

**The tractor, the shop and the filling station: Work migration as self-help development in
Albania.**

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For many Albanians who lost their jobs with the collapse of communism, and the cohorts that have left school since, emigration is the only means of finding work. However, while some of those who have left may have thought they wanted to go for good, many do not. Surveys in Albania have consistently found that most migrants intend to go abroad for a few years, or even just a few months, in order to work. They far outnumber those who expect to leave permanently (International Organization for Migration 1995, cit. Sanfey & Papapanagos, 1998, p.4; DeSoto, et al. 2002, p.43; Uruçi & Gedeshi, 2003, p.29). An early survey of Albanians in Greece and Italy also found that more intended to return than did not, though the difference was smaller.¹ Considerable numbers have already returned and resumed residence in Albania. There is constant back and forth movement. Many who work abroad intersperse their absences with periods of residence in Albania (Kule et al., 2002, p.233; DeSoto et al. 2002, p.xiii). Some of those who have returned have used migration to acquire sufficient savings, skills and other assets, to create livelihoods for themselves, and have become an important factor in Albanian development.

In what follows, where not otherwise stated, the data were obtained from informal conversations with informants, in Albanian, and from observation of developments over several years, while doing fieldwork for more broadly based studies in villages in southern Albania between 1996 and 2003. The data were thus obtained in context, but as a result, they are more fragmentary than they would be in a study directed just at migration. I did ask male informants fairly systematically if they had worked abroad. Some of them, or members of their families (usually their wives), told me about their migration history, often as it was taking place. I have also had conversations in Greece, about both Albanians and former Greek migrants, and with returned migrants elsewhere in southern Europe.

The new kurbet

Once the Albanian borders were opened, migration in search of work might be said to have had tacit official approval. In a speech at the end of 1990, Ramiz Alia, the then first secretary of the Albanian Party of Labour, said 'Now every citizen has a

passport, nobody raises objections to seeking work outside the country' (*Zëri i Popullit*, 27 December 1990, cited in translation in *ABSEES* 1991, p.2). Given the poor state of the Albanian economy at that time, it was tantamount to encouragement to do so. Albanians knew that Greeks, Italians, Kosovars and others had worked as *Gastarbeiter* in Northern Europe and had returned home better off. They assumed, being unaware of the changes in the economies of the host countries in recent decades, that they could do the same. Their perception of the capitalist West was not just one of the luxury and glitter they saw on television, but also of large factories employing many workers. They took it for granted that, because they would work hard, employers would hire them. Westerners were only unemployed, they argued, because they did not want to work. They were also aware of the long tradition of periodic and seasonal work migration in the Ottoman Empire, in which many Albanians, and others, had participated, and a more recent tradition of work migration to America, that lasted until the Second World War, and is still recalled by older people. Present-day migration is understood as part of this tradition, and is referred to by the same term, '*kurbet*'.

Many Albanian men of working age have worked abroad at some time since 1990. Some were accompanied by their wives, and a few by their families, but most went alone. Some men spent only a few weeks outside Albania, usually in the early 1990s, while others have worked abroad almost continuously for years on end, but most fall between these extremes. The majority of the former emigrants I spoke to had been in Greece, some in Italy, and a few in other countries, including the UK. Except for a slight under-representation of returnees from Italy, this roughly corresponds to the pattern of Albanian emigration, and reflects its chronology. The countries which took the first waves of emigrants are also those from which the first ones have returned. For present purposes I consider as returnees those who have returned of their own accord, and are unlikely to migrate again unless they need more money to sustain their projects in Albania. Few of these have given up migrating because they were forcibly expelled from neighbouring countries. Such migrants often emigrate again at the earliest opportunity.²

Given that movement, in both directions, goes on all the time, and that much of it, according to some estimates as much as 90 per cent (e.g. Telo & Papa 1998, p.72), is illegal, and hence clandestine, it is impossible to quantify its volume with any accuracy. Estimates have been made of the number of Albanians present in neighbouring countries, and of Albanian citizens absent on particular dates, said to be as many as half a million at any one time (Pulaj, 2002), but there are no reliable data on returns, let alone back and forth movement. On the basis of field evidence, I estimate that perhaps a quarter of the men of working age now resident in southern Albania, are returned migrants. The limited available survey evidence suggests this is not an overestimate. Of the 40 per cent of a regionally representative sample of wage-earners between the ages of 16 and 64 in 1999 for whom data were complete (which will tend to overstate migration), about a third had spent substantial time working outside Albania (De-Coulon & Piracha 2002, p.9).

