

Travelling genealogies: tracing relatedness and diversity in the Albanian–Montenegrin borderland¹

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Oh, you come from our relatives in Albania. Welcome, welcome. Our door is always open to you. Are you hungry? Please stay for lunch. How are our relatives? Send them kind regards and tell them that we are looking forward to seeing them again soon. Come, stay for lunch. My son will be here in a minute. (cited from fieldnotes)

This astonishingly warm welcome was immediately followed by a breathtaking moment. When Rustem – my co-traveller – and I entered the house of Ilija Karadaglić's 85-year-old widow, Marija, in the village of Vranj (see Figure 4.1), we really did not expect to find what was hanging on the wall to our left, so that it would be the first thing visitors would see. It was the most complete version of the Sarapa family tree we had seen so far and we were totally unaware of its existence. The small genealogical fragment we had been carrying with us for weeks seemed inconsequential compared to the magnificent and artistic genealogy comprising twelve families and going back to the fifteenth century that had been compiled by Colonel Vaso Vukičević in 1959 (see Figure 4.2).²

However, we were not the first visitors who, by following the 'genealogical' path, had knocked on the door of the Karadaglić family. About thirteen years before, the Ymeribrothers from Koplik in Albania – whose family tree we carried with us – had crossed the Montenegrin–Albanian border immediately after its reopening in 1990. The two brothers, who were well-known dentists about to open a private clinic on the outskirts of Koplik, were fulfilling their father's last wish: to re-establish contact with their relatives in Montenegro, contact that had been almost entirely lost by the closure of the border in 1948.

In the course of my research on the coexistence of ethnically and religiously diverse populations in the Shkodra region (see Figure 4.1), where I collected life stories and family histories, I encountered several cases of family (re-)connection, including the reconstruction of genealogies. Having framed my research as a regional comparison (Gingrich and Fox 2002), I was drawn into this ongoing 'genealogical cross-border movement' and became both a 'witness' and at times even an

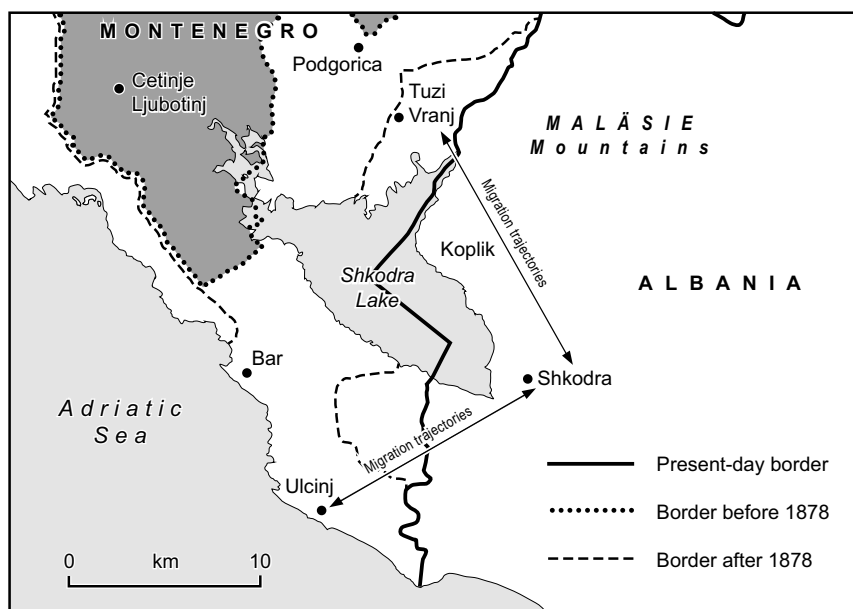
agent of family reconnection. I decided to trace the genealogical trajectories and relations and use them as a compass for capturing regional cross-border mobility and relatedness (Carsten 2000). In particular, however, I was interested in their interrelation with local diversity patterns, understood as modes of differentiation and accommodating difference (e.g. Vertovec 2009). In this sense, the Sarapa case proved to be highly instructive.

Indeed, the intra-regional comparison soon revealed a significant difference between two main migratory and hence 'genealogical trajectories' connecting Albania and Montenegro: one leading from Shkodra and its surroundings to Ulcinj, and the other one from Shkodra up to Tuzi and Podgorica (see Figure 4.1). While genealogies marked by migration between Ulcinj and Shkodra were clearly mono-ethnic and mono-confessional (Albanian–Muslim), the Sarapa genealogy – which included relations stretching across present-day Albania and Montenegro north of Lake Shkodra – featured an extraordinary diversity and inclusiveness that incorporated practically all local ethno-national, religious and ideological/political 'categories'. Here, people declaring themselves to be Albanians, Montenegrins, Serbs, Yugoslavs, Christians and Muslims, democrats or socialists – allegiances that entailed tensions and conflicts in other parts of the Balkans – were not merely relatives, but respected the individual freedom of self-denomination.

In this chapter I use episodes from my journey along the Sarapa genealogical pathway to explore the interrelatedness of human and border mobility and inclusivity of diverse population patterns. I will show how the narrative and biographical movement through, and the shared knowledge of, the border region within different time-spaces is constitutive of the openness to diversity that characterises this northern Montenegrin–Albanian borderland in the Sarapa case.

Furthermore, I will show how in the case of a particular inclusive kinship practice and genealogical representation, ethno-national and religious diversity – although prominently featured – are but two aspects of diversity understood in a multi-dimensional (Vertovec 2007, 2009) and intersectional (e.g. Yuval-Davis 2011) manner, where citizenship, cross-border migration background, gender, bilingualism and political and ideological positions also play a vital role. The chapter thus follows the call to take seriously the salience of ethno-nationalism in the Balkans, while accepting the need to go 'beyond' conventional analyses (e.g. Verdery 1994; Duijzings 2003; Bougarel et al. 2007; Tošić 2015a) and avoiding the reproduction of the Balkanist stereotype of the ethno-national 'powder keg'.

I conclude by suggesting that the kind of inclusive diversity pattern revealed through genealogies and modes of relatedness characteristic of the border region that is the focus here is one of the important factors for peaceful coexistence: that is, the lack of ethno-national violence. Moreover, I argue that the border legacy of peaceful coexistence should be considered within the ongoing process of EU integration, which – through its focus on minority rights – has so far strengthened rather than transcended ethno-national allegiance.



