

Evaluating the Balkan Female Fieldwork Over Time: The Case of Albania

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Abstract

Unique in its diversity, the Balkan region can be considered as an attractive destination for a variety of researchers. Presented in a form of a chronological analysis, this study focuses on the work of four female researchers who conducted fieldwork in Albania at the beginning of the 20th century, during communism, and shortly after communism during the transitional period, in order to capture the evolution of the female fieldwork in the Balkans over time. Since the fieldwork methodology stresses family, household and patriarchy, this study can contribute to the conceptualization of the political culture within the Balkan society.

Keywords: Albania, Balkans, ethnography, fieldwork, orientalism, balkanism.

Introduction

Albania has been a very attractive destination for many researchers and ethnographers throughout the last two centuries, particularly the northern rural area. Fascinating tribal society, kinship system, family organization and precedence of traditional customary law over the official national law attracted many Westerner researchers. The differences between south and north Albania are still visible today, the mountain borders having preserved a unique culture in the northern Albanian mountains over centuries (Pandolfi, 2002).

The aim of this study is to analyze the evolution of fieldwork in Albania from the end of the 20th century through the present, in order to evaluate what part the ideas of the family, households, and patriarchy play in conceptualizing the political culture within Balkan society. For example, in political science, ethnography plays an important role in providing an insight into people's lived experiences. The lived experiences of actors might be more significant for political analysis than the number of votes or statistical data that cannot capture such phenomenon. Ethnography can fill the gap between capturing people's

beliefs and everyday practices affected by political decisions “from above” (Weeden, 2010).

Firstly, the Balkan region and research in the Balkans focusing on family, household, and patriarchy will be introduced. Consequently, the paper will be divided into three chronological sections covering the fieldwork and methodology in Albania before the socialism, during the socialism and after the socialism. During each period I will focus on a few significant and outstanding female researchers who contributed to the body of work with their work on Albanian population. At the beginning of the 20th century, Edith Durham travelled the Balkans and provided the first in depth insight into Albanian society and the customary law. Analysis of her fieldwork and methods will be covered in the first chronological section.

The isolation of Albania during socialism created major issues for foreign researchers, as they were not allowed in the country. However, Norwegian researcher Berit Backer conducted fieldwork in Kosovo among the Albanian population. Her study covered household organization and family structures within traditional Albanian society. The timing of Backer’s research has been crucial, since only few years after her study, the social and family organization started changing sharply due to the upgrade of Kosovo’s status,¹ enabling citizens to travel and work as ‘gustarbeiter’ (Elsie & Young, 2003).

Finally, after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the country became more open to foreign research. Antonia Young focused on the issue of patriarchy and more specifically on sworn virgins in Northern Albania, where she conducted fieldwork in 1990s. Furthermore, fruitful and important fieldwork conducted by Clarissa de Wall during the first decade after the collapse of communism will be included.

1. Balkan fieldwork

1.1 The importance of fieldwork methodology

In order to gain in depth knowledge about society, studying it from “below” is necessary. Studying families, households and organizational structure might provide us with valuable information on political culture. Fieldwork might be perceived as crucial method of anthropological research since history and political culture can be studied at its centre. While conducting fieldwork, by staying with local families, talking to locals and observing and

¹ As a result of the new Constitution adopted in 1974 in Yugoslavia, Kosovo has gained a status of autonomous province, providing Kosovo with increased economic and political rights (Fierstein, 2009).

experiencing their everyday life, a researcher gains unique inside into society. By studying “the Others” and interacting with them, a researcher can understand the differences between “us and them” and hence connect it with historical and political developments (Kaser, 2004).

Participant observation, ethnography and fieldwork are very closely related, sometimes even represented as synonymous methods, “they can all mean spending long periods watching people, coupled with talking to them about what they are doing, thinking and saying, designed to see how they understand their world” (Delamont, 2007: 206). Delamont (2007) furthermore distinguishes two types of fieldwork, total immersion and partial immersion. In the case of traditional anthropology, total immersion, where the researcher “goes native”, living continuously in the researched community, occurs more often. By contrast, partial immersion means that the researcher leaves the research site at the end of each day. In the case of the four studied fieldworks presented below, all of the researchers practiced total immersion.

