

# **NEW ISSUES IN REFUGEE RESEARCH**

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## **Accommodating the internally displaced in south-central Albania in 1918**

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## Introduction

The practice of ordinary people accommodating refugees in their homes is probably the oldest form of giving shelter to those who are displaced and certainly the most widespread. Yet references to it have until quite recently been rare. The refugee exodus from Kosova in 1999 and ensuing accommodation of the vast majority of these refugees by private families in Albania and Macedonia brought the practice to public and professional attention. Until then it was barely noticed by anyone but the displaced and host families themselves, let alone studied.

One assessment of that emergency referred to the scale of hosting by private families as 'unprecedented' (Overseas Development Institute 2000:II 70). Yet a few examples show that the scale of response was not unusual. For example, the proportion of families sheltering refugees in host communities in North Kivu in DRC in 2008 was put at 60-80 per cent (McDowell, 2008:9). What was unprecedented about what happened in the Balkans was not its scale, or that it was new but rather that it was noticed.

In the decade or so since the crisis in Kosova it has become common to mention 'host families' in briefings and press releases. An extensive, but not exhaustive, search found cases of private families hosting displaced people in an area extending from South-East Asia and South Asia, right across the Middle East and North and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the Americas (Haiti), the Caucasus and the Balkans.<sup>1</sup> Invariably, the number of host families was considerable and they accommodated similarly large numbers of displaced people, most notably the internally displaced.

Yet very little has been done in the meantime to increase our knowledge and understanding of this very significant contribution to the welfare of refugees. In 2000 the DEC assessment of the response to the Kosova emergency noted that '(s)everal surveys and assessments had been made of Kosovo refugees and host families. However, there has been no comprehensive and systematic attempt to record the phenomenon' (Overseas Development Institute 2000:II 70). Thus, for example, the surveys undertaken by the World Bank (Barjaba and La Cava, 2000), which had a wider scope than most, seem to have been ignored.

Hosting assessments continue to be produced but they invariably have a narrow focus on immediate issues, as seen by a particular NGO, and tend to be based on rather repetitive surveys. The most detailed study to date was carried out by McDowell (2008) but was sponsored by an NGO with the purpose of assessing the likely movements of the displaced between host families and camps, and this has unavoidably limited the depth of analysis and the insights gained. Another study by Haver (2008) draws on the same survey as well as some unpublished data, but its consumer behaviour analysis limits its potential to extend our understanding of hosting in general. However, this survey is one that might repay a further and deeper analysis.

A recent, and useful, paper by Hopkins (2011) discusses the cases of self-settled refugees from Casamance (Senegal) in The Gambia, where they are taken in by the local inhabitants on arrival, and many continue to live with them. The study takes a qualitative approach with the findings reported as description that places them in context. Perhaps for this reason it is more sensitive to the situation of both refugees and hosts than studies based on surveys and allows them to be seen as rounded people seeking to get on with their lives. Probably its most useful contribution to the discussion is the clarity with which it shows the severity of the burden imposed on poor villagers. However, detailed in-depth studies that pose critical questions about this form of accommodating

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR briefings, *The Guardian* and *Le Monde* have been consulted.

refugees on its own terms and within the context of the societies in which it takes place are still lacking.

### **Displaced people left to their own devices. A historical case study**

This study uses a set of very detailed historical data of displacement in order to advance our knowledge of hosting and suggest where questions need to be asked about the private accommodation of displaced people or refugees. I have sought to highlight salient characteristics of this case in such a way as to enable the identification of parallels, or differences, elsewhere.

The data source consists of the enumeration lists of a census carried out in 1918 in the regions of Albania then occupied by Austria-Hungary, this represented two-thirds of the country. It was undertaken by the statistical office of the Austro-Hungarian civilian administration with the assistance of local census commissions. The value of this census for the study of displacement lies in the fact that the entire *de facto* population (i.e. those present) is enumerated in a uniform way, and the displaced can be clearly distinguished from the sedentary population.

This study focuses on just one district, Mallakastër,<sup>2</sup> an area of hills in the southern half of the country, bounded on three sides by mountains and to the north by a marshy plain. Its western boundary is formed by the river Vjosa. In 1918 it was entirely rural, consisting of ‘villages’ (*fshat* or *katund*) composed of scattered houses and hamlets, each house built on or near the owner’s land. About a quarter of the population enumerated by the census (total 24,466) was displaced. Almost 700 (2.8 per cent of the population) had come from other districts some four years before. The rest had been displaced within the district<sup>3</sup> in the two years since the arrival of the Austrians, most of them recently. The intention of the displaced was to return to their home villages when it was again possible to do so.