4.1 The Shkodra region: border movements, migration trajectories and localities

Moving and crossing borders: mapping genealogical time-space

The border between present-day Montenegro and Albania features several significant spatial shifts through time and different socio-political contexts. Although necessarily reducing the historical-spatial complexity of border movements, the map in Figure 4.1 emphasises three distinct time-space border fixations. The dotted line represents the border up to the Treaty of Berlin (1878), which not only recognised Montenegro's independence, but extended to it significant territorial gains (as indicated by the shaded area). The solid line indicates the present-day state border, whose ground was laid at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The border was marked not only by time-space shifts, but also by shifting degrees of porosity and enclosure, as successive border regimes transformed the landscape in different ways. Under the Ottoman Empire in the mid-nineteenth century, the area was a frontier rather than the border 'line' that came to typify post-Westphalian Europe as naturalised, timeless and self-evident (see, e.g., Green 2009). Like other 'shatterzones of empire' (Bartov and Weitz 2013), this imperial borderland was marked by permeability, brisk and diverse forms of mobility, 'flexible' governance strategies and ambivalent loyalties among the population (e.g. Reinkowski 2003; Blumi 2003). As Reinkowski argues, it was the distinctive dynamics of the Ottoman-Montenegrin border that contributed to shifting identities, boundaries and allegiances among the local population. Local people found themselves

between the 'soft' margins of Ottoman rule on the one hand and, on the other, the political strategies of the Montenegrin rulers whose goal was to shift the border in their favour. Hence repeated border crossings, conversion to Islam or intermarriage were common social practices in the Montenegrin–Ottoman borderland.

After having been marked – although still permeable and contested – by more pronounced linearity due to the post-imperial rise of the nation-state in the Balkans and the emergence of contested national borders, the year 1948 represents a crucial rupture in the history of the Albanian–Montenegrin borderland. From 1948 onwards Enver Hoxha's totalitarian and isolationist regime transformed Albanian borders into almost impermeable 'death zones'. 'Even the birds were afraid to fly over the border' was a phrase I often heard during my fieldwork in Albania, which clearly expressed the collective trauma of a life marked by repression, fear and highly restricted mobility. The few individuals who could cross the border legitimately – for example athletes – were often covert 'messengers' carrying letters to relatives beyond. The even fewer individuals who managed to flee – whose families often did not even know of their plan – did not as a rule carry messages due to the clandestine and highly risky nature of their one-way journeys to 'free' and 'modern' Yugoslavia.

After the fall of the authoritarian socialist regime in Albania in 1990, the reopened border to Montenegro (at that time a Yugoslav republic) became the space of travelling goods and people both legally and illegally. Apart from the political and economic aspects of the reopening of the border after more than 40 years, a crucial socio-cultural dimension of the cross-border process was the (re)discovery and revival of family ties. Most of all Albanians, longing for reconnection with the 'outside world' after decades of almost hermetic isolation, reached out for their known and unknown relatives led by surnames and genealogical fragments. The Montenegrins, on the other hand, as in the case of the Sarapa 'genealogists,' as we shall see below, were as much driven by curiosity as by a desire for family reunion. Albania represented the ultimate socialist 'other' in contrast to Yugoslavia's open borders, freedom of movement and global non-aligned political agency.

The two main reasons for cross-border movement between Albania and Montenegro – family reunion and trade – were mutually constitutive. The kinship-led border crossers were joining the large-scale cross-border movement connected to the retail trade and smuggling, which was especially profitable during the international trade embargo on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. At the same time, these family ties to Montenegro and bilingualism were crucial for becoming a successful border entrepreneur. In many cases initial encounters between relatives led to regular border crossing for mutual visits and eventually to the (re)building of close personal and trade relationships that persist to the present day.

Genealogies, genealogists and diversity

Apart from exemplifying early anthropological ‘mimicking’ of natural science epistemologies,³ the genealogical mode of thought has been the object of substantial critique in anthropology due to its tacit essentialist and binary (nature/culture) implications. However, the genealogical paradigm remains relevant in anthropology, since it ‘not only figures centrally in organizing knowledge about the world alone but is also implicit in structuring those social institutions and relations that give our social world its form and meaning’ (Bamford and Leach 2009: 2–3).

Following the many critiques of the genealogical method, my aim is not to reconstruct a historical genealogical ‘truth’. Rather, I aim to explore how and when people narrate and (re)present their genealogical knowledge, and how they relate to each other while referring to it. In other words, I am principally concerned with what people actually ‘do’ with genealogies. The heuristic notion of ‘relatedness’ (Carsten 2003: 5) is a useful conceptual tool, since it makes graspable relations grounded on claimed and genealogically ‘proven’ ‘natural’ kinship connections, as well as those based on other kinds of relations (such as historical knowledge, trade relations and friendship) which evolve around the process of family reunion.

My epistemological approach is both emic and narrative-praxeological. In the first sense I have taken up the local prominence and similarity patterns of social organisation in the Montenegrin and Albanian part of the Shkodra region. The region is historically characterised by an exogamous patrilineage and tribal system,⁴ a pronounced knowledge and socio-political relevance of relations based on reference to genealogical and symbolic kinship,⁵ similar customary law patterns⁶ and patriarchy (e.g. Djilas 1958; Kaser 1992; Morrison 2009).

In the second sense, I conceptualise the ethnographic reality of genealogy, which people were reconstructing and literally carrying around, as a narrative (and) agency space.⁷ In other words, I appropriate the local prominence of the genealogical mode of representation and relatedness as a ‘sensor’ for inquiring into modes of accommodating various dimensions of social differentiation as well as the dynamics of life in a border region. Genealogy figures here as a ‘boundary marker’ (Heiss and Slama 2010), exemplifying specific modes of exclusion and inclusion, and as a medium of narrating the historical dynamics of population diversity in the Albanian–Montenegrin borderland.

The case of kinship (re)connection in the context of a transforming borderland immediately after the end of a highly restrictive border regime is a particularly interesting setting for inquiring into modes of dealing with difference. To begin with, it includes people who have in many cases never seen each other before, and who in spite of spatial proximity lived in radically different socio-political environments, have different educational and social statuses and mobility biographies and potentially refer to different readings and segments of family and regional history.

