# Rural Property in an Age of Transnational Migration: Ethnic Divisions in Southeastern Albania

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***Abstract:*** In this article we analyze the effects of transnational migration on rural property relations in post-socialist Albania. Our analysis proceeds by comparing changes in property relations regarding agricultural land in three villages inhabited by different ethnic groups. We demonstrate that the immigration laws of neighbouring countries contribute to a differentiation of migration opportunities and thereby property relations along ethnic lines. The migration practices of Vlach, Macedonian and Albanian villagers unravel the legal designations of land rights instituted by land reform, transforming the Albanian countryside and differentiating villages. Our findings, therefore, attest to the significance of migration as a transnational social field with strong effects on rural property relations. Migration flows, immigration laws, localities of migrants' origin and receiving areas constitute each other in scalar transnational dynamics. These dynamics may lead to ethnically differentiated changes in rural property relations if immigration laws employ ethnic markers to define lines of exclusion and inclusion.

**Keywords:** property, transnational migration, ethnicity, land, Albania, Southeastern Europe

***Résumé :*** Dans cet article, nous analysons les effets des migrations transnationales sur les rapports relatifs à la propriété rurale dans le contexte post-socialiste de l'Ablanie. Notre analyse compare les changements de rapports de propriété relatifs aux terres agricoles dans trois villages peuplés par des groupes ethniques différents. Nous démontrons que les lois sur l'immigration des pays voisins contribuent à une différenciation des opportunités de migration et, conséquemment, des rapports de propriété le long des frontières ethniques. Les pratiques migratoires des villageois Vlach, Macédoniens et Albanais fragmentent les dénominations légales des droits fonciers institués par les réformes agraires, transformant du coup la campagne albanaise tout en différenciant les villages. Nos conclusions témoignent de l'importance de la migration comme champ social transnational aux lourdes conséquences sur les rapports de propriété rurale. Les vagues migratoires, les lois sur l'immigration et les localités d'origine des migrants ainsi que celles qui les accueillent se co-constituent par le biais de dynamiques scalaires transnationales. Ces dynamiques peuvent mener à des changements différenciés sur le plan ethnique concernant les rapports de propriété rurale si les lois sur l'immigration font usage de marqueurs ethniques afin de définir l'exclusion et l'inclusion.

**Mots-clés :** propriété, migration transnationale, ethnicité, terre, Albanie, Europe sud-orientale

## Introduction

Southeastern Europe has experienced massive transformations of rural property relations over the past two decades. With the collapse of socialism, property reforms became top priorities for post-socialist governments and transnational lending institutions (Verdery 2003). For rural areas, the reforms implied radical changes in property rights to various kinds of rural resources, including agricultural land and forest (Szelényi 1998). The legislative changes meant that millions of rural people set out to renegotiate the social relationships governing the use of resources and control over those (Hann 2003; Verdery 2003).

Yet post-socialist property reforms have been only one factor influencing property relations in Southeastern Europe. As we argue in this paper, migration has emerged as another important transforming factor. In the wake of the collapse of socialism and the Yugoslav wars, rural people left their villages of origin in numbers unparalleled since World War II (Bonifazi et al. 2006). Some left permanently, others temporarily, in search of political asylum, employment opportunities or the promise of a better future elsewhere. While some moved to the cities and towns of their own countries, others crossed state boundaries to live abroad. Many have assumed transnational lives, maintaining various kinds of ties with their villages of origin at the same time as they are incorporated into societies abroad (Nicholson 2002; Sandu 2005; Eastmond 2006). Over time, in the villages of origin as in the localities of destination, transnational migration thus caused significant changes in rural populations (Carletto et al. 2006), economies (Horvat 2004), identities (Fox 2003) and—we surmise—property relations.

Ethnicity has been noted as one of the organizing principles of these migrations (Brubaker 1998). It has figured prominently as a "push factor," pushing people of certain ethnic categories out of their home villages, and as a "pull factor," pulling them toward destinations where

they are granted privileged access. The flows of refugees fleeing from ethnic cleansing in Ex-Yugoslavia may be an apt example of the former (e.g., Hayden 1996). The latter has received attention under the rubric "migrations of ethnic affinity" (Brubaker 1998). It has primarily been associated with the "return" migration of ethnic Germans, Jews, Hungarians or Russians to their putative home countries (Brubaker 1998; Fox 2003; Münz and Ohliger 2003). As heterogeneous as these migrations have been, they typically involved a special permeability on the part of the receiving country. This permeability originated from a common understanding that the country had a particular responsibility for ethnic affiliates abroad and found its expression in immigration legislation that considerably eased access for some ethnic categories while excluding others (Brubaker 1998).

In this article, we look at the effects of transnational migration on property relations in southeastern Albania.[1] We use the term "transnational" to call attention to "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement" (Basch et al. 1994:6). This allows us to connect our study to broader research on migration as a transnational social field (Portes et al. 1999; Levitt 2001; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Within this field, we are interested in connecting transnational migration with two factors: first, property relations as a particular aspect of political, economic and cultural relations in the places of origin (see Portes 2001); and second, the influence exerted by the immigration laws of settlement countries on social relations in the places of origin (see Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). In more concrete terms, we examine changes in property relations in Albanian villages set in relation to different transnational migration practices. In addition, we seek to uncover the role of law—highlighted in Turner and Wiber's introduction to this section—by analyzing the effects of ethnic categories established in immigration regulations on transnational migration.

