Return migration, entrepreneurship and development in rural Kosova

Lumnije Kadriu

Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës,
Prishtina, Kosova
lume70@hotmail.com

Abstract

Return migration has become very prominent a pattern in the migration trajectories of peoples' mobility and thus increasingly researched, revealing a myriad of nuances and experiences. Mostly, the motive for emigration is based on the desire and goal to achieve a success which will prove fruitful upon return. However, the return is faced with different challenges which were/are being under the scrutiny of return migration theoretical explanations. Although Kosova is primarily known as a country of emigration due to its turbulent political history and ongoing economic challenges there are evidenced cases of voluntary return migration. In this paper I will bring experiences of several low skilled returned emigrants in their villages of origin who established businesses upon return that resulted with certain degree of development and upward social status mobility at personal and communal level. The return of low skilled workers in rural areas may be among the most challenging returns if considered limited opportunities these areas usually provide. However, new dynamics, especially in tourism potential, are emerging in rural areas. The cases in this paper are quite unique and serve as an illustration of different individual agencies of migrants used as strategy of return.

Key words: *Return migration, rural, entrepreneurship, social mobility, development.*

Introduction

The most significant characteristic of migration, regardless of its direction – outward or return - is the desire to secure and achieve a better life for the migrant as an individual and their family. Return migration studies have become an increasingly important part of migration studies, as their growing volume enables analysis from various perspectives and disciplines. Several types, nuances, and impacts of return migration have been recognized and analyzed using various approaches: Neo-Classical Economics, New Economics of Labour Migration –NELM, the Structural approach, the Transnational approach, and the Social Network Theory. The Transnational and

ISSN 3027-5024 (Online)
DOI https://doi.org/10.62303/6vwx2g05

Social Network approaches have proven particularly fruitful, as they examine return migration from various angles, including the continuous mobility of people, their ties with both receiving and origin countries, the transfer of goods and information, and their interaction within these contexts. Successful return migration often results in upward social status mobility for returnees and their families, as well as contributing to the local development of country of return.

Although Kosova is among the poorest countries in Europe, and the desire to emigrate remains strong within its population, the phenomenon of return migration - specifically *self-voluntary* return migration - is becoming increasingly evident. I use the term 'self-voluntary return migration' to distinguish these returnees from so called 'voluntary returns' which are typically sponsored and lack better alternatives. (For more, see: Bivand-Erdal and Oeppen, 2022,70-83; Kadriu 2024, 95 - 117). In this text, the term 'voluntary' will connote 'self-voluntary' even if not explicitly stated each time. It is worth noting that the various waves of emigration of Kosovar Albanians since 1960s (Mustafa et al. 2007, 27; Kadriu 2022, 97-8) that resulted from agreements between the Yugoslav state and Germany and Switzerland, regarding "guest worker" migration policies, led to continuous return migration.

Kosova was an agricultural country, so most migrants came from rural areas.[1] Consequently, returns often occur in the same places they departed from. However, it is increasingly evidenced that returnees may chose to settle in nearby urban areas or the capital city, attracted by greater opportunities and other factors.[2] Nevertheless, reliable data on the number of voluntary returnees is scarce, as they are not registered in official data of return migration programs, and their timing of return is based on personal or familial decision.

Another notable characteristic is that, despite growing diversity of educational profiles among migrants since the 1990s, migrants from rural areas in Kosova were often low-skilled workers with limited education, similar to migrants from other countries (Farrell et. al 2012, 31-44; Hagan and Wassink, 2019; Mustafa at al. 2007, 27; Gallopeni 2016, 296). As a result, once in the host country, they often worked in low-skilled jobs and received little attention. However, if they choose to return voluntarily after some time, they have opportunities for success and upward social mobility due to accumulation of financial, social, human, and cultural capital. Even without professional education in host countries, the experiences, networking, and the know-how and skills they acquired for certain businesses or entrepreneurial ventures enable a successful return. The concept of "skill" and distinction between "high-skilled" and "low-skilled" workers/ migrants has garnered attention from many scholars and have been defined differently by economists, sociologist, and policy makers. (Kubiciel-Lodzińska and Maj 2021; Weinar and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2020; Pastore and Tomei 2018) In this paper, high-skilled workers are "defined as those who hold a university degree (Iredale, 2016), while workers with a secondary and lower education level, or who are still studying, were included in the low-skilled category" (Kubiciel-Lodzińska and Maj 2021, 1552).

The impact of migration and development in rural areas, driven by remittances is evident in several anthropological accounts (Reineck 1998, Kadriu 2016, Leutloff-

Grandits, 2023). However, there was no focused anthropological research regarding rural return migration and development, and social mobility resulting from entrepreneurship in Kosovo. In such cases, the eleveation or upward mobility of migrants' social status is commonly anticipated. Pitirim Sorokin introduced and defined *social mobility* as "any transition of an individual […] from one social position to another." (1959,133). He identified two types of social mobility: horizontal mobility, which involves the transition of an individual or social object from one social group to another at the same level, and vertical mobility, which refers to the movement from one social stratum to another – either upward or downward.