Genealogies themselves – as relational and historical narrative ‘maps’ – had a

crucially different significance in the Yugoslav and Albanian parts of the borderland. While in Montenegro genealogical knowledge and 'activity' was not sanctioned, in Albania under Hoxha genealogies evolved almost as secret knowledge, an instance of which the local significance of genealogies in Shkodra – the present-day urban centre of northern Albania and one of the most important urban units in the Ottoman Balkans – can serve as a prime example. During my fieldwork I realised that the reconstruction of family history and genealogy was a way of reappropriating social status after the trauma of the Hoxha regime, which *inter alia* aimed at literally erasing urban middle-class identity. In Shkodra, which as one of the strongholds of the urban middle class was particularly targeted by the Hoxha regime, the dominant discourse of incorporation centred on urbanity. The prime 'other' of the urban resident (*cytetar*) is the 'hill dweller' and the peasant (*malisor* and *katundar*), who can, however, accommodate to the urban way of life. A crucial aspect of the latter – usually expressed through the metaphor of 'calmness' – is their alleged 'inherent' tolerance for ethno-religious diversity and the associated peaceful habitus of the urban dwellers (Tošić 2015b). The main collective agents of the urban middle-class discourse are the so-called 'old families' (*familje e vjetere*) whose existence and legitimisation depend literally on the production of genealogies. This is best exemplified by the work of Hamdi Bushati, whose two volumes on the history of Shkodra together with his genealogical booklet containing the family trees of the old families (Bushati 1998, 1999a, 1999b) graced the bookshelves of every family I visited in Shkodra. The following statements represent the quest of many Shkodra families to belong to the class of old families, a quest that motivated the reconstructive 'genealogical activities':

'We should have been in the book.' 'At the time we were asked to provide our genealogy, we still haven't reconstructed it.' 'Ours is a real old Shkodra family. You can find us and our family tree in Bushati's book.' 'Many old families were left out by Bushati.'

Hamdi Bushati's book, which is both held in high regard and seen as incomplete, became the encyclopaedia of old Shkodra families and as such expressed the middle-class discourse on urbanity and incorporation within which genealogies served as documents of old-family pedigree (Tošić forthcoming 2015b).

By contrast, families in Albania with kinship ties to Montenegro had to hide their genealogies during the totalitarian Hoxha regime, since any link to Yugoslavia was likely to result in even greater surveillance than that experienced by other Albanian citizens and could lead, for example, to denial of access to higher education. Thus it is understandable why the Ymeri brothers waited for the end of the regime and the opening of the border before attending to their father's dying wish to reach out to their relatives across the border. As Bajram Ymeri remarked when explaining why genealogical information was top secret: 'No one was supposed to know. Otherwise we would have never been allowed to study! This would have been a huge problem for us!' The genealogists in this case were generally fathers and grandfathers, who

communicated genealogical knowledge to their children surreptitiously and by word of mouth.

In Montenegro the situation was crucially different. Genealogical knowledge, although part of the standard cultural repertoire, never acquired such a huge significance, since it was never sanctioned. Within the Yugoslav context, the Montenegrin focus on kinship and local history was (and still is) both envied and ridiculed. In the manner of 'nesting Orientalisms' (Bakić-Hayden 1995), it was ascribed to the 'more traditional' and 'tribal' 'Montenegrin mentality' as opposed to the urban, individualistic and nuclear family mode of 'Yugoslav' and 'socialist' sociality.

The Montenegrin genealogists I encountered in the course of my Sarapa travels were usually older men who were interested in family history and who devoted their life to genealogical research after their retirement. Their prime motives were twofold: first, preserving the history of the family and situating it within the context of the history of Montenegro; and second, reuniting relatives and keeping relations based on kinship 'alive'. The historiographical work can be characterised as a transnational and systematic collection of sources (letters, documents, pictures, obituaries, historiographical references and notes made by different relatives) by a number of persons – sometimes in cooperation, but sometimes in competition – that resulted in meticulous private archives, genealogical drawings and internet sites (as in the Sarapa case).⁸ 'I gathered all this because one should know about one's family. The young people are usually not interested', Jovan Vukičević – a retired director of a furniture factory living in a small 'socialist' flat in Podgorica with his wife – told us as he unpacked mountains of material on the Sarapa in front of our eyes. His genealogical and historical work, which became his main preoccupation after retirement, aims to preserve knowledge of the Sarapa as 'one of the best Montenegrin *bratstvo*'.⁹ Jovan emphasised the uniqueness of the Sarapa, by pointing not only to their courage in resisting the Turkish invasion (from the fifteenth century onwards), but also by stressing the internal diversity and inclusiveness of this *bratstvo*. He saw no problem in being genealogically related to Muslims and Albanians. Nor did an 'unproven' genealogical connection prevent him from offering his potential relative, Isa Paljević, a job in his company, as we shall see below. Jovan's overarching 'genealogical' goal might even be characterised as 'setting right' the history of Montenegro in general and in terms of its inner diversity – in particular, in terms of the inclusion of Islam.

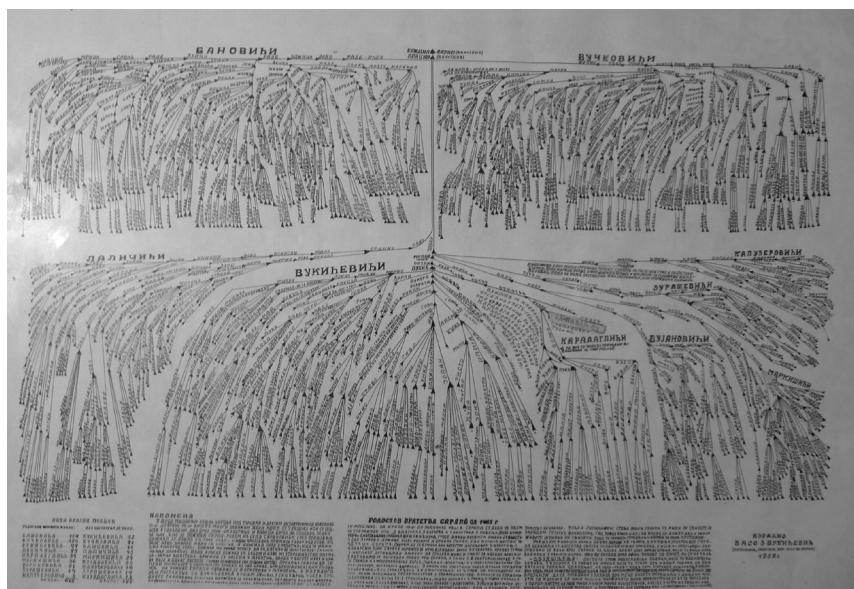
The Turks were present in Montenegro, although we say we were never invaded. They were indeed here ... You will find very few Montenegrin families where no one converted to Islam. But people are hiding this fact, they think it is a crime ... I don't have a problem with that. It is a matter of individual choice. The important thing is, if someone is a good person.