Studying kinship, family, societal bonds and their experiences of economic, political and environmental and other changes is important for understanding the development and culture of Balkan society. Regime changes and transitions to other regimes can be observable on families and affect the change of their structure. Political scientists might disagree with the use of ethnography in political research due to subjectivity and the role of interpretation. Another objection against ethnography might be the issue with generalization, however, “ethnography can demonstrate that previous generalizations were wrong (thereby producing new ones), replicate findings (but not necessarily encounters), explicate mechanisms that can have wide-ranging application, and bring new ways of seeing and understanding into plain view” (Weeden, 2010: 268).

Furthermore, anthropological research, particularly fieldwork provides accurate and real data rather than top-down research carried out by institutions. Careful studying of local models of social reality without projecting “Western normality” may provide more valuable data (Hann, 1994). Studying experiences of political, economic, social or demographic changes from below can result in better understanding of political culture, particularly in Balkans considering the variety of ethnicities, linguistic groups and religions it encompasses.

The rise of popularity of travel literature throughout 18th and 19th century in Europe contributed to an increase in the number of Western visitors in Balkans, in part because ‘the periphery of Europe’ had been widely perceived in the West as exotic and wild lands (Allcock & Young, 2000; Bakic-Hayden,

1995; Pandolfi, 2002; Todorova, 1994). However, in the majority of cases the travelers' accounts have been strongly affected by the political views and social background of the authors. So Todorova (1994) identifies two contradictory perceptions of the Balkans as viewed through Western European lenses. The first perception is from aristocratic point of view, where travelers found it easier to identify with the Ottoman rulers rather than local Balkan folk. This understandable view was most likely the result of the social background of the travelers who could afford to travel in 18th and 19th century; hence the projections of travelers' normality might have created a distorted image about the Balkans. The second perception, according to Todorova (1994), is rather romantic, experienced by the bourgeois rather than aristocrats. The bourgeois travelers were affected by a romantic obsession with folklore and village life and so saw the locals as peasants. Edith Durham would belong to the second category despite her aristocratic background.

The Balkans have been double divided by religion and empire. Christian countries under the Hapsburg Empire have been regarded as more Western than countries under the Ottomans who affected significant Islam conversion rates (Bakic-Hayden, 1995). The external recognition of the Balkans which has been affected by the projected domestic situation and normality of the travelers has also played a role in this division, together with the self-determination of Balkan peoples about their position in Europe. Furthermore, dividing the Europe into East and West and subsequently dividing the Balkans into East and West based on the Empire controlling them, has contributed to the spread of orientalist misconceptions and spreading stereotypes. "Orientalism", as a concept discussed widely by Edward Said, presents the division of the world to the East and the West as constructed rather socially than geographically. Western society is "orientalizing" the Eastern society by perceiving it as underdeveloped and backward, hence, promoting seeming superiority of the West. "While geographical boundaries of the "Orient" shifted throughout history, the concept of "Orient" as "other" has remained more or less unchanged" (Bakic-Hayden, 1995: 917). Hence, following this logic, the Western world tends to use some parts of essential factors within another culture and society and then applies it generally. Isolating some features of a group unknown to us and making it as their general characteristic can be dangerous in a combination with nationalist discourse. Placing stereotypes in contrast to our known culture and taking them as facts promotes the gap between "us" and "other". And thus orientalist misconceptions are born, such as viewing the West as progressive and rational, and the East backward and mystic (Bakic-Hayden, 1995).

After the fall of communism, one might perceive the Balkans as being 'colonized again', but this time by Western experts attempting to establish liberal democratic institutions in the region. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the fall of communism provided a fertile ground for Western society to expand its influence. "Since 1989, Western ethnographers working in the poorer regions of former Socialist Europe have been in a situation which in a number of respects echoes that of the ethnographers working in the colonialist era" (De Waal, 2005: 1).