Our empirical analysis deals with property relations regarding agricultural land in three Albanian villages. The focus is on agricultural land because land remains a key productive resource in the Albanian countryside. Albania, in turn, offers a unique opportunity to study the transformation of rural property relations, although rural Albania may not be representative of rural conditions in other parts of the world. Just as in other previously socialist countries, Albania's post-socialist governments mandated the transfer of property rights to agricultural land from the previously dominant agricultural co-operatives to rural households (de Waal 1998). The policy reforms were accompanied by intense negotiations at the local level over the distribution of land parcels and enforcing authority (de Waal 2004). Moreover, Albania has one of the highest emigration rates in the world, with approximately one fifth of its resident population living abroad (mostly in Greece and Italy). The consequences of migration for rural production and life are very visible as 40% and more of the original population in 1990 has left some rural areas (King 2005). Furthermore, ethnically differentiated migration has transformed ethnic identities and relations, leading to "a new situation of transnationalism" (de Rapper 2005:192).

Our argument builds on de Rapper's conclusion that transnational migration, as conditioned by the immigration laws of other countries, differentiates Albania's countryside along ethnic lines. Yet in contrast to de Rapper's attention to discourses about identities, we instead focus on changes in property relations regarding agricultural land. Differences in migration opportunities, we surmise, affect people's propensity to migrate and their opportunities to go abroad. In this way, ethnically differentiated migration opportunities may differentiate rural property relations along ethnic lines. We develop our argument by way of studying three villages in southeastern Albania that are inhabited by different ethnic groups (Vlach, Macedonian and Albanian). The villagers enjoy different access to foreign labour markets, which is at least in part due to the immigration laws of the neighbouring countries. Before we turn to our cases, we take a brief look at the Albanian countryside under socialism and review the stipulations of Albania's post-socialist land legislation.

## The Albanian Countryside under Socialism

> *Në radhë të parë, jemi shqiptare*
> (In the first place, we are Albanians)
> *Popular saying in socialist Albania*

By the 1980s, Albania was not only one of the most isolated countries in the world, but it also retained a much larger share of its population in rural areas than other countries in Western and Eastern Europe. In the perception of its political leadership, the country was surrounded by hostile powers, including both capitalist and socialist countries. This fear caused the socialist regime to split from the Warsaw pact countries in 1961 and break with China, its last remaining ally, in 1979. The ensuing isolation largely stopped exchanges of people, products and information between Albania and other countries (Pettifer 2001). Isolationist policy also caused the socialist regime to emphasize national food sufficiency. The regime restricted internal rural-urban movements to retain the labour force required in agriculture. As a result, many people remained

in the countryside, while their peers in Western and Eastern Europe migrated to urban areas from the 1950s to the 1970s (Sjöberg 1991). By 1990, 63% of all Albanians continued to live in the countryside, most of them working in agriculture.

Collectivization and state planning served to ensure national food self-sufficiency for the socialist regime (Sjöberg 1991). By 1967, private ownership of land was eradicated and agriculture fully collectivized. Control over productive decisions shifted from individual producers to agricultural co-operatives. The co-operatives, in turn, were subject to a centralized system of state planning and procurement that emphasized the cultivation of grain for bread production. As a result, wheat fields covered large parts of the country, extending from the fertile plains into marginal sites with low yields in the mountains. At the same time, state planning and procurement worked to reduce economic differences among rural villages. Villages located in marginal areas received a similar level of state support in return for lower procurement quotas than villages in favourable areas. Similarly, collectivization brought about a levelling of economic differences among households within villages. Collectivization and state planning thereby turned Albania into "an island of increasing poverty" characterized by "extreme, spartan egalitarianism" (Vickers and Pettifer 1997:12).

Just as Albania's agricultural policy served to reduce economic differences, social policy sought to diminish ethnic distinctions. Albania has always included a number of ethnic groups, even though the proportion of ethnic Albanians is much higher than in other Balkan states. Alongside the majority of ethnic Albanians, which accounted for roughly 90% of the total population in 2003, the country is inhabited by groups of Bosniak, Greek, Macedonian, Serbian-Montenegrin, Roma, Vlach and Yvgjet origin (Lastarria-Cornhiel and Wheeler 1998; Berxholi et al. 2003).[2] While many members of minority groups live interspersed among the ethnic Albanian population, some—especially Bosnians, Macedonians and Vlachs—live in ethnically homogenous villages. Despite the diversity of these groups, Albania's socialist regime sought to play down the distinctiveness of their cultures and histories (de Rapper 2005). In its perception, national unity was critical for developing a strong Albania, an Albania that could withstand invasion by neighbouring powers. The regime therefore emphasized membership in the Albanian nation regardless of ethnic identity, promoting a singular national identity by way of a one-language policy and the systematic integration of ethnic minority representatives into the political system (Grupi Shqiptar i të Drejtave të Njeriut 2003).

By way of this brief review we want to indicate the economic and social egalitarianism that characterized the Albanian state's strategy for the countryside under socialism. The socialist regime sought to create a countryside where rural people became members of agricultural co-operatives regardless of their economic situation and ethnic affiliation, and where villages would fare relatively equally independent of the variation in local conditions. Considering the profound economic inequality and distinct ethnic identities characterizing pre-socialist Albania, the socialist policy worked to level economic and ethnic differences to some extent. By the 1980s, virtually every village was accessible by road and possessed irrigation, a school, and a cultural centre, even if it was located high up in the mountains. Similarly, the majority of adult villagers were members of a co-operative receiving relatively equal remuneration for their work (Vickers and Pettifer 1997).