This paper presents the experiences of several low-skilled returned migrants who successfully established businesses or entrepreneurial ventures in rural areas. The ethnographic and descriptive aspects of cases are based on the conversations with the returnees conducted through open semi-structured interviews in their villages (from 2018 to 2024). Several cases of returnees who invested in their places of origin were encountered spontaneously during my fieldwork for various research projects[3]. Some were discovered through discussions with friends and colleagues, while others were identified through short interviews on TV programs, which motivated me to visit them in person. For this paper, I have selected three cases of Kosovar returned migrants from different Western countries (Switzerland, Germany, and Slovakia) who returned to various villages in Kosova. Two cases involve first-generation migrants who, at the time of migration, were students: one a high school student and the other a university student. Coming from rural background, both had experience and knowledge in agricultural work. The third case, involves a migrant from a rural background whose family has sent members abroad for five generations. They worked as bakers in various places, starting in Serbia, then moving to Vojvodina, Romania and finally settling in Slovakia. During seasonal returns to the village, they also worked on their field crops.

In all three cases, the knowledge and skills (e.i., human capital) they acquired as members of families with agricultural background helped them find jobs in the host country. In turn, the experience gained abroad facilitated their entrepreneurship and their social mobility upon return. In the first case, a returnee became a plant cultivator; in the second, a bio product entrepreneur, (producing eggs, honey, dairy products, fruits, and vegetables); and in the third, a wine producer. Their names used in the text have been changed to preserve interlocutors' anonymity. Consent to use their stories was obtained verbally before the recording of conservation. To understand these experiences in the context of return migration, the first part of the paper briefly introduces the types and theoretical frameworks of return migration, as well as the concept of development in the context. This will be followed by a presentation of three cases mentioned, illustrating successful returns with a developmental impact.

Studies on return migration

Although return migration has almost always been present as a phenomenon, it was only briefly mentioned in scientific literature during the 1950s (King 2000, 27).

Its development as a field of study began in the 1960s, gaining momentum since the 1970s (King 2000, 27; Cassarino 2004). Today, it is considered a subfield or branch of migration studies (King and Kuschmider 2022, 8; Čapo 2024, 12). As a result, several authors have proposed typologies of return migration. For example, in 1974, Bovenkerk classified return migration typology based on four factors: (1) level of development of the host and home country (poor countries v.s. rich developed countries), (2) the time spent in host country, (3) the distance between countries, and (4) the motivations and circumstances of return; Francesco P. Cerase's 1974 typology includes four categories: return of failure, return of conservatism, return of innovation, and return of retirement; in 2018, Graziano Battistella also proposed four types: return of achievement, return of completion, return of setback, and return of crisis or forced return (King 2000, King & Kuschminder 2022, 4-5). In addition to these typologies, there are also several theoretical frameworks for understanding return migration.

In 2004, Jean-Pierre Cassarino elaborated five theoretical frameworks, which are briefly explained below. The *Neo-Classical Economics* approach focuses on return migration as result of real income differences between sending and receiving countries. Migration is considered a one way, with return viewed as failure. The *New Economics of Labour Migration* (NELM) approach views return migration as the logical result of a "calculated strategy", defined at the family or household level, resulting from the successful achievement of a purpose. According to Oded Stark, the NELM approach "changes the focus of migration theory from individual independence [...] to mutual interdependence", at the family or household level (Cassarino 2004, 256). Despite the differences and advantages, Cassarino argues that both approaches have shortcomings. While they attempt to explain when and why a decision to return home is made, they fail to address where returnees actually go or the social, economic and political conditions in their homeland. The Structural Approach adresses these gaps by focusing on the return migration process through empirical findings and theoretical insights from anthropologists, sociologists and social geographers. (Cassarino 2004, 257). In both the Structural and NELM approach, financial and economic resources brought to the country of origin are critical for making the decision to return and achieving reintegration afterward. The success or failure of returnees is analyzed by linking theeconomic and social realities of their country of origin with their expectations. George Gmelch (1980, 135-159) further elaborated on Structural approach, emphasizing the need for migrants' return intentions with their motivations. Whether real or imagined these intentions shape returnees' expectations in their country of origin.

Since the late 1980s, the Transnational approach, embraced by many migration researchers, has shown to be a very fruitful framework for understanding the situation of migrants. The advantage of transnationalist theoretical framework lies in its central focus on the economic and social ties between migrants'countries of reception, which exist at different levels. Unlike structuralists and advocates of NELM, transnationalism does not view return as the end of the migration cycle. For them, "return migration is a part and parcel of a circular system of social and economic relations and exchanges which facilitates the reintegration of migrants while conveying knowledge, information

and membership" (Cassarino 2004, 262). As a result, transnationalists emphasize migrants'preparedness before their return (i.e. through visits, remittances, etc.). It is worth noting that "the transnational approach to return migration seems to encapsulate their initiatives and projects at home in a fundamental set of mutual obligations, opportunities and expectations stemming from common ethnicity (i.e. diaspora) and kinship (i.e., family, the household)" (Cassarino 2004, 262-5).

The next approach, Social Network Theory, shares two key similarities with the transnational approach. First, it views "returnees as bearers of tangible and intangible resources" and second, it emphasizes maintaining strong ties with their countries of origin andreception (Cassarino 2004, 265-8).

Preconditions for successful return

These theoretical frameworks and typologies have been expanded and further developed by many scholars. Russell King and Katie Kuschmider note that "over the past two decades [return migration studies] expanded in four ways, such as 1. The widening geographical range of research on return, 2. broadening the conceptualisation of return, 3 increasing politicizations on return and 4. post return effects of return migration" (2022, 8).

Drawing on diverse experiences from countries worldwide, these typologies and theoretical theoretical frameworks demonstrate that the return migration can vary widely in outcomes. It may be successful or unsuccessful, desired or regretted, driven by family circumstances, or carried out without severing ties with host country, etc.