Migration, though not necessarily a family decision, is often part of a family strategy. One or more family members, not always the same ones, may be working abroad at any one time, but they are still considered, and consider themselves, to

belong to the family in Albania (Tusha, 2000, p.43; Saltmarshe, 2001, p.77; UNDP, 2003, p.51). Many Albanians abroad fall into this category. According to the 1998 census of agriculture, which included all the holdings occupied (Instituti i Statistikës, 2000, p.24), and thus about half of the population, more than 150 000 family members (over 10 per cent of the total agricultural population) had done less than half a year's work on the holding in the previous year because they had been working abroad (ibid., p.85). Almost 60 per cent of these were classified as 'other family members' (i.e. not the head of household or his spouse), and over half were under the age of 35. Those in their twenties accounted for between 20 and 25 per cent of the category 'other family members', which means, as they are almost all male, they were almost half of young men in that age group.³ The unemployment rate for the 16 to 34 age group (including women) is 60 percent (Economic Commission for Europe, 2002, p.5), so this is hardly surprising.

Most emigrants maintain a stake in Albanian society. They make frequent, and expensive, telephone calls to their families (Nicholson, 2002b, p.440). Until the recent explosion in mobile phone ownership in Albanian villages, people would, if necessary, travel quite long distances to a telephone to talk to relatives who were abroad. At weekends village telephone offices would be crowded with people waiting to make or receive calls. Young men marry women in Albania and establish new families there. Some new wives accompany their husband abroad, but others move to the house of their husband's parents, as is the custom, to wait for his return, and bring up their children there. Those who bring money to Albania in person, as many do (Misja 1998, p.22; Gedeshi, 2001, pp.4-5), return every few months. Migrants take leave from their jobs to return home to help out with heavy work at peak seasons, such as the wheat harvest. Young men return to Albania to do their military service. Students working abroad continue to follow distance learning courses at Albanian universities (Nicholson, 2002a, p.2). At peak holiday times, especially at New Year and in August, large numbers visit their families in Albania. On the main north-south highway there are extra buses on the long-distance routes from Athens and other Greek cities, all full, and processions of small, Greek registered cars with luggage, and the odd washing machine, piled on the roof. The ferries from Italy, too, are full. When they could get visitors' visas, which is now rare (see Nicholson, 2002b, p.440), Albanian families visited their relatives in Greece. Some visit relatives in Italy and further afield. Even when whole families are abroad, work migrants maintain, or extend, their houses in Albania, or build new ones (Nicholson, 2001, p.39). With rare exceptions, they leave their land in the care of relatives, rent it out, or leave it fallow, rather than sell it.

Work migration as a strategy for earning and saving

Many migrants contribute to the maintenance of their families in Albania. Survey evidence in the mid-1990s showed that over half of migrants' earnings were sent back to Albania, of which just over half was used for consumption purposes (Kule, et al., 1002, p.235). For many families work migrants are a major source of the cash income, which keeps them out of poverty (DeSoto et al. 2002, pp.90, 99). Emigrants also give assistance in kind by allowing relatives and neighbours, to use resources they

leave behind. This may be land or a house, which they can use or let out -- both occur -- or vehicles or household equipment, which can be used for small-scale income generating activities. The effect may be small and short term, but it raises the standard of living for an individual family, and is probably significant in aggregate.

Work migrants also save, according to some estimates, up to half of often very low earnings (Gedeshi, 2001, p.14). Many are target savers, who intend to invest their savings in Albania, aware that, costs being much lower than in neighbouring countries, they will increase in value when repatriated. They (and their families) may have decided before they leave how they will use the money, even to the extent of planning, for example, what a new house will be like and staking out the plot where they will build it. Some have several aims to be achieved in succession.