Several significant issues can be identified in the case of Balkan fieldwork conducted by foreign researchers. Firstly, travellers in the Balkans and particularly Albania were often adopting Orientalist logic, which has been adopted by variety of researchers throughout centuries, during communism, and might be also observable today (Kurti, 1996; Pandolfi, 2002, De Waal, 2005). Orientalist perspectives can lead to "Balkanization" and hence can promote stereotyping of the whole region. "Balkanism" is a pejorative term depicting the Balkan region as inferior to the rest of the Europe, connecting it to violence, backwardness, mysticism and underdevelopment (Todorova, 1994). According to Bakic-Hayden (1995: 920), "Balkanism" or "balkanization" is a "variation on the orientalist theme," and cannot be understood without comprehending the basic ideas of Orientalism. However, Todorova (1994) argues that balkanism and orientalism have developed separately considering the geopolitical distinctions between Eastern Europe and the Orient, as well as the colonialist legacy which is missing in the Balkans. Nevertheless, deeper debate on balkanism and orientalism falls outside of the scope of this study. Going back to the focus of this paper, taking in account the fact, that researchers can be easily affected by orientalist perspectives and balkanism, the significance of the Balkan fieldwork might be marginalized within political science and other sciences (Kurti, 1996). Hence, from this point of view, researchers adopting the Orientalist standpoint might conduct their fieldwork in the form of observation, adopting etic² perspective, in which the researchers interpret the observed situation based on their own perspective. (Morris et al, 1999) Secondly, researchers might prefer to study rural areas as

² In ethnographic research the contrast to the etic perspective is emic perspective, where the researcher is a participant, therefore takes in account the interpretations of the observed groups and their views. Etic perspective in anthropological terms means observing from the outside (e.g. economic conditions and external features, etc.) while emic perspective pays attention to observing from the inside (e.g. cultural features, local habits etc.) (Morris et al, 1999).

they might assume that is easier to study social relations and networks in rural areas (Horschelman & Stenning, 2010).

According to Pandolfi (2002), Western views on the region might be affected by essentialism. Essentialism lies in the assumption that specific attributes of a culture or a group are given and unchanging, furthermore, essentialism ignores potential variation within cultures or groups (Grillo, 2003). Thence, essentialism can present another obstacle for the credibility of the ethnography.

2. Fieldwork in Albania

The differences between Albania and the rest of the Balkans might be a reason of the relative popularity of this small country among researchers. Contrasting to the rest of the Balkans, rural Albania might be considered as patriarchal, patrilocal, patrilinear (Elsie & Young, 2003), patricentric and exogamous (Calloni, 2002; Young, 2000). Therefore, the society is male dominant in terms of men being more respected than women as well as gaining more respect with age. In terms of patrilocality, usually men bring their wives to their villages to their parents' houses, which closely relates to exogamy by marrying exclusively outside ones kin group. Considering patrilinearity, in traditional terms, only male descents can inherit. Overall, the rural society might be furthermore perceived as patricentric – organizationally centered on one man, usually a respected older chief of a kin (Young, 2000). The northern rural part of Albania has been a magnet for foreign researchers and travelers since the beginning of the 20th century. Similarly, as in the case of researchers visiting all the Balkans, the researchers were very likely to be affected by their domestic political situation, hence increasing the possibility of research bias (Kaser, 2004; Pandolfi, 2002).

In the early twentieth century, the fieldwork in Albania was focused on exoticism and the researchers practiced something like “cognitive voyeurism” (De Wall, 2005: 3; Kurti, 1996; Pandolfi, 2002). The fascination with exoticism might be quite understandable considering the lack of knowledge about the Orient in the 19th century. However, in the 1990s, when the country was opened after decades of isolation, the trend of researching Albanian exoticism occurred again. Nevertheless, in the 1990s Albania was going through many salient issues worth researching, such as the difficult transition³, the fall of

³ The transition to democracy and market economy has been rather complicated in Albania as the country maintained communism for the longest period in the

Pyramid schemes which nearly resulted in a civil war and other issues such as mass migration, widespread crime and pervasive corruption (De Waal, 2005). From the political science point of view, the aforementioned issues would be expected to attract more attention than well-researched exoticism of Albanian mysterious mountains. To date, Albania is among the poorest countries in Europe, where poverty mostly affects the population in the rural areas (ISTAT, 2006). The differences between rural and urban Albania have been substantial throughout modern history of the country (Calloni, 2002; De Rapper, 2002).

The evolution of fieldwork in Albania will be analyzed in this section, divided chronologically into three chronological sub-sections, covering the time frame from the beginning of the 20th century through the 1990s. The selected researchers have primarily used participant observation, informal interviews and discussions, and narrative analysis.