The census gives details of all the members of every household,<sup>4</sup> and the house they lived in at the time of the census and their domicile; those displaced are marked as ‘evak’ (*Evakuierte*). Thus, the displaced and their host families are identified, as are local families who were not hosts and displaced families who lived independently in their own dwellings. In the case of displaced individuals living in the families of others, for example as servants, information on domicile alone had to be relied upon.

Instead of being reduced to numbers, which would obscure important details and limit potential insights, the data are analysed ethnographically. Interpretation of the data draws on experience of ethnographic fieldwork in rural areas in southern Albania, including Mallakastër, between the mid-1990s and 2011, and an account of customary law in an adjoining district *Kanun i Labërisë* (henceforth *Kanun*). Where not otherwise stated the census is the source used.

### **The flight from the south**

Albania declared its independence on 28 November 1912 after 500 years as part of the Ottoman Empire. It was surrounded by states that had predatory designs on its territory, which made armed incursions into large areas in the north and east that devastated large stretches of the country and

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<sup>2</sup> It covers a larger area than the present district of that name.

<sup>3</sup> A small number from adjacent villages in a neighbouring district are included.

<sup>4</sup> The terms household and family are interchangeable in an Albanian context and both are used here.

caused the population to flee (see Durham, 1914; Woods, 1914:462; Nicholson, 2007). The Great Powers of the time proposed to give a guarantee for a loan of £60,000 for their relief, though only £5,000 was advanced (Woods, 1914:463).

Greek soldiers and irregulars invaded southern Albania seeking to annex the territory in 1913 and in the Spring and Summer of 1914. They burned and pillaged houses, stole livestock, burned crops and committed murders, massacres and other atrocities (see Selenica, 1928:CXXXI-CXXXV; *Koha* (Korça) 15-28 Mai 1914; Bourcart, 1922:292-305; Memushaj, 2004:384; Diaries of M Edith Durham, Diary No.14 (henceforth MED) 1 August 1914). Many thousands of people, in fear of their lives, fled northwards along mountain paths. Most travelled on foot, and many died of heat and exhaustion along the way (MED, 15 July 1914; Sonne, 1916:42).

Some of the people from the south passed through Mallakastër, which at its southernmost corner bordered on the areas of Greek destruction. Local recollections are that the refugees were taken into people's homes, well treated and urged to stay (Elmazi, 2005:49; Memushaj, 2004:387).<sup>5</sup> A small number of refugees did stay and are included in this study, and there is no doubt more that could have been accommodated. However, most felt insecure, the Greeks were not far away, so they carried on to the small town of Vlora on the coast, which was then the seat of government. They believed there they would get help from the government and the international community (Elmazi, 2005:50, Sonne, 1916:41; Woods, 1914:463 op.cit.).

Several hundred refugees were arriving in Vlora (pop. 6,000) each day. The town authorities were said to be feeding up to 7,600 a day. The most fortunate were lodged in the houses of local inhabitants, who gave as much assistance as they could but others had to find shelter under the olive trees on the hills around the town, where many died from disease and starvation. (Letter M.E.Durham to Lamb, 14.07.14, MED, 14, 16, 17, 18, 26, 27 July 1914; Selenica, 1928:CXXXI). Government ministers sought assistance abroad, but in vain, and with the outbreak of World War I all hope of outside assistance ended. The Greeks (who had not yet entered the war) agreed to cease hostilities in Albania in Autumn 1914 but did not evacuate South Albania, thus preventing the refugees from returning to their homes.

Most of the refugees who entered Mallakastër would probably have done so by way of a pass to the east, where it appears they left one of the main streams of refugees, which was heading north to the town of Berat. From this entry point they would have moved westwards towards the River Vjosa where most joined the refugees heading for Vlora. Those who did not continue fanned out to the villages in a fertile area of upland (Riedl 7 July 1917; information from local farmers) and beyond, to villages nearer the river, where they found lodging with local families. In 1918 this was where most of them were to be found, though some had been caught up with their host families in the subsequent evacuation of the riverside villages.

In addition, families from the South-East had entered Mallakastër near its southernmost tip and found shelter with families nearby but most refugees from these villages also headed for Vlora. Finally, there was a small and diverse group of refugees, some of whom had not come over the mountains but had come by more circuitous routes. By the time of the census, all the refugees from the south had been in Mallakastër almost four years.

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<sup>5</sup> Though these people were internally displaced, they are referred to as refugees in this paper in order to distinguish them from those who were locally displaced within Mallakastër, and does not imply that the territory these people came from lay outside Albania borders.