Drawing on typologies and theoretical frameworks on return migration, Russell King outlines several conditions that contribute to successful return migration and its role in development. He defines development, in the broadest common sense, as the *overall improvement of living conditions* (2022:314), while migration is seen as both a desire and an act to achieve this goal. The preconditions for a successful return that contributes to development include the following: First, the *willingness* of an immigrant to return, which makes it a *voluntary* decision, made without eternal pressures, such as expiration of contract or failure to gain asylum rights. The second condition is *preparedness*, as discussed in Cassarino's elaboration of transnational approach (2004, 261-5). Preparedness includes the migrant's *desire*, *readiness* (such as having financial capital, relevant skills, and social contacts), and *knowledge assessment of suitable conditions* in the country of origin. The third precondition is the *length of stay* in the host country and the returnee's *optimum age* upon return. Cerase suggested a ten-years stay to ensure a successful return. However, King argues that the stay should be long enough "to enable the migrants to accrue financial, social, and human capital and to absorb experiences and values, yet sufficiently short that returnee still has time and energy to utilise the acquired investment capital, skills and attitudes" (King 1986, 19). The final precondition concerns age: returnees should be old enough to have mobilized their resources but young enough to pursue their goals and use their capital to foster home-country development. (Lang et al. 2016, 12, in King 2022, 321).

Rural return migration in Kosova

In the case of Kosova, due to decades-long political tensions in former Yugoslavia, return migration has become more aparent only after the war in 1999, following thewithdrawl of Yugoslav forces from Kosova (Kadriu 2022, 98; Gallopeni 2017, 18; Mustafa and al. 2007, 27). Given that most migrants originate from rural areas, it is not surprising that return often occurs in home villages, despite the ongoing trend of rural depopulation in Kosova. For example, while 61.7% of population lived in rural areas in 2011, the latest data show that in early 2024, the percentage had decreased to 50 %, (ASK Vjetari 2024, 9; Digital 2024 Kosovo Report). This makes focusing on return migrants to their villages particularly important, as it highlights a counter flow to rural depopulation. Moreover, if development proves succesful, it could generate new opportunities and create jobs. This research also contributes to the limited anthropological studies on return migration, which would help envision and understand returnees' experience, motives, thoughts, and the outcomes of their decision in depth - in other words, enabling us to explore their life (hi)stories (Kadriu 2022; Kadriu 2019).

The existing literature on Kosova Albanian return migration often addresses the subject within the context of a broader migration topic such as poverty reduction (Vathi and Black, 2007), reintegration (Arenliu and Weine, 2016), and/or intention to return or probability of returning (Gashi and Adnett, 2015; Möllers et al. 2017, Kotorri 2017; Gallopeni 2017). From an anthropological point of view, this approach has several limitations. First, they are all based on qualitative data; second, they address the intentions or probability of migrant return rather than actual returnees; and third, the data is gathered either through conversations with migrants in various host countries, as seen in Galopeni's work (2017), or through interviews with heads of households in Kosova who responded on behalf of emigrant family members, as in Gashi and Adnett's article (2015). Research on reintegration tends to focus on returnees who were deported or otherwise forcefully returned. Even in cases of assisted voluntary return, genuine free will is often questioned, as these cases usually involve targeted migrants with no legal right to stay in the host country. Moreover, none of these studies focus on self-voluntary return migration or exclusively examine return migration in rural areas.

Voluntary rural return migration is just one dimension of demographic dynamics occurring in the rural areas, which Caitriona Ni Laoire describes as a repopulation of rural areas. According to Ni Laoire "rural repopulation processes involve complex inter-relationships between new in-migration, return migration, return visits by ex-rural dwellers, second homes (some owned by ex-rural dwellers), and importantly, declining out-migration rates." (2007, 332-344). In Kosova's villages, all the above-mentioned nuances of re-inhabiting rural areas, can be observed, despite the ongoing trend of outmigration. In addition to retirement return migration and returns for family reunification or investments, new in-migration driven by lifestyle changes, such as building second homes, is also evident. These second homes may be constructed by new owners purchasing land independently or by companies as part of tourism projects. However, the latter is a topic that requires further research.

This paper is a modest attempt to address the gap in scholarly literature on return migration, entrepreneurship, and development in rural Kosova by presenting experiences of three cases discussed.

Bees, rabbits or trees: The establishment of business upon return as a dream come true

Shyqa is a plant cultivator and producer. Born in 1970 in the village in central Kosova, he migrated to Germany in 1986 at the age of 16. He had experience working in crop fields and some knowledge of grafting plants, which he learnt from his uncle, his father's brother. Finding a job in host country was not difficult, as his older brother was already there and working there. Together, they worked for a tiling company and a nursery garden, *Baumschule*. In the latter, they cultivated plants purchased from elsewhere; they did not breed or produce plants there. These jobs came easily to him, and he kept working on both roles for 14 years. Although he did not experience social upward mobility while in Germany, he accumulated financial and human capital, including savings and enhanced skills.