Furthermore, this egalitarianism appeared to shape the initial debates about a desirable post-socialist countryside. The majority of political leaders and common people expected the countryside to be populated by a class of relatively equal small producers (Cungu and Swinnen 1999). This vision found its expression in the Land Law of 1991. The Law sought to re-create private property rights to land 24 years after its nationalization under socialism. It stipulated not only that all collective farmland was to be distributed on an equal basis to the rural population, but also that this rule applied to the whole country independent of distinct local histories and conditions. It took into account "neither former ownership, nor the land boundaries and sizes before collectivization" (Article 8). Instead, it stipulated the full distribution of all collectivized land on a per capita basis (*për frymë*) to the members of former agricultural co-operatives (Article 5). In addition to co-operative workers, other rural dwellers who were not members of co-operatives such as state farm employees, teachers or military personnel were also awarded land, albeit in smaller quantities (Article 6). This concern for economic and social equality set Albania apart from the rest of Central and Eastern Europe where most collective farmland was restituted to its historical owners or their heirs. Albanian critics of the Land Law, therefore, quickly labelled it a "communist law," as it smacked of the egalitarianism that had been so dominant under socialism.

In the remainder of this article, we examine how the 1991 Land Law played out in three villages inhabited by different ethnic groups. We trace actual changes in property relations regarding agricultural land to examine how those consolidated, modified or unravelled the egalitarian

vision for the Albanian countryside contained in the Law. Our analysis proceeds by way of three case studies, the first of which we turn to now.

## The Vlachs: Mass Exodus to Greece

The Vlachs number about 200,000 in Albania (Schwandner-Sievers 1999). They speak a Romance language and reside not only in Albania but also in neighbouring countries. In Albania, many Vlach villages are located in the rugged Gorë and Mokra mountains of southeastern Albania. One of these villages we call Bagëtia,[3] the site of our first case study, situated at 1,087m above sea level amidst immense old-growth forests and mountain pastures.

During socialism, Bagëtia was part of a co-operative with two other mountain villages of ethnic Albanians. Although the mountainous terrain was not suitable for crop production, central planning required the co-operative to produce wheat, rye and corn. Each year the co-operative had severe difficulties in meeting the production quotas set by the Ministry of Agriculture. Livestock husbandry had to make up for the low productivity of crops, producing meat, wool and dairy products. Yet despite these difficulties, Bagëtia and the other two villages were on relatively equal footing with co-operatives in better biophysical conditions.[4] This was mainly so because of the massive support the state provided to crop cultivation in the form of machinery, services and inputs. In addition, the state invested in the villages' infrastructure despite their remote location; a road connected Bagëtia to the lowlands. The village also had a cultural centre, an elementary school, a store selling consumer goods, a small irrigation system, livestock shelters and two large grain depots. Adult labourers worked in co-operative brigades and engaged in small-scale household production just like their peers in other Albanian villages.

Agricultural production and public infrastructure collapsed in Bagëtia after the co-operative was decollectivized in 1991. As the Albanian state liberalized domestic markets and, in particular, international trade, the cultivation of basic grains was no longer profitable. It did not pay because output prices dropped and input prices soared. At the same time, the gravel road that once connected Bagëtia to the lowlands became impassable due to lack of maintenance. The closest place to catch a minibus to a lowland market was now an hour's walk away along a narrow and rugged mountain path. In addition, by 2004 the village possessed only three public faucets and, in the winter, was often cut off from electricity for days at a time. The villagers could no longer receive Albanian radio or television programs—despite the satellite dishes on their houses, which allowed them to receive Greek, German and Italian channels. If they wanted to make a phone call they had to walk up a mountain about 500m before their mobile phones reached the net.

As living conditions deteriorated at home, new opportunities arose for the villagers across the border. Available jobs and living conditions in Greece proved highly attractive to many people from Bagëtia. According to returning migrants, an unskilled labourer could earn €25 a day in agriculture or €50 a day in construction in Greece in 2004.[5] At the same time, in the lowland towns around Bagëtia there were hardly any jobs available in agriculture and in construction, a labourer could make only between €8 and €15 a day. Moreover, Greece promised the villagers the opportunity to take up a modern life, an opportunity many did not see in Albania.

Migration to Greece was not only attractive for these economic and social reasons but it was also made easy by Greek immigration policy. The Greek state granted Vlachs three-year visas (*viza 3-vjeçare*) for a small fee that allowed them to work in Greece. Greek legislation also allowed Vlachs older than 65 to register as residents in Greece, which entitled them to a monthly pension of €200 (*pensioni i grekut*). The Greek state provided Vlachs this preferential treatment because it regarded all Albanian Vlachs (as well as other Albanian Greek Orthodox) as of Greek origin (Schwandner-Sievers 1999; Konidaris 2005). In the Greek view, Hellenic heritage was seen as passed on through Byzantine culture to contemporary practitioners of the Greek Orthodox religion.[6]

The new opportunities in Greece dramatically affected livelihood strategies in Bagëtia. Between 1991 and 2004, almost two thirds of the original 70 households permanently left the village. Of the remaining 24 households, 20 had one or more persons permanently or seasonally working in Greece. These households typically received significant remittances from Greece, giving them annual incomes of several thousand euro and allowing them to build second houses in the lowlands. Only four of the remaining households stayed entirely in Bagëtia. They lived off of the occasional sale of livestock as well as pensions and social assistance paid by the Albanian state, which hardly exceeded a couple of hundred euro per year. The 100 or so people remaining in the village, therefore, engaged in varied livelihood strategies as illustrated by the following examples.

Maks and Lisa Dulellari exemplified the "orphaned pensioners" alluded to by de Soto et al. (2002:46). This elderly couple had two sons and a daughter living near Athens. The children regularly sent remittances so that, economically, Maks and Lisa were well-off. Maks said he missed his children and grandchildren but was generally

happy with his life as a shepherd. Lisa, on the other hand, felt increasingly lonely. What she missed, she said, "is the sound of children shouting, their happy voices. But now it is silent, [you hear] only the sound of livestock when it comes in from the pasture. Imagine in winter, nothing whispers."