The second of the two motives of 'genealogical agency' mentioned above – reuniting relatives and keeping kinship ties alive – also includes valuing diversity

and inclusiveness as an integral part of kinship relations and family history. As Bajram Ymeri narrates the early days of his genealogical travels to Montenegro, he recalls how he and his brother were hosted by different families for weeks and were proudly introduced to still unknown relatives. The scene he repeatedly recalls as ‘the most magnificent moment of family reunion’ is when Stevan Karadaglić – one of the relatives with whom they had the closest relationship and who added the Ymeri branch to the Sarapa genealogy – presented the brothers to the assembled relatives following the funeral of his wife. ‘I will tell you who these men are. They are our relatives from Albania. Every one of you should know that.’ The Albanian-speaking Stevan in turn laid out in great detail the family history for the some fifty relatives gathered at his wife’s funeral, giving special attention to the origin of the Ymeri branch of the Sarapa. Bajram Ymeri and his brother were close to tears. Their father’s dying wish was finally fulfilled.

**‘This was all Turkey, you know’: border legacies, conversion and
genealogical inclusiveness**

In order to contextualise fully the genealogical, narrative and relational framework this chapter emphasises, one must start from the ‘beginning’ – the founding myth of the Sarapa genealogy. This narrative is the overarching reference point for individuals recounting genealogical ‘evidence’ and is an integral part of the most complete genealogical representation of the Sarapa (see Figure 4.2).



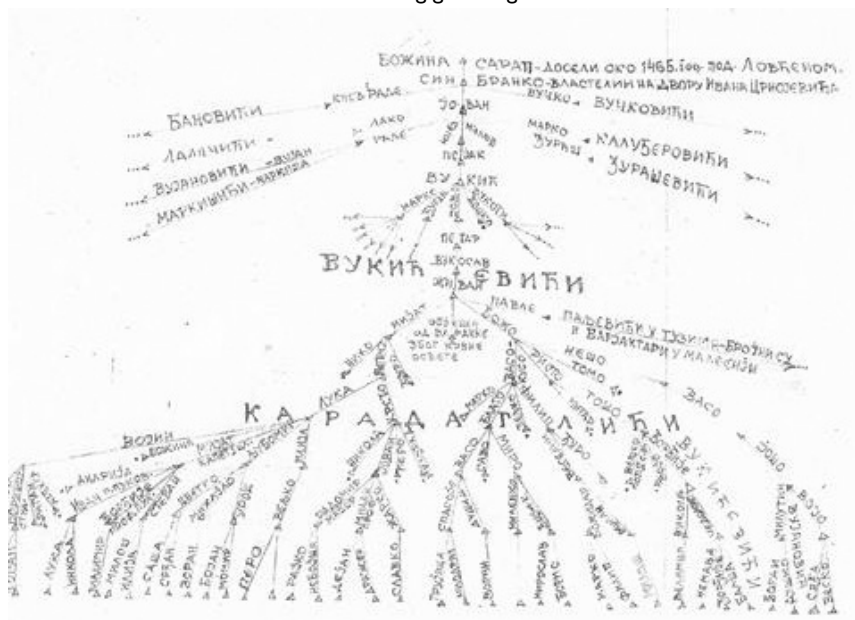
4.2 The Sarapa genealogy by Vaso Vukičević, 1959

The ancestor of all the Sarapa – Božina Sarap – from whom 12 families derive their origin today, is said to have come from present-day Bosnia (the village of Sarapovina) to Montenegro in 1465, two years after the Ottomans conquered Bosnia. The grand narration that all agree upon, regardless of confessional and national affiliation, is that Božina Sarap was one of the brave men who came to the (still) not occupied ‘Old Montenegrin’/Zeta lands (see Figure 4.1, green zone) to fight against the Ottomans and protect both Montenegro and Christianity. After conflict and subsequent reconciliation with the local lord Ivan Crnojević,¹⁰ Ivan granted Božina a piece of land. This is how Božina settled near Cetinje (the village of Boguti in the region of Ljubotinj), worked the land and remained a respected servant of Lord Crnojević. He built a church for Saint Nikola – whom the Sarapa venerate as their family saint (*krsna slava*) – next to which he was buried and where his descendants built a statue in 1930 in honour of the founder of the *bratstvo*.

As already mentioned, for centuries life in the Montenegrin–Ottoman borderland was marked by war and shifting borders. Božina’s descendants, like all the inhabitants of this borderland, lived in a situation of ongoing conflict with the Turkish army and administrators determined to collect taxes. War against the Ottomans was not the only hardship for the locals, nor was the constant re-establishment of the Ottoman frontier the only mode of engaging with the shifting border. Blood feuds and poverty frequently led to cross-border migration to ‘Turkey’. Virtually every genealogical narrative I collected during fieldwork identified blood feuds as the primary cause of cross-border migration. Flight across the border was often accompanied by a change of family name and sometimes by conversion to Islam, which would prevent being identified as a target by potential assassins. Without denying the possibility of the blood feuds’ impact on historical migration dynamics, its narrative deployment illustrates an interesting interrelation and mutual constitution of the border and local social formations and systems of value. The border here functions, one could argue, as a way both to comply with and reproduce the local socio-legal organisation and to outwit it by ‘camouflaging’ patrilineal identity. Furthermore, the mutual relation of local social organisation and customary law and the opportunities afforded by a life in the imperial borderland enabled the emergence of inclusive diversity patterns, as we shall see in the case below.

