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City of the ‘calm’: vernacular mobility and genealogies of urbanity in a southeast European borderland

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By combining a genealogical and ethnographic approach, this paper aims to explore temporal and mobility-related dimensions of the moral ‘self-essentialization’ in the north Albanian city of Shkodra. The image of the Shkodrani as ‘calm people’ – prominent in narratives, urban myths, life-stories, family histories or interpretations of everyday interactions – served both as an explanation of the ‘inherent’ peacefulness and inclusiveness of the inhabitants of Shkodra and as a marker of ‘urbanity’. Intrigued precisely by its a-historical ‘aura’, I will suggest that a very fruitful way of analytically disentangling ‘calmness’ is to view it through the temporal prism of the prevailing mode of migrant incorporation in Shkodra – not according to ethnicity or religion, but rather along lines of what I will refer to as ‘vernacular mobility’.

Keywords: Southeast Europe; mobility; migration; morality; moral economy; temporality; genealogy; urbanity; borderland; late-Ottoman; emic notions of belonging

Once someone, who was not from Shkodra, threw a pig’s head into the Abu Bekr mosque. These were turbulent times. But the people stayed calm. Voices were not raised. The people of Shkodra understood that this was an external provocation. The head was removed from the mosque and everything was cleaned. The Bishop and the Imam got together right away and decided to span a chain of light between the minaret and the church tower.

This paraphrased urban myth – relating to an event of a type common all over the Ottoman Balkans at the beginning of the twentieth century (e.g. Clayer 2011) – was retold to me many times. As a rule, it served as a narrative illustration of the ‘calmness’ of the people of Shkodra, the north Albanian city where I conducted my fieldwork. It constituted an urban value, which was claimed by the inhabitants to be the main reason why Shkodra managed not to be dragged into ethno-national and religious tensions and conflict that were a strong feature of the late Ottoman Balkans. This narrative ‘calmness’ includes not raising one’s voice – or, in other words, becoming ‘loud’ – in the face of provocation.¹ The metaphorical argument that ‘The Shkodrani are calm people!’ (alb. *qetësi / njerezit e qetë*, mn. *mirni, tihi ljudi*) continuously recurred throughout narratives, urban myths, life-stories, family

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histories or interpretations of everyday interactions. In that sense, ‘calmness’ can be seen as forming the ‘moral’ dimension of the urban ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu and Waquant 1992) of being a Shkodran (alb. *Shkodrane*). In other words, the ‘urbanite’ (alb. *qytetar*) is peaceful and open to – and explicitly values – differences and diversity. Embodying the ‘calm’ urban habitus in turn opens up the door for urban incorporation – to some extent even to the most marginalized and poor segments of the population. In contrast, embodying ‘loudness’ prevents one being accepted as a citizen of Shkodra, a *qytetar Shkodrane*, regardless of potential wealth or economic success.

By combining a genealogical and ethnographic approach, this paper aims to explore the emic moral ‘self-essentialization’ of the Shkodraneese. Intrigued precisely by its a-historical ‘aura’ (e.g. Foucault 1977), I will suggest that a very fruitful way of analytically disentangling ‘calmness’ is to view it through the prism of the past and present of migrant incorporation (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar 2008).² By focusing on the prevailing mode of migrant incorporation in Shkodra, which is not according to ethnicity or religion, but rather along lines of what I will refer to as ‘vernacular mobility’, I will explore three prominent present-day emic notions of belonging related to migration legacies: Podgoriçan, Ulqinak and Malësor.³ As will be explained below, instead of ethno-national or religious belonging, these notions represent references to historical and present migration trajectories, which figure as the central dimension of belonging and have entered the vernacular ‘identity pool’.

Apart from analysing how the vernacular ‘bracketing’ of ethno-national and religious belonging is often seen as an expression of ‘calmness’, in my ethnographic analysis I will trace how ‘calmness’ plays out as a moral marker in a holistic sense (e.g. Fassin 2012) by focusing on the narratives and everyday practices of different generations of migrants with regard to both the present and the late Ottoman and socialist/totalitarian legacy. Namely, apart from the moral self-cultivation of becoming an ‘urbanite’ or dignified acceptance in the face of provocation and injustice, ‘calmness’ can also be read as a manifestation of an (urban) moral economy (e.g. Browne 2009). Against the background of the post-socialist/post-totalitarian and neoliberal discursive and material battles over wealth and status⁴ – within which migrants take up and are ascribed particular roles – embodying ‘calmness’ implies an alternative moral economy in Shkodra, which can be meaningfully related to aspects of the Ottoman and socialist legacy. Namely, the practice of respecting and participating in the urban economic space and of displaying wealth modestly and respectfully appear far more relevant than individual profit, actual wealth and the manifestation of it. In other words the reference to ‘calmness’ can be viewed as a dimension of a counter-model to the ascension of a post-socialist neoliberal economy in the Balkans.

I will start the paper with a brief historical and spatial contextualization of Shkodra as a regional migratory knot by focusing on legacies of ‘vernacular mobility’. By subsequently focusing on each of three cases – Podgoriçan, Ulqinak and Malësor – I will show how the dynamics of migrant urban incorporation functions in discursive (self)-reference to the moral value of ‘calmness’. All three cases of vernacular mobility can thus be seen as a specific expression of appropriation of this historically grounded urban ideology. Based on these ethnographic insights, I will end the paper with a ‘genealogical’ sketch of ‘calmness’, along the dimensions of the Ottoman and socialist legacies as well as the post-socialist neoliberal order. I will show that rather than implying an a-temporal continuity, ‘calmness’ can be

seen as representing both an ideology and an inter-subjective mnemonic reference pool for ‘moral cultivation’ of an urban habitus.

