

The Relational Ethics of 'Never ... Too Much' Situating and Scaling Intimate Uncertainties in an Adriatic Harbour

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how a specific pattern of relational ethics – referred to as ‘never ... too much’ – figures as a way of coping with intimate uncertainties in close relationships. The concept of relational ethics refers to the historically embedded ways in which people live and cultivate ethical values through relations and, as such, also represents an ethnographically grounded conceptual contribution to ongoing anthropological debates on moral economy. My research unfolds ethnographic insights into three variations of the relational ethics of ‘never ... too much’, three respective sets of social actors and relational scales: ‘never *feel* too much’/local women and their relationship to their marital partner; ‘never *own* too much’/local men and their relationship to property; ‘never *settle* too much’/female migrants from Russia and their relationship to the place of settlement. The article’s analysis is developed against the background of a particular spatial and temporal location – a border minority town with a history of (forced) migration, and is a contemporary focal point of migration, marginalisation by the state and patriarchy.

KEYWORDS

Adriatic, borderlands, gender, intimacy, migration/mobility, moral economy, patriarchy, relational ethics

It was one of those beautiful early October mornings in Ulqin/Ulcinj¹. While I was making myself comfortable on the floor of the huge terrace in one of the guest apartments my host family is letting out during the tourist season, a text message came in. I reluctantly stretched out for my cell phone, unhappy about anyone potentially disturbing my quiet writing session. At this time of the year, when there are almost no tourists around, the soundscape of Ulqin/Ulcinj – the most southern Montenegrin coastal town – no longer reverberates with chaotic layers of different music genres rising from the many cafés, the buzz of thousands of conversations from the Small Beach (Plaza



e Vogel) right below the apartment house or the constant drone of traffic. Only the sounds of the sea and the prayer calls from the city's six mosques accompany one's thoughts. Over and over those meld into the multilayered melody flowing from the *nova mahala* (the new quarter) – the urban hinterland where the new centre of the town was built in the eighteenth century – towards the Small Beach. While inhabited by poor fishing families 150 years ago, today the area right behind the Small Beach represents the most profitable, and – as many in Ulqin/Ulcinj complain – the most excessively overbuilt and thus distorted location in the city.

The text message was from Zenepa,² inviting me to join her for a coffee in her favourite café. I had met Zenepa – a school psychologist in her early forties and the married mother of three sons – during my previous field stay in June 2016. She was very interested in my work and happy to share not only her views on the town and its inhabitants but also her knowledge and experiences of the intimate dimensions of life in this small Adriatic harbour in which gender relations are marked by patriarchy and a related, pronounced social control in public space. That day's conversation, however, turned out to be especially revealing in terms of her very personal account of growing up as and being a woman in Ulqin/Ulcinj. Apart from telling me about how she decided to get married – and the personal crisis that marked this process – I was deeply touched by her subsequent narrative about her grandmother and their relationship. What caught my attention most was the particular management of emotions implicit in the knowledge Zenepa's grandmother had repeatedly conveyed to the girl – and, later on, the young woman – of how to best handle one's emotions in order to lead a good and crisis-free life in light of its inherent uncertainty. In concluding her account of how she managed to make herself grow into a 'happy' marriage, Zenepa recalled: 'My grandmother always used to tell me "Never feel too much, because you never know what is going to happen"'.

However, beyond what one could refer to as the affective economy of desirable marriages³ in patriarchal settings⁴, the 'never feel too much' advice kept on resonating throughout my fieldnotes and still-headnotes. As I contemplated why it felt so relevant, I realised that Zenepa's grandmother's wisdom seemed to connect different types of relationships in Ulqin/Ulcinj that I had been exploring as disconnected from each other. The three different kinds of close relationships I will explore and compare in this article are the relationship

between local women and their (marital) partners, local men's relationship with property, and the relationship of recent female Russian immigrants with Ulqin/Ulcinj as a place of settlement. Even though very different and situated on different scales (interpersonal, property relations, place-attachment), these relationships can all be referred to as intimate in that they represent long-term, emotional and – both essential and uncertain/fragile – forms of close attachment and interaction. In other words, they can be considered intimate because they imply 'a sense of self in close connection to others – other selves or other things' (Oswin and Olund 2010: 60) and, as this article highlights, 'other' places. Furthermore, they all exemplify that the intimate is inherently political in terms of being shaped both by intersecting regimes of power (in these cases primarily patriarchy, the minority regime and the migration/citizenship regime) as well as forms of resisting and transforming those regimes. In this regard the article also builds on Ann Stoler's (2006: 4) call to explore the intimate 'through and *beyond*' the spheres of the domestic and the sexual while stressing that it is precisely the 'matters of the intimate' that represent 'critical sites for the consolidation of . . . power' (2006: 4). Here Stoler explicitly refers to colonial power, as her research explores how colonial rule was ensured precisely through the realms of the intimate.

Apart from being gendered in specific ways, an important shared feature of the three different kinds of intimate relationships is that they are embedded in particular patterns and conditions of mobility (patrilocality, the historical expulsion of a minority, a restrictive immigration/citizenship regime).