In 2000, Shyqa left his married brother and his family in Germany and returned to an extended family in Kosova, which included his parents and three married brothers (three older sisters were already married and living elsewhere). Before returning, he and his brother in Germany discussed who should return. Shyqa said that he decided to return because he was single and wanted to marry, while it was safer at that time for his married brother with children to remain in Germany. Therefore, his motivation for returning were to rejoin his family, marry and establish a business, as there was high the hope for Kosova to prosper after the war. He said: "We thought we will turn Kosova into Switzerland after liberation […] and it was our dream to open a business once we return". Upon returning, Shyqa, along with one of his brothers at home and the finances he and his brother in Germany had saved, decided to start a business together. He considered three business ideas: cultivating bees, raising rabbits, or establishing a nursery garden for plants and tree varieties. He chose the third option, thinking it would be simpler, but it turned out to be quite challenging, as plants and trees need long time to grow. He had learned grafting from his uncle and further enhanced his plant cultivation skills by studying various books, although he never took any formal course. For this, they used family land that his father had purchased long ago. In 2009, the extended family divided. His youngest brother continued with him in this entrepreneurial venture. Now, although they live in separate houses manage separate household expense, all other property, including land and company, remains jointly owned.

The business grew slowly but steadily. Today, their company employs sixteen regular workers and his sister's son now serves as the manager. His nephew used to study and work during the summer season he often invited friends and fellow students to work in the company. Over time, many of those students completed their studies, with some emigrating and securing professional employment in various countries. He

mentioned this achievement as contributions to both family and societal development, demonstrating how social capital, alongside family relations, is continuously built.

Figure 1. Nursery Garden Office. Photo by author.

A degree of development is evident in the fact that his company successfully export plants and trees beyond Kosova, including to Italy and the Netherlands. Cooperation has become much easier since his 20 -year-old son joined him. His son is a student at a university in Prishtina, studying Management, Business and Economics. His fluency in English has significantly facilitated their work.

His upward social mobility since he returned is evident - he has a new house, new fields, and is a business owner - and the contribution to intergenerational upward mobility appears promising. From a low- skilled worker in Germany, he has become the manager of the only nursery in the region that cultivates plants - seeding, grafting and nurturing them over for several years. He takes pride in his work, noting that while other companies trade plants, they do not cultivate them. When asked about the value of his experience in Germany, he emphasized that the most important lessons were the work ethic he developed, his approach to clients, and his shift toward prioritizing work over prolonged socializing and visits with family and kinship members. He views his enterprise as highly innovative due to the transnational ties and cooperation he has established with Italian and Dutch companies. His social mobility is evident when he reflects on starting everything from the scratch and, through hard work and persistence,

achieving ownership of the enterprise.

Figure 2. Parcel of Nursery Garden with plant varieties. Photo by author.

If I am doing this here, why can't I do it there?

Dema was born in 1961 in a peasant family in a picturesque mountainous village with scattered households. His family included his parents, four brothers and two sisters. In 1980s, Dema and his two brothers were students at the University of Prishtina when the political unrest began in Kosova, and they became involved in student movements. Due to increasing political and economic insecurity, Dema migrated in Switzerland in 1987, while one brother moved to Germany, and the eldest and youngest brothers

remained home. In Switzerland, he eventually found a job working in the crop fields owned by a university professor specializing in bio products. It was during this time that he was first introduced to the concept of bioproduction, which was just beginning to gain traction in Switzerland. Having worked in his family's fields and cared for livestock, Dema proved to be an excellent worker. Like many migrants do, Dema took on additional jobs. After a few years in Switzerland, he married an Albanian woman from Kosova. She began working in the restaurant kitchens there. The couple had two children: a daughter and a son.

In 1999, immediately after the war, he began the process of returning by first sending his wife and children back home, never imagining that he would remain a migrant until 2011, 24 years after he emigrated. Since their family homes in the village were all destroyed by Serbian bombardment, they built a new house that accomodated Dema's parents, two brothers with their families, and Dema's wife and children. He decided to return after learning about the benefits of bio products, particularly eggs, and the promising future that scientists in Switzerland predicted for such products. As he explains:

> One day I was watching TV and while listening to the news I noticed they were showing results on a survey about people's most favourite product. "Bio egg" was in the first place. I listened attentively about the advantages of bio products and its economic and health benefits. And then it struck me "That's it. I am going home and I will do the best for my country and people. If I am doing this here, why can't I do it there?"

Upon his return, he built a chicken coop where he initially kept 200 chickens, adhering to all required standards for producing bio eggs. This positively impacted not only his nuclear family but also on his brothers, who live nearby and, in some respects, still function as extended family. Now, the four brothers each have their houses and live separately, but they work together in different sectors. They run a bio products company, and in addition to bio eggs, they sell honey from beekeeping operations (one of brothers has 50 bee hives), as well as jams, pickles, *ajvar* and other goods made from fruits (apples, plums, pears, and various berries) and vegetables, all cultivated without pesticides. They also produce cheese and dairy products from their cows. Their youngest brother remains in Germany but continues to send remittances.

His return has had a positive impact beyond his family, extending the boundaries of his influence and elevating the degree of the development impact. Over time, the number of chickens increased, requiring him to set up additional chicken coops and collecting points, which have also benefited other villagers (he now has around 6000 chickens). In addition to renting land for coops, he involved several families with low socio-economic status in entrepreneurship, helping them improve the quality of cattle and chicken farming while ensuring adherence to bio standards for producing cheese and eggs. He distributes eggs to around 200 markets across Kosova and delivers family bio products to affluent clients in Prishtina.

Figure 3. Chicken coop. Photo by author.