2.1 Before socialism

The ethnographic accounts as results of fieldwork conducted in the Balkans and particularly in Albania by Western researchers before the socialism have provided a strong base on which many contemporary academics and researchers have built their work. Nevertheless, the methodology of the fieldwork has not been covered in detail in those accounts as anthropology as a science had not been fully developed when these early researchers collected their data. The majority of the data collected at the beginning of the 20th century by researchers such as Rebecca West and Edith Durham was obtained through informal interviews and participant observation. Edith Durham did include details on her data collection techniques and methods of analyzing the data in the studied ethnography '*High Albania*'. However, based on her description, it is apparent that the data was obtained through informal interviews of peasants as well as authorities and local academics, and also participant observation, which she was able to do as a result of her total immersion in the culture. Her ethnography furthermore consists of narrative analysis of stories collected during her fieldwork.

Everyday life of villagers from Albanian mountains was following oral laws of Kanun⁴. "Resisting the invader, the Balkan peoples got even closer one

Europe, furthermore the isolation has further complicated the transition (De Waal, 2005).

⁴ Kanun of Leke Dukagjini is a set of traditional customary Albanian laws, "Kanun Laws dictate every aspect of life, marriage, hospitality, personal conduct, and

to another, forming a society that, in the absence of their own state, found a counterpoise in the patriarchal life. Customary law was perfectly suited to the patriarchal conceptions of a Balkan man” (Ademi *et al*, 2013: 44). The cornerstone of Kanun is a lifelong trust or ethical code called *besa* which binds Albanian people together. An example of longevity of *besa* can be the case of sworn virgins⁵ (Ademi *et al*, 2013; Young, 2000).

Sworn virgins presented also an exception in case of inheritance, where women becoming men could follow patrilineage. One paragraph of Kanun is dedicated to sworn virgins who are defined as women or girls who due to social conditions swear to live like men. They dress like men, behave like men and are allowed to socialize with men unlike other women (Elsie & Young, 2003; Young & Twigg, 2009; Young, 2000). Sonless families chose a daughter to become a sworn virgin in order to keep inheritance within family, another motivation to become a sworn virgin may be avoiding marriage (Sarcevic, 2004; Young, 2000).

The most common family structure in the Balkans used to be *zadruga*⁶. During the pre-nation state period, people within *zadruga* did not perceive their national belonging as important and political changes were important for people only at the family or community level (Karakasidou, 1997). Patriarchal models used to affect organizational structure of Balkan family (Kaser, 2004). Political changes affected the importance of patriarchy within the society, as can be seen on the example of the large family units (De Rapper, 2002).

2.1.1. Edith Durham

Edit Durham travelled the Balkans during the period of unrest between the years 1900-1914. She has collected a wide range of ethnographic material such as notes, drawings and pictures. Furthermore, she collected Balkan garments and embroideries from Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Dalmatia, and Albania. “As an entity, the collection is an invaluable aid to our

even just retribution in cases of adultery, theft, and murder.” (Mustafa and Young, 2008: 88).

⁵ “The Virgins (women who dress as men): They are not distinguished from other women, except that they are free to associate with men, although they have no right to voice in the assembly” (Backer, 1979 in Elsie & Young, 2003: 104).

⁶ *Zadruga* is extended family with large amount of members, used to be mostly present in Serbia but also Albania and Kosovo and other Balkan countries (Elsie & Young, 2003).

understanding of the Balkans” (Hill in Allcock and Young, 2000: 33). However, according to Kurti (1996), collecting such items might contribute to essentialisation of the studied area rather than to understanding of local reality. Furthermore, folklorization in terms of reducing the importance of the area to its traditions can occur and hence promote orientalism.

The timing of her travels was crucial as she was able to capture the changes in the Balkan society during the revolt against Turks in 1903-1904 and the Balkan War in 1912-1913. During the periods of conflict, Edith Durham purchased items from locals in order to help them economically, though some of the garments and items were given to her as expressions of gratitude. Each received or purchased piece had an historical meaning. “Linked to specific events, such pieces provide an insight into the effect of social and political unrest on the Balkan people” (Hill in Allcock & Young, 2000: 35).

Besides written documents, Durham, a talented artist produced many drawings and pictures. Drawings of houses, items, and people have been very useful and helped to illustrate the reality in rural Albania, which was very difficult for Westerners to imagine. Instead of travelling with an interpreter, she preferred the company of a local Bible-seller, who spoke the local language and had great knowledge of the area, thus might have seemed more trusted to the locals. Hence, accompanied by a local man, Durham might have had the unique opportunity to gain more trust from locals, gain deeper insight into their society and prevent alienation (Medawar, 1995).