However, their prime commonality, which is the central concern in this article, is that the *relational ethics* maxim 'never . . . too much' was either explicit (in conversations and narratives) or figured as the implicit reasoning in **how a particular relationship should be built and 'built into' one's life in order to cope with inherent uncertainty.** In a broader conceptual sense I use the term 'relational ethics' to refer to the historically embedded ways in which people live (and cultivate) ethical values through and manage emotions in close relationships. As such, the relational ethics of 'never . . . too much' implies both a moral imperative and a Foucauldian ethical perspective of cultivating the self (e.g., Foucault 1997) with, however, a focus on building and maintaining close relationships. Because relational ethics thus goes beyond the values/norms binary, it can be seen as

an important dimension of ordinary ethics as elaborated by Lambek (2010) and Das (2012); namely, it is precisely the process of ‘relating to’ that both inherently saturates values and norms as well as essentially constitutes ‘the human condition’ (Lambek 2010: 1) and, thus, our everyday lives.

Acknowledging the inconsistent and blurred conceptual boundaries between ethics and morality (Lambek 2010: 8–9) and the resulting importance of the ethnographic enquiry into how ethics and morality ‘are threads woven into the weave of life’ (Das 2012: 134), my analysis of relational ethics ties into the ongoing work on revisiting the concept of moral economy (e.g., Fassin 2009; Hann 2010; Narotzky and Besnier 2014; Palomera and Vetta 2016). It does so in two ways. First, the different cases of the relational ethics of ‘never . . . too much’ explored here show how the affective and economic spheres are crucially entangled and similarly patterned while spanning different kinds of relationships (with persons, things/property and places). Here it makes sense to think of (moral) economy in its etymological sense of *oikonomia*, referring to ‘managing’ or ‘housekeeping’ (German *haus-halten*) both emotions and property in reference to values and norms. The relational perspective on moral economy thus makes clear, to speak with Fassin, that ‘emotions are not separate from values and norms’ (Fassin 2009).

Second, my analysis highlights and explores the inherent relational aspect of moral economies beyond the relation between social classes or ‘the rich and the poor’ (see Fassin 2009) but rather in an extended perspective, including different kinds of close relationships on different scales – not only among people but also between people and objects/property and places. In this regard I join Fassin (2009) in his reassessment of ‘moral economy’ in terms of a prime interest in the ‘moral’ without, however, losing sight of (political) economy and class – both in terms of Thompson’s (1971) and Scott’s (1976) approaches as well as the more recent reassessments of ‘moral economy’ by Hann (2010) and Palomera and Vetta (2016) that are justifiably critical of a potential inflationary usage of the term that disregards the economy. Lastly, because a crucial aspect and value of the concept of moral economy is its attentiveness to the historical context (Fassin 2009), before I elaborate on each relational ethics pattern I will first dwell on Ulqin/Ulcinj as a place that literally harbours different kinds of relations by focusing on the particularly relevant aspects of its political-economic and spatial location in a historical perspective.

**(Forced) Migration/Marginalisation, Citizenship
and Patriarchy: Dimensions of Uncertainty
in Ulqin/Ulcinj through Time**

Ulqin/Ulcinj is a border minority town with a history of emigration and expulsion of its population. Ulqin/Ulcinj is a town of around twenty thousand inhabitants, largely populated by Albanians (around 70 per cent, Muslim majority, Catholic minority) as well as Montenegrins (some of them identifying as Serbs), Bosniaks, ethnic Muslims, Roma/Egyptians and, most recently, Russian immigrants (Monstat 2011). In addition, a large number of seasonal workers from Serbia, Albania and Kosovo live in Ulqin/Ulcinj during the tourist season (and beyond, working as cleaners and in the fields and olive grows, etc.) Today the town is simultaneously marginalised by the state as well as a focal point for different forms of migration.

A crucial milestone in the town's history is its incorporation after the Congress of Berlin in 1878 into the Montenegrin state (at that time a principedom). What followed was an ambivalent inclusion of the Albanian-speaking Muslim population by Prince (later King) Nikola, the primary aim of which was to prevent the emigration of wealthy Albanian-speaking sailor merchant families to cities such as Shkodra and Durres – at that time still within the Ottoman Empire (for more, see Tošić 2015). This process of emigration was driven by the reluctance of Ulqin's families to become state minority subjects (entailing obligatory military service and non-Islamic education) as well as the influx of Montenegrin settlers. It led, however, to the widespread partition of families (with some family members staying, others leaving), which in turn resulted in the cultivation of enduring cross-border social ties and mobility (kinship, economic, educational, etc.) that persist up to the present day. This 'voluntary' emigration was, however, later followed by a threat of forced expulsion during the Second World War, when many Albanian families from Ulqin/Ulcinj left for Shkodra, leaving their property behind in the face of potential attacks by Montenegrin Četnik troops⁵. The majority were able to reclaim their property upon return after the Second World War, and the subsequent Tito-Yugoslavia period was a very positive one, as recounted in life stories and everyday references – especially after the 1974 constitution, which significantly extended minority rights (Ustav Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije 1974). However, the threat of potential expulsion lurking deep in the narratives of the local Albanians resurfaced during the Kosovo War in

1999, when nationalist – and anti-Albanian – voices in Montenegro became more pronounced. One must also mention here that one of the reasons for this is the fact that then president of Montenegro Milo Djukanović opened the door for Kosovo refugees, in this way both provoking nationalist reactions and winning future Albanian votes in elections and the referendum for state independence (2006). Albanians in Montenegro were largely in favour of independence, and in Ulqin/Ulcinj one often hears the opinion that Montenegro ‘owes’ its independence to Albanians. This was a time when socioeconomic ties with Albania, which had been reestablished after the border opening in 1991, were further strengthened.