Vernacular mobility: late Ottoman and post-socialist migration

Shkodra is the largest urban economic and administrative centre of the Albanian–Montenegrin borderland and has for centuries been a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional node of migration, located at diverse imperial frontiers and, later, nation-state borders. As indicated on the map (see Image 1), the border between present-day Montenegro and Albania has featured several significant spatial–temporal shifts and related migration movements. Of crucial relevance in this paper is the eastward movement of the Ottoman border (Image 1, purple line) after the Congress of Berlin (1878), which – as will be outlined in the sections to follow – figured as a prime factor in the late Ottoman migration to Shkodra. The most recent (post-)socialist border dynamics – the complete border closure between 1948 and 1990 (Image 1, red line⁵) – fortified the ‘special treatment’ Shkodra received during totalitarianism. Namely, due both to its image as the ‘unofficial capital’ of Albania and one of the bastions of the middle class, as well as its spatial proximity and inhabitants’ links to former Yugoslavia, Shkodra was a particular target of Enver Hoxha’s totalitarian regime of surveillance and total border closure. ‘Even the birds were afraid to fly across the border’ was a metaphorical reference to life in Shkodra during totalitarianism that I heard throughout my fieldwork.



Image 1. The Albanian–Montenegrin borderland: localities, historical border shifts and mobility.

The intertwined historical legacies (i.e. Ottoman, Habsburg and socialist contexts) in Shkodra are manifested through a complex emic repertoire of belongings based not only on religion and nationality, the latter actually being the least significant. In addition to religious labels – Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim – local, socio-spatial identity labels figure as the most prominent vernacular terms of belonging in Shkodra. The basis of my analysis will be three terms (Podgoričan, Ulqinak and Malësor)⁶ that are inextricably connected to the above-mentioned historical border shifts and migration routes. Before going into the ethnographic and historical details of each of these in the sections to follow, I want to provide a few grounding epistemological and comparative remarks.

These three emic notions represent migration legacies on different temporal and spatial scales – Podgoričan and Ulqinak represent late Ottoman urban and lowland rural migration, while the term Malësor refers to post-socialist/post-totalitarian migration from the mountains into the cities. However, they share one crucial aspect: representing belonging as primarily based on mobility, while rendering the implicit ethno-national and religious dimensions as secondary or ‘bracketed’. To take one example: although the majority of the Podgoričani are Slavic-speaking Muslims in everyday conversations in Shkodra, they are primarily seen as people ‘who came from Podgorica’. This mode of framing belonging as ‘vernacular mobility’ not only demands an analysis of migration beyond ‘methodological ethnicity’ (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar 2008), but also represents a critique of the hegemonic Balkanist mode of seeing the region exclusively through the prism of ancient ethno-national and religious hatreds. Moreover, ‘vernacular mobility’ not only represents the prevailing emic mode of referring to migrant populations, but meaningfully relates to, or even can be seen as a manifestation of, ‘calmness’ in the context of migrant incorporation in terms of a compliance with core urban moral values as opposed to a potentially conflict-generating mode of stressing ethno-national and religious belonging. This again, as will be explored in more detail below, can be seen as a crucial aspect of the Ottoman legacy of migrant incorporation and the well-established insight in Ottoman studies that the economy of Ottoman cities crucially rested precisely on the incorporation of migrants. (e.g. Riedler 2014). My analysis resonates well with Blumi’s recent and substantial deconstruction of the ‘Balkanizing’ mode of writing late Ottoman migrants’ history based on the implication of the ‘modern nation-state’ as the normative form of social organization, in which ‘the refugee’ commonly figures as ‘a monolith, a categorical point of reference made subordinate to a larger narrative about the trajectory of the empire and its successor ethno-national states’ (Blumi 2013, 3). The exploration of vernacular mobility in its relation to the urban ideology of ‘calmness’ contributes specifically to this complicating and unsettling of the ‘meta-narrative of “the nation”’ (Blumi 2013) by showing trajectories of migrant incorporation beyond ethno-nationalism, evolving in the midst of ethno-nationalist tensions and forced migration in the late Ottoman Balkans and figuring as a powerful legacy up to the present.

‘Sabar!’: work hard, be calm and go with the people’

As noted above, the vernacular mobility term ‘Podgoričani’ (literally meaning ‘people that came from Podgorica’,⁷ the present-day capital of Montenegro) refers to the progeny of Balkan Muslims, who migrated to Shkodra in four historical periods and in highest numbers after the Congress of Berlin 1878.⁸ Like the Ulqinak, the

Podgoričani thus personify the mass forced displacement of the Muslim population from the Balkans and the ‘unmixing of peoples’ (see e.g. Brubaker 1996, 153) at the time of the retreat of the Ottoman Empire, which has only recently sparked renewed scholarly interest (e.g. Blumi 2013; Chatty 2013).

Precisely the incorporation of the Podgoričani – many of whom settled in Shkodra, which was then both still a part of the Ottoman Empire and the biggest urban unit in the border region (see Image 1) – is often used as an illustration of one dimension of the ‘calm’, namely, ‘migrant-friendly’ attitude of the Shkodrani towards everyone ready to adopt the ‘urban moral code’ of Shkodra. Although commonly non-Albanian speakers, often perceived as somewhat too pronounced in their Islamic practice (see Tošić forthcoming), the ‘calm’ and ‘hardworking’ Podgoričani – as they appear in narratives, self-descriptions and everyday conversations – were welcome in Shkodra. The majority started off as peasants working the land of urban middle-class families or land they themselves had managed to buy. Many of them – mostly members of the second and third generation – gradually moved into the city as workers, small entrepreneurs and merchants, while often keeping the connection to relatives in the rural surroundings of Shkodra (as well as transnational ties to Montenegro until the border closure in 1948). Apart from this significant rural–urban intersection, another crucial aspect of the spatial incorporation of the Podgoričani in Shkodra is that by and large they entered a specific quarter, Rus, where most of them still live today.⁹ Rus – and especially its neighbourhood close to the road leading from Shkodra towards Montenegro – became the new home to the Slavic-speaking Podgoričani, who thus could partly maintain their pre-migratory social relations and their language, while at the same time becoming part of Shkodra’s population.