The Dulellari's favourable economic situation was radically different from the dire circumstances in which Dhimitri Tanellari found himself. In 2004, Dhimitri had become a lonely, disillusioned old man of 62 years who lived alone after his wife passed away in 2003. He had to live on about €1,000 a year, as he had no children in Greece. Of this, the pension he received from the Albanian state accounted for about €700 while the remainder resulted from the sale of his yearly calf. Each year Dhimitri collected wild plums to make some 40ℓ of *raki* (strong liquor), which helped drown his sorrows.

Many of the households who left Bagëtia had completely broken off their ties to the village. Only a few people came back for special occasions such as important Orthodox holidays. Frosina Geri, for instance, a hale and hearty old lady of 73, returned to Bagëtia three times a year on Christmas, Easter and Mary's Assumption (*Shën Marien*). "Here [in Bagëtia]," she said, "I have my dead father, my sisters and brothers and as long as I can still walk I want to come and see them!" Yet her connections with Bagëtia did not go beyond this. She barely managed to keep up her house and had long given up any interest in agricultural land.

### *Property Relations Regarding Agricultural Land: From Distribution to Restitution*

> *Kur erdhi kooperativa, ju më vodhët tokën time, tokën e babait dhe gjyshit tim. Tani unë do e marr atë prapë!*
> (When the co-operative came, you stole my land, my father's land and my grandfather's land. Now I take it back!)
> *Maks Dulellari, Bagëtia*

The massive exodus to Greece had a strong bearing on property rights to land in Bagëtia. Starting immediately after the collapse of the socialist regime, the departure of many households gave considerable maneuvering space to a local land reform that differed considerably from the legal stipulations laid down in national legislation. Instead of the equal distribution of co-operative farmland on a per capita basis, villagers ultimately settled on restituting the land to historical owners and their heirs. Migration facilitated this process because many of the emigrating households envisioned a future abroad or in the lowland villages, and thus displayed very little interest in asserting their claims to agricultural land in Bagëtia. At the same time, those who stayed behind felt very attached not only to the place but also the particular parcels of land they or their ancestors had worked in the past.

Nevertheless, the decision to restitute was not implemented without controversy. Before the villagers finally agreed upon restitution, three land commissions attempted to distribute the co-operative land. The first commission was established under the socialist regime to distribute 0.15ha of co-operative farmland to each household. It worked on this process for less than a week before the order came to dissolve the co-operative. The subsequent commissions did not acknowledge distributions made by the first commission. The second land commission intended to implement the legal stipulations of the land reform law. Headed by the former chief of the co-operative, this second commission distributed 0.13ha per capita. The figure was chosen because this was the maximum land area a household could own and still be eligible for social assistance. Yet, before the second commission was able to issue a provisional land certificate (*tapi*), the head of the commission left Bagëtia for Greece. It was, therefore, left to a third commission to issue land certificates. At the time of writing, these provisional documents were the only *legally* valid form of land ownership in Bagëtia, as the cadastral service never came around to confer formal land titles to villagers.

The distribution mandated by the Albanian state quickly encountered open opposition in Bagëtia. Families with few members and claims to large areas of ancestral land resisted the distribution and did not shy away from using physical force to assert their claims. A crucial role in advocating for and enforcing restitution fell upon Maks Dulellari, who resisted equitable distribution on the grounds of historical justice. Maks had worked his father's land for 12 years as a young man before it was collectivized by force. Throughout the time of the co-operative, he had remained an outsider in the community, never forgetting the bitter moment when he was forced into the co-operative. Maks, therefore, thought that the right time had come to reclaim his landholdings.

Maks had to fight hard to get his land claims recognized by fellow villagers. When the land commissions assigned some of the land claimed by him to other families in the village, he went out with his wife, children and grandchildren to plant 2.5ha of wheat. Furthermore, Maks declared: "I will not give my land back. And if someone dares to plant something on it I will kill him!" To back up his words, he bought an old German carbine which he always carried with him. Facing these actions and proclamations, the proponents of distribution called the police. According to his account, Maks was arrested and jailed 12

times. The police confiscated his rifle, the family's new television set, their radio and carpets. One time after a bitter night in jail, Maks remembers, one of the policemen threatened him, "return the land, or I will crash this chair on your back!" But none of the pressure or threats worked. Before his resistance crumbled, other families in the village began to follow Maks' example and claim their historical landholdings as well.

Maks and other proponents of restitution got their way because many other villagers simply did not bother to put up a fight. Some of them tried to resist restitution initially but ultimately shied away from the social conflicts their resistance would entail with local big men like Maks Dulellari. Moreover, as we pointed out above, the massive out-migration that started in Bagëtia in 1991 eased many potential conflicts. One household, for example, sold their house and left to live in a lowland village after their 0.15ha homegarden was restituted to the pre-collectivization owner. Since the family wanted to leave Bagëtia anyway, they did not bother to put up a fight. Villagers, therefore, eventually settled on restituting the land, even though it caused some households to end up with very little or no land because their ancestors had sold their holdings prior to collectivization.

## The Macedonians: Seasonal Labour Migration to Macedonia

The second village, which we call Dardha, is one of nine Macedonian villages located on the shores of Lake Prespa in southeastern Albania. Together, these villages are home to some 4,500 people, whose origin in the region dates back to medieval Bulgarian and Serbian empires (Apostoli 2002). They speak a Macedonian dialect and have re-established relations with people across the border in what is now called the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, after ties to former Yugoslavia had been completely cut off during socialism. Dardha is home to a population of about 340 persons in 81 households, a number which changed little between 1990 and 2004.