His innovation does not stop there. For nearly ten years, he has also operated a restaurant on the first floor of his house, offering stunning views of the mountains and sky. Alongside local traditional dishes, the restaurant serves Swiss dishes prepared by his wife, who learned to make them during their time in Switzerland. Next to the restaurant, he opened a "Hof-laden" (a German term for a farm shop), where he sells his family's bio products. A large table in his *Hof-laden* is covered with numerous photos of distinguished guests who have dined there, including ambassadors, Kosova and world politicians, World Bank representatives, and many others. The menu costs €25, including wine and rakia. Although it is more expensive than in other places, he explains:

> It is worthwhile, since once they are here, they can feel as if they took a flight and reached in Swiss Alps, not only because of the dishes, but also of the beautiful view from window that look directly in mountains.

Figure 4. View from the restaurant. Photo by author.

Figure 5. Hofladen. Photo by author.

Ideas and agency for development are expressed by new initiatives. Recognising the beauty of the village and its potential to attract tourists, he plans to expand his business by offering rooms for rent. More importantly, he collaborated with fellow farmers to establish an association aimed at addressing their common needs with relevant ministries. Additionally, dissatisfied with the donations and subsidies provided by the state to entrepreneurs, he is negotiating with fellow farmers to open a bank to achieve independence.

Figure 6. Products sold in Hofladen. Photo by author.

Thanks to his innovativeness and new social status, he believes he has become a strong competitor in the market to two international egg brands, one from Italy and the other from Turkey. He proudly states that his production methods have attracted visits from foreign expert and students from national university. His upward social mobility and satisfaction with his success, especially in contrast to his life as immigrant, are evident when he states:

> I feel so proud because the sceptics who told me that I will not succeed, that I would not be able to sell, and that many products would not grow in my village without pesticides, were proven wrong […] In Switzerland I was anonymous.

> Today I am visited by ambassadors, professors, politicians and other prominent people.

Leaving as bakers, returning as wine producers

The third case, involving Luka, reveals different patterns of migration, action and negotiation. Luka's family originates from the village near the municipality of Prizren, located in the ethnographic province of Has in southern Kosova. This region is renowned for its long history of migration, particularly among men, who worked as bakers throughout the area. Meanwhile, those who remained worked in family fields cultivating different crops and vegetables. Luka has seven siblings - four brothers and three sisters. He is the eldest son, born in 1975, and his youngest brother was born in 1985.

Five generations of this family have worked and continue to work abroad as bakers in various locations. They began in Rahovec, a town in Kosova, then moved to Serbia, where Luka's grandfather and earlier generations worked for decades. Later, they moved to Vojvodina, with his father Isa and his uncle Hasan relocating there in 1964. Luka joined them in Vojvodina at the age 15. By 2000, all brothers and their nuclear families had joined as well. Luka worked in Rumania from 2008 to 2019, without his brothers. More recently, they relocated in Slovakia. His third brother moved first to the city of Šamorin, while Luka settled in Bratislava, where three other brothers soon was joined. Currently, Luka and Xhema work together in one bakery, while Ahmet and Nebi run another. Refik chose to work independently in Šamorin.

It is worth noting that Luka and his brothers, like many families in rural Kosova, show strong elements of traditional extended family structure. Those elements were also evident in Dema's case. I have previously referred to cases like this as transnational extended families, characterized by the large size of extended families among Kosova Albanians and the unique solidarity that extends to uncles (Kadriu 2018, 173–193).

According to Deborah Fahy Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela "transnational families [… are] families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of a collective welfare and unity, namely 'familyhood', even across national borders" (Fahy Bryceson & Vuorela 2002, 3) This phenomenon, combined with the feeling of belonging and connection to the homeland, reveal communal symbolic boundaries to a great extent. Although by the year 2000 all brothers were living outside of their country of origin, ties to the homeland were preserved. This was primarily because since 1992 Isa, their father, had returned to the village in 1992 and lived there with their mother. Their socioeconomic positioning in the host country remained unchanged for generations. However, in their village, it began to shift, first with purchase of land and later with a construction of a new family house in 2002. Although they predominantly lived transnationally, Luka and his brothers always intended - and still plan - to return permanently some day. The first step was taken by Luka in 2007, when his wife and three children returned to the village, although he continued to work abroad. Shortly afterward, Xhema followed

suit. The primary motivation for returning their wives and children was to prevent their children's assimilation into the host country. They work in pairs because it is more convenient for managing their business. For Luka and Xhema, this arrangement also facilitates visits and care for their nuclear families and their mother back home (their father passed away in 2015). They take turns staying home for three months at a time. The other brothers live with their nuclear families in host cities and visit homeland for summer holidays or other important occasion. Nevertheless, all five of them still mostly think and work as a joint family, especially concerning the shared property in their home village, thus maintaining their identity as an extended transnational family.

As a predominantly transnational family, but always keeping return and a strong connection to their homeland in mind, their upward social mobility became evident in 2013. That year, they began constructing separate yet uniform houses in the same courtyard, which they moved into in 2018 when the houses were completed. They are beautiful, large, modern houses, and surrounded by beautiful courtyards. They symbolize traditional values such as equality, brotherhood, and familyhood, while reflecting their success and modernization. The accumulation of financial remittances and joint investments reify symbolic boundaries of familial belonging. In public discourse, as is often the case with migrants, this expression is elevated to notions of ethnic, national, or cultural belonging.