The in many ways ‘golden age’ narrative of Ulqin/Ulcinj during Tito-Yugoslavia, however, changes with the powerful earthquake of 1979; at this point a narrative of neglect and marginalisation by the state starts unfolding that continues into the period of Montenegro’s independence (2006) and up to the present. After the earthquake, favourable loan conditions promoted extensive construction of houses/house floors with rooms for small-scale private ‘cheap tourism’ instead of high-class hotels, and this has marked the town’s economy and led to it having the enduring appearance of an ‘overbuilt’ small town⁶. Many in Ulqin/Ulcinj criticise precisely this process heavily as ‘fake development aid’, as well as the state strategy of ‘buying off’ and silencing the local population’s calls for rebuilding ‘high tourism’ (*visoki turizam*) in the town and its surroundings as well as restitution claims regarding property ‘absorbed’ by the state. A prime example here is the use of the Valdanos Olive Bay – which represents an economic and identity pillar for many Albanians in Ulqin/Ulcinj – as a luxurious military resort, which is most commonly retold in terms of ‘usurpation’⁷. The later closure of the town’s salt works (2011) as well as further hotel closures are not only examples of postsocialist neoliberal reforms leading to rising unemployment but are also by and large seen as further proof of marginalisation by the state.

Both the historical experience of emigration and expulsion as well as the perceived marginalisation by the state are dimensions of uncertainty for the local Albanian population – in terms of dispossession through the loss of property and employment – that can be said to have consolidated ethno-national identity in particular ways. National parties blossomed that, without mobilising for secession, tried to (re)claim the development and local governance power of the regions with an Albanian majority. A common point of critique of the Albanian political scene by many Albanians in Ulqin/Ulcinj is that the

former is seen as too diverse and corrupt to ensure benefits for the regions where Albanians represent the majority population. This has been done in the case of Tuzi (7km from the capital) and its quest to become a municipality (*opština*) independent of the capital of Podgorica.

At the same time, as mentioned above, kinship, educational and economic/property ties to Albania and Kosovo were strengthened in the face of economic insecurity, the border opening and the rise of Montenegrin/Serbian nationalism during the Kosovo crisis. The marginalisation narrative common among Albanians in Ulqin/Ulcinj is often coupled with an assimilation narrative that implies that the state of Montenegro – even though acknowledging minority political actors and portraying itself as having a ‘minority-inclusive’ political sphere – at the same time conducts a ‘subtle’ long-term assimilation by altering the demographic structure of Ulqin/Ulcinj. This vernacular theory is usually coupled with using the nearby town Bar/Tivar as an example of having lost its original Muslim-Albanian identity due to the immigration of and intermarriage with Montenegrins, Serbs, Bosniaks (former ‘Muslims’) and even Catholic Albanians.

A crucial aspect of the ethno-national identity of prime relevance in this article is the local patriarchal gender regime. Apart from (re) claiming property and cultivating the Albanian language, it is the strict control of ‘desirable’ marriages in terms of ethno-religious endogamy (Albanian-Muslim) that figures not only as a commonly unquestioned ‘way of life’ argument but also often as a necessity in face of potential assimilation. Because it is a largely unquestioned norm that Albanian-Muslim women are not supposed to marry out of the ethno-religious community, Ulqin/Ulcinj can be characterised as a town of peaceful coexistence (see Tošić 2015), albeit based on very clear boundaries (even though not very welcome, due to patrilineal inheritance men’s marriages out of the community are tolerated). I argue that these boundaries are maintained precisely by controlling women’s emotions and marital choices, which directly relates to the ‘never feel too much’ relational ethics (as will be elaborated in the next section).

Apart from these gender-regime-related uncertain intimate prospects in terms of both the future husband and his family (patrilocality), there were other historical and transgenerational core aspects of uncertainty and hardship to women’s lives (primarily before socialist Yugoslavia). These included the habitual long-term absence of men (many of whom worked on ships as fishermen or as migrant workers

abroad), widespread poverty, the combination of household/childrearing/elder-care responsibilities and the hard physical labour of the olive harvest. The latter was traditionally performed by women only, while men kept the olive groves 'in order' during the year.

Today, because the main male work domains of fishing, trade and sailing have largely been replaced by tourism, the gendered division of labour, as is often lamented by women, seems to imply that apart from 'catching guests' during the ever-shorter tourist season and a bit of petty cross-border trade outside of that, most of the men in Ulqin/Ulcinj seem to spend their days 'preparing for the season' – or, in women's eyes, not working⁸. In that sense, the new form of uncertainty that women in Ulqin/Ulcinj are often confronted with is a low male contribution to the household budget. Due to the demise of the salt works and hotel tourism since the 1980s – because of which many men lost their jobs – and the ever-shorter tourist seasons marked by the arrival of mainly working-class and low-spending guests from Kosovo, it is increasingly common for women to need to combine household/care work with employment and running the family apartment houses, where they bear the main maintenance/cleaning workload, if they cannot afford to employ a seasonal worker. (Although Albanian women started working – in the sense of being employed – during the socialist period for the first time, many started working only when the economic situation declined in postsocialist and post-earthquake times.)