However, according to King (2000) Durham very possibly had issues with professional distance during her fieldwork. She was very passionate about “her people” and actively defended them in the field of foreign policy after she returned to the UK.

To date, Durham’s work is perceived as a key testimony of Albanian society at the beginning of 20th century and serves as a source of many researchers (Medawar, 1995). Nevertheless, the target audience for Durham was ‘common folk’ and not academics; therefore her writing was conducted in a simple and understandable way, complemented with myriad of visual materials. The most famous and popular of her seven books is *High Albania*, published in 1909, which has been reviewed for the purposes of this research. Durham travelled throughout the country, lived with local families or stayed in local guesthouses, collecting various items, creating drawings and writing journals. “Her journals for the period reflect a familiarity with the land and its people, which was exceptional for the travellers in the Balkans at that time.” (Medawar, 1995: 30) As a researcher, Durham was meticulous about providing

a source for every informal interview, she quotes every priest or villager whose story she includes in High Albania.

In addition to her own publications, Durham contributed to the journal *Man* published by the Royal Anthropological Institute, where she was a fellow (Medawar, 1995). Durham was involved in foreign politics, attempting to defend the Albanian people, in particular, by providing detailed accounts of the society and the relationships in the country. “Durham was a woman of wide interests and engaged in many kinds of activities. Although well known as an ethnographer, she was also a newspaper correspondent, relief worker, and a political activist” (Medawar, 1995).

2.2 During socialism

With the arrival of socialism, Albania has become even more isolated. Together with linguistic and cultural isolation from the rest of Balkans, major political and cultural differences and separation have created even wider gap between Albania and Yugoslavia, even though the two countries shared the same ideology (Pandolfi, 2002). Albanian people have perceived themselves as “a non-Slavic people trapped in a South Slavic state” (Berg in Bakic-Hayden, 1995: 926). Tourism and foreign research in Albania were prohibited. Albanians were also prohibited from leaving the country.

Household and family structures changed during communism, due to collectivization of the land. Large family units started breaking up as they had a limited allowance of land per family unit. In some cases one can observe increased emigration patterns due to experiencing regime change. (Mustafa et al, 2013)

2.2.1 Berit Backer

The key testimony of rural life among the Albanian population in Kosovo was conducted by Norwegian anthropologist Berit Backer (Young & Twigg, 2009). Traditional practices such as aforementioned sworn virgins or following Kanun were banned by the communist government, though they were still practiced in a limited manner in the rural areas. Berit Backer conducted her fieldwork in the Albanian village Isniq in 1975. Her ethnography ‘*Behind the Stone Walls*’ is her unpublished Master thesis, completed in 1979, however it is a key evidence of rural life of Albanians in the time of dramatic changes. Backer has not managed to edit the publication of her work due to her sudden death, therefore, Antonia Young with Robert Elsie published her unedited thesis with their commentary. “It is a superb empirical study and one of the

most important compilations of ethnographic material on traditional Kosovar Albanian village life from the 1970s.” (Elsie & Young, 2003: 10) As was common in Yugoslavia at the time, Backer was under constant surveillance by the communist party during her fieldwork, and locals around her were suspicious of her being Western spy. However, despite the external difficulties, she managed to complete her work successfully.

The aim of Backer’s research was to prove that due to economic changes, large family and kinship units were slowly being transformed in the rural areas inhabited by Kosovar Albanians. Large family units used to consist of 30 members on average, during the year of her fieldwork, the average for Kosovo family was reduced to an average of 6.6 members, which was the highest in Yugoslavia. Backer collected data through participant observation and taking detailed field notes. However, taking field notes was rather difficult as she herself described it as very impolite to leave a gathering in order to make notes. Therefore, part of her fieldwork consisted purely of observation without taking notes at the immediate time. Quantitative data was collected in two stages. The first stage consisted of collecting official registers of land ownership in the village Ishiq from the year 1932, which is the first year that records were available. The year 1932 represented pre-war era and was compared with the year of the fieldwork, 1975. Backer then interviewed the descendants of the families from the 1932 register. The purpose of the interviews was to register the frequency of different family types. Hence, Backer asked the descendants about the size of the family in the year 1932 and from this information calculated the average of 16 members in 1932 (Elsie & Young, 2003).