The refugees came from all the areas the Greeks had attacked but only a very few from each one. It seems that on the whole individual households, only a minority of them extended, acted independently. For the most part only one or two families from any one village had taken shelter in Mallakastër and then as often as not in different villages. In a very few cases, two, or at most three, households linked by kinship appear to have fled together, or made common cause after their arrival.

The only significant exceptions were two groups of families, each from a single village, both of which had been the sites of massacres (Kotani, 2003:92, 98) a handful of families from the mountains of the south west, and several traders all from the same village. In all but the last there were apparent links of kinship. In the first case, refugees from the village of Panarit in the hills in the South-East, 13 families, 75 people in all, were located in or close to three hamlets in neighbouring villages, from which the others could be reached on foot within an hour or so. The men of this village were well known as masons, seasonal migrant labourers, who built houses all over the European Ottoman Empire, and walked long distances to their work in groups (Hahn, 1854:43; Riza, 1971:133), an experience they may well have drawn on in their search of refuge.

### **Foreign occupation and further displacement**

Albania was neutral in World War I and took no part in the hostilities. For the first two years Mallakastër saw little of the war, but subsequently, like the rest of the country, it and neighbouring areas were occupied by foreign armies. In mid-1916, the Italians took over the area on the western bank of the River Vjosa, i.e. on the opposite bank. Then their opponents, the Austro-Hungarian army, took control of the eastern bank and Mallakastër came under their control but with a civilian administration overseen by the Austrian Consul in Shkodër (in North Albania).

Albania was, according to the Austro-Hungarians, '*ein okkupiertes neutrales Freundesland*' (an occupied neutral friendly country) (PA I 1006 Thurn an Burián Nr. 14.120, Beilage, Teschen 8/9 1916). No hostilities were directed against Albania, but the inhabitants of Mallakastër found themselves on the frontline between two opposing armies, the river Vjosa and a tributary, the Luftinje, and this led to further population displacements during the following two years.<sup>6</sup>

This was a minor front in the war, the function of both armies was to keep the other pinned down. Frequent skirmishes, attacks by the Italians that destroyed houses and the positioning of artillery in villages put civilians, who also risked being taken hostage, in danger (Riedl, 31 Aug 1916). In villages on the broad plain of the lower Vjosa the account that has been handed down suggests that people moved back and forth between their own homes where they could tend their land and animals, often at night, and places that were less dangerous (conversations with villagers in Varibop, May 2003). In addition, several houses were requisitioned by the Austro-Hungarian army so their occupants had to find accommodation elsewhere (Elmazi, 2005:43).

All these people are referred to here as the locally displaced. A large proportion were only displaced for several months but for others displacement lasted for up to two years.

The third and largest category of the displaced were the evacuees. In early 1918, the Austro-Hungarian army which had long shown its displeasure that having a sizeable civilian population

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<sup>6</sup> A few people crossed into Mallakastër from the Italian occupied area, but their numbers were very small and they have not been included with the displaced in this study.

close to the enemy (Veith, 1922:230) decided to evacuate all the villages closest to the river Vjosa and a tributary, the Luftinje. The evacuation started on 24 January (Veith, Tagebuch AOK), and appears to have continued over several weeks.

The census count began on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1918 (Seiner, 1922:5) and was completed by mid-May. It thus documents the status quo as it was in the period after the evacuation. It is unlikely that it changed significantly until after the beginning of the Italian advance which signalled the start of the Austro-Hungarian retreat, and affected parts of Mallakastër in July and August 1918 (Veith, 1922:545-553), that is to say up to seven months.

### **Displacement and the concept of *muhaxhir* (refugee)**

The most important tenet of Albanian unwritten law and its highest virtue, is hospitality. This should be shown to anyone who comes seeking shelter or nourishment, and particularly to strangers (e.g. *Kanun*: 47-48). In this case, customary law coincides with Islamic law but it is common to all Albanians.<sup>7</sup> It is not so much a law, as an articulation of what is thought to be decent and proper in the local society, against which a family's reputation is measured. A displaced person was referred to as a *muhaxhir* (Elmazi, 2005:49), a term that has come by way of Turkish from the Arabic *muhajir* (see Elmazmad, 2008:52) that is used all over the Middle East, in parts of Asia and the Horn of Africa.

This is a broader concept than 'refugee', as it can also mean migrant and traveller.<sup>8</sup> All guests are to be received with hospitality, but those deemed to have suffered, that is those fleeing persecution, are to be treated particularly well (Elmazi, op.cit.). It is also an act of generalised, or to use Kibreab's formulation, expected, reciprocity (2002:13).