According to Lumije, whose family history serves as a good example here, ‘All the Podgoričani who came here already knew each other and had either family or trade relations’.¹⁰ Her grandfather, a well-off peasant, migrated from Spuž (Montenegro, see Image 1) around 1870 and bought land in the rural surroundings of Shkodra. ‘You arrive, find some land, work, you find your way around’, explained Lumije in her adorably simplifying accounts of the complex and personally challenging experience of forced migration. Lumije herself grew up in Shkodra’s countryside, where her father and uncle had built a house. She often accompanied her father while he was working the land and vividly remembers the day the water pump arrived – the first one for far and wide, as she does not tire of emphasizing. Although he was strict and conservative – first preventing his daughter from studying and later regretting this decision – Lumije’s memories of her father are marked by benevolence and admiration for a ‘hardworking’ (*radan*) and ‘decent’ (*pošten*) person.

Apart from the diligence that formed the epicentre of the family’s life, Lumije’s childhood memories reveal another central value of her upbringing, which, as she explains, has helped her substantially both in mastering life under totalitarianism (see below) and in navigating and profiting from the turbulent borderland socio-economic arena. ‘Father always told us: *Sabar*!¹¹ Be calm; calm down. Do not rush; slow down. If you do *sabar*, you will always gain. Do not reply instantly another’s bad word. First calm down and then reply’.

Apart from representing an attitude that has been crucial to Lumije’s success as a border-entrepreneur, the legacy of cultivating ‘calmness’ in terms of ‘pausing’ when faced with insult, violence or injustice played out in particular ways under

totalitarianism. Unlike the Ulqinak, which I discuss below, the better-off Podgoriçani not ‘only’ had their property expropriated by the Hoxha regime. Moreover, the Podgoriçan population was subjected to a fierce nationalizing assimilationist state policy towards minorities¹² by means of the ‘Albanization’ of surnames.¹³ Furthermore, the Podgoriçani as a rule kept a low profile in terms of their kinship ties to Montenegro (see Tošić [forthcoming](#)) and their bilingualism often suffered significantly under Hoxha’s assimilationist regime.¹⁴ When Lumije recounted this difficult time, it was impressive that her tone lacked anger or bitterness. This often led to heated discussions with her nephew; however, Lumije’s reasoning about the Hoxha period – stressing that these were difficult times for everyone in Shkodra and thus the Podgoriçani also had to suffer – always seemed to gently prevail in debates.

‘My father always said: “Children, always go with the people, with the majority. Never be the last and never the first ... The majority can never be at fault”’. The dimension of ‘calmness’, consisting of keeping a low profile and ‘embracing things as they come along’, could ‘flourish’ under totalitarianism.

When communism came the majority embraced it; they were seeking a better life. I have never been a communist, but I was hardworking and calm (mn. ‘mirma’). I did not want to be one of those heroes. Why would I want to break my head, to go to jail? ... We did not want to flee, to get our children into trouble. Our family was calm, hardworking, minding their own business. We did not want to be spies. We were hardworking and decent (mn. ‘pošteni’).

Following the opening of the Albanian–Montenegrin border in 1990, and after spending 35 years of her working life in a candy factory, Lumije – today a merchant in her late 60s – became a ‘border-entrepreneur’. She moved to Rus with her husband during the Hoxha period and with him she managed to build a new one-floor house from the border-trade income. After her husband’s death, Lumije kept on working with her son up to the present day. Even though bent by severe scoliosis, Lumije gets up every day at 5am and boards one of the ‘shared taxis’, which head towards Montenegro from the Café ‘Podgorica’, located in one of Rus’ main squares. Frequently driven by bilingual Podgoriçani – who usually combine their ‘transportation border entrepreneurship’ with petty trade – these (mostly) Mercedes-Benz vehicles have for the past 25 years carried all kinds of goods and hence livelihoods across the Albanian–Montenegrin borderland. Lumije knows it all: how to pick a good driver, how to talk to the Montenegrin border officials in order to get goods across safely (and cheaply), and how to trade successfully and maintain good relations with other traders in the market in Tuzi, Montenegro.¹⁵ The hours spent at the market often pass quickly – especially on weekends when she does not have to make too much effort to attract customers – and at around 2 pm Lumije locks her stand and heads back home.

Lumije is one of many examples of Podgoriçani who – having spent their childhood in a rural, working- or lower middle-class setting – acquired significant wealth through their cross-border trade networks. Just like traditional Shkodra houses, and unlike those in the newly emerging ‘Malsori’ neighbourhoods (see below), Lumije’s house in Rus, which she shares with her son and often her sister – although clearly attesting to her wealth – is discreetly furnished and surrounded by a wall. While preferring something more suitable for her back than one of the comfortable armchairs, Lumije would often sit on a wooden chair in her living

room and recount how Shkodra had changed over time due to migration, but would hold back from a detailed ‘othering’ of the Malësor population:

Earlier Shkodra had less than half of the present-day population. Shkodra was a ‘cultured’ city, a city of ‘fine’ people. There was the Podgoriçan and the old Shkodrani. Now the population has doubled. All those from the mountains came to the city.

The Podgoriçani not only respected and engaged with the ‘cultured’ and ‘fine’ urban life, but they had actively built affinal relationships in the urban realm. Lumije’s grandfather is a good example of this, as upon his arrival in Shkodra, he married a local Albanian-speaking girl. This dimension of the Podgoriçani’s incorporation – their common practice of entering into marriages not just with members of the Muslim community but also with the broader population of Shkodra – is why today it is hard to find a family in Shkodra that does not exemplify the literal omnipresence of the vernacular mobility term ‘Podgoriçan’ in the private realm and everyday conversations. The incorporation of the Podgoriçani was indeed a mutual process and extended beyond the practice of mixed marriages. For example, the Slavic idiom spoken by the Podgoriçani inscribed itself into local Albanian through songs, toponyms and expressions such as the designation for the very idiom itself: *Nashki*, literally meaning ‘our language’, has become the vernacular Albanian term for the Slavic language of the Podgoriçani. As such *Nashki* perfectly blends into – or is another manifestation of – ‘calmness’ in terms of the ‘bracketed’ treatment of ethnicity in the context of vernacular mobility.