As introduced by Zenepa's story above, the relational ethics pattern of 'never *feel* too much' implies a pronounced ambivalence in female perceptions of men in Ulqin/Ulcinj. The 'cautious' affective economy it expresses implies a 'realism' regarding relations with the future ('adequate') marital partner as well as a general lack of female expectations towards the spouse. The uncertainty – and potential crisis – here is twofold. On the one hand, it refers to the 'ambiguous excitement' of sharing a life with a person one still does not know well (or not at all). On the other, it refers to the common view that even though a woman in Ulqin/Ulcinj 'needs' a husband to fulfil social expectations (the role of being a married woman), she is essentially on her own. Namely, in female narratives and reasoning about everyday (and long-term) family issues a husband appeared as a necessary but at first unknown and then later a chronically uncertain (and potentially literally 'absent') element in women's lives. The local saying that 'a man is like an umbrella' blended into this affective economy – the husband here figures as a visible and 'presentable', albeit 'light' form

of protection. Another prominent saying – ‘A man is a treasure in the house, even if the only thing he brings into it is the mud on his shoes’ – also communicated the profound, even if primarily ‘symbolic’ value of male status and (sporadic) presence in women’s everyday life and labour, characterised by household and care work plus other forms of heavy and taken-for-granted physical labour.

‘They make mistakes themselves: “Let me do this, my son; you go to sleep”. In the end, the men are totally incapable and they don’t work’, I remember Vera, a young beauty entrepreneur from Novosibirsk (see below), saying while we were sitting in a local café on a workday and wondering about its almost exclusively local male clientele. Patriarchy – and the related division of labour – is one of the first things young Russian female immigrants comment on when talking about their critical perceptions in Ulqin/Ulcinj. Russian female migrants in Ulqin/Ulcinj share a postsocialist, patriarchal background with local women, which implies the feminisation of household/care work and the control of female bodies and emotions in terms of ethno-national/religious identity politics. At the same time, Russian female migrants in Ulqin/Ulcinj are particular in several ways and embody a distinctive character of Russian immigration to Montenegro. These migrant women often initiate and economically secure migration (either alone or with their families); often they are divorced/remarried and autonomous in terms of being entrepreneurs and performing household/childcare work jointly with their partners. Unlike the majority of Russian immigrants to Montenegro, who began to come after the Yugoslav wars and especially after independence in 2006, the Russian population in Ulqin/Ulcinj grew at a later time and is marked by explicit boundary making with regard to Russians in other parts of Montenegro.

‘We came here because there are not many Russians around’ is a statement one often hears from Russian immigrants in Ulqin/Ulcinj, frequently in conjunction with identifying Russians in other parts of Montenegro primarily as men from Moscow who come with their families, attracted by the affordable but good quality of life (they are financed by renting out their Muscovite apartments), the business opportunities and the ‘high life’ – a way of life that is, however, increasingly unsustainable after the latest financial crisis and the fall of the rouble. Russians in Ulqin/Ulcinj often originate from other cities of Russia (such as Irkutsk, Novosibirsk and Vladivostok) and consciously picked this small border town to get away both from other Russians (mostly Muscovites) and the Montenegrin state (perceiving

them primarily as potential business partners and a source of money, respectively). Ulqin/Ulcinj is perceived as a place in many ways located ‘outside of’ Montenegro and where immigrants are more welcome because mobility is an integral part of the town’s history and the everyday lives of most of its inhabitants. Furthermore, even though present, corruption is perceived as less pronounced, everyday life as more immediate and intimate and this as a place where as a Russian is more likely to be respected and left in peace. Therefore, Russian immigrants perceive not Montenegro but rather Ulcinj and its people as ‘home’ and often portray it as the place they ‘fell in love with’ as well as one of privacy and recovery from a hectic (entrepreneurial) life, thus leading to personal transformation.

The original transnational context of Russian immigrant’s lives in Ulqin/Ulcinj – that is, living in Ulcinj but also working in Russia (teaching, counselling) and with Russians coming to Ulqin (see below) – has been seriously affected by the above-mentioned fall of the rouble following the financial crisis in 2007–2008. What makes ‘being a Russian in Montenegro’ today a profoundly uncertain condition is an inconsistent and restrictive citizenship regime (see below) as well as an increasingly negative and suspicious public discourse on Russians in Montenegro. In particular, after the elections in October 2016, marked by the claim that a group of Russian and Serbian ‘terrorists’ was planning to kill prime minister Milo Djukanović, the image of Russians suffered to such an extent that even the Russian Ministry of Exterior warned Russian tourists heading to Montenegro. The result – heavily lamented over in Ulqin/Ulcinj – was a marked decrease in Russian tourism in the following season.

‘Never Feel Too Much’ – Being a Woman and Becoming a Wife in Ulqin/Ulcinj

When Osman, a 65-year-old waiter, was once telling me about his daughter’s ‘character’, he proudly said,

When the teacher in school asked if one would marry out of love, almost all the girls said yes. My daughter thought a bit and then said that she would marry out of love, but not only out of love. That is when I realised that she is smart and will make the right choices in life.