When the people fleeing from the south got to Malakastër individual families took them into their houses. News of the atrocities perpetrated by the Greeks to the south had spread far and wide. The refugees were Albanians so they were considered 'brothers' 'of the same blood' who shared the same history of suffering (Elmazi, 2005:49). Only among those from adjacent areas to the south-west (a small proportion of the total), were there a few with relatives by marriage (*krushkë*) and perhaps *miq*, trusted friends,<sup>9</sup> but most were taken in by strangers. Even the poorest families would offer hospitality, however modest. Indications of the relative wealth or poverty of householders are sparse, but, such as they are, they indicate that the displaced were housed by all manner of people.

No information about individual dwellings was recorded in the census. The term 'house' encompassed all forms of accommodation, provided they were inhabited (Seiner, 1922:6). In some cases there were separate living quarters for individual nuclear families within an extended family's property surrounded by a wall. Men's and women's quarters were separate except in the smallest houses. The richest beys and landowners were renowned for the size and magnificence of their houses, (Riza, 133; Seiner, 1922:6) but none of these houses now remain. Ordinary houses, some of two storeys, most just one, were built of stone without mortar and had roofs of thick slates, with

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<sup>7</sup> About 98 per cent of both the resident population of Mallakastër and the refugees from the south counted in the census were muslims (about 10 per cent of each were Bektashis) and the remaining two per cent Albanian Orthodox. This had no bearing on the accommodation of the displaced.

<sup>8</sup> Though the term 'refugee' (*refugjat*) is now more commonly used in Albanian, it retains much of the sense of *muhaxhir*

<sup>9</sup> In the Spring of 1914 auxiliaries from Mallakastër had taken part in the defence of the mountainous area of Kurvelesh to the South-West against the Greeks (Sonne, 1916:11). There are indirect indications that bonds may have developed between men fighting together in a tough male environment, that they had inaugurated *miqësi*, became *miq*.

gaps to let out smoke. Poorer people built one-roomed houses, referred to as *kasolle*, meaning hut, either of stone or, in the case of the poorest, of woven branches plastered with mud and with a thatched roof (Riza, 1984:63-64).

In 1918, almost two-thirds of refugee households (94), including about half of the larger ones, were still living in the houses of local families. Of these at least 20 (perhaps up to 23) had been caught up in the evacuation of the local population from villages near the Vjosa. The mode of recording, which showed a displaced local family followed by a refugee family in the home of a new host, indicates that refugees and their original host families had moved and were taken in as one unit. Birthplace information of children born to refugee families since their arrival in Mallakastër supports this interpretation. Only in the rare cases where families evacuated from a particularly large village which could not be accommodated in the already overcrowded neighbouring villages were to be found in huts adjacent to them did the small number of refugee families (4) among them have their own huts.<sup>10</sup>

Of the 44 remaining families, just over a quarter, were living in a house of their own (that is they were enumerated separately and not within the house of a local family), and 13 other families lived with them, bringing the total not living with a local family to 57. These houses were scattered round the district, two or three, and no more than four in any one village. Those refugees who built houses would have had to obtain permission from the council of the neighbourhood or village elders (*Kanun*: 38) and from the owner of the piece of land, which seems to have been forthcoming.

In these houses the first family listed has been counted as the householder and subsequent families as secondary. Of the nine houses which also accommodated other families, in five cases they were kin, in two both kin and non-kin (the latter respectively a family of refugees and a family of local evacuees), and in two non-kin (though one of these may have been kin). It is conceivable that in some cases, though no information is available, they were joint owners, especially if they were kin, but this cannot be taken for granted, and in some cases they definitely were not. These families had either been taken in by local families and later moved out, or, in some cases, such as traders and those with a profession or a business this seems more plausible, they had from the outset sought to be independent. The latter may have stayed initially at the *han* (inn) in Ballsh, the small administrative centre, or taken temporary lodging with a local family, in which case they probably paid. This was normal practice where there was no inn (Sonne, 1916:6).

Finally, there was a small number of refugees who did not live as independent families, but as servants and unrelated persons in a local family. Not counting the servants who worked for refugee families, and are included as family members, 29 refugees were listed as servants in someone else's family, and four of them had a relative living with them. They had done as local people did when, due to widowhood or the death of parents and other relatives, they found themselves without a family or a home, and had apparently been accepted on the same terms.

### **The locally displaced: the first wave**

Local displaced families, i.e. those displaced due to the fighting or the requisitioning of their houses had to find alternative accommodation for themselves from the beginning of the occupation and stayed elsewhere for the duration of the occupation. As time went on and the inhabitants of further villages found themselves exposed to danger, more people moved, if only periodically. Some of

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<sup>10</sup> It is likely that families built their own huts, it was normal for people to build their own dwellings, probably as dispersed as space allowed rather than resembling a camp.

the evidence might be interpreted as indicating that individual families from villages that were eventually evacuated had prepared contingency plans, or had left before being evacuated. Where the locally displaced differed from the refugees from outside the district was that many of them had kin or in-laws in villages not directly affected by the fighting, where they were entitled to be given shelter.