Against the backdrop of this ‘legacy of incorporation’, the emergence of minority organizations – and the present-day claim by some Podgoriçani to be Serbs, Montenegrins or Serbo-Montenegrins¹⁶ – provokes wide criticism in Shkodra. It is also another point of debate between Lumije and her nephew, an active member in one of the minority organizations. The following quote by a historian from Shkodra illustrates a common line of argument:

This claim of being Montenegrins or Serbs is nonsense. And I don’t understand it. The Podgoriçani are Muslims from Montenegro who came to Shkodra and have been welcomed with open arms. And they have become a part of the city, one of the categories of the urban population. They have become Shkodran.

The sudden explicit rendering of the ‘bracketed’ ‘ethno-national’ identity – the ‘nationalization’ of vernacular mobility – in the course of demanding minority rights, can thus be seen as the opposite of ‘calmness’; it can be read as being loud, raising one’s voice, pointing the finger at inequality and thus potentially disrupting the urban peace.

Being a migrant and a *qytetar*: networks, tastes and dignified acceptance

Although the case of the Ulqinak can also be located within the historical dynamics of the forced Muslim outmigration in the late Ottoman Balkans, there are significant differences to the case of the Podgoriçani.¹⁷ While the Slavic-speaking Podgoriçani were primarily peasants, workers and small entrepreneurs, the Ulqinak were often members of wealthy merchant and sailor families. As encountered in narratives of family histories, they were well-off urban families who – after Ulqin/Ulcinj was granted to Montenegro in 1877 and 1878¹⁸ – refused, in the terms often

used by my interlocutors, to ‘sail under the cross’¹⁹ and decided to migrate. Due to their family and trade relations many of them came to Shkodra,²⁰ then still part of the Ottoman Empire, where the first generation of the Ulqinak had often already entered the city’s Muslim quarters (e.g. Perash), eventually buying houses from wealthy Shkodran families.²¹ Hence, as opposed to the case of the Podgorićani – which features a trajectory of incorporation into a demarcated urban socio-economic and spatial realm of the working and lower middle class (the urban quarter, Rus) – the family histories of the Ulqinak often reveal a narrative of apparently ‘sliding into’ the local urban elite, or the so-called, ‘old families’ (alb. *familje e vjetër*).²²

Apart from the spatial dimension of urban incorporation, the histories of Ulqinak families feature narratives of inclusion into the entrepreneurial and (in)formal political realms in Shkodra. ‘Selim was a *qytetar*, respected in the city and thus became a member of the City Council [Komisioni Qytetar]’, recounts his grandson Halit, a poorly paid state administrator in his late 50s and a passionate explorer of his family’s history. Halit’s grandfather is not only his favourite character in the history of the family and his role model of a believer and ‘distinguished’ person in Shkodra. Moreover, in Halit’s accounts Selim figures as the narrative and ‘personalized evidence’ of the present-day – or rather, even inherent – *qytetar* status of the Sinani family in Shkodra. Having been the first Sinani born in Shkodra (immediately after the migration in 1888), Selim is portrayed as a respected businessman, who was instantly incorporated into the ‘highest’ ranks of the Shkodran urban elite. Apart from entering the Muslim elite as a member of the Tijaniyya Order,²³ Selim became a member of the Kommisioni Qytetar. This informal, urban elite body consisted of intellectuals, businessmen, officials and in general – as Halit recounts – ‘well-known people, whose task it was to promote urban values and responsibilities,’ and was dominated by Catholics. Selim, who was one of the owners of the Shkodran Cement Factory and who had also owned a shipping company, managed to buy a house in the city’s Tophane quarter (where the Sinanis still live today) in 1930 and was one of the few Muslims who bought land in the region of Theth – a traditional summer residence for wealthy Catholic families.²⁴

The ‘remains’ of the Fiat Millecento that Selim purchased for travelling to the family’s Theth summer residence, can today be found in the cellar of the Sinanis’ house. This car represents one of the many ‘distinctions’ (Bourdieu 1984) the Sinanis – never having really recovered from being ousted under totalitarianism – highlight today when recounting their family history and their present-day status. ‘Selim was an emancipated man’, says Halit, recounting the ‘fine’ way of life in the house he grew up in. ‘While others ate from low tables, we had a real high table and Italian silverware’. Most of the furniture, household articles and clothing came from Italy, where the multilingual male Sinanis received their education, newscasts (e.g. Radio Roma), and with which they maintained trade relations. During a family gathering, Halit’s 20-year-old son proudly referred to a dresser purchased in Trieste for his grandfather’s wedding in the 1930s (see Image 2) in the following way:

We were offered up to 20.000 Euros for this dresser, but we would never sell it. Many families today buy the modern version of such furniture, in order to give the impression that theirs is a family like ours. Just as the furniture, they are fake!



Image 2. The model of one of the Sinani ships on the dresser from Trieste in the Sinanis' dining room.

In terms of the global political economic context, the mobility 'map' of the Sinanis can be seen as a good example of a Muslim 'bourgeoisie' in the late Ottoman context, in Eldem's terms, continuously moving between and engaging with both Ottoman and European urban economic and 'cultural' centres (2014).²⁵ Namely, the main mobility coordinates of the Sinanis, as well as other wealthy Ulqinak trader families, were Trieste, Istanbul and Alexandria.

In Halit's childhood narratives, the most prominent figure, his grandfather Selim, is endowed with many (once we counted 88) positive traits. Apart from having been 'erudite', a polyglot, 'respected', 'responsible', 'righteous', 'a philanthropist helping the poor', a 'good patriarch', 'courageous', etc., Halit's accounts of the way Selim handled tensions and violence reveal a delicate mixture of acceptance and dignity. This can be read as an important dimension of a 'calm' attitude that avoids open conflict without necessarily being discredited. As Halit recounts, when communists under Hoxha came to power and started to expropriate the property of wealthy families in Shkodra, Selim called the family together, asked his sons to stay calm and to offer no resistance to the communists. In family narratives and discussions, this move by Selim is seen not as cowardice, compliance or opportunism, but rather as a wise step to save the family and a move, which eventually enabled the Sinanis to keep their house (whereas many wealthy families

had to leave their homes). As will be discussed in the closing section, similar to in the case of the Podgoričani, this dignified, non-resistant mode of reacting to violence and injustice can serve as the basis for exploring how a mode of migrant incorporation in the late Ottoman context – grounded in the mutual interests and agency of the Shkodrani and the immigrants – plays out under totalitarianism.