Zenepa’s intimate choice perfectly expresses the transformed patriarchal regime exemplified by her father’s reasoning. In the past, women

were not formally employed and were appointed to household work (which did not count as work because it was unpaid) and could seldom make marital choices. Today women can, in principle, choose their future husband (a choice probably most clearly limited by ethno-religious identity). However, making the 'right choice', which means one not based on emotions (alone), is valued and thus expected of them. The socioeconomic transformations described above – women's increased autonomy in terms of education, employment and their related power within the household – seem to have led to an interesting coexistence of patriarchal values and norms (such as endogamy, favourable marriages and the related 'affective economy') and women's enhanced freedom to choose. Even more interestingly, my analysis suggests that even under conditions of 'cracked' patriarchy, relational ethics implying a particular affective economy both retains its strength and is infused with new meanings (see below).

Zenepa's marriage was indeed her decision – that of an educated woman about to enter the labour market – but a decision made under conditions of social expectations and ideas of the 'appropriate' marriage partner (here, a man from a Muslim-Albanian family). When Bahrija – the son of a family of local *pâtisserie* entrepreneurs – asked for her hand she was less than pleased. In the midst of her psychology studies, she was looking forward to a life of continuing education, travel and 'adventure'. She vividly recalled her student days in Belgrade and especially the 'magical' moment when she once met Nikola, the brother of one of her close friends. This situation represented both the ultimate impossibility of an intimate choice and the memory of a unique and uncontrollable feeling. However, Zenepa was also very attached to her hometown and family and wanted a family of her own. After she declined Bahrija's proposal – in spite of her parents' hope that she would marry him – she went back to Belgrade for another year of studies. However, as the academic year unfolded she started reconsidering her decision – her internal 'negotiation process' began. The following summer, after having met Bahrija over coffee, she decided to make the 'right' decision. Once married and while 'migrating' to the new household, a process began of getting to know someone very different from her in terms of lifestyle and interests. Sharing the most intimate space and time with a person one does not really know yet proved to be a profoundly uncertain process of repeating peaks of personal crises. However, Zenepa and Bahrija started talking about and 'negotiating' their joint everyday life – household, work, leisure and, soon, childcare. Before long, Zenepa found herself

developing some aspects of her personality and a way of life she had never dared to 'indulge' in previously. This disciplined, hard-working and frugal young woman started enjoying going and eating out, travelling and shopping. It was through marriage to Bahrija that she learned how to enjoy life.

Instead of love as a 'prerequisite' of marriage, her choice and experience exemplifies the process of 'cultivating' a happy marriage based on mutual understanding, rational choices and cautious and 'mature' affection. For Zenepa's grandmother the relational ethics of 'never feel too much' made sense against the backdrop of male absence and habitual neglect; however, under present-day postsocialist and neo-liberal conditions of transformed patriarchy, 'never love too much' obtains new meanings in women's lives and relationships. In Zenepa's case it means 'keeping a cool head' and 'negotiating' mutual obligations and responsibilities so as to always have clarity regarding what to expect from each other. The latter represents a crucial aspect of her marriage, as Zenepa repeatedly highlighted: 'Not knowing what the other wants and feels is what makes me most uncertain. This is why at the beginning of our marriage I explained to Bahrija: "You have to tell me what you think and feel, so that I do not have to guess and feel insecure"'.⁶

Being connected not 'merely' through love and affection ('never feeling too much') but also as household and parenting partners bound together by a contract (as Zenepa often refers to her marriage, in terms of a partnership and clear communication) exemplifies both the persistence and transformation of the cultivation of intimate relations between spouses. The 'never feel too much' relational ethics namely appears historically grounded in a patriarchal gender regime, transformed through the socialist ideological legacy (and partial realisation) of gender equality and, finally, as an expression of a postsocialist/neoliberal (flexible and individualistic) entrepreneurial intimate moral economy.

'Never Own Too Much' – Men, Property and Historical Experiences of Expulsion

'I know who picked my house, but I would prefer to leave it to someone else', Ismet recounted what he had half-jokingly told Nikola, one of his Montenegrin pals, while he was playing out the next card. He was sharing with me his vivid memories of a difficult period for Ulqin/

Ulcinj. It was April 1999, and the war in Kosovo was raging. Hundreds of thousands of refugees headed towards Albania and Montenegro. After the then Montenegrin president Milo Djukanović opened the borders to Kosovo-Albanian refugees, to the great discontent of nationalists, anti-Albanian voices started building not only in Parliament but also in local arenas of everyday encounters. The café at the small beach In Ulqin/Ulcinj where local men spend much of their time outside of tourist season playing cards, watching TV and talking politics was one of those social arenas 'haunted' by history.

Ismet's economic reasoning – his relation to property and investment – is strongly based on the transgenerational experience of (forced) mobility. This retired engineer in his eighties is a descendant of one of the Ulqin/Ulcinj families of whom some members left the town when the princedom (later kingdom) of Montenegro gained independence and 'received' Ulqin/Ulcinj after 1878. While often stressing that he belongs to the part of the family that stayed in Ulqin/Ulcinj at that time, he sees expulsion as an ever-present – even if unlikely – possibility and, in this sense, a crucial aspect of the uncertain life of the Albanians in Ulqin/Ulcinj. Apart from this, Ismet shares the common perception of being marginalised by the state as well as the territorial-demographic assimilation narrative (see above).