Kinship relations were not recorded in the census but are inferred from birthplace data. This method inevitably produces some false positives, especially in links between the most populous villages. However, every case was checked to ensure a link was plausible so there are likely to be few errors, and are outweighed by relationships, such as the important one with a mother's sister, which can only rarely be detected

Residence is patrilocal and, with the exception of one or two villages, marriage is usually exogamous (i.e. women usually move to another village on marriage). Therefore, almost all links through the male line are confined to the home village, except for some *miq* relationships, which are probably few in number. Links to other villages, that is to in-laws and between married sisters, goes through the female line. Where a woman in a host family comes from the home village of the displaced family, or a woman in the displaced family comes from the village in which they have taken refuge, or indeed both, this has been counted as a kinship link.

The importance of kinship relations is that, as in many societies, they are founded on *trust* and obligation, as are secondary relations of in-laws and *miq*, to an extent that is unique to them. As Campbell (1964:204-205) described it in the analogous case of northern Greece, 'there is no social group in this community which through common membership can commit him to any duty towards persons with whom he is not committed by kinship or marriage'. Indeed marriages are arranged with an eye to the benefits of the relationship that will be formed, the reputation – and wealth – of both families being a vital consideration, for from then on they will be linked and will have mutual entitlements and obligations.

While these relationships are cemented by affection, to see the bond as just one of emotion, as is sometimes done in the context of hosting, is to fail to understand that they are much more. Kin relations are the fundamental building block of society, kin are civil society (c.f. Singerman, 2006). They are not organizations but networks with mutual entitlements and obligations, nor are they 'traditional', for they continually evolve and remain very effective. The relationships of kinship are carefully nurtured and maintained. Children play with siblings and fraternal cousins and they are taught about and visit their maternal kin from an early age. Bonds between siblings and parents and their children are particularly strong and continue into adulthood and old age. The relations of trust are mutually strengthened, by exchanging visits (this can be observed in the census). Being taken in by kin forms part of that process, not of charity, but of strengthening the bond.

Hospitality offered by non-kin rests on a different basis, that of custom, the obligation to help people in need, irrespective of who they are; elsewhere it has been known for former enemies to take in refugees (Khalili, 2006:60-61). There are no obligations on either side, just an idea of a generalized reciprocity and an expectation that both hosts and guests will behave according to the local idea of decency and politeness. The relationship is not one of trust, and it may not extend beyond that one encounter, though in this case among some of the descendants of the refugees there remained a generalised sense of gratitude (Memushaj, 2005:387). Everyone will be taken in somewhere, but staying with kin is preferred to non-kin. With kin they can get on with their lives to some degree, with non-kin this is more limited.

As the census was carried out after the evacuation of the riverside villages only a small number of

those who had already moved can be distinguished with any certainty from the evacuees, but a few individual examples give some idea of the resources they employed and the strategies they pursued. The more well-off families had the best options open to them. A landowner whose house was requisitioned and his extended family of 16 people, including two wives and three servants, went to live with his equally prosperous kin, a household of 10, in another village for the duration of the occupation (Elmazi, 2005:43; Census manuscript). The less well-off leave fewer traces but data such as the birthplaces of children born during the occupation indicate that spontaneous movements were taking place. For example, a family with small children moved from a village that repeatedly came under fire to their in-laws in a safer one (Census manuscript; Riedl, 5 Feb. 1917 ff.).

Families also took care of their daughters and sisters. Several widows with young children (a small fraction of the total), in which the eldest son, perhaps a child, would be the head of household, had taken them in, which they would normally not do. Likewise, women left alone when the men in their household were conscripted as soldiers, might move temporarily to a parents' or brother's family. Some such moves became a first step in the eventual evacuation. Others moves prefigured it. At some, probably considerable, time before the evacuation an extended family of 12 persons, from a village near the river hired itself out to work as servants for a miller (a refugee) some distance away.

There were 70 internally displaced families recorded in the census as occupying houses that were theirs. For the most part they can be assumed to have lived in them before the main evacuation, perhaps as part of their back and forth movement. If not, they moved there when the evacuation began. Almost a third of these were giving shelter to others (who may not have arrived until the main evacuation).

