reported and that they do not wish to cover the topic in this book; this does not seem completely to justify making no mention of prostitution which need not necessarily be linked to trafficking, and has certainly had its representatives amongst Albanian migrants.

Analysis with the use of several tables, of the gendered transnational household reveals that half of the male interviewees emigrated to Greece in the first few years after the fall of Communism, most of the rest by 2002, and only one in 2007. For women there is an entirely different picture, highly affected by the 1998 Greek regularization of wives' status. However, patriarchal attitudes concerning remittances were little changed, though several different situations were seen at the recipient end, in that many households were headed by women at least part-time and some even by children, as reconstituted families are forced to operate transnationally. The most vulnerable households were those where children and the elderly were left in Albania by young, but illegal migrant workers to Greece.

One chapter is devoted specifically to the question of remittance flows, patterns and processes in shaping the role of gender—affected by such developments as money transfer

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operators, both legal and particularly informal and by better modes of transportation. The authors break down very clearly and exactly women's involvement both as remitters and receivers of remittances. Up to 2005, cash payments accounted for 95% of transfers; reflecting distrust as part of the legacy of the pyramid 'savings' schemes of the 1990s which adversely affected trust in banks.

Vullnetari and King, unlike most analysts choose not to view remittances used for leisure as 'unproductive', arguing that such expenditures can also enhance quality of life which in itself is productive. They also find that in 80% of small businesses in Albania which have been helped by remittances. It is the women who do most of the work, even when the businesses are registered in their husbands' names—due to a system of compulsory insurance premiums. Unsurprisingly the authors find men to prefer to use the remittances for business ventures, whereas women's preference is on family and home.

In conclusion, Vullnetari and King explain that while Albania exported its unemployment problem, the migration and the ensuing remittances—almost entirely through private initiatives of the migrants—lifted tens if not hundreds of thousands of families and households out of poverty. This has been facilitated by the intensive participation of women, either as migrants or when remaining in their villages of origin.

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