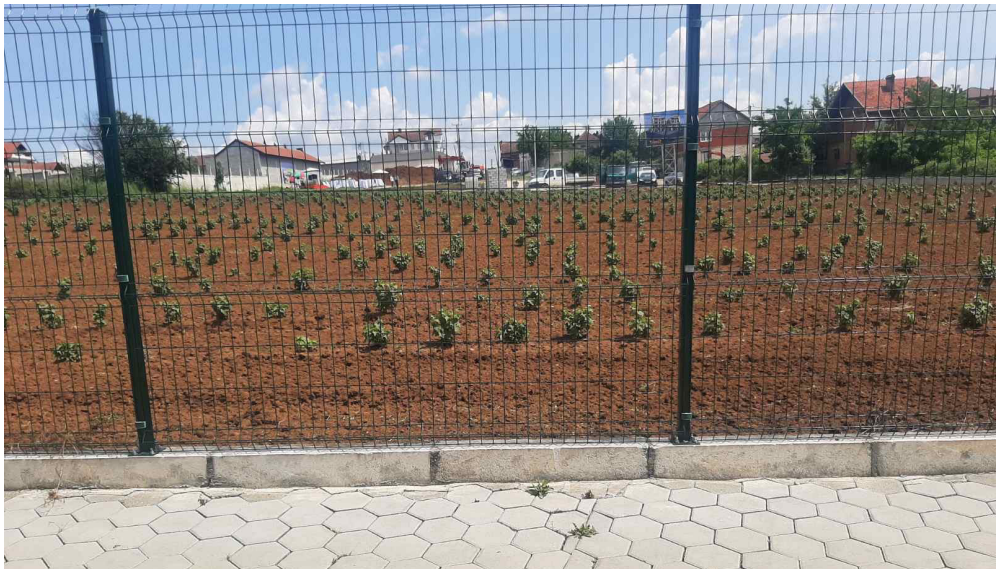

Figure 7. Field planted with currants. Photo by author.

A decade later, in 2023 Luka and his brothers took a significant step in their transnational life journey by leveraging their expanded social network. After establishing a meaningful relationship with Sala, an Albanian wine technologist from North Macedonia, and his employer – a wine owner in Slovakia - they decided to invest in a major joint project, that would allow them to cross multiple boundaries. They established a currant wine factory. The land their father bought decades ago, which

was previously planted with corn, wheat, and other common crops and vegetables, now has been planted with currants. In recent years, they had not used the land themselves, instead renting it to a villager without compensation, simply to keep it productive. The factory premises' foundation was inaugurated in June, with all brothers agreeing that it was a valuable opportunity. This venture provides all of them with motivation to eventually return home.

Figure 8. Foundation of currant wine factory. Photo by author.

A degree of development and upward social mobility is anticipated with the operationalization of the wine factory. This will involve a shift in profession, managerial responsibilities, and employment opportunities that will impact not only their family but also the village community. This indicates the need for a network of professionals for factory, including entrepreneurs from abroad, architects, construction companies, as well as wine experts from Kosova, too.

The cases presented in this paper provide valuable insights into the experiences of professionally low-skilled emigrants (without higher education in these professions). Despite their lack of formal qualifications, their innovative agency and ideas succeeded due to other factors identified as preconditions for successful return: readiness, preparedness, time spent in the host country, age and the sufficient accumulation of

financial, social and human capital. There are also examples of professionally high-skilled emigrants returning to rural areas in Kosova, whose developmental impact may be greater - or not - and which undoubtedly warrants further research.

Each of the above experiences is unique but shares several commonalities. In all cases, noticeable their functioning within an extended family is evident, exemplifying the notion and characteristics of a transnational family as a factor contributing to preparedness and maintaining relevant social networks and ties to homeland. Third case appears particularly distinct, as it highlights not only strong familial ties but also a transnational social network and its impact on new ideas and innovation, and development. This also demonstrates that, in some respect, development has been achieved while traditional values are preserved. Overall, in all three cases, the returnees have achieved upward social mobility, particularly in terms of quality of life and wellbeing. Significant development and upward mobility in respect to cultural development (i.e., university education) are noticed in second generation demonstrating ongoing investment in further social mobility. From a gender perspective, wives are increasingly participating in entrepreneurship. However, in rural context, they continue to perform traditional tasks such as cooking and preparing dairy products.

A lack of agency in decision-making among migrant's wives concerning return is evident in Dema's and Luka's cases. However, gender equality in rural areas was observed during research in another village of Rugova region, where returnees (a couple with their children) established a motel. The couple prepare traditional food, rent rooms, and contributes to the region's tourism development. Progress in improving women's role and position can be anticipated among younger generations, such as migrants' children. This is evident the fact that Luka's daughter graduated from university and is now employed as an early childhood educator at a preschool in nearby city. Similarly, Dema's daughter graduated with a degree in Mathematics and is employed.

The first two cases, which may be considered as established return cases, revealed that interlocutors highlighted several challenges they encounter as entrepreneurs. Among their concern was the lack of sufficient governmental support, though they acknowledged receiving occasional assistance. However, they argued that their contribution to the state through taxes support overall development, and thus their entrepreneurship should be further encouraged and supported. Dema explained how certain regulations complicate access to support and hinder development: "If we have donations/grants, we cannot ask for bank credits. If we apply for bank credit, we are not allowed to request donations. Considering the low level of support, high taxes, and the significant monetary demands from market-shops for selling products, we face considerable burdens."

In all three cases, the conversations revealed certain social remittances brought from the host countries. According to Peggy Levitt, "social remittances are the ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that migrants export to their home communities. They include ideas about democracy, health, and community organization." (2004, 6). In this context, they all emphasized work ethics, punctuality, and communication with second and third parties as most relevant experiences gained from the host countries.