The close similarities between survey evidence of intentions and of actual patterns of investment, and increasing evidence in Albania of investments and enterprise financed by repatriated savings, suggest that many realise their aims. In a survey of Albanian emigrants in Italy in the early-1990s, Misja found that a third of those who saved⁴ intended to use their savings to build a house. Almost nine per cent planned to buy a vehicle. For some this would be their very own 'Benz' (Mercedes), a status symbol, but one that also offered prized mobility in a land where there had been no private cars. Many, perhaps a majority, would buy a commercial vehicle or a car that would have a commercial use (Nicholson, 2002a). A further eight per cent intended to invest in a hotel, restaurant or café, and three per cent in an industrial building or equipment. About 40 per cent were less specific about their ultimate objective; they were simply going to put the money in a bank (Misja 1998, p. 91). A survey of actual behaviour in 1998 found that almost 40 per cent of remittances sent back to Albania by first-time emigrants were being saved or invested (Kule, et al. 2002, p.236). The proportion investing in property (seven of the 40 per cent) was barely half what Misja's survey might have led one to expect. However, allowing for differences in categorisation, both the actual proportion saved (23 per cent) and the proportion invested in 'productive activities' (11 per cent, that is just over a quarter of savings and investment combined) were higher.

These findings may just indicate the extent to which goals have been achieved in the short term. They are not necessarily representative of the overall use of savings over a longer period and the eventual use of amounts initially reported as 'saved', by those who went abroad several times. Field observations and comments by returned migrants suggest that spending and investment patterns vary in the course of a migratory career, depending on a migrant's circumstances and priorities. Some build a new house before making other investments, others delay building or improving a house until they have established the basis for a livelihood. Savings may have a succession of uses before being invested. They provide a source of informal credit (Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2000, p.144; Nicholson, 2001, p.40), loans from family or friends, which has been found to provide almost as much capital for small firms as remittances (Kule, et al., 2002, p.236). Thus, in some cases, one migrant's savings may contribute to the development of more than one business.⁵ On the other hand, the difference between the predictions and actual behaviour, and some anecdotal evidence, may also indicate that migrants' experience abroad encourages more of them

to consider investing in a business in Albania than intended to before they left. These are questions that deserve further investigation.

The proportion of investments put to productive *use* is undoubtedly greater than the amounts earmarked for self-evidently ‘productive’ projects would suggest. Some new houses include work premises or a shop, or these form part of improvements to an existing house. The first micro-enterprises used domestic items, such as stoves (selling fast food, and in the first guest houses), bathroom scales (to earn money by weighing people in the street) and kitchen scales and pocket calculators (on market and street stalls). Women who produce and sell milk store it overnight in their household refrigerators (Nicholson, 2003, p.150). Domestic refrigerators are also used in micro-businesses that sell cold drinks. Some of these items were among the earliest remittances in kind of consumer goods. There are also instances of ‘non-productive’ investments that have enabled the productive use of previously non-productive assets, such as building or buying a new house or flat so that a ground floor flat in a central location can be converted into a business, as a great many have.

One might further speculate that, just as in societies that have experienced acute conflicts, in Albania, where since 1991 there have been radical changes, and at times turmoil, ‘investment of remittances in social activities may be seen as reconstruction of the social fabric, in which “productive” activities are embedded.’ and that ‘(b)y facilitating the accumulation or repair of social capital, such investment may lay the foundation for later reconstruction and development’ (Sørensen, Van Hear & Engberg-Pedersen 2002, pp.18, 20). Much of the ‘non-productive’ investment made in Albania by emigrants over the past decade has been directed at improving poor living conditions and paying for such things as medical treatment abroad that was not available in Albania (c.f. income from remittances spent on health, Uruçi & Gedeshi, 2003, p.27). It has undoubtedly improved wellbeing and self-confidence, and thus has probably been a factor in the growth in the entrepreneurial activity of migrants and non-migrants alike.

Returned migrants and their small enterprises

Typically, returned migrants use their savings to invest in micro-enterprises, one-person or small family enterprises. They provide start-up finance for a new enterprise or finance or equipment to improve the productivity and efficiency of moneymaking activities they or their families already engage in (Nicholson, 2001, p.39). Savings from migration provide seed corn finance to start a business on a small scale, or may be just one element of a bigger package put together with finance from several sources (Nicholson, 2001, p.40). Then by working long hours, using family labour and not employing others, as much as possible of the takings is conserved and reinvested so that the business grows. While this is not necessarily a conscious or pre-planned strategy, it minimises the amount of time that needs to be spent working abroad.