The case of the Vukičevići, a sub-branch of the Sarapa (see Figure 4.3), follows the narrative pattern outlined above in which a blood feud features as the cause of cross-border migration. In the mid-nineteenth century three brothers of the Vukičevići – Mijat, Božo and Paljo – fled across the border to ‘Turkey’ to save their lives.

Two of the brothers, Mijat and Božo, changed their name to Karadag, which in Turkish means Montenegrin, and their progeny are the present-day Karadaglić, who are Orthodox Christians and consider themselves to be Serbs.¹¹ The third one, Paljo, is said to have married a rich Muslim woman, and his offspring are the present-day Paljević (see Figure 4.5), who see themselves as Muslims and Albanians.



4.3 The Vukićević (Karadaglić and Paljević) branch of the Sarapa genealogy

Even if not all present-day Vukićevići, Karadaglić and Paljević are involved in intense everyday relations, they know of and refer to each other as relatives. Although an important aspect of their practice of relatedness is a narrative one that transcends the present time-space context, genealogical relatedness and shared narratives can crucially shape relations in the present. Jovan Vukićević's decision to employ his (most probably) relative Isa Paljević can serve as a good example in this regard. For Jovan, this act represented a continuation of kinship solidarity between the Vukićević and the Paljević, an act that transcended both time and space. In a directly associated narrative, Jovan recalled how in 1941 when his father was on his way to the Albanian front to retrieve his horse, he was hosted by the Paljević in Tuzi. After sharing their knowledge about what was going on in Albania, the Paljević finally convinced Jovan's father not to go, and thereby actually saved his life.

The practice of symbolic kinship in public represents a crucial expression of relatedness among the Sarapa in the present time-space context. 'Standing in the line of family members' (*stajanje u redu*) at funerals exemplifies demonstrative kinship practice. In the following quote, Marko Karadaglić recalls how a guest at his uncle's funeral wondered how the Muslim Redzo Paljević could stand in the family line:

You know, sometimes someone asks, like for example, when my uncle died and Redzo was standing in the line – you know, when someone dies, the relatives stand in the line – and someone asked me, 'How can Redzo stand in your line? He is a Muslim!' And I said, 'Of course he stands in our line, He is my relative!'¹²

The specific feature of this genealogy and the present-day practice of kinship based on it – the inclusion of Islam in a Montenegrin family tree, in which the apical ancestor (Bozina Sarap) had once fought against Islam to protect Christianity – becomes even more astonishing when one considers the hegemonic historical image of conversion. The following verse from the famous ‘Mountain Wreath’, in which the Montenegrin Prince-Bishop and poet Petar II Petrović Njegoš speaks through Prince Danilo who cites the Ottoman Sultan, describes and harshly condemns the policy of Islamisation seen as the alternative for the failed military conquest by the Ottomans:¹³

‘Montenegro I cannot win or tame,
nor call it mine in any real sense;
this is how one should deal with its people.’
And so began the devil’s Messiah
to offer them sweetmeats of his false faith.
May God strike you, loathsome degenerates,
why do we need the Turk’s faith among us?¹⁴

The religious inclusiveness which the Sarapa genealogy exemplifies is unthinkable in some other parts of Montenegro, where families who converted to Islam are not to be found on family trees. Moreover, it is equally unlikely that persons declaring an identity other than Montenegrin, such as the Paljević who consider themselves Albanians, will be included in genealogies. They simply cannot be considered relatives.

How is the extraordinary inclusivity of the Sarapa genealogy and the kinship practice based on it to be understood and explained against this background? The specificity of the borderland dynamics described earlier – the legacy of the semi-permeable, contested and shifting border – is clearly one factor. That the history of the Sarapa unfolded in the former Ottoman–Montenegrin borderland is a crucial part of the explanation of its inclusivity and ambiguity. Hence it is not surprising that the genealogies and conversations I recorded described migrations across the old border to the Ottoman territory – as in the case of the Vukičević – and uses them to legitimise the transformation of ethnic and religious identity in the region up to the present day.

‘This was Turkey, you know’, my interlocutors kept on repeating, highlighting that conversion cannot undo kinship relations. Marko Karadaglić explained his view of the conversion of the Paljević as follows: ‘They accepted this new religion, but they remained our relatives. Their ancestor, Paljo, simply turned to the new faith, but a relative stays a relative. Nothing can work without relatives. People turned to Islam because they were pressured, or some did it out of free will. It is their affair, their destiny. This is no problem at all.’¹⁵

Jovan Vukičević, for whom conversion represents an integral, although often silenced aspect of Montenegrin history, also explained the identity transformations

of the Paljević by emphasising the border legacy. When I asked him how Paljo's children could be Muslims in a society where identity and religion are transmitted through the male line, his answer was familiar: 'I know it's strange, but this was Turkey, you know.'

Jovan also mentioned the process of conversion within Montenegro itself, illuminating the connection between border crossing and identity transformation. When a conversion occurred across the border on Turkish soil, it was neither a reason to exclude the relatives nor a disgrace to the family. However, within Montenegro, conversion was an issue, for it seemed to threaten to Islamise the country. Thus those who despite their poverty resisted conversion like the Vukičević were applauded, as Jovan proudly describes:

They were decent, heroes and patriots. They protected Montenegro. Among them there were no renegades. You know, there were many people in Montenegro, who not only converted to Islam, but moreover caused great problems, great problems. They wanted influence, spread around, wanted to build mosques and to Islamise the whole region. We did not have such problems in our family.

This pronounced double standard in relation to judging conversion is constituted through border crossing: as long as relatives converted out of pressure and necessity upon emigrating to Ottoman territory and did not return to Islamise Montenegro, they remained relatives and their decision was understood rather than condemned.