Although strongly place-based in terms of belonging and residence, Ismet's biography is inherently mobile and transnational. Apart from spending part of his working life abroad (Switzerland) and his participation in the regular family visits to Albania that were reestablished following the Hoxha period (1944 to 1985), Ismet had spent a part of his childhood in Albania when his family fled Ulqin/Ulcinj to escape potential assault by Četniks during the Second World War. It was precisely the memory of the latter period of his life that was revived in spring 1999. As the ethnographic opening of this section illustrated, when nationalist anti-Albanian voices in Montenegro became louder during the Kosovo War in 1999, rumours spread in Ulqin/Ulcinj of how a few Montenegrin coinhabitants had silently divided the property of wealthy Albanians among themselves in expectation of their impending 'voluntary' emigration to Albania. It was in this period that Ismet decided to acquire property in Albania because – as he often says – 'one never knows what the future will bring'.

The male relationship to property (inherited along the male line) is indeed a profoundly intimate one in terms of both livelihood and identity. Ismet likes to retell the story of his great-grandfather – a hard-working but rather poor man who decided to stay in Ulqin/

Ulcinj following 1878, unlike his wealthy cousin, who migrated to Shkodra to secure his wealth (money, gold, car, ships, etc.). The former is reported to have replied to his son's attempts to convince him to emigrate to Shkodra alongside other relatives with the following rhetorical question: 'Tell me, my son, there will I be able to stretch out my arm directly from my bed through my window and grasp a delicious fig for breakfast?' This account of the really very intimate relation to one's house and land – and the associated way of life and feeling that one is reluctant to give up – is not only an example of the narrative manifestation of the 'pride' of the descendants of those who stayed in spite of adverse conditions, nor is it simply an illustration of the implicit moral economy-related claim that it was the rich who left in order to secure their individual property while the poor stayed to protect the 'historic' homeland. Furthermore – and of crucial relevance to my analysis here – this story frequently figured as a prelude to Ismet's elaborations on how best to design and cultivate one's relation to property.

'One should never own too much in one place', Ismet told me as we talked about the 'fate' of his relatives in Albania who had lost all their property under Enver Hoxha. They had bought a block of houses, where they both lived and opened up several shops. After the Second World War, however, everything was lost overnight. Decades of hardship (forced labour/migration, imprisonment, torture and poverty) followed. Today the 'tables have turned', and the once-wealthy relatives are grateful to accept Ismet's help when they are ill or preparing their children's weddings. Ismet's reasoning regarding property under potential threat of loss, as illustrated by his relatives' experience, is to own less in one place and disperse property – not just spatially but also by owning different types of property (e.g., flats, salesrooms) both in Montenegro and Albania. Furthermore, this strategy simultaneously secures his children's future livelihood, brings steady income and represents a safeguard in the event of potential emigration (because some of the property is located in Albania and because small flats and salesrooms are easier to sell than huge and expensive properties).

Ismet also often pointed out that the younger entrepreneurs in Ulqin/Ulcinj unwisely disregard the relation to property (and related strategies of ownership) based on historical experience. Instead, they invest too much in private hotels and cafés/restaurants, which depend exclusively on the ever-shorter tourist season. Apart from owning too much of the same kind of property in one place, disregarding the relational ethics of 'never ... too much' in this case also implies showing

off with one's property and, thus, potentially attracting both envy and too much attention.

'Never Settle Too Much' – Falling in Love with a Place of Uncertainty

'We came here for holidays on the advice of a friend. After we had been here for two weeks my husband turned to me and simply said, "Let's move here"'.

The successful young beauty specialist and owner of a three-floor salon in Novosibirsk thus went on her first holiday in six years, and instead of a sixteen-hour working day (including two to three hours of commuting), she finally had time to spend with her son and husband. It turned out to be a life-transforming experience. As she recalled how she felt the taste of salty water on her lips for the first time, Vera told me, as she often did, about how she 'fell in love' with Ulqin/Ulcinj and simply had to move to this small coastal town.

Like other Russian immigrants to Ulqin/Ulcinj, Vera accounts for her move with a set of specific reasons. By and large Russians moving to Ulqin/Ulcinj – often young female wellness/beauty entrepreneurs – share the experience of a life dominated by work, stress and hypermobility and the resulting quest for a quiet and healthy life. 'When I wake up in the morning, I drink my coffee and just stare at the sea', Vera often pointed out, contrasting her life in Ulqin/Ulcinj with the 'madness' of the daily commute to her stressful work place in Novosibirsk, which 'makes you forget to live your life'. According to her, Ulqin/Ulcinj, far from being 'ideal', is specific and differs from other places in Montenegro in several crucial ways. Even though there is gossip and, as Vera perceived it, 'rough tongues', she finds its inhabitants less corrupt and 'pushy' and life as more spontaneous and intimate. Furthermore, apart from the fact that there are not many Russians around, one is not harassed for being Russian as they are in other parts of Montenegro – both in terms of being seen almost exclusively as a source of money and in terms of the recent and increasingly bad image Russians have acquired in Montenegro (see above). 'People try to offer you to buy property, but when you refuse, they just leave you in peace'. For Vera it is the fact that Ulqin's past and present are so strongly marked by migration that has framed the generally inclusive attitude towards migrants – as long as they are prepared to fit in

with the local way of life and observe social boundaries. It is also the shared experience of (forced) emigration that connects the cautious place-attachment of Russian migrants with the ‘never ... too much’ relational ethics in Ulqin/Ulcinj as an uncertain place of settlement and property (see below and also next section).