During socialism, Dardha excelled in high agricultural productivity. The village controlled more than 100ha of fields and pastures of which about 60ha were irrigated. Dardha's people cultivated mainly wheat and corn in a co-operative they had formed together with the inhabitants of surrounding villages. Starting in the early 1980s, they also raised an expanding herd of livestock that by 1990, included some 90 head of cattle, 250 sheep, 800 goats and more than 100 draft animals. In addition, the village kept some 1-2,000 chickens in a battery farm. A book about the Prespa region, therefore, lauds Dardha because "the duties of the plan were realized...in agriculture and livestock, and even more was produced" (Apostoli 2002:43).

Despite this strong economic performance, Dardha did not stand out among other Macedonian, Vlach and ethnic Albanian villages in southeastern Albania in terms of amenities. In fact, its infrastructure was comparable to that of Bagëtia: Dardha had a cultural centre, an elementary school, a cistern for storing drinking water, an irrigation system, stores selling consumer goods, shelters for livestock and grain depots. The only significant difference was the chicken farm in Dardha, for which there was no equivalent in Bagëtia. Otherwise, most of the villagers worked in one of the three co-operative brigades, cultivated small household plots and raised some animals on their own account.

After decollectivization, the conditions for viable commercial agriculture rapidly deteriorated in Dardha as in Bagëtia. Most importantly, much of the village's vital irrigation infrastructure was looted in the upheavals of 1991, seriously diminishing the productivity of the once fertile land. As in Bagëtia, lack of market access came to be another major impediment because it took three hours on a bumpy gravel road to reach the nearest Albanian market and farmers had to rely on public transportation for marketing.

As agriculture was no longer a profitable activity, villagers looked across the border for new opportunities. Not only was the Macedonian border closer than the next urban centre in Albania, but being ethnic Macedonians, the villagers did not face restrictions in migrating to Macedonia and taking up employment there (King and Vullnetari 2003:32). Especially with regards to employment, they received preferential treatment by Macedonia, which had become independent from Yugoslavia in 1991. Their ethnicity entitled them to unrestricted labour migration because of the weight the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia accords to ethnic identity. From the viewpoint of the Macedonian state, an ethnic Macedonian (*Makedonec*) was someone who was an Orthodox Christian, spoke Macedonian, and identified as Macedonian. This emphasis on ethnic identity reflected not only the country's recent secession from former Yugoslavia but also the culmination of a nation-building process that the country had pursued since the end of the Second World War (Perry 1997). For this reason, the constitution of Macedonia specifically mentions a "concern for the status and rights of persons belonging to the Macedonian people in neighbouring countries" (Article 49). Thus, it became common practice for the Macedonian state to grant citizenship to ethnic Macedonians living in

Albania. For the villagers of Dardha this meant that virtually all held dual citizenship in 2004.

The jobs available across the border proved highly attractive to the people of Dardha. Over the course of the 1990s, a growing number of households began sending a member or two to Macedonia for seasonal employment. They took on jobs as masons, master bricklayers or hired hands in agriculture. Although wages in Macedonia were not much higher than in Albania, it was much easier to find work there. By 2004, seasonal labour migration to Macedonia had become the most popular way to make a living in Dardha. The migrants usually worked in Macedonia for between three and eight months a year and returned home during the winter months. Of the 81 households in the village, 45 had one or more members working seasonally in Macedonia. There were only 24 households that did not engage in any seasonal labour migration and 12 households had members working seasonally in Greece.

Sterjo Shumka and his family illustrate the livelihood strategies of migrant households in Dardha. Sterjo lived nine of 12 months in Monastir, Macedonia, where he worked as a bricklayer or hired labourer in agriculture. His wife Drita stayed in Dardha together with their 13-year-old son. The couple's three daughters lived with their father in Monastir, where they went to high school and university. Except for the short stints when Sterjo was at home, Drita took care of all farm activities, including the cultivation of one hectare of agricultural land and more than a dozen sheep and goats. This was difficult because the land and the livestock would have normally required more work than one person could do. Drita, therefore, worked their land at a very low intensity, as did other migrant households in Dardha.

### *Property Relations Regarding Agricultural Land: From Individualization to Co-ordination*

Unlike in Bagëtia, the implementation of the land reform in Dardha followed the legal stipulations of the land reform law. The villagers formed a land commission in 1991 and distributed the collective farmland on a per capita basis. Every household received some six parcels of land, including vineyards and cropland of different qualities. The total area depended on the number of people living in the household. The result of this distribution was a highly fragmented structure of landholdings. The average holding was a mere 1.2ha, the typical parcel being a thin stretch of land measuring 15m by 150m. Considering this fragmentation and the labour shortage due to migration, Dardha's farmers faced serious problems in cultivating the land. Nevertheless, in face of the risks associated with seasonal labour migration—such as the possibility of not finding employment—they continued to engage in agriculture to build up a safety net at home.

The villagers solved the problems associated with land fragmentation and labour shortage by co-ordinating their cultivation practices. They co-operated in the cultivation of wheat and corn fields to facilitate the use of large machinery. Together they hired two or three tractors at the beginning of each planting season to plow all fields. Like in co-operative times, the tractor drivers plowed entire blocks, which contained up to 50 individual parcels. During the harvesting season, the pattern was repeated with combine harvesters. For the tractor operator, this meant dealing with 50 different landowners. For the farmers, it required a readiness to deal with the tractor driver on the day when he was going to plow the parcel. If farmers missed the tractor driver, the driver would skip their plots and, during the busy planting season, was unlikely to return to plow it later.

Thus, property rights to agricultural land in Dardha had evolved away from the highly individualized structure created by distribution. Individual households continued to possess exclusive use rights to the parcels allocated to them in 1991. At the same time, they were expected to honour collective agreements among villagers. They felt the social obligation to meet the tractor driver on the arranged day and they had an economic interest in doing so, as there was no other viable form of land preparation or harvesting. Property rights to land in Dardha, therefore, connected individual rights to use land with social obligations about the management of the land. During the agricultural season, the significance of co-ordination was visible in the village landscape: agricultural fields displayed a homogeneous pattern of corn and wheat.