Again the most affluent were at an advantage. Four large families had houses in other villages to which they moved (Census manuscript; personal communication from one owner's daughter). Two brothers bought a property in one of the remoter villages because its owner was moving out of the district. A handful had managed to rent land in a less exposed village to which they moved and built a house on it. As most families in Mallakastër owned their own plot and had no surplus there were not many such opportunities. Over half of these families had kin in the villages to which they moved. Here too kin were an asset and may have facilitated the move. Two brothers moved to the home village of both their wives and worked as millers (the village miller had gone to fight with irregular forces in the mountains). Five households had moved into houses that appear to have belonged to deceased kin. However, five families whose houses were requisitioned avoided moving by living in huts nearby.

For the most part the dwellings owned or built by the displaced were scattered among the different villages. However, exceptionally, in one village (Kreshpan) on the edge of the Vjosa flood plain, adjacent to the area with the most populous of the exposed villages, there were twenty houses that belonged to families displaced from five of those villages and two that belonged to refugees. Eighteen houses, those belonging to the refugees and sixteen to the locally displaced were additions to the existing village. The numbering sequence shows that they doubled the size of one neighbourhood and added two new ones,<sup>11</sup> the first and last in the sequence, belonging to refugees. From the size, and the orderliness of these new hamlets it can be assumed they had the approval of the village elders.

This was one of the villages that accommodated the most locally displaced, 66 families altogether.

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<sup>11</sup> The first of these was called Mahalere (*Mëhallë e re*), which means literally new neighbourhood.

Some had probably been there a considerable time, so building their own houses would seem a reasonable thing to do (the median size of household in the new hamlets was over 9). One refugee family and two of those displaced took in another family, one was also displaced and the other was an unrelated local family. However, the houses were not intended to be permanent; their inhabitants returned to their home villages (and their land) once the war was over (Selenica, 1927).

### **The locally displaced: the evacuees,**

The last displacement phase began in early 1918 with the evacuation of the population that still remained in the 20 or so villages which the army considered as too close to the frontline. The first evacuations were carried out on 24 January in a village on the remotest stretch of the frontline, then proceeded systematically down a tributary to the Vjosa, then downstream along its right bank.

The inhabitants of the first village were ordered to evacuate without warning and most were not able to pack their belongings or take their livestock or food stocks. By early February an Albanian official reported to the Austrian Consul (who was not kept informed by the army) that the 135 evacuees had been sent to the centre of the country, presumably on foot, where they were reported to be in great need. Other evacuees were begging in the streets of the nearest town because no provision had been made for their sustenance. It was the worst time of year for such an operation. Instead of the heavy rain that was usual in February, the weather, though fine, was exceptionally cold, with hard frosts and ice on the rivers (Veith, 1922:536). The evacuees were thus exposed to the risk of illness and death,<sup>12</sup> and they suffered irrecoverable material losses (notably of livestock). There were also damaging reports in circulation that, in the course of the evacuation, families were being broken up, which, not least, violated the seclusion of women.

There was such uproar at the evacuation and the manner it had been conducted that people took matters into their own hands. Some of the inhabitants of the next villages to be evacuated were reported to have gone over to the Italians (9 Feb 1918 No. 31/P. Appendix ), and this is reflected in the Albanian census of 1923 (Selenica, 1927) which indicates that between one and two thirds of their populations were not accounted for in the 1918 census. Some had kin on the other bank of the Vjosa.

In a matter of days the Consul issued instructions that in future the evacuees were to be well treated, they were to be allowed time to pack their belongings and take their livestock with them. Families were to be kept together and they were to be found accommodation of a good standard and adequately provided for (11. Feber 1918 EV Nr.1357/Res). The commander of the Austro-Hungarian army in Albania also allocated 10,000 Kronen for the relief of the evacuees (2304 Nr.34/P., 19 Feber 1918).<sup>13</sup> From then on most evacuees were moved to the villages between 5 and 10 kilometers behind the evacuated villages. Evacuees were informed that they would be allocated land (though whose land is not specified) and that they could return to their properties for the olives harvest (the following Autumn!) (E.V. Nr. 2866 Verwaltungsbericht pro Feber, 18./III.1918).

How the evacuation was carried out from then on is not clear, but from the outcome it appears that each evacuated village had been allocated to another village. Local elders would most likely have made their views known. It also seems that the evacuees themselves exercised a considerable

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<sup>12</sup> Comparison of the age structures of the evacuated and non-evacuated populations indicate higher mortality among the former, both among small children and still more among the elderly.

<sup>13</sup> This would equal barely euros 1 per head at today's prices for the evacuees in Mallakastër alone. The money was probably directed at the first evacuees, who had been made destitute.

degree of agency, perhaps seeing it was unavoidable, organizing the move and selecting the destination themselves.