Finally, Selim's practice of Islam – he secretly performed the prayers (*namaz*) in his home – as well as his death in 1964 feature a combination of consistency and 'calmness'. 'He knew he was going to die and silently prepared for it', recounts Halit. Selim called the members of the Tijaniyya, who, after he passed away, held a *zikhr* at the Sinani house,²⁶ an event Halit will never forget and which represents a strong founding element of his revived faith today.

In the post-totalitarian context – like in many other cases of the dispossessed middle- and upper-class families in Shkodra – in the Sinanis one can see a family strongly depending on remittances from their relatives abroad (living mainly the US). In addition to migration itself being a heavily debated issue in the family, the Sinanis have not, in Bourdieu's terms (e.g. Bourdieu 1984), transformed their migration-related social capital into an economic one. In other words, in contrast to many Podgoričani families and as illustrated by Lumije's case, the commonly non-Slavic-speaking Ulqinak seldom actively utilized their (family) connections with Montenegro for economic purposes after the opening of the border in 1990. In the context of the post-socialist transformations in Albania, the Sinanis can indeed be seen as one of the many 'losers' of neoliberal reforms (e.g. Kajsiu 2013). However, economic capital does not seem to represent the most crucial dimension of the Sinanis' self-understanding. As a '*qytetar* family without wealth' – or a 'fallen bourgeoisie' – nevertheless equipped with the symbolic capital of their family's legacy of migration and status, the Sinanis 'evaluate' how other migrants can or cannot be incorporated into the urban moral sphere of 'calmness'.

Apart from dismissing the quest by sections of the Podgoričani population for a 'Serbo-Montenegrin' national identity as too 'loud' – at times referring to those with the negative label of 'peasants' (*katundar*) – the Sinanis also manifest one of the crucial dimensions of the discourse on migration in present-day Shkodra: the 'othering' of the Malësorët.

From 'wildness' to 'culture': leaving behind 'the bad' and 'reforming' oneself

The third example of migration legacy and vernacular mobility – the case of the Malesor – differs in several important aspects from those of the Podgoričani and the Ulqinak.²⁷ Apart from representing a post-socialist/post-totalitarian migration from the mountain region, not a late Ottoman one, and unlike the Ulqinak and Podgoričani, Malësorët have not been very welcome in Shkodra and neither have they opted for the 'calm' trajectory of urban incorporation. The hegemonic stereotype of the Malësor is based specifically on the claim that they represent the opposite of the embodiment of the urban habitus of 'calmness'. Indeed, 'loudness', directly associated with potential violence, is a crucial aspect of their stigmatization. To an extent 'loudness' is a self-identification and description of the Malësor who started moving to Shkodra from north-eastern mountain villages in high numbers after the collapse of the socialist regime in 1990. 'Due to the economic hardship of our life, we were somewhat wild [*i egër*]', so Gjon F., who came to Shkodra from the Dukagjin region in 1997 and now works as an employee at the waterworks in Shkodra, repeatedly

argued as he was recalling the extreme poverty he experienced while growing up in a mountain village about 75 kilometres north of Shkodra. His memories of growing up by candle light, the scarcity of food and at times sharing one pair of shoes in the family, were joined by narratives of the ‘respected’ and ‘proud’ members of his *Fis*.²⁸ The discursive (self-) stereotyping of the Malësor as ‘wild’ can be seen as a variation of the urban–rural discursive dynamics in the Balkans (e.g. Jansen 2005; Stefansson 2007). Generally marked by an orientalizing grammar (Baumann 2004), the urban habitus normatively stands for being ‘cultured’, ‘modern’, ‘peaceful’, etc. while the rural population are rendered as ‘lacking culture’, ‘traditional’, violent, ‘wild’, etc. (e.g. Bringa 1995).²⁹

Two common narrative genres of describing the Malësor represent instruments of a ‘moral boundary drawing’ (Sayer 2005, 4). First, the reference to blood-feuds (*gjakmarrje*) in the midst of the urban space serves as a narrative Leitmotif rendering the ‘Malësor’ incompatible with urban ‘calmness’, which is characterized by a peaceful and participatory attitude.

‘*Gjak* [blood] is like gangrene’, anxiously declares Gjon F. – one of the founders and the secretary of the organization Missionaries of Peace (Missionari Paqe)³⁰ – as he recounts a number of cases of blood-feuds where he acted as a mediator. Based on profound knowledge of the Kanuni i Dukagjinit, for which his *Fis* has been known,³¹ Gjon provides an explanation for rising violence in the north Albanian lowlands and cities after totalitarianism.³² Not only has this social practice entered these new realms due to migration from the mountain regions after 1990, but the opening of stores of arms in the course of the 1997 civil war figures as the most prominent factor here.³³

Suddenly everyone had a gun! Both the genuine men and the ‘unmanly ones’ (alb. *pa burri*), women and children. All those who did not know what a gun actually is. It is easy to pull the trigger, but the consequences are far-reaching.

The other and related narrative genre disqualifying Malësor as potential bearers of urbanity belong to stories about them taking over houses by the force of arms. The following narrative by my landlord – the owner of a construction company and a former work migrant in Germany – on how the Bekteshi family from Shkodra lost their house is quite illustrative of accounts of houses seized in the outskirts of Shkodra, which often belong to urban middle-class families: ‘Four brothers – fully armed – suddenly appear. And there stands Mr. Bekteshi. He has culture, so he does not want to shoot. He simply leaves’. In this narrative fragment, the semantic space of ‘calmness’ – embodied in Mr. Bekteshi’s unwillingness to turn to arms and hence start the cycle of *gjakmarrje* in spite of being expropriated by brute force – intersects with ‘culture’. Namely, while the urban dwellers are ‘cultivated’, the loud, violent – and ‘culture-lacking’ – Malësor are seen as a threat to the ‘calm’ and peaceful urban space.