The second quantitative data collection consisted of interviewing landowners registered in the year 1975, and collecting their details (name, age, occupation, education, income, and kinship position). The average family size calculated for the year 1975 was 6.6 members. Backer noted the major obstacles in her data collection as lack of interest of the landowners to participate in her research. They were bored by her questions and preferred to talk about other issues, such as culture (Elsie & Young, 2003).

According to Elsie & Young (2003) Backer did not enjoy writing. However, based on reading her thesis, and also according to the editors of her thesis, her writing can be considered as exceptional and the form of presentation of her findings has a logical sequence and is relatively easy to understand. According to Delamont (2007), it is important to have the ability to write well in qualitative research, particularly ethnography. The ethnography of Backer serves as a crucial evidence of the changes in family structure and patriarchy during the communist era. Her research conducted in Kosovo can be applied to

Albania, where the family and kinship structures and the importance of patriarchy are similar.

Similarly as Edith Durham, Berit Backer has spent a significant amount of time interacting with locals and experienced their daily life. In anthropological terms, they have been studying “the Other” and by comparing their own experiences and habits, they had the opportunity to understand political developments in the culture of “the Other”.

This fact presents one of the major contributions of anthropological fieldwork to political science. By living with locals and experiencing their practices and closely observing the social and family structures, the researcher can understand the economic and political changes and developments which are often reflected on the family and social structures.

2.3 After socialism

Many westerners came to Albania in the early 1990s with expectations that since the country had not been in touch with the West for so long, Albania would be the same level as third world countries in all aspects (Pandolfi, 2002). Criticism has been directed towards the foreign experts who claimed that Albania was highly dependent on foreign aid. In reality, Albanians working abroad, many who have come from the villages, have been supporting the Albanian economy and mountain villagers have started to further develop their lands. It is possible that large amounts of funds and foreign aid have been misused due to corruption but this fact cannot be ascribed to common Albanian folk. Much ethnography from Albania is preoccupied with exoticism and rarities and thus might overlook current issues, which might be perceived as more important particularly by the Albanian citizens (De Waal, 2005).

The fall of communism might have even strengthened patriarchy in rural Albanian society, which has been attempted to reduce during communism (Young & Twigg, 2009). In the 1990s, mostly following the crisis⁷, blood feuds emerged again and many families still live in fear (Young, 2000). Economic emigration has increased in rural areas among men; therefore families living by Kanun may still practise gender change in order to enable women to run households (Young & Twigg, 2009).

⁷ During Albanian crisis caused by political situation and failure of infamous ‘pyramid schemes’, old Soviet armouries have been opened, therefore almost every man gained access to weapons which had crucial impact on renewing blood feuds (Young, 2000)

After the fall of communism, families and households were affected again by regime change mostly in economic terms. Hence, by observing labour migration or joining small family units into big ones again might reflect the big changes in a society.

2.3.1 *Antonia Young*

Antonia Young conducted extensive fieldwork in 1990s among Albanian sworn virgins. Sworn virgins are Balkan phenomena present mostly in the northern rural parts of Albanian highlands. These women have changed their gender by swearing to live their lives like men, mostly due to difficult social situation. Sworn virgins had the same privileges as men and would occupy a male position in a family or clan. Women had a very difficult position in the Albanian rural society and such gender change was the only option for their social movement (Young, 2002). Sworn virgins allegedly disappeared after communism, as they were oppressed and the change was prohibited by the government. However, Antonia Young found a few of them and conducted her fieldwork among them. Sworn virgins were common in Kosovo, Montenegro, and Albania and large numbers of them were documented approximately two centuries ago. One of the reasons for the large number of sworn virgins could be the power of customary law Kanun and widespread blood feuds, resulting among other things in the scarcity of men (Young, 2000). In her research on sworn virgins, Antonia Young travelled across northern Albania and conducted interviews with few of the remaining sworn virgins.