In the first evacuation under the new regime this is probably true of 13 of the 34 families evacuated who were accommodated with kin, and possibly of some of the families without evident kin links in the village they moved to. However, in some houses in the village two or more unrelated families had been taken in. This suggests that families were organized into groups that set off with a military escort in the direction of the village where they were to be accommodated, and, with their agreement, were taken in by – or billeted on – the inhabitants. The term billeted is not intended to imply compulsion but rather to indicate that a third party made the request for the evacuees to be taken in.

The impression that the accommodation available was not sufficient in every case is reinforced by the experience of the evacuees from several other villages. Only a few of the evacuees from the next evacuated village had kin to stay with, several were accommodated, two to a house, by families in neighbouring villages and almost a third, 12 families, were making do living in huts.

In the next two villages to be evacuated, both quite large, the problem of accommodation was more acute. Together they had 175 families, whereas in the three villages within a reasonable distance there were barely 100 houses. In both villages marriages tended to be arranged between families in riverside villages on both banks of the Vjosa, and especially within the village itself. In one of the villages just 25 per cent of ever-married women and in the other barely ten per cent were from non-riverside villages. Thus even though most families had kinship links in several directions, not every family had kin in a village further from the river to whom they could turn.

To take the villages in the likely order of evacuation, the larger one, Krahës, first: most families moved to the nearest neighbouring village Zhulaj, located on two broad hilltops jutting out from a ridge that ends at the river bank. The remaining 28 families, probably those who lived on the opposite side of the valley, had no village close to hand to be evacuated to and were described as living ‘in huts’. Three refugee families living in Krahës also lived in huts. This could suggest a camp but it is more likely the huts, which were probably self-built, were scattered over the hillside and grouped by paternal kin. Nor was this simply an option where no others existed. Quite a few of the families had kin in villages that were fairly close. Other considerations, such as proximity to their land and the need to secure their food supply for the coming year may have taken precedence over the quality of their accommodation.

The village of Zhulaj was small and had just 38 houses and a population of 190. It was not a rich village and the houses were small;<sup>14</sup> however, it seems to have been selected to receive a large number of the displaced. Sixty-one families from Krahës, of which 24 probably had kinship links – so at least 37 did not – were accommodated by families in the village in their houses. In addition, two families brought their own kin whom they had taken in earlier, widowed sisters and a child or children from one of the exposed villages, and nine came with families of refugees who had lived with them and were being displaced a second time. Two more families of refugees came without a local family, presumably having obtained their previous dwelling for themselves, which they had shared.

Not all families had taken in large numbers, but one family was accommodating nine displaced families, fortunately quite small ones, and another had taken in a family of 28 persons, who were

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<sup>14</sup> When I tried to find out more about this in the village, I was told that ‘everybody’ had lived in huts then, using the word *kasolle* that is also used for one-room houses (Conversation with villagers in Zhulaj, May 2003).

kin. There were also groups of interrelated families that had been taken in together by a single family in the village. It appears that quite a number of families had been taken to Zhulaj and systematically billeted. After most of the families were accommodated, seven had no accommodation and had to build themselves huts to live in.

Almost the entire population of the second village, Kalivaç also went to Zhulaj, having presumably been directed to go there. It was the most accessible village, reached by walking along the spine of a ridge on which the two villages were situated; however, there were very few kinship links between these two villages. Just 13 families from Kalivaç had gone to other villages, all but three of them to kin. Of the rest, 16 found shelter with families in Zhulaj. It seems the first arrived while Krahës was still being evacuated, and there were still families who had not taken anyone in (though a few never did). One family had kin, though as none of the adult men was at home had perhaps been asked to come (or had asked to) before the evacuation. The other families had most likely been billeted.

There were still 35 families from Kalivaç left to house when it was found that there was no more accommodation to be had in the village houses. Some of the families to accommodate were large, there was one with 31 persons and 5 more with 10 or more. They had to build themselves huts to live in. In all, almost 500 of those displaced were living in huts in Mallakastër and just over half of them in Zhulaj as well. When the evacuees were added, the total number of persons in Zhulaj was 1,11 – six times the normal resident population. In addition there was livestock, up to 1,000 sheep, perhaps 500 goats, a few cows and a couple of hundred draught animals (ÖAW, *Volkszählung 1916-17*), for which further huts would have been built.

The scale of overcrowding, even by Albanian standards, is hard to imagine. It was worst of all for women, who ideally remained secluded. By the date when the census was carried out in Zhulaj in mid April the people had been living in these conditions for almost two months, and they were to stay for several months more. It is possible, though this cannot be established on the basis of the data, that families which by the time of the census were staying with relatives elsewhere had moved on after being evacuated to Zhulaj, and perhaps others did later, but that is only speculation.