Interestingly, in the first two cases, grafting and bioproduction can be interpreted as modern advancements of traditional practices, adapted to align with new consumer trends and marking social and economic development. The ideas for establishing a farmers' association and a bank represent tangible innovations related to democracy and community organization. The establishment of the wine factory, though still in its early stages, is anticipated to have a significant impact on both the village and the country. I have contacted Luka recently (2024) and I was really delighted to hear that the planted fruits are thriving in their land.

Despite the difficulties and challenges these returnees encountered upon returning and establishing businesses, when asked if they regretted their decision to return, the answer was a firm 'no'. Their reasoning often included patriotic sentiments and deep love for family, community, and homeland. This serves as evidence that their determination and willingness to return drives their continued efforts toward personal, familial, and communal development, as well as their goal of making their homeland a better place.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of self-voluntary return of migrants has been observed since the end of the war in 1999. This occurred largely due to the anticipated freedom of homeland and the heightened expectations surrounding the new political situation. This situation and sense of security for Kosova Albanians provided a well-founded precondition for what Amartya Sen described as 'people's *capability* to control their own lives and have access to key resources for enjoyable and satisfying life' which leads to development. (Amartya Sen 1999, in King 2022, 315)

For Shyqa and Dulla, 1999 was a year when they gained the capability to take control of their actions and realize their desire to return. This was a year in which, as emphasized in Structural Approach, "reality of the economy and society in the country" was favourable for them; it was also the year when, in line with the theory of New Economics of Labour Migration, their "calculated strategies" could be realized. Shyqa's willingness, motivation, and readiness to get married and start a business were immediate, whereas Dulla's "preparedness" required several more years.

These two cases exhibit fewer elements of Transnational approach since their return seems more as the "end of the cycle" of their migration. However, Shyqa's business is becoming transnational due to export of his commodities, while Dula's restaurant is evolving into a symbolic "transnational space" where Switzerland can be tasted through Swiss dishes, mountainous landscape, and international customers. In Luka's case, elements of Transnational and Social Network approach are more prominent. This is because they live as a transnational family across several host countries while investing in same entrepreneurial venture, utilizing their Social Network to support the business. The impact of their entrepreneurship on family and community development is promising, although it is still a work in progress.

International literature on return migration suggests that return to rural areas often have limited developmental impact for two reasons: first, returnees often have low skill profile, and second, rural areas offer limited opportunities and are often characterized by closed, conservative, and patriarchal communities. However, these case studies demonstrate that the return migration to rural areas can lead to success, local and state development, and social upward mobility of migrants, their families and communities, ultimately contributing to overall wellbeing.

ENDNOTES

1 According to World Bank estimates from 2007, 70 per cent of Kosovar migrants originate from rural areas (Möllers et.al 2017, 13).
2 In numerous conversations with migrants, it was evident that, in addition to investing in their villages, they also buy apartments in nearest city from the village or in the capital Prishtina, thereby becoming multilocal. Carolin Leutloff-Grandits observed a similar phenomenon among migrants in the region of Opoja in Kosova, and explained it as a need to distance themselves from social control of village life. This pattern has also been observed in other countries (Farrell et. al 2012, 31-44; Hagan and Wassink 2019).
3 My thesis, titled "Family Affairs While on Holiday: Practicing Holidays and Keeping Family Ties in the Kosova Albanian Diaspora" was defended on 28 November 2016. Many returnees were also encountered during the project titled "Atlasi etnografik i fshatit në Kosovë/Ethnographic Atlas of Kosova Villages" which was conducted in 2023 by the Institute of Albanology in Prishtina, respectively its two Departments: Ethnology and Folklore. As a result, 18 villages across Kosova were visited, and 80 interviews were recorded. Some of the interviewees were return migrants.

REFERENCES

Arenliu, Aliriza, and Stevan M. Weine. 2016. "Reintegrating Returned Migrants to Kosovo." *Psychological Research*, 19 (1): 61-73

Battistella, Graziano. 2018. *Return Migration: A Conceptual and Policy Framework.* Rome: Scalabrini Migration Center.

Bivand-Erdal, Marta, and Ceri Oeppen. 2022. "Theorising Voluntariness in Return." In *Handbook of Return Migration*, edited by Russell King and Katie Kuschminder, 70–83. Cheltenham: Elgar Publishing.

Bonvenkerk, Frank. 1974. *The Sociology of Return Migration: A Bibliographic Essay.* The Hague: Nijhoff.

Cassarino, Jean-Pierre. 2004. "Theorising Return Migration: The Conceptual Approach to Return Migrants Revisited." *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 6 (2): 253–79.

Cerase, Francesco. 1967. "A Study of Italian Migrants Returning from the U.S.A." *International Migration Review* 1 (3): 67–74.

Čapo, Jasna. 2024. "Introduction: Meandering Through Return Migration and Its Effects." In *Return Migration and Its Consequences in Southeast Europe*, edited by Jasna Čapo, Rozita Dimova, and Lumnije Jusufi, 11–33 (47). Berlin: Peter Lang.

Fahy Bryceson, Deborah, and Ulla Vuorela. 2002. "Transnational Families in the Twenty-First Century." In *The Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks*, edited by Deborah Fahy Bryceson and Ulla Vuorela, 3–18. Oxford: Berg.

Farrell, Maura, Marie Mahon, and John McDonagh. 2012. "The Rural as a Return Migration Destination." *European Countryside* 1: 31–44. https://doi.org/10.2478/v10091-012-0012-9.

Gallopeni, Besim. 2016. "Kosovar Emigration: Causes, Losses and Benefits." *Sociologija i Prostor* 54 (3): 295–314.