## The Albanians: Impediments to Migration

Kodra, as we call our last case study village, is inhabited by ethnic Albanians. Albanians generally believe that they derive from the ancient Illyrians, tribesmen who settled in and beyond the area of what is today Albania (Pettifer 2001). Archeological evidence from sites near Kodra shows that the region around the village has been settled since at least the late Bronze Age (1600-1000 BC).

Kodra itself is located close to the road connecting Tirana with the town of Korça. It lies at 872m above sea level at the entrance of a valley that is surrounded by the high, rolling foothills of Guri i Kamjes. With a population of about 1,000 persons, Kodra was much larger than both Bagëtia and Dardha in 2004. Its population size had remained stable since the collapse of socialism.

During socialism, conditions in Kodra were relatively comparable to those in Bagëtia and Dardha. Kodra was part of a co-operative together with three neighbouring ethnic Albanian villages. In Kodra, the co-operative produced a rich variety of agricultural products including grain, forage, fruits, vegetables and tobacco. In addition to crop production, some 200 cows, 250 sheep and several dozen oxen, horses and donkeys were kept in Kodra. The co-operative infrastructure included a cultural centre, an elementary school, co-operative stores, three irrigation reservoirs, half a dozen animal shelters and two large depots to store the harvest. As with Bagëtia and Dardha, village adults worked the land in brigades and in small homegardens.

Deterioration of economic conditions after the collapse of socialism was less pronounced in Kodra than in Bagëtia and Dardha. Biophysical conditions were favourable to agriculture in Kodra, as the village is located in a fertile valley suitable for growing a diversity of crops. In addition, the village irrigation system remained intact for the most part during the upheavals of regime change. Likewise, urban amenities and markets continued to be accessible, as the small town of Pogradec was close by and could easily be reached via regular minibus routes. In 2004, Kodra still operated its own elementary school, had just re-opened a mosque and was building an evangelical church. In addition, four grocery stores, three bars and a restaurant, a garage, a doctor, and even a private language school testified to the dynamism of the village.

Despite the good conditions, most households in Kodra were only part-time farmers and derived their main cash income from sources outside agriculture. Of the village's 312 households, 53 were full-time farmers or shepherds. One hundred and eighty-eight households received their main cash income from working in the construction or service industries in Pogradec. For only 71 households did the income from seasonal migration or remittances constitute the main source of cash income. The low number of households living mainly on remittances indicated a comparatively low level of emigration; 55% of households in Kodra had one or more members permanently or seasonally working abroad—in comparison to 84% in Bagëtia and 70% in Dardha.

One cause of the comparatively low emigration rate was that Greek immigration law remained restrictive for all Albanians except for members of the Vlach and Greek minorities. Albanians without an employment history in Greece could not obtain a visa to enter the country. Migrants who had worked in Greece before could obtain visas for a three-*month* period only. For each additional three-month period that they wanted to extend their visa, they had to overcome bureaucratic hurdles and pay a fee of €150, which was a substantial expense for them. Compared to the regulations pertaining to members of the Vlach minority, who easily obtained a three-*year* working visa, the disadvantage for ethnic Albanians is obvious. In addition, even if they held proper visas, Albanians were sometimes turned back at the border or had their visas cancelled by Greek police without reason (see Nicholson 2002, 2004).

Immigration law, of course, was only one factor influencing villagers' decisions to migrate. Another factor that worked to discourage migration was the severe discrimination that ethnic Albanians faced in Greece. Discrimination continued despite two Greek regularization programs in 1998 and 2002, through which more than 300,000 Albanian immigrants were legalized (Fakiolas 2003; Konidaris 2005). As a result, some migrants from Kodra who had worked in Greece in the early 1990s chose to work in Italy in 2004 as conditions were better there (see King and Vullnetari 2003). But even there, negative attitudes towards Albanians went hand in hand with increasingly restrictive immigration policies. The most recent of these was the Bossi-Fini Law of 2002, which—while permitting further regularization—criminalized undocumented migration and further tightened the rules for expulsion (Carletto et al. 2006; Kelly 2005).

Nevertheless, despite restrictive immigration laws and discrimination, many villagers continued to find their way into Greece and other neighbouring countries (see Nicholson 2002). Some men without a history of formal employment in Greece crossed the border illegally. Most of them already knew the route through the mountains from past experience. Others chose to go with local smugglers who took people to Greece via Macedonia for the price of €900 per person. They were ready to pay this hefty fee because they calculated that two months of good work would cover the cost of the trip. Migration, therefore, was more attractive to many villagers, especially young men, than working in agriculture or other sectors at home. Nevertheless, the risks taken and expenses incurred appeared to motivate more ethnic Albanians to look for livelihood sources at home than their Vlach and Macedonian peers.

As a result of the impediments to migration and the comparatively favourable conditions for agriculture and off-farm employment, the majority of villagers had remained in Kodra in 2004. Among village households, a variety of livelihood strategies had emerged each of which each depended on particular combinations of migration strategies, agricultural production and off-farm activities. In contrast to Bagëtia and Dardha, agri-

culture continued to be a significant source of subsistence and income for a large majority of the households in Kodra.

Most households had taken up part-time farming, combining subsistence production with small-scale commercial agriculture and wage labour. Lavderim and Xhuli Sherifi, a young couple in their 20s for example, cultivated 0.2ha of land with onions or cornflowers. They sold their crops to merchants who specialized in vegetables or medicinal herbs. Whenever he could, Lavderim made some additional money by working as a hired labourer in construction or agriculture around Pogradec. Although they were both hard workers, Lavderim and Xhuli barely made enough money to make ends meet for themselves, their three children and Lavderim's grandmother. Lavderim had never been abroad and explained that he had no intention of going.