Apart from illustrating the non-calm, that is violent and peace-ignorant, attitude of the Malësor, this episode can also be read along the dimension of moral economy. The immoral act of seizing property figures in the narrative as clear evidence of unwillingness to bring one’s economic strategies in line with the urban common good and to be considered an ‘urbanite’ (*qytetar*).

Apart from this disruption of the urban moral economy through violence, another aspect relevant to the dimension of moral economy is the display of wealth,

which should not make one ‘stand out’, but instead should be moderate and appropriate. Seen against this backdrop, the considerable reticence citizens of Shkodra express towards currently emerging ‘Malësor’ neighbourhoods on the city margins becomes manifest. During my stay in Shkodra, completely new parts of the city rapidly emerged and embodied a novel appropriation of the urban space by migrant families working abroad. In my fieldnotes, I once noted the following from an informal conversation on present-day transformations of the city due to migration: ‘They go abroad, probably are criminals, earn money. Then they bring their whole family down from the mountains and build a palace here’. I continually encountered this and similar statements during fieldwork; my interlocutors complained about ‘Malësor houses’ lacking a surrounding wall, using shiny materials and eye-catching decorative details or being simply ‘too big’ – all of which equate to being ‘loud’. Wanting to stand out by means of an overly pronounced display of wealth was seen as a ‘provocation’ of others who have less or more and hence as a potential threat to the urban peace. Similar to the case of the Podgoriçani, the post-totalitarian period marks the socio-economic ascension of the Malësor primarily due to migration capital. However, unlike the Podgoriçani, who had bought or have built houses within the city quarters they migrated to that are in keeping with the surroundings, Gjon F. sees the newly built ‘loud’ neighbourhoods as an expression of an inadequate ‘integration strategy’ by parts of the Malisori.

Some of those who came to Shkodra did not bring along the good. They wanted to become *qytetar* instantly, but you cannot be the same as someone who has been living here for 200 years. This causes problems. However, those who were decent there, are decent here as well. They bought land and houses; they did not build. Their kids went to school and studied hard to become part of the culture of the city. Integration is hard work.

In a similar manner as in his account of the ‘gjak-gangrene’ – ascribed primarily to ‘unmanly men’ (*pa burri*) and the post-totalitarian chaos of a corrupt state – in his reasoning about the behaviour of some Malësor in the urban space, Gjon F. paints a differentiated picture of the migrant population from the mountain region, thereby clearly disrupting the hegemonic urban narrative of them being inherently and merely ‘wild’ and hence also disrupting the urban mode of ‘calmness’. Apart from the gendered dimensions of the local ‘moral vocabulary’, ‘manly’ (*burrni*) can indeed be read as a moral term denoting, for example, trustworthiness, and the knowledge of acting fairly and calmly. Thus, Gjon F.’s employment of the notion of ‘integration’ (alb. *integru*) – which dominates his narrative and refers to the mode for successfully entering the urban realm – represents an example of a virtue-ethics perspective in terms of the cultivation of the ‘good’ – both the already embodied values and practices as well as those developed in the course of ‘reforming oneself’ to become a *qytetar*.

It is not easy to integrate, because you have to be gentle. You have to be a cultured man, to have good relations at work, at home, in any other surroundings. You have to reform yourself [alb. *reformu*]. I am not saying that the Malësor do not have a good tradition, but you must cultivate what is best. You have to be persistent in your effort to integrate into the life of the city and leave the traits of the Malësia behind. You have to be calm [alb. *i cetë*] and cultured [alb. *kulturor*] and think before you speak ... I have no problems with anyone. I am just like the other *qytetar*.

A brief genealogy of ‘calmness’: from the late imperial to the neoliberal

I will conclude my paper by once again taking up different dimensions of the emic reference to ‘calmness’ mentioned so far and by exploring them more systematically through a genealogical lens (e.g. Asad 1993; Foucault 1977) on morality. It is precisely the necessary intertwinement and not mere ‘complementarity’ (e.g. Asad 1993) of an ethnographic and a genealogical perspective that informs my analysis here. From this perspective, ‘calmness’ appears as a crucial aspect of the urban (*qytetar*) moral habitus, in the sense of both ‘a product of history’ and ‘an open system of dispositions’ (Bourdieu and Waquant 1992, 133), that individuals both ‘embody’ and refer to when speaking of themselves or others in terms of cultivating (ethical) practice, and which as such indeed greatly contributes to comprehending the specificities of inclusiveness towards migrants in Shkodra. While taking into account these praxeological and ethnographic insights, the genealogical perspective enables us to capture the workings of the ‘urban ideology of “calmness”’. In other words, a particular sensitivity to claims of a-temporal binaries and ‘essences’ that give the impression of ‘not having a history’ (Foucault 1977, 139) – in this case implying the Shkodranes’ almost ‘natural’, ‘calm’ urban and migrant-friendly ‘character’ (Bushati 1999, 283) – reveals a tacit historical ontology of origin (e.g. Foucault 1977), linear causality and continuity. Rather than blending into the hegemonic, ideological and essentializing narrative of the ‘calm’ city of Shkodra – and thereby also reproducing the positive Balkanist image of the Balkans being a ‘natural’ space of tolerance and diversity (e.g. Tošić 2009) – the genealogical reflection helps us see ‘calmness’ primarily as an emic, intersubjective and trans-generational mnemonic reference pool for values and practices playing out in different ways in different temporal contexts.