Gallopeni, Besim. 2017. "Kthimi i Emigrantëve Kosovar në Kosovë: Mit apo Realitet." *Social Studies* 11 (2): 17–34.

Gashi, Ardiana, and Nick Adnett. 2015. "The Determinants of Return Migration: Evidence for Kosovo." *Croatian Economic Survey* 17 (2): 57–81.

Gmelch, George. 1980. "Return Migration." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 9: 135–59.

Hagan, Maria, and Joshua T. Wassink. 2019. "Return Migration and Social Mobility in Mexico." *Current History* 118 (805): 50–55.

Kadriu, Lumnije. 2024. "Self-Voluntary 'Permanent' Return Migration to Post-War Kosova." In *Return Migration and Its Consequences in Southeast Europe*, edited by Jasna Čapo, Rozita Dimova, and Lumnije Jusufi, 95–117 (47). Berlin: Peter Lang.

Kadriu, Lumnije. 2018. "The Transnational Family: Between Preserving the Old and Acquiring a New Way of Life." *Ethnologia Balkanica* 21: 173–93.

Kadriu, Lumnije. 2020. "Paslufta dhe Migrimi i Kthimit në Kosovë." *Albanologji* 10 (2): 43–51.

King, Russell. 2000. "Generalizations from the History of Return Migration." In *Return Migration: Journey of Hope or Despair?*, 7–55. Geneva: United Nations, IOM.

King, Russell, and Katie Kuschminder. 2022. "Introduction: Definitions, Typologies, and Theories of Return Migration." In *Handbook of Return Migration*, edited by Russell King and Katie Kuschminder, 1–22. Cheltenham: Elgar Publishing.

King, Russell. 2022. "Exploring the Return Migration and Development Nexus." In *Handbook of Return Migration*, edited by Russell King and Katie Kuschminder, 314–30. Cheltenham: Elgar Publishing.

Kotorri, Mrika. 2017. "The Probability of Return Conditional on Migration Duration: Evidence from Kosovo." *South East European Journal of Economics and Business* 12 (2): 35–46.

Kubiciel-Lodzińska, Sabina, and Jolanta Maj. 2021. "High-Skilled vs. Low-Skilled Migrant Women: The Use of Competencies and Knowledge—Theoretical and Political Implications: An Example of the Elderly Care Sector in Poland." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 22: 1551–71. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-021-00813-5.

Lang, T., B. Glorius, R. Nadler, and Z. Kovács. 2016. "Introduction: Mobility Against the Stream? New Concepts, Methodological Approaches and Regional Perspectives on Return Migration in Europe." In *Return Migration and Regional Development in Europe*, edited by Z. Kovács, B. Glorius, and T. Lang, 1–22. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Levitt, Peggy. 2004. "Transnational Migrants: When 'Home' Means More Than One Country." *Migration Policy Institute Online Journal*. Accessed August 22, 2014. http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/transnational-migrants-when-home-means-more-one-country.

Leutloff-Grandits, Carolin. 2023. *Translocal Care across Kosova's Borders: Reconfiguring Kinship Along Gender and Generational Lines.* New York: Berghahn.

Möllers, Judith, Diana Traikova, Thomas Herzfeld, and Egzon Bajrami. 2017. "Study on Rural Migration and Return Migration in Kosova." *Discussion Paper* no. 166. Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies.

Mustafa et al. 2007. *Diaspora and Migration Policies.* Forum 2015. Prishtina.

Ni Laoire, Caitriona. 2007. "The 'Green Green Grass of Home'? Return Migration to Rural Ireland." *Journal of Rural Studies* 23: 332–44. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2007.01.005.

Pastore, Gerardo, and Gabriele Tomei. 2018. "High-Skilled Migration and the Knowledge Society: Theories, Processes, Perspectives." *Arxius de Sociologia* 39: 19–36.

Population of Kosovo in 2024. Accessed December 2024. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-kosovo.

Reineck, Janet. 1991. *The Past as Refuge: Gender, Migration, and Ideology Among the Kosova Albanians.* PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley.

Sorokin, Pitirim. 1959. *Social and Cultural Mobility.* Illinois: The Free Press of Glencoe. https://ia804704.us.archive.org/13/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.275737/2015.275737.Social-And_text.pdf.

Vathi, Zana, and Richard Black. 2007. "Migration and Poverty Reduction in Kosovo." *Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty*. University of Sussex: Brighton.

Vjetari Statistikor i Republikës së Kosovës, 2024. Agjencia e Statistikës së Kosovës (ASK). Accessed December 2024. https://ask.rks-gov.net/Releases/Details/8328.

Weinar, Agnieszka, and Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels. 2020. *Highly-Skilled Migration: Between Settlement and Mobility.* IMISCOE Short Reader. Springer.

About the author

Lumnije Kadriu is a senior research associate at the Institute of Albanology, Department of Ethnology, in Prishtina, Kosova. She is the author of two monographs: *"Glocalization: Ethno-Cultural Perceptions"* and *"Holidays, Family, and Homeland in the Practices of Kosovo Albanian Diaspora."* She serves as a member of the editorial board for the journal *"Gjurmime Albanologjike: Folklor dhe Etnologji"*, published

by the Institute of Albanology in Prishtina, and for *"Antropologji,"* published by the Institute of Anthropology and Study of Arts in Tirana. She is also a member of SIEF (International Society for Ethnology and Folklore) and InASEA (International Association for Southeast European Anthropology). Her recent research interests focus on globalization, transnationalism, and return migration.