Against the background of the interesting synergy between patriarchy and tourism, it is often precisely the female migrants from Russia who find themselves being ascribed particular (im)moral images/stereotypes and related expectations of ‘Russian women’. Hence, the way they act in (semi-)public spaces is a focus of social control (e.g., gossip) and, thus, a source of uncertainty when trying to build a ‘respectable’ life in Ulqin/Ulcinj. The experience of Vera’s friend Olga – a young, unmarried physiotherapist from Irkutsk – is a case in point: it took a long time and much explanation for her to convince local men that she is not a prostitute but rather a physiotherapist/masseur. Vera herself quickly learned Ulqin’s/Ulcinj’s particular social rules and the ways to use ‘gossip’ – one of the core aspects of the spontaneous and intimate dimensions of local life – in her own favour. Visibly amused, she told me how she ‘spread the word’ about how expensive her hairdressing equipment is and how this immediately brought her a ‘wave’ of customers.

Another crucial and challenging aspect of Vera’s intimate relationship with Ulqin/Ulcinj is witnessing patriarchy in a very immediate and embodied way. Vera’s work as a beauty entrepreneur provides her with deep insights into the local gender regime in terms of both female hardship and self-neglect. ‘Their hands and feet are marked by hard labour, and they have difficulty allowing themselves any pleasure’, Vera once said as she told me how she literally taught – primarily middle-aged – women to relax in the beauty salon. When they first come for a haircut, they nervously hold their cell phone, repeatedly asking her how much longer it will take and why she is washing their hair more than once. With time and with Vera’s help, her customers learn how to turn off their phones, lean back and let her take care of them as long as necessary.

Vera has never wanted to live anywhere else in Montenegro, even though she had offers of work with renowned hairdressers in the capital. Instead, her aim has been to build up a beauty academy between Novosibirsk and Ulqin/Ulcinj that brings groups of young future beauty specialists for training. However, even as it eventually became clear that this plan would not work out – as the rouble dropped in value and both flights to and life in Montenegro became

more expensive for Russians – Vera stayed in Ulqin/Ulcinj and found a job in a local beauty salon. Nevertheless, she regularly travelled to teach in Russia, and she recently moved back there – but with an ever-open option to go back to Ulqin, which she considers her second home. Like the majority of Russians, Vera never settled exclusively in Ulqin/Ulcinj, in spite of her deep and intimate attachment to this town. Apart from its size, scarce work opportunities and her son's educational prospects there, it was primarily the restrictive and inconsistent citizenship regime that made her return to Russia – this time to Moscow. At one of our last meetings in Ulqin she told me, 'I should not love this place too much. There is no future for us here'. The turning point of her life in Ulqin/Ulcinj, which finally made her leave, was when she was refused a permanent resident permit (which would have secured the possibility to apply for citizenship after ten years of legal residence). Vera lamented the fact that the legislation was changed without any warning or public consultation. When I met Vera, she had been in Ulqin/Ulcinj for four years. For three of these years she had a visa, and during the second block of three years that she applied for, she should have exceeded the five years required for a permanent-stay permit. However, it turned out that instead she was repeatedly granted a three-year visa without ever receiving the permit and, thus, no citizenship, even though she worked and paid taxes.

For Vera and many other Russians, building a life in a place where one may never (legally) belong in terms of gaining citizenship – and where, even when a citizen, one might find oneself no longer welcome – makes Ulqin/Ulcinj far too uncertain a place to settle (and invest) long term. This being-a-minority experience creates an additional connection between the Russian migrants and local Albanians. Faced with this status-based and political uncertainty (many would say injustice), Russians find that the options are to return to Russia or find another anchor point in their transnational lives.

Conclusion: Scale, Convergence, Synergy

My aim in this article was not to 'uncover' a pattern of timeless relational ethics 'underlying' what are indeed very different forms and scales of relationships imbued with distinct histories; rather, it was to explore in what way these can be seen as both historically embedded and interwoven as well as mutually illuminating in terms of a comparative analysis. Furthermore, the focus on relational ethics figures

as a way to explore Ulqin/Ulcinj through the prism of cultivating and moralising different kinds of relationships – beyond focusing either on individual ‘agency’ or structural constraints. The ways in which people relate to each other, property and place and infuse those ways of relating with ethical values and practices represent a fruitful prism for exploring the processes of ‘navigating’ (e.g., Vigh 2009) uncertainty and crises. One of the main claims and insights in this analysis was that it is precisely the relational dimension of ethics and morality that allows for grasping the inherent intertwinement of values, norms and affects. It is in this way that this text seeks to contribute to anthropological approaches to morality/ethics and moral economy.

It is obvious that the first two kinds of relationships I have explored – the female relation with the marital partner and the male relation to property – clearly intersect and share a common historical placement. However, even though the third kind of relationship – the close relation of the Russian female migrants to Ulqin/Ulcinj – does not share the same historical trajectory, it is indeed illuminating to enquire into precisely how more recent mobile populations deal and interact with and possibly appropriate moral/affective economies that they experience and encounter through their lives and interactions in a new place. Although the ‘wisdom’ of not attaching to a place too much is potentially relevant in a variety of migratory settings, settling in a place that itself is constituted by historical and contemporary (forced) mobility and minority position as well as the related moral/affective economies, one could argue, makes incorporation and coexistence more likely (in spite of many challenges) due to similar ways of cultivating relations to the place and people. Of special interest in this respect is that uncertainty in all three cases relates to (im)mobility – moving to another family, the threat of having to emigrate and leave property behind and the risk of never really legally settling in a place and ceasing to be an immigrant. Against the backdrop of this comparative analysis of the three different cases of the relational ethics of ‘never ... too much’, Ulqin/Ulcinj appears as a place of both strong attachment and ambiguous/uncertain relations and settlement in which the dialectics of staying put and moving on ([im]mobility) is built into the way people both have been and are inhabiting this border town by building different kinds of relations on different scales in similar ways in order to cope with forms of uncertainty.