Antonia Young conducted other extended fieldwork in Shala Valley in northern Albania together with Mentor Mustafa and a group of fellow researchers, where they studied customary law, Kanun, and blood feuds. Descent (in terms of family origins), marriage, and feud have been identified by the researchers as the only consistent factors throughout the years, changing on a very limited scale (Mustafa et al, 2013). Ethnographic data was collected over two years, based on participant observation, survey, and interviews. Their research methods consisted of collecting structured and open-ended survey data related to feuds. The fieldwork lasted one month per year during 2005-2007, during which the researchers conducted twenty-eight structured face-to-face interviews. High competency in Albanian language⁸ enabled both of the researchers to overcome initial issues with trust prior to conducting the interviews and also facilitated the ability to participate in informal discussions

⁸ The interviews were conducted in the dialect of northern Albania called *geg*, which is distinct significantly from the southern *tosk* dialect (Mustafa & Young, 2008).

(Mustafa et al, 2013; Mustafa & Young, 2008). Compared to Clarissa de Waal, who was not competent in Albanian and always required a translator, in which much precious information might have been lost or misinterpreted. According to Godina (2003), issues with credibility of informants were common, particularly if the researcher and the informant do not speak the same language. Furthermore, the informants always filter the information somehow. Also, the informant might be reluctant to show and express the perceived bad aspects of his or hers culture, village, kin or whatever phenomenon is being studied.

Furthermore, ethnographic qualitative data has been compared against statistical data and demographics from the years 1918 and 1929 related to marriage, descent and feuding relations. Collecting data on feuding relations in the rural area of Albania has been a peculiar task. "Because a feud inevitably involves multiple sides and is frequently a multigenerational process, however, a clear narrative is elusive, and as reconstructed through interviews, it is almost always one-sided" (Mustafa et al, 2013: 97).

The work of Young is accompanied by a significant amount of visual data mostly in the form of photographs, capturing sworn virgins and also graphs and maps of the studied region. In her extensive fieldwork, by studying family structures, patriarchy, and feuding relations over time, Young has captured how the political and economic changes in the country were affecting everyday lives. Finding sworn virgins in the 1990s has been surprising as this practice has been banned during communism, as well as practicing blood feuds. The presence and the renewal of these traditions might mirror the political changes in Albania.

2.3.2 *Clarissa de Waal*

Clarissa de Waal conducted her fieldwork in Albania during 1992-1996, returning annually until 2003, catching up with developments. She researched the life of rural population during the first decade after the fall of communism and captured many changes in the society. Focusing more on actual issues than on the exoticism of rural Albania, she significantly contributed to the understanding and knowledge of lived experiences during the decade of major changes. The aforementioned changes include mainly de-collectivisation, migration, unemployment and their effects on daily practices of rural population in Albania. De Waal traveled all over Albania, visiting various villages where she stayed with local families formed into various household structures, which provided her deeper insight into the lives and society of rural Albania. After traveling around and searching for the best base for her fieldwork, De Waal settled in Mirdita, which had been covered in the fieldwork

by Edith Durham. The methodology of De Wall consisted mostly of interviewing locals on informal basis, living with them, practicing their daily rituals and observing them.

The effects and impacts of political changes are observable by providing an insight and detailed description of the changes in household organization as well as the changes in the patriarchal values. Furthermore, by describing the everyday life of villagers and their issues, De Waal captured the widespread problems of corruption and its effects on common folk, such as inability to send children to school due to lack of resources for necessary bribes. The issues of increased migration were expressed by the absence of males within households, as they were overseas, supporting large families through remittances. "The commonest survival strategies since the end of communism have been migration abroad and descent from mountain villages to plains and plain towns" (De Waal, 2005: 241).

Conclusions

The work of four female researchers has been reviewed in order to capture how studying family structures, kinship, household, and patriarchy can mirror economic and political changes. Ethnography might be considered as marginalized research method in political science, nevertheless, its importance and contribution should not be underestimated. Studying the effects of political changes on the everyday lives of people can help political scientists to gain in depth insight into the impacts of politics (Weeden, 2010).

In the case of the Balkans, the changes within family and kinship structures have been parallel with the changes in the regime. Before communism, large family units were prevalent, however, with the arrival of communism and collectivization of the land, these units started to break apart, mostly from economic reasons. After the fall of communism, families and households were affected again by the regime change, again in economic terms. Family units began to merge again and traditions such as blood feuds and sworn virgins returned to everyday lives of the people in northern Albania. Economic migration has further affected the family structures, as it increased as unemployment rose. Hence, by observing labour migration or joining small family units into big ones again might reflect the big changes in a society.

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