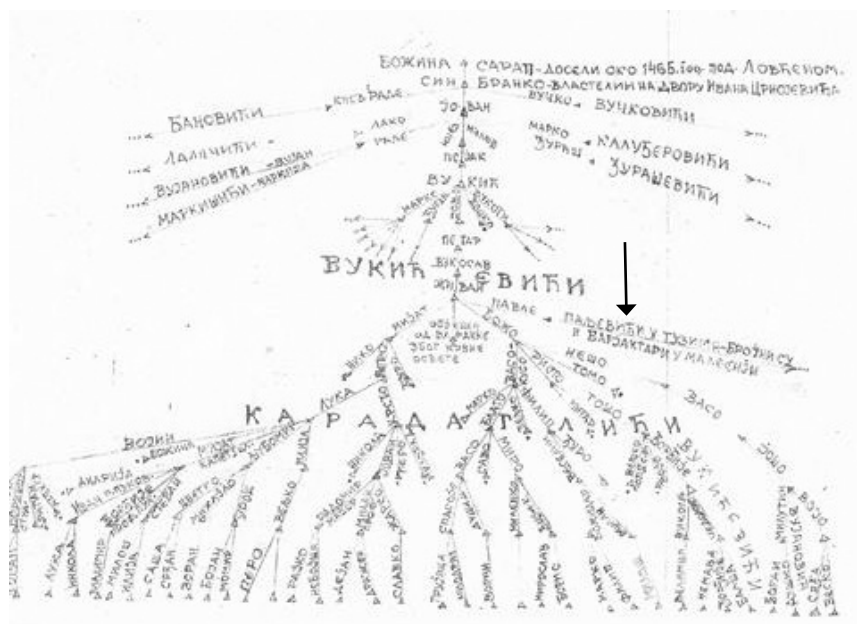
Although converted relatives were often referred to as 'Turks' or as 'Turkicised' (*poturčeni*), they were thought of as our 'own Muslims' in contrast to 'real Turks'. A common refrain heard throughout the region expresses the crucial boundary between converts and historical migrants of the Ottoman period: 'Originally, there were no Turks around here.' Three notions of 'Turk' are implicated in this view. First, the 'authentic Turk', who is occupier, soldier, tax collector and Islamiser. This authentic Turk is seen as less threatening than the second kind of 'Turk', who is the local convert imagined as a passionate and enthusiastic 'internal Islamiser', an image exemplified by Jovan's narrative about the 'problem-causing' converts in Montenegro and who are seen as a threat to the confessional identity of the Montenegrin *bratstvo*. Finally, the 'legitimate Turk' is the border-crossing relative, who was either forced to accept the new faith or did so out of a quest for a better life in the new post-migratory socio-economic context.

The discursive association between the border time-space factor and the frontier orientalist mode (Gingrich 1998) of differentiating between the legitimate, border-crossing convert and the threatening 'real' and 'problem-causing' 'own Turk' provides the ground for maintaining two strands of loyalty: kinship and nation/religion. One can thus simultaneously maintain two markers of identity regardless of conversion: the Christian orthodox faith and patrilineal belonging. This discursive strategy once again enables genealogical inclusivity as an important basis of identity dynamics in the Montenegrin–Albanian borderland.

Border crossers: beyond time-space and the ethno-national

Apart from inclusivity across ethno-national and religious lines, the Sarapa case also exemplifies a subversive ambiguity towards ethno-national diversity and a means to transcend it. Once again the border can be seen to underpin the ways in which local diversity plays out, as demonstrated by the case of another border-crossing family and branch of the Sarapa *bratstvo*, the Paljević.

Apart from sustaining close relations with relatives across the border, the Paljević are actively related and regularly perform symbolic kinship with their Christian relatives in Montenegro. Among my interviewees were two brothers, Isa and Sait Paljević, who like the Paljević in general, see themselves as Muslim Albanians. Although aware of their genealogical links to the Vukičević and Karadaglić, Isa and Sait did not possess a copy of the Sarapa genealogy. As Rustem and I unfolded before them the grand version of the Sarapa family tree (see Figure 4.2) and the sub-genealogy of the Vukičević /Karadaglić (see Figure 4.4), the brothers were stunned. After initial speechlessness Isa and Sait recounted the familiar genealogical narrative. However, their version included an interesting variation: the possibility that their ancestors had already been Muslim before crossing the border to 'Turkey'. When he visited Ljubotinj a few years later to see his family place of origin, Isa searched the cemetery and found what he was looking for: Muslim tombs. In spite of having made the point, which echoes Jovan Vukičević's claim that there



4.4 The Paljević branch of the Sarapa genealogy

were indeed converts in old unoccupied Montenegro, the brothers were in no doubt about their orthodox Christian origin. They thus favour the genealogical version that they share with their Christian relatives, in which the descendants of their ancestor Paljo became Muslims only because he had crossed the border to 'Turkey' where he married a Muslim woman.

Isa's and Sait's encounter with genealogy – perceived as a historical document and approached with visible respect and veneration – ignited a series of lively debates, which on different occasions involved other family members and friends. While these debates were fascinating because they provided the missing genealogical information of the Paljević branch, their primary significance lay in revealing the functioning and practice of fluid and ambiguous identity claims. For hours the brothers switched backwards and forwards between claiming their Montenegrin and Albanian identities. The long and challenging conversations, supported by food, coffee and laughter – but never marked with conflict or closure – again demonstrated the crucial significance of the origin across the historical border.

Sait: 'Yes, we are Vukičevići from Cetinje, Montenegro, our ancestors were orthodox Christians, according to our origin we are *real* Montenegrins. But today we feel as Albanians. Our grandfather, father and uncles all married Albanian women and declared themselves to be Albanians. We cannot be something else. But our origin is Montenegrin. We are Albanians with a Montenegrin origin.'

Isa: 'And after all, as one can hear in the parliament. One has the right to declare as one wishes to belong!'

Although the Paljević use ethno-national terms and reproduce the ethno-national pattern as the dominant way of framing difference, they also subvert it. They do this by insisting on embodying identities which, in many other parts of the Balkans, cannot be combined: they are both Albanians and Montenegrins; both Muslims and (former) Christians; nationals by origin and citizens of a liberal state free to choose their identity.

What enables them to do this? In this case, their family history along the shifting border plays a crucial role and functions as a platform on which to enact their identity. The notion of origin enables the Paljević to locate their Montenegrin identity in another genealogical time-space, beyond the historical Ottoman–Montenegrin border. This relocation of identity through reference to an origin beyond the historical border enables the Paljević brothers to be Christian Montenegrins by patrilineal and territorial origin without endangering their inherited Albanian Muslim identity. In other words, the reference to the historical border crossing is a brilliant way both to legitimate the ambiguity of ethno-national identity and stay in line with patrilineal ideology.