Micro-enterprises, whether started by migrants or non-migrants, have predominated in Albania since private businesses have been permitted. Single-person businesses make up about 80 per cent of the total and provide almost a quarter of employment. In the 18 per cent of businesses with no more than 10 employees, the average number employed is three (Muent, Pissarides & Sanfey, 2000, p.3). In practice, many of those who

work in these businesses are family or kin, and very close friends. People rarely trust non-kin, especially with money, or believe that employees who are not members of their family will work conscientiously. No less important is the fact that micro-enterprises can be started with just a small amount of capital, relatively modest personal resources, such as skills or contacts (such as a cousin who has started another business, has a vehicle, or possesses complementary skills), and hard work. They thus provide the only realistic possibility for many returned migrants to create a livelihood for themselves. Even after several years' work abroad, few have accumulated sufficient resources to finance anything bigger.

The tractor

In the largest economic sector, agriculture, remittances are the source of most investment (Kodderitzsch 1999, p.6), in livestock and in tractors and other machinery. Besides agricultural work, on their owner's holdings and for others for payment, tractors with trailers are used for haulage. Returned migrants are among those who make a living out of any or all of these.

The migration career of one such migrant, and the experience of the family he had left behind at home, is typical of many. When I first met his wife, she was alone with her two young sons. Her husband had been in Greece for ten months. Prior to that he had already spent two years working there, travelling back and forth at intervals. He was in Greece legally, he did not have to go over the mountains, but he worked on one of the islands so he could not come home very often. As he provided most of the family's cash income, his wife would sometimes run short of money. The following year, when he came home on holiday he built a wall in front of his house. By that time he had spent a total of three and a half years working in the building trade in several places in Greece. By the next year the wall had a high metal gate, which could be locked, and there was a small Chinese tractor with a trailer, standing outside. He had bought the tractor with savings from his work in Greece, it had cost 4 'million' (i.e. 400 000) Albanian lekë (£2 000). He had not gone back to Greece at the end of his holiday, but had started working as a self-employed tractor driver instead. Later he fitted a cab to his tractor so he could work in bad weather, and built a shelter for it inside his gate. During the summer he had plenty of work, but there was less in winter. By midwinter they began to say he would go back to Greece, because they needed money, but 'not yet'. As time went on they said he would go over the mountains when the winter was over, but he was clearly reluctant to leave his young children. By the summer of the following year he had still not gone. By the next year he was getting more work in winter as well as summer, and they were not even talking about his going to Greece.

The filling station

Those who undertake larger projects, or who did badly paid work abroad, may join forces with another man, sometimes more, to start a business. Usually they are related: brothers, cousins, a man and his son or son-in-law, a (paternal or maternal) uncle and a nephew, *baxhanakë* (men whose wives are sisters). Their respective wives

and sisters may also work in the business. Two brothers whose land abuts a main road used their savings from working in Greece (six years in one case, four years in the other, doing agricultural work, mostly illegally) to build their own filling station. They built a small office with concrete blocks and started selling diesel from their sole pump. They made their own sign, and gradually improved the office by putting in windows and painting it white. Inside they have a small bar, a table, chairs and a refrigerator, so they can serve coffee and cold drinks. They did most of the work themselves, as well as staying open day and night. At first I did not see too many vehicles stop, though they always insisted when asked that there were '*plotë*' (lots). After two years, they had erected a canopy, of which they were very proud, with their father's name painted on it and proclaiming they were open '*24 ore*'. The tree they planted when they started had grown tall and provided shade where they could relax while they waited for customers. More vehicles were stopping to fill up, and neither of the brothers had been back to Greece.

Mobilising non-monetary assets: the shop

Another migration strategy is one used by people with marketable skills. They go abroad to work to get the resources to turn their skills into a means of making a living (Nicholson, 2001, p.40). What they need may be quite modest. A worker from a state farm set up a carpentry workshop in some old state farm buildings he had bought, then he worked in Greece for six months to buy good quality machinery, and his small business has maintained him and his family ever since.