Hence, when turning to the Ottoman legacy of ‘governing’ urban diversity and immigration, we can identify on the one hand the significance of a ‘hierarchized and regulated organisation of difference’ (Freitag and Lafi 2014, 1) and on the other the importance of loyalty and a contribution to the common urban economic space (e.g. Sugar 1977). Thus, religious pluralism and tolerance as well as participation (as opposed to violence and conflict) – as illustrated by the urban myth of ‘calmness’ at the outset – were some of the main markers of the Ottoman urban mode of coexistence, which was severely affected by the turmoil at late Ottoman frontiers (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the overall inclusive historical pattern of incorporating migrants and refugees into Ottoman cities (e.g. Lafi 2011) was not only based on their social status, but also on their potential and willingness to contribute to the city’s economy – revealing the importance of both the moral practice of charity grounded in Islam and Ottoman ‘pragmatism’.³⁴ Thus, the process of Podgoriçani and Ulqinak urban incorporation, rather than being an expression of Shkodra’s timeless, calm urban ‘mentality’, can be seen as the interface of the mutual interests and agency of Shkodrani and immigrants in order to prevent both the escalation of ethno-national/religious tensions and economic downturn. This insight relates well to Blumi’s deconstruction of the hegemonic image of the late Ottoman refugee as the passive victim of ‘western’ nation-state modernity ‘crushing into’ the ‘pre-modern’ Ottoman Empire (Blumi 2013). Neither did the Podgoriçani and Ulqinak collectively embrace Albanian nationalism³⁵ – as indicated by the enduring strength of vernacular mobility notions ‘bracketing’ ethno-national and religious belonging – nor were they ‘pre-modern Ottoman subjects’. In fact, many of them can instead

be characterized as transnationally networked rural entrepreneurs entering the urban realm or as members of the urban bourgeoisie with transnational links to different parts of the empire as well as to Western Europe.

Under the socialist-totalitarian regime of Enver Hoxha – one of its pillars being precisely the violent destruction of the urban way of life – the reference to and practice of ‘calmness’ enabled a mode of survival and dignified legitimization of non-resistance under totalitarianism. However – as both Lumije’s and Selim’s cases illustrate – ‘calm’ and dignified acceptance of repression should not merely be seen as ‘passivity’, but as an active strategy of preventing loss of life, (more) property and potential forced dislocation from the urban realm.

Finally, as outlined at the beginning of the paper, in the present moment – heavily marked by the socialist-authoritarian legacy of violence and fear as well as by an explosion of mobility and urban socio-economic transformation – the reference to ‘calmness’ figures as a discursive and praxeological tool in novel ways. Former members of the wealthy urban elites – having been dispossessed under the Hoxha regime and not having utilized their cross-border networks economically – often find themselves lacking means to improve their economic situation under conditions of neoliberal reforms (e.g. Kajsiu 2013). Faced with the ‘dizzying’ economic rise and ‘overly pronounced’ urban presence of the Malësor migrants, as well as sudden ‘loud’ minority right claims by the Podgoriçani, who in many cases have become successful border-entrepreneurs – the reference to ‘calmness’ is, however, not to be seen as a mere rehabilitation of an ‘authentic’ ‘Ottoman’ moral order. Rather, it can be read as an (indeed to a considerable extent successful) reclaiming of status beyond the value of wealth and economic success – often labelled as immoral and corrupt – and in that sense an alternative ‘moral economy’ to the post-socialist neoliberal present.

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Notes

1. As is apparent in the paraphrased urban myth, ethno-national and religion-based provocation is commonly identified as ‘external’ to Shkodra and its inhabitants. In a similar manner, new forms of Islamic practice, perceived as ‘fanatic’ (Alb. *fanatike*), are identified as ‘imported’ and ‘external’ (see Tošić 2015).
2. I join Glick-Schiller and Çağlar in critiquing both ‘methodological ethnicity’ and ‘methodological nationalism’ (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar 2008) as reductive and ideological assumptions when exploring migration. Furthermore, while I do consider the effect of state/imperial migration regimes, the nation-state is but one factor in my analysis, which is located on a regional and temporal scale reaching from developments

- in the late Ottoman frontiers up to the present; in this context, the nation-state does not figure as the norm, but rather as a historical and ideological development (see Image 1).
3. These emic terms of belonging represent nouns in the singular, while the plural (except in the case of Ulqinak) includes the suffix -i.
 4. Following the dissolution of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania in 1991–1992.
 5. While the red colour of the line symbolizes the border closure between 1948 and 1990, the border did not shift after the regime change and the opening of the border in 1990 up to the present.
 6. Other mobility-related emic notions of belonging prominent in present-day Shkodra are e.g. Vraçaor and Magjyp/Egyptian (see Tošić 2015).
 7. Podgoriça represents the generic 'location' within this vernacular mobility term to which people refer as the place their family came from even if further conversations reveal that the precise location turns out to be a smaller urban (e.g. Nikšić) or rural (e.g. Spuž) unit. This can be read as an indication that claiming an urban (*qytetar*) identity was an important aspect of the incorporation strategy of the Podgoriçani.
 8. Hamdi Bushati – the author of the most popular history of Shkodra, which embellishes the shelves of almost every Shkodran family I have visited (Bushati 1998, 1999) – lists the following four stages of the Podgoriçan migration to Shkodra: during the reign of the Bushati family (1757–1831), after the Congress of Berlin (1878), WWI and WWII (Bushati 1999, 309).
 9. Apart from Rus, today many Podgoriçani live in the nearby quarter Kiras.
 10. Both first names and surnames are anonymized.
 11. The word *sabar* is derived from the Arabic (*sabr*, صبر) via Turkish and can be understood as 'Patience: the capacity to endure hardship, difficulty, or inconvenience with 'calmness', self-control and without complaint' (<http://quranicteachings.org/sabr/>).
 12. The 'Vraçaor' – the Slavic-speaking and Christian-orthodox population in the Shkodra region – was also exposed to this assimilationist regime.
 13. Either by the erasing of the Slavic surname-suffix 'ić' (e.g. Piranić becoming Pirani) or by substituting a surname with an Albanian word that happens to have spontaneously crossed a clerk's mind, as I was often told during fieldwork among the Podgoriçani (e.g. Hebovija becoming Arrë, meaning 'walnut').
 14. Which is why many Podgoriçan families today participate in one of the minority organizations in Shkodra, providing language lessons in Serbian/Montenegrin for both children and adults.
 15. Since the opening of the border in 1990, and particularly during economic sanctions against FRY (1992–1995) the 'flea-market' in Tuzi became the main regional market, and a crucial source of income for the Podgoriçani. While during the sanctions the market in Tuzi provided essential commodities, such as fuel and cigarettes, after the sanctions were lifted it still continued to be the leading market offering a variety of goods at lower prices compared to, for example, the market in Podgorica. Lumije sells textiles of all sorts, which her son purchases during his regular trips to Istanbul.
 16. The first minority organization founded in Shkodra after the regime change ('Moraça Rozafa') aimed at representing the Slavic-speaking population of Shkodra and its surroundings with reference to the minority of 'Serbo-Montenegrins' (mn. srpsko-crnogorska manjina/alb. minoritet serbo-malezeze) (see <http://www.moraca-rozafa.com>, accessed 11 July 2015).
 17. A similarity to the Podgoriçani as revealed through family histories – and a potential problem for their incorporation in Shkodra – was the fact that most members of these migrant populations were more outwardly religious, which stood in contrast to one of the crucial aspects of the local regime of 'calmness' – the modest display of religious belonging in the public urban space (see Tošić 2015).
 18. After the Montenegro–Turkish war (1876–1877), in which Montenegro's defeat was prevented by retreat of the Ottoman armies due to a Russian offensive at the Danube front, Montenegro was able to double its territory (Treaty of San Stefano in 1877) and eventually gain independence (Congress of Berlin 1878). Apart from Nikšić, Spuž, Podgorica, Kolašin, Andrijevica, Žabljak, Plav and Gusinje, the harbours Bar and Ulqin/Ulcinj were included in the newly independent Montenegrin state (Morisson 2009, 28).