In terms of scale, although the focal point of a relationship and its ethical dimension can be another person, property or a place, these focal points are crucially intertwined. Russian migrants relate

to Ulqin/Ulcinj by attaching to its people, nature and their (potential but unlikely) settlement, including property against the background of potential permanent residence and citizenship. Male relations to property are again negotiated in the course of cultivating and performing close relationships with relatives and fellow urban residents and are strongly marked precisely by emotional attachment to place. Women's cautious affective economies in the course of deciding upon a marital partner crucially impact their experiences of place and (im) mobility, and even though the issue of property inheritance is largely defined by the patriarchal gender regime, these affective economies also imply 'negotiations' of 'ownership' and responsibility for different kinds of labour and leisure.

I will conclude with a few conceptual remarks referring to the wider theoretical-epistemological level. An obvious way to conceptualise similarities among different relationships and relational ethics with different histories would be to speak of 'convergence'. Although this would account for different threads of historical development not directly related to each other – 'coming together' (through migration) and producing particular effects – it does not capture the interrelation of the cases explored here. However, 'shared experiences' are not givens of or 'predispose' towards 'coexistence'; rather, the former are only established through encounters, communicating histories and – as this text explored in particular – cultivating relations. This makes the 'encounter' between Russian immigrants and the inhabitants of Ulqin/Ulcinj that this text has been exploring appear to be more a matter of 'synergy' than mere 'convergence'. The 'synergy' of the different socioeconomic and historically placed experiences and relational ethics has the potential to produce mutual transformation and is a way to conceptualise how migration can sustainably transform societies in the realm of cultivating different forms of close relationships. Russian immigration and ongoing emigration/return migration has folded into and strengthened the local historically grounded narrative of the (migrant-)welcoming place (Ulqin/Ulcinj), itself located within a noninclusive and marginalising state and, thus, representing an uncertain place of settlement, property and attachment. On a different intimate relational scale Russian immigration to Ulqin/Ulcinj has sustainably changed how some local women relate to their personal time and their bodies as well as their marriages and household labour. At the same time – in spite of a shared critical and orientalist stance towards local patriarchy – the regulated and 'straightforward' rules of life and relations in Ulqin/Ulcinj have given Russian

women the feeling of having (re)claimed some of the most important intimate relations in their lives – with their families, with a home (they now have time to actually live in) and, finally, with themselves.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the “Intimate Uncertainties” Project-Team – most notably Sabine Strasser and Louisa Piart – for their thorough and insightful feedback to the text. I would also like to express my appreciation to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments. My fieldwork in Ulqin/Ulcinj is a part of a larger exploration of the Albanian/Montenegrin borderland (funded by the Austrian Academy of Sciences through the APART/AAS-CEE Fellowship) and has been unfolding through repeated fieldwork stays since 2012.

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Notes

1. I use both names for the city, since both Albanian [the minority language] and Montenegrin are official languages, and bilingualism has a long history. Through the Law on Rights and Freedoms of Minorities [adopted on 10 May 2006, based on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities] Montenegro introduced Albanian as the official language in the administration and education in municipalities with an Albanian-speaking majority.
2. All names as well as aspects of biographies have been changed in accordance with anonymity and informed consent.
3. I refrain from using the ideologically burdened term ‘arranged marriages’, as it both occludes the complexity of power relations as well as interpersonal and personal negotiations and is commonly used as a tool for othering individuals and collectives.
4. I use the term ‘patriarchy’ both in the narrower anthropological sense of kinship studies in reference to patrilinear and patrilocal societies [e.g. Holy 1996] as well as in a wider feminist sense of different forms of power regimes of ‘male dominance rooted in kinship, production and ideology’ [Wilson 2000: 1495].
5. The main figure dominating the narratives is Pavle Djurišić, the leader of the Četniks [in Montenegro], the pro-fascist King-loyal forces who allied first with Italian [1942–1943] and then German troops [after 1943].

6. People in Ulqin/Ulcinj as a rule refer to the local tourism as 'cheap tourism' [jeftini turizam], characterised by letting cheap rooms to low-spending tourists, as opposed to 'high tourism' [visoki turizam] before the earthquake in 1979, characterised by hotels and international guests [mostly from Germany].
7. The Valdanos Olive groves located right next to Ulqin/Ulcinj are always pointed out as the ancient property of the town's population [and the source of exquisite olive oil], which was one of the core economic pillars for centuries. Most of the families had accepted the (insufficient) payment by the state and sold their olive trees.
8. The transformation of tourism after the 1979 earthquake [and later after the Yugoslav wars] includes a shorter season [July–August] due to the decline in numbers of international tourists arriving in spring and staying up to October in favour of family tourism from neighbouring states [primarily Kosovo but also Bosnia and Macedonia].

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