Moreover, in the Paljević case, the ethno-national aspect of diversity is not only ambiguous, but is also superseded by other aspects of identity and social differentiation, primarily by the fact that the Paljević are successors to a famous and respected



4.5 Beçir Tafa (*centre*), the Bajraktar of Tuzi, Montenegro

family of Bajraktars. The title of the Bajraktar ('flag carrier') was a prestigious title – originating in the Ottoman military vocabulary – which the Ottomans granted to respected local families.¹⁶ The photograph showing Isa's and Sait's grandfather, the Bajraktar Beçir Tafa (see Figure 4.5), was repeatedly and proudly presented, and ever remained close at hand during our conversations. In a narrative sense Beçir was sharing our table in the present, handing over his prestigious function from the beginning of the twentieth century.

This narrative movement across time and space into the nineteenth century is, however, not the end of the Paljević story of the interrelation of belonging and the dynamics of the border, for it is not only the historical border shifts and crossings that are of crucial relevance here. The personal experience of Isa and Sait with the more recent socialist border, or rather with its complete closure, are also relevant. Because of this bilingual competence and kinship networks, Isa's and Sait's father

had worked as a driver and interpreter for the Serbian communists in Albania after the Second World War. When the border was closed in 1948 the Paljević were, so to say, trapped in Albania and remained living in Shkodra for many years. In Albania, they were again someone else: primarily Yugoslavs, and only in the second instance, Montenegrins. The main feature of their identity, apart from their language competence, was their Yugoslav citizenship, which they never wanted to relinquish in favour of Albanian citizenship. They considered themselves Yugoslavs and do so to the present day.

Upon returning to Montenegro, which they longed for due to the harsh living conditions in communist Albania and out of nostalgia, the brothers found their land had been confiscated by the very institution with which they had identified while in Albania: the Yugoslav state. But relatedness, in this case in the form of patronage, entered the scene. As already mentioned, Isa soon found work with the help of Jovan Vukičević, precisely because he was a 'Sarapa'.

One can argue that the key feature of the inclusivity the Paljević embody is the fact that they are both the progeny of border crossers and are border crossers themselves. Hence, both the legacy and personal experience of cross-border migration are the bases for flexible, context- and interest-oriented usage of ethno-national identity categories.

Finally, the case of the Paljević clearly shows the critical importance of a multidimensional approach to diversity in the Balkans where ethno-national belonging is merely one aspect of difference. In the Paljević case, cross-border migration background, historical social titles, social networks, multilingualism and citizenship are all clearly equally or even more important than the ambiguous ethno-national loyalty.

Gendering patrilineal genealogies

Women are nonexistent in patrilineal family trees, in so far as these embody ideological representations of the continuity of the male line. It was continuously surprising to me and my female interlocutors that women are completely omitted genealogically. I recall the moment of the genealogical interview with the husband of Lirie, one of my initial acquaintances and later close friend in Shkodra, when she literally cried out: 'This is outrageous! Why am I not visible in your family tree? I am your wife and we have two children!'

Although as a rule women themselves were neither in possession of nor pursued the reconstruction of genealogies, they often took the role of co-narrators of their spouse's family history. Moreover, upon being confronted with expressions of interest, they willingly revealed their often substantial knowledge of their own family history, while referring to and introducing male family members as the prime 'narrative agents'. In Lirie's case, it was her uncle who joined us in several conversations on Lirie's parents' family histories.

In another case narrative authority was again granted to men. As expressed

through the opening quote of this chapter, Marija, Ilija Karadaglić's widow, repeatedly referred us to her son as the prime source for the history of the Karadaglić. However, during the genealogical conversations it turned out that she was actually more knowledgeable than he was. Marija had been an active listener and co-chronicler next to her husband and his brother. Although her son was irritated by his mother's spontaneous and passionate outburst of detailed knowledge, he valued her knowledge highly. He repeatedly lamented that he had not listened more attentively to his father's accounts of their family history.

In the case of the Paljević, however, women were almost completely silent. While at times sitting with us and listening to the narratives and heated debates about belonging, politics and regional history – unlike other women participating in these conversations, such as neighbours – Fatima and Nura barely entered the conversation. Once, when I explicitly asked Fatima for her opinion on the issues being debated about her family history, she apologised for not speaking Montenegrin well enough¹⁷ and smilingly indicated that it is 'their business'. Apart from the not entirely plausible language argument, since most of the discussion was in Albanian, this silence is interesting when one considers that the land the family lives on belongs to the family of Isa's and Sait's wives. In other words, the expropriation of the Paljević by the Yugoslav state forced them to live on what they refer to as 'foreign land'.

Although missing from patrilineal genealogical representations and often silent, women do in fact appear in genealogical narratives.¹⁸ However, as the Sarapa case exemplifies, they do so in particular ways that are directly linked to the interrelation of identity transformation and the border.

Unlike the 'instability' of the Paljević narrative mentioned earlier, regarding the issue of Paljo's confessional belonging prior to his border crossing, the following narrative variation about what happened following the border crossing is centrally structured by female agency. 'Paljo died as a young man. His Muslim wife then disregarded the agreement that the male children will keep the Christian faith.' In this widespread explanation of why the Paljević are Muslims today, which is emphasised primarily by the Karadaglić and Vukičević,¹⁹ female agency is made responsible for the ultimate 'rupture' of the patrilineal genealogy and the non-transmission of religious belonging through the paternal line. Hence, the narrative about this post-mortem matrilineal intervention clearly renders female agency as transgressive and unjust, and discharges Paljo²⁰ from bearing responsibility for the loss of religious identity. Women do appear in Isa's and Sait's genealogical narrative, although not as autonomous agents, and they are referred to as the main factor when legitimising another patrilineality-unsettling transformation: the change of national affiliation. Thus they would say: 'Our grandfather, father and uncles all married Albanian women and declared as Albanians. We cannot be something else.'

Both these cases exemplify how female agency is only deployed when seeking to sustain patrilineal belonging and relatedness in the face of identity ruptures. Even

here, though, female agency has to be imagined in a specific way. Women are not only narratively utilised – by being blamed – for legitimating elementary disruptions of patrilineal order, but also are made to appear as fixed in contrast to mobile border-crossing male subjects. They appear as fixed in a twofold sense: fixed both in the space beyond the border and fixed ‘outside’ the patrilineal realm of belonging. Hence, one can argue that since women embody the ‘outside’ in multiple ways, they can easily be made responsible for any identity ruptures in religious and ethno-national loyalties that are inconsistent with patrilineal ideology. In this sense, women therefore act as unintentional agents of diversity.