Others have more ambitious projects. One man had worked as a goldsmith '*përpara*' ('before', that is, in the communist period) and had taken over the old shop when it was privatised, but sold it (because he needed a better one). When I first met him he was working as a labourer on a World Bank project to rebuild irrigation canals (effectively a make-work scheme, because five years later they were still not in use, and were again falling into disrepair), but he had already worked in Greece for three years. He would walk over the mountains, so he did not have to spend money he needed to realise his own project on getting an expensive visa (c.f. Nicholson, 2002b, p.440), and would stay for three or four months at a time, working in construction. He aimed to set up shop selling and making gold jewellery in his village, because he knew there was enough business. People already knew him, and frequently came to his house, especially on the day of the weekly market, to have jewellery and watches repaired. He spent another two winters working in Greece, then by the summer of 2000 he had built a small, but very solid and secure shop in front of his house. Like most people, he did a lot of the work himself. He and his wife, who has also learnt the goldsmith's trade, were getting more work all the time. He said that the shop was not quite finished, he would have to go back to Greece one more time to get the rest of the money. By December he had decided not to go back to Greece that year, and he has not gone since.

Work migration as a source of new skills and business contacts

Broadly speaking, it might be said that emigrants tend to be deskilled when they go abroad, because, whatever their experience or qualifications, many do jobs which do not use them. A survey in Greece in the early 1990s found that 31 per cent of illegal immigrants in unskilled jobs had technical or post-primary education (Lianos, et al. 1997, p.473). However, in aggregate, those who return to Albania are more skilled than when they left. Many have acquired skills, or experience they regard as useful (Kule, et al., 2002, p.234). A common pattern in the early years was for returned migrants to replicate the enterprise or industry they had worked in. One such had gone over the mountains to Greece in a group and worked there for seven or eight years. He learnt his trade as a cobbler and earned the money to buy equipment (which was not new) to bring back to Albania, where he rents a small shop and earns his living repairing shoes. Many of the first fast food outlets (including the only one I found that was owned and run by a woman), selling *sufllaq* (souvlaki), *pica* (pizza) and toasted sandwiches, originated in this way (Nicholson, 2001, p.40). Perhaps the best known cases, because they have featured in the Greek media, are the migrants who worked in patisseries in Greece, then returned and set up their own businesses in Albania. Those who already had skills, such as building and agricultural workers, have learnt new techniques. Some of the latter have learnt how to grow vegetables under plastic, and have introduced the technique on their own land (and been imitated by others).⁶ They have also introduced new equipment. During the 1990s better pesticide sprays than had previously been used in Albania became widespread (especially for use on vines, to ensure a good supply of *raki*). By 2002 rotating sprinklers were on sale in markets, and in use on vegetable plots.

In addition to learning new skills and accumulating savings, some returned migrants used their stays abroad to make contacts with potential suppliers, and make links to information sources, so they could start, and gradually expand, small manufacturing businesses of their own (Nicholson, 2002a, p.5). The carpenter referred to above gets some of his materials from Greece, where he bought his machines and got ideas for his business. Like other carpenters, he now makes fitted kitchens, previously unknown in Albania, which have been introduced by returning migrants. Workshops producing aluminium doors, windows and blinds have been set up by men who had done that kind of work in Greece, from where they too import raw materials. One of the larger enterprises is a paint factory that provides work for nine people, which was started in 1994. The two owners, brothers, had worked in a factory in Thessaloniki for two years, learnt the trade and made contacts, which they continued to use to source inputs and get information and new ideas as they expanded the business further.

Savings from migration in context

It is widely considered in Albania, and it can be readily observed, that those who have worked abroad have a better chance of starting or expanding a business than those who have not (Kule, et al. 2002, p.237-238; c.f. Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2000, p.144). In comparable cases it often takes the former less time to obtain capital to

make investments than those who must save an equivalent amount by working in Albania. To take one example, when agriculture was privatised, men started working as merchants by going by train, usually taking a bicycle, to villages along the railway to buy produce to bring back to town to sell. Among these were men from the town of Vlorë, who went to villages in the Myzeqe plain (40 to 50 km from Vlorë) each day to buy milk from producers, then returned to Vlorë to sell it to their customers (see Nicholson, 1999b). Two of these men worked for about eight years before they had saved enough money to buy a van. Two other men who did the same work were able to buy a van after just three years, when the brother of one of them returned from working in Greece and joined the partnership.