Other households focused on full-time farming as a livelihood strategy. These households practiced small-scale commercial agriculture, cultivating a diverse mix of cash crops, such as grapes, vegetables and fruit trees. They did not engage in labour migration. Some households of this group had started processing their crops, making wine and raki, for instance, and selling the processed products to local bars and restaurants. Instead of crop production, some had gone into raising livestock, focusing on the production of meat and dairy products.

Aside from these full- and part-time farmers, there were also a few households that did not engage in commercial agriculture but worked the land solely for subsistence purposes. Gjergji and Afërdita Proni, for example, were one of the 71 households in the village whose main source of income derived from remittances. The Pronis had two sons living in Greece who sent home about €2,000 per year. Together with Gjergji's state pension of almost €80 per month, this amounted to a substantial amount of money considering rural Albanian standards of living.

### *Property Relations Regarding Agricultural Land: Contested Distribution*

> *Shteti i ka ndarë një herë ato dhe po ia riktheu pronarëve, do të plasi luftë civile*
> (The state has already divided it, and if it's returned to the ex-owners, a civil war will break out)
> *Taxi driver near Kodra*

As with Dardha, Kodra's land commission completed their work in 1991, distributing collective farmland to the agricultural labour force. Similar to Dardha, Kodra's households received some five parcels of land, including a share of the fertile land on the valley floor, a piece of the collective vineyard, a plot with fruit trees, and a plot of cropland on the valley's slopes. Household landholdings were relatively equal, the average holding being 0.7ha. Yet in contrast to Dardha, Kodra's farmers proceeded to farm their land on their own. Land continues to represent a valuable asset for the smallholders of Kodra, as agriculture remains a primary source of livelihood. In this way, property rights to agricultural land in Kodra closely match the expectations that have informed Albania's post-socialist land reforms, especially if one compares the property relations in Kodra with those in the other two villages.

Nonetheless, the distribution effected by the land commission has never found unanimous support among the local population. Many people continue to assert the legitimacy of historical rights to land (i.e., the rights of people to the land that they or their parents had worked prior to collectivization). Therefore, many discussions in the village today centre on the legitimacy of distributing land to the agricultural labour force in 1991. The topic remains highly controversial, as the following conversation, which we overheard in a shared taxi near Kodra, illustrates:

| | |
|---|---|
| Passenger: | I'm for the return of the property that my father left me and which belongs to me. |
| Driver: | But it has already been divided by the state. |
| P [insists]: | It belongs to me because it's mine. |
| D: | What belongs to you? [Turning to the other passengers] Hey, to whom belongs the land, to him or to God? [To the first passenger again] The land belongs to God and He made it for Man, so it belongs to everybody. |
| P: | My father bought it a long time ago, and the others take my land, huh? |
| D [loud]: | The state has already divided it, and if it's returned to the ex-owners, a civil war will break out and Sali and Fatos will be declared "Enemies of the People." |

The conversation reached a critical point here. Sali Berisha and Fatos Nano were opposition leader and prime minister at the time this conversation took place. "Enemies of the people" (*armiq të popullit*) had been a category created by the socialist regime to condemn wealthy peasants and deviants from the Party line. People who fell into this category were publicly ostracized under socialism and lived a miserable life. It was the harshest treatment that the driver could think of for politicians who supported the restitution of land to historical owners. Yet it did not deter the passenger from insisting on his point:

P [louder]: They are assfuckers! If the state wants, it takes your land, and there is nothing you can do!

D [conciliatory]: The state eats my shit, that's all it does! [But] what you want is that ten persons eat and 900 others die. No, no, look [the taxi passes by a cemetery], two metres belong to us, nothing more.

Contestations over property rights to land were not just theoretical debates, as some villagers took things into their own hands, just as Maks Dulellari had done in Bagëtia. Hassan and Mira Proni, for instance, were involved in a dispute about an agricultural parcel for many years. The elderly couple in their 60s received the parcel adjacent to their home in the course of distribution. They even received a provisionary certificate to the land from the land commission. Yet neither the land commission's decision nor the certificate prevented Bujar Sherifi, a fellow villager and former head of the commune council, from claiming the plot for his own household. Bujar based his claims to the plot on historical rights he held and threatened that he would destroy any crops planted by the Pronis. The couple responded by filing several complaints with the commune administration and Pogradec deputy to the national parliament, but their efforts were in vain, and the conflict over the plot was unresolved.

## Conclusion

Taken together, our case studies indicate that migration contributed to radical transformations of rural property relations in Albanian villages after 1990, unravelling the legal specifications contained in national law. These transformations originated from negotiations over property at the local level, defying the uniformity of Albania's land legislation (see de Waal 2004). The negotiations were strongly influenced by rural people's pursuit of economic opportunities and a better life, which motivated many to migrate abroad. Migration, in turn, was conditioned by ethnic categories used in the immigration laws of neighbouring countries. Immigration laws thus contributed to changes in rural property relations that were ethnically differentiated.

Our account thus suggests that migration has significant influence on rural property relations (see Nuijten and Lorenzo, this volume). Moreover, its influence is conditioned by the particular form it takes. This is particularly true for transnational migration; that is when people cross national borders and maintain social relationships across them (see Levitt 2001; Portes 2001). Transnational migration connects localities across national borders, affecting both the localities of origin and migrants' destinations. At the same time, changes in the originating and receiving areas affect the transnational flow of migrants. In this way, migration, sending localities and receiving localities constitute each other in a transnational social field (Basch et al. 1994; Portes et al. 1999; Levitt 2001). This mutual constitution is a key feature of the scalar dynamics discussed by Turner and Wiber (this volume), involving practices and processes operating at the local, national, and transnational levels.