Conclusion

The kind of inclusive genealogy exemplified by the Sarapa/Paljević case is far from exceptional. Such genealogies are quite common in the northern border region between Montenegro and Albania.²¹ The fact that here one can easily find ethnically and religiously mixed genealogical narratives and practices of relatedness that transcend ethno-national and religious affiliation can be seen as an expression of an important regional pattern marked by pronounced inclusivity and historic acceptance of diversity. In this context, ethno-religious conflict would potentially imply forging war not only against friends and neighbours – as was the tragic case in former Yugoslavia – but also against one’s next of kin.²² This, however, is particularly unlikely in a society where kinship remains the basis of identification, social cohesion and everyday life, and implies deep historical knowledge²³ and a central reference point for belonging.

What are the implications of the encounter between European Union (EU) multicultural policies and this historic and highly integrative local acceptance of diversity along the Albanian–Montenegrin border region? Both Montenegro and Albania have entered the process of EU accession with its emphasis on multiculturalism and minority rights. Apart from bringing national legislation into line with the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) and the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), the two countries’ overall progress towards membership of the EU and their implementation of the FCNM in particular are regularly monitored. My research in the region so far, however, indicates that the European Framework primarily emphasises the framing of diversity in terms of ethno-national and religious minority rights, while other aspects such as citizenship, language, social status, migration background and gender and sexual orientation are rarely addressed.

Also not taken into account are the kinds of historic inclusivity and openness to diversity that I have considered here, which are potentially subverted and destabilised by the essentialising ‘national minority grid’ imposed in the course of European integration. Seen from the perspective of the Albanian–Montenegrin borderland, the European future is likely to be but another specific transformation

of regional border dynamics. Even as the border opens up, the inclusivity, legacies of mobility and the relationship to the state of the border-crossers are likely to remain the central means of defining oneself and relating to others in the Albanian–Montenegrin borderland.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Hastings Donnan, Madeleine Hurd, Carolin Leutloff-Grandits, Ioannis Mano, Bruno Riccio, Fotini Tsibiriodou and Eftihia Voutira for their inspiring comments and Rosie Gant for her feedback and language editing.
- 2 These figures are intended to illustrate the *form* these genealogies take rather than the detailed content or names they contain.
- 3 As with Rivers's aim of using the genealogical method to obtain 'objective' 'scientific' knowledge (Bamford and Leach 2009).
- 4 Rather than representing 'timeless structures', patrilineages/tribes (Albanian *fis*; Montenegrin *bratsvo* and *pleme*) are forms of social organisation that consolidated due to the Ottoman presence (e.g. Kaser 1992: 14; Morrison 2009: 17), and which have kept changing in response to the circumstances around them.
- 5 In the Montenegrin context symbolic kinship based on witnessing, baptising or marriage (*kumstvo*), or 'exchanging' blood (*braca po krvi*), are prominent forms of relatedness between families beyond ethnicity and religion.
- 6 Local customary law – recorded for example as the north Albanian Kanuni i Lek Dugadjinit – continues to be an important reference point. Both in the Albanian and Montenegrin part of the Shkodra region there are assemblies which perform mediation in case of conflicts and prevent or mediate in existing blood feuds.
- 7 Following Benhabib's approach to the 'narrative constitution of the self' (2002: 15–16), which explores the individual agency associated with engaging with and transforming (collective) narratives, and Sieder's (2008) analytic disentangling of narratives as sequences of decisions, I consider genealogical narratives as a form of agency.
- 8 <http://www.sarapi.org>.
- 9 The Montenegrin term *bratstvo* comprises all sub-branches of a patrilineage sharing a myth of a common ancestor, as in the case of the Sarapa. The term *pleme* (tribe), however, implies a common territory, which can include several *bratstva* (such as the *pleme Ljubotinj* in the case of the Sarapa).
- 10 Lord Ivan Crnojević ruled Zeta between 1465 and 1490.
- 11 In this chapter I do not go into the peculiarities of the Serbian–Montenegrin denominational (and official language) dynamics in the context of present-day Montenegro. It should be noted, however, that this antagonism, which climaxed following Montenegro's independence in 2006, has a profound impact on local identity politics.
- 12 The equivalent emic expression is *rodjak* (or the diminutive *rodjo*).
- 13 The extermination of converts by Prince Danilo, which is the central theme of Njegoš's epic poem, lacks historical validity (Djilas 1966). Conversion to Islam was contested, but remains an integral part of Montenegro's history.
- 14 http://www.rastko.rs/knjizevnost/umetnicka/njegos/mountain_wreath.html#meeting.

- 15 See below for reflections on the gender dimensions of this process.
- 16 The introduction of the Bajraktar title can also be seen as an example of the aforementioned co-optive governance strategy by the Ottomans of actively incorporating segments of the occupied population into their ruling and military structures. In a similar way in the context of the Albanian highlands, the Ottomans granted the title of the Bajraktar to tribal leaders (Kaser 1992: 18).
- 17 At home the (bilingual) Paljević brothers and their Albanian-speaking wives only speak Albanian.
- 18 In spite of their exclusion from patrilineal genealogical imagery, female figures in the Sarapa/Paljević genealogical narrative appear as knots of relatedness within the patrilineal ideology. In this manner, for instance, the Paljević regarded my co-traveller Rustem as a relative, since he is the grandson of their grandfather's sister.
- 19 According to Isa and Sait, there was already an agreement prior to the early death of Paljo that the male children would become Muslims, while the daughters would keep the Christian–Orthodox faith.
- 20 Paljo's conversion, which is a part of this narrative variation, does not seem to represent a 'problem' since it is legitimized by the necessity of identity change due to the blood feud and since it was agreed that his male offspring would keep the Christian faith.
- 21 My fieldwork data includes other similar cases of genealogical inclusivity, such as the Alibasić, Otović and Iliković.
- 22 Another crucial factor is Montenegro's minority regime. Without going into detail about the complexities of minority politics in Montenegro, one can note the 'traditionally good relationship between Montenegro's Albanians and the ruling authorities' and the fact that the former see Montenegro as their state (Morrison 2009: 224).
- 23 This marks a major difference to the Bosnian case.

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