The proportion of the migrants who return to Albania who start some sort of economic activity is not known. Studies in countries with a longer history of migration have found that anything between ten and fifty per cent of returnees invest in economic projects (Dustmann & Kirchkamp 2002, p.354, 355n; McCormick & Wahba 2001, p.171). A recent survey in Albania found that 10 per cent of the self-employed and the managers in the sample used savings accumulated abroad to set up a business (De-Coulon & Piracha 2002, p.16). In total, returners were found to be almost twice as likely to be self-employed as stayers (*ibid.*, p.11) (though it does not necessarily mean they had all financed their enterprise with earnings from migration, several returned migrants who now run businesses assured me they had not). However, the latest phase of work migration from Albania is still relatively recent. As more migrants spend longer abroad and accumulate more savings, the number who potentially can invest will increase.

The economic contribution made by migrants' savings is considerable. It was found at the end of the 1990s that they accounted for 17 per cent of investment in Albanian firms, not counting the smallest micro-enterprises (the amount obtained from financial institutions was little more than a third of that) (Kule, et al. 2002, p.236). This was consistent with earlier surveys. Small entrepreneurs complain it is difficult to obtain finance from banks, and indeed, during the 1990s credit ceilings in Albanian banks were set at levels insufficient to meet the demands in the private sector (Jarvis 2000, p.3). A gradual increase in credit sources, including the recent appearance of agencies offering microcredit and an expansion of bank lending, may change this, but in the short term it seems likely they will supplement, rather than replace, migration as a means of obtaining capital. Many people are less reluctant to take risks with savings than to get into debt. Even among the financially literate, there is unwillingness to incur the expense of paying what they consider to be high rates of interest. According to survey evidence, sixty per cent of respondents avoid borrowing for this reason (Muent, Pissarides & Sanfey 2000, p.14).

Some outsiders, notably in migrants' host countries, tend to be sceptical of the likelihood of success of businesses started by migrants who return to poor countries (e.g. NIDI 2001, p.7). In Albania some make a reasonable living, and manage to build their business into something bigger. Others give up after a time, but observations over several years suggest that the level of failure is not unduly high. IMF data (1998, p.5; 2000, p.5) indicate that about two thirds of small and micro-businesses are still active two years after they started. By no means all of those who have started small businesses regard them as a desirable way to make a living. Many do hard and

often tedious work for long hours for modest rewards (Nicholson, 2001, p.41), but the alternatives available to them may be no better. They make for themselves a life less uncongenial than being a migrant, and get satisfaction from working for themselves, and not for others (Nicholson, 2002a, p.5). This latter sentiment is often expressed in Albania. Moreover, if a business becomes inactive it is not necessarily synonymous with failure. Some of those who started small enterprises have used them as stepping stones to other ways of making a living, including employment in more demanding and satisfying jobs than they did previously, or as a means of consolidating their capital for another use.

Migration and development

Albanians like to quote Greece as a country that has benefited from migration, and it has been shown that remittances and the savings of return migrants did indeed raise levels of development (Glytsos 1990, cit. McCormick & Wahba 2000, p.530). Migrants inject greater resources into a developing economy than aid does, or is ever likely to (c.f. Horst & van Hear 2002, p.34). In Albania remittances (of which work migrants' repatriated savings form part) were estimated to be US\$542.6 million in 2001, that was 23.4 per cent of GDP (IMF, 2003, p.12). Estimates for the period 1994-1999, based on IMF and World Bank data, show that Albania had the sixth highest ratio of remittances to GDP of all the world's developing economies, and the fourteenth highest amount per head (\$662) (Gammeltoft 2002, p.10).

Return migrants give better value for money than conventional aid. They do not have overheads, and, because they invest their own money in projects whose outcomes affect them personally, they have a direct stake in what they are doing. If they fail, they suffer the consequences. Problems of aid dependency and phasing out at the end of projects do not occur. Small family businesses employ people they know specifically to protect themselves against corruption (Nicholson, 2002c), an important consideration in Albania, which they do more effectively than big international organisations. Small businesses have also proved to be resilient in the face of uncertainty and instability. Some observers assumed that economic activity came to a standstill during the armed rebellion of 1997 (e.g. Kodderitzsch 1999, p.1), but during field work in this period it was found that many micro-enterprises, and brigades in the construction industry, continued to function (Nicholson, 1999a, p.546; Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2001, p.144). This may help to explain why recovery was remarkably rapid (Nicholson, 1999a, p.562 to 565), and the events had such limited effect on economic variables (Jarvis 2000, pp.20, 23).