As much as transnational migration is about flows of people across national borders, it comes about by the barriers states and other political, social or religious institutions erect to control the flows (see Massey 1999; Levitt 2001). In other words, transnational migration offers attractive opportunities for the pursuit of livelihoods and a better life because of the simple fact that the opportunities are not equally available to everybody. Among the key barriers states purposively erect to exclude or include are immigration laws. These laws are an important influence on migration flows and the forms migration takes, yet they are also only one conditioning factor among several. People always find ways to negotiate the immigration laws of other countries, for example through "illegal" migration. Furthermore, the attractiveness of a country for migration depends on other factors such as attitudes regarding migrants.

Immigration laws may be defined in national law, yet they are transnational by their very nature. First, the influence of immigration laws reaches far beyond national borders as they are embedded in transnational social fields (Levitt and Jaworksy 2007). As migration has become a significant livelihood strategy in many parts of the world, immigration laws generate repercussions not only in immediately bordering areas but thousands of kilometres away. More importantly, as laws respond to migration flows, they are influenced by changes in localities far away. Second, the notions informing immigration laws are often transnational. Many laws use ethnic categories to define lines of exclusion and inclusion. More specifically, the idea of an ethnic homeland has found its way into many immigration laws (Brubaker 1998). For example, most of the new constitutions written in Southeastern Europe tie the definition of citizenship to ethnic markers, dividing resident populations into ethnic majorities and minorities and extending citizenship to co-ethnics living abroad (Verdery 1996). The idea of an ethnic homeland is also enshrined in many other constitutions and immigration laws across the world (Brubaker 1998).

Transnational migration contributes to an increasing differentiation of rural property relations as part of its

broader effects on places of origin (see Landolt et al. 1999; Landolt 2001; Levitt and Jaworksy 2007). As some people enjoy better opportunities to pursue livelihoods and better lives abroad than others, migration becomes a significant factor transforming rural property relations. Migrants pursue different claims on rural resources than those who stay behind. Moreover, migrants' claims on resources are likely to depend on whether they move on a more permanent basis or seasonally, individually or as whole households. Consequently, transnational migration affects the distribution of property rights to rural resources in the localities of origin (as it will in the destination areas). It also influences the legitimacy of competing justifications available to people making claims on resources, such as the need for subsistence. Furthermore, it affects the range of uses considered legitimate for rural resources, above all through the once dominant concern with productive uses of land. Migration, therefore, emerges as a key field of transnational agency with direct influence on rural property relations.

The differentiation of rural property relations may occur along ethnic lines if ethnic markers distinguish people's migration opportunities. Of course, the pursuit of economic opportunities, political freedom and a better life remain the primary drivers of migration. Yet ethnic markers differentiate people's ability to engage in migration, just as transnational migration opens up ethnic definitions for renegotiation (see Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Ethnic markers thus emerge as a primary factor conditioning changes in property relations. They emerge as a significant influence not because of any inherent differences in property relations between ethnic groups nor are the ethnic differences "home-grown" in any sense; ethnically-differentiated property relations arise under such circumstances because of transnational dynamics involving migration flows, immigration barriers and receiving areas as much as the localities of migrants' origin. Correspondingly, international immigration laws may not determine migration flows and thus property relations, but they may contribute to the emergence of ethnically-differentiated property relations in migrants' originating areas.

Finally, transnational migration challenges the very tenets of "rural" and "property" in "rural property relations," as it does with the notion of "home" (Eastmond 2006). How can one consider property relations in a "transnational village" (Levitt 2001) to be any longer "rural" if they are influenced by transnational migration flows and conditioned by the immigration laws of other countries and by what is happening in receiving localities? Transnational migration, therefore, challenges the presumably sharp divide between rural and urban, the association of rural areas with a particular dependency on natural resources and the premise that rural villages are relatively stable communities with few "externals" (see Turner and Wiber, this volume). Similarly, transnational migration shakes the conceptual foundations of "property" by challenging the position of the nation-state as the politico-legal institution sanctioning property relations. Property is a key field in which nation-states assert and solidify authority over people and territory. Nation-states, in turn, are often key politico-legal institutions recognizing claims on resources as property. Therefore, as transnational migration weakens the broader authority of nation-states, it touches a key foundation of property relations and contributes to the unevenness of the state's presence in people's lives (see Levitt and de la Dehesa 2003; Caglar 2006). It may even strengthen customary arrangements against national law, as is highlighted in our account and the case discussed by Nuijten and Lorenzo (this volume), giving rise to "transnational custom" in the process—but that is a subject we must leave for another paper.

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## Notes

1 See Turner and Wiber (this volume) for a discussion of the property concept. Drawing on their discussion, we understand property relations regarding agricultural land as emergent patterns of actual land use practices that are considered legitimate and in turn, influence individual practices.
2 We emphasize that these ethnic categories are problematic as they tend to naturalize distinctions that are socially constructed. For insightful discussions of ethnic identities in Albania see Schwandner-Sievers 1999 and de Rapper 2005.
3 This name, the names of the other two study villages and the names of all villagers are pseudonyms in order to protect the identities of our informants.

4 This comparison (and similar ones involving the other two case study villages) is informed by a random survey of 98 villages supervised by Daniel Müller under a different component of the research.

5 Unless noted otherwise, all salaries and prices in this chapter are those paid in 2003-2004, assuming an exchange rate of 125 Lek to the Euro.

6 The Greek view is not the only interpretation of the Vlachs' historical origins and cultural affiliations. Some Vlach organizations in Albania take a "pro-Romanian" stance, basing their claim on linguistic evidence that shows that the Vlach language is closely related to Romanian (Schwandner-Sievers 1999). In our own fieldwork, we found that most Vlach villagers considered themselves to be autochthonous people (*autokton*).

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