19. After Montenegro was granted Ulcinj, the half-moon symbol embellishing the sails was replaced by a cross. In line with his overall aim to prevent the Muslim outmigration, the Montenegrin King Nikola I Petrović Njegoš was eager to keep the wealthy Albanian families in Ulcinj. Apart from sending his famous and respected official Duke Simo Popović to Ulcinj with the aim of convincing the wealthy families to stay, he had also reversed this symbolic act of power. However, the massive outmigration of Albanian families, many of whom left for Shkodra, but also Durres or present-day Turkey, could not be prevented.
20. When doing research in Shkodra and Ulqin, one often hears about the ‘traditional’ and long-standing connection between these two cities along trade and kinship ties.
21. As opposed to some 50 families that have been settled in a neighbourhood in one of the Muslim city quarters, Lagjia e Kodralijve (see Bushati 1998, 83).
22. The ideology of ‘calmness’ crucially intersects with a prominent middle-class discourse in Shkodra – the discourse on so-called ‘old urban families’ (*familje e vjetër*) (see Tošić [forthcoming](#)).
23. The Tijaniyya Order – a strict orthodox North African brotherhood founded at the end of the eighteenth century – was established in Albania in Shkodra by Muhammed Shaban Domnori after his Hajj in 1920. Since then the order has gathered respected Muslim religious representatives, intellectuals and businessmen in Shkodra. As Nathalie Clayer lays out, while King Zog had initially aimed at secularization in Albania – which the Tijaniyya representatives strongly opposed – after 1930 he aimed at strengthening religion as a means of weakening the emerging communists (for more see Clayer 2009).
24. Originally, Tophane was a Catholic neighbourhood up to the nineteenth century, at which point Muslim families living in the old city neighbourhood around the Lead Mosque started buying houses in Tophane, while the Catholic families started moving to other parts of the city such as Gjuhadol, Rremaj and Sarreq. In the nineteenth century – especially the second half – the city started to spread due to the influx of migrants, among whom precisely the well-off Ulqinak families tended to buy houses in Tophane (personal communication with the historian Ndrیقin Mlika, Muzeu Historik i Shkodrës).
25. As opposed to the hegemonic and orientaling historiography of late Ottoman transformations where the notion of the ‘bourgeoisie’ refers to non-Muslim and ‘imported’ fragments of the population, the Sinanis can serve as an example of a Muslim ‘bourgeoisie’ due to their transnational mobility and trade, or in Eldem’s terms, their ‘integration with western-oriented or dominated networks’ (2014, 161).
26. This narrative is highly interesting beyond the aim of this article. It confirms the assumption (Clayer 2009, 492) that after the death of Muhammet Bekteshi in 1958 the Tijaniyya Order in Shkodra was headed by Sheh Xhemal Alibali and thus existed informally during the intensification of communist purges of religious institutions and clerics.
27. The third example of migration legacy and vernacular mobility - the case of the Malesor - differs in several important aspects from those of the Podgoricani and the Ulqinak.
28. The Albanian notion of *Fis* (*bratstvo* in Montenegrin), denotes patrilineages as forms of social organization that consolidated due to the Ottoman presence (e.g. Kaser 1992, 14; Morrison 2009, 17).
29. For an elaborate historical account on the relation between the population of the Albanian highlands and different imperial/state regimes – as well as the implied marginalization and essentialization of the highland peasants – see Pula 2011.
30. This organization was co-founded by Gjon F. and has as its aim mediation in cases of blood-feuds on the basis of traditionally inherited knowledge of the Kanun and, as Gjon highlights, ‘the ultimate fulfilment of achieving a forgiveness and thereby saving lives, as the prime duty before God’.
31. The Kanuni i Dukagjinit is the north Albanian customary law, which was documented by the Franciscan priest Shtjefen Gjecovi at the end of the nineteenth century. The Kanun regulates core aspects of social relations and obligations (family, property, marriage, etc.) and thus contains detailed rules regarding blood-feuds and their potential

- mediation. Gjon F. acquired knowledge of the Kanun from his father who was considered a prime authority in this regard in the region of the Dugadjin.
32. For a detailed account of the interrelation between the post-socialist transformation in Albania (e.g. instability and retreat of the state, contestations over property) and the 're-vitalization' of the northern Kanun see Schwandner-Sievers 2001.
 33. After the collapse of pyramidal schemes, which left thousands of Albanians without means, a civil uprising against the government spread throughout the country in the course of which around 2000 people were killed.
 34. In the course of the Tanzimat reforms – instead of status (e.g. nobility) – mainly property and fiscal capacity became prime 'coordinates' of the urban incorporation of migrants (Lafi 2011, 21).
 35. Although some of them surely did.

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