A further explanation is that many of the people who lost money when the pyramid schemes collapsed went straight back to Greece or Italy to earn more to make up for the loss. Projects for which the lost savings were to be used (and migrants' plans to return) were delayed but not necessarily abandoned. The events of 1997 were an interruption, but less of a catastrophe than had been feared. It has been suggested, on the basis of findings elsewhere, that to be effective, stays abroad must be long enough for the migrant to acquire substantial savings (see Dustmann 1996, p.238; McCormick & Wahba 2001, pp.175, 176), learn skills and make contacts (Nicholson, 2002a). Indeed, when work migrants are forcibly expelled, instead of investing their

earnings from migration productively, some recycle them to finance a further, perhaps illegal, trip abroad to earn the rest of money they require.⁷ The experience of 1997 shows that in the unpredictable situation in which many returnees operate, it is no less necessary that the option of migrating again remains open. The paint factory referred to above has been able to flourish, in part, because its owners are ethnic Vlachs, who, unlike ethnic Albanians, can obtain Greek visas without difficulty. This freedom of movement has also benefited other Vlach entrepreneurs in the same village. For some, it can mean the difference between failure and success of their small enterprises. Not all of those who contemplate migrating again do so, as examples quoted above show, but migrants are more willing to take the chance of returning to Albania and giving up migrating when this option is available (Nicholson, 2002b, p. 442; c.f. Saltmarshe, 2001, p.135).⁸

Conclusion

Migrants who return, repatriate their savings, and bring new ideas, have set out to create a better life for themselves, but they have done so by migrating to obtain the means to make that life back in their home country, not to settle abroad. Almost all returned migrants have learnt new ideas (Nicholson, 2002a, p.5). In Albania, *kurbet* has always been a source of modernisation (see Elezi, 2002, p.71). Its importance in the development of a society that was as closed in the recent past cannot be overestimated. At the micro level, their investments have enabled other migrants as well as themselves to give up the migrant life and to earn a living within the country, and others not to leave at all.

However, the strategy they have used to obtain capital and other resources with which to pursue their entrepreneurial careers is in conflict with migration policies in most host countries. For Albanians all legal movement is severely constrained (Nicholson, 2002a, pp.3, 9), and there is opposition from several Western governments to ‘guestworkers’, that is precisely the short-term movers who return home and invest. Indeed the pressure being put on the Albanian government by the European Union to adopt policies of ‘managed’ migration to meet requirements for eventual membership, if it places more obstacles in the way of work migration, could have detrimental effects on the country’s development. For this reason, if no other, greater understanding and recognition of the value of self-help development by work migrants to transition economies, and not only Albania, are necessary and overdue.

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1. Reported migration intentions need to be treated with caution. One would expect responses given in Albania to overstate return intentions and those given abroad to understate them. Misja’s survey was carried out early (no date is given) when many people’s intentions were still rather fluid. The findings are complicated by a large proportion of don’t knows, and a still larger proportion of

respondents, especially young people, who stated they intended to move to a third country (Misja, 1998, pp.45, 46).

2. By no means all those expelled from Greece in the much-publicised mass expulsions in the early 1990s, were illegal migrants. Some were working legally, but were nonetheless summarily expelled without being allowed to inform their employers or collect wages and belongings. Many illegal immigrants have never been expelled.
3. Preliminary results of the 2001 census also showed that half the young men between the ages of 25 and 35 were abroad (Pulaj, 2002).
4. The proportion of migrants who had savings was not given.
5. Some of these small businesses become, in their turn, sources of informal credit. Almost invariably, small shops have a book, in which they keep account of goods bought on credit, so that, indirectly, remittances contribute further to poverty alleviation. Tradespeople, such as plumbers, also allow customers to pay in instalments.
6. The availability of an immigrant labour force also facilitated the introduction of these new techniques into Greek horticulture (Kasimis, Papadopoulos & Zacoboulou, 2003, p.177).
7. Some Albanians who are deported from Britain, or avail themselves of the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme, where they are the largest single category of returnees (Home Office 2002, pp.2-3) tell their families they are seeking to get back to the UK, even that they have documents to return. Some of those who were deported have claimed they did not have an opportunity to retrieve their savings from the bank, and there are reports that police confiscate money when they catch illegal migrants. This creates a powerful incentive to migrate again to recoup losses.
8. When Spain and Portugal joined the EU there was a substantial return migration of guest workers from Germany (Constant & Massey, 2000, p.6).

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