The rest of the villages to be evacuated were better placed for finding accommodation. Neighbouring villages were more heavily populated and accessible, and the villagers had more kinship links than those in the villages already discussed. For example, the large village of Kutë<sup>15</sup> had not been unduly exposed to hostilities and prior to the evacuation the people had remained in their own homes, cultivating their land. Small numbers of evacuees from the village were distributed among several villages, where at least half had kinship links, suggesting that these families had made their own arrangements, whether when news reached them of the pending evacuation, or even before, given the continued uncertainty on the frontline. Altogether half of those who were to be evacuated went to stay with kin, and a further handful had managed to find a house they could live in or to get taken in by non-kin.

Only in the neighbouring hamlets of Zaimaj and Lekuras in the large village of Fratar did a disproportionately large number of the displaced families stay with non-kin, which could indicate a degree of outside organization. Perhaps in these cases the army had gathered together families that had not yet left, who tended not to have well-placed kin, and accompanied them to another hamlet or village to find families upon which they could be billeted. Less than half of the displaced families from Kutë were accommodated in this way.

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<sup>15</sup> Three neighbourhoods were not evacuated and displaced families either did not go or were not sent there.

The populations of villages that had been exposed to fighting had already moved to safer places, at least intermittently, and had themselves found families that would accommodate them. The army appeared to have had little or no role in it. One such village was Varibop on the lower Vjosa plain. Varibop is relatively endogamous and many of the outward kinship ties are with other villages that were evacuated. Most of the rest of the ties were with two quite large villages and it was there that all but a handful of its 50 families found accommodation, though in less than half the cases with kin. Within these villages, the families were widely dispersed, with only one or two families in all but four of the 22 neighbourhoods in which they were accommodated, suggesting that they had taken it upon themselves to find shelter. Were it not for the census, these self-settled evacuees would have been hard to trace.

### **The receiving villages**

The locally displaced were distributed around about 50 villages in most of which there were already small numbers of households of refugees who had arrived from the south in 1914. In contrast to the latter, who were fairly evenly distributed, just short of 90 per cent of the evacuated households (854 of 962) were concentrated in the 15 villages that had received 10 or more displaced families. These villages were generally the most accessible and included some of the better off villages. There were few in out of the way or very small villages, and evacuees that went there mostly sought out relatives. In only three villages were there no locally displaced or refugees.

The patchwork living arrangements in the villages receiving most of the evacuees meant that the distribution within villages and within neighbourhoods (some were quite large) varied. Some of the larger houses were generous and took in several sizeable families, even though their own household was large but so too were some households that appeared to be poor. Not every house took in evacuees, either because they declined or were not asked and some only took in kin. These variations are illustrated by the example of a fairly small hamlet (Sulaj in the village of Greshicë) in which the 19 resident families lived in 18 houses. In one house an extended family of two brothers had divided into two independent families, that is they separated their housekeeping arrangements, which was the normal way to do it, but continued living in the same house. Each of the other houses there was just one local family.

The hamlet is not altogether typical, in that only a very small proportion of houses had no displaced families in them, but it illustrates a representative range of living arrangements. Three families had already taken in refugee families, probably when they arrived in the district. Two of these did not take in any locally displaced families, but one took in an extended family of 25 persons to which a kin link is apparent, even though there were then 33 persons living in the house. A further three families each took in a displaced family with whom they had kinship links, and another probably took in two (it is not certain if both were kin). One accommodated a family that was kin and one from another village that was not. The sequence of families (five in all) from the village of Hekal and eight families from village of Kremenar, who were accommodated, either in addition to kin who had arrived previously or two to a house, may indicate that they had arrived as a group from each village accompanied by soldiers charged with finding them a place to stay.

Nonetheless, though several households were persuaded to give house-room to quite a lot of displaced people, and one might wonder if a little social pressure was brought to bear, some apparently declined.

We can see the workings of some of the rules derived from custom and practice around the delicate business of inviting people, strangers as well as kin, into one's home or private sphere. They have to do with both the potential hosts and the would-be guests. It is not covered by custom because it has become provision of a service for an outside body. It is thus necessary to distinguish it from the customary practice of giving hospitality to people in need of shelter.

As information on earlier practice is lacking, we must assume that the families worked out for themselves how, or if, they thought it fitted into what was acceptable and respectable, and the expectations which hosts and guests might have of one another. As the example of Sulaj shows, and it is typical, different families followed different courses of action.

Families, including extended families with twenty or more members, including servants if they had any, were in every case accommodated in the same house. A family or household is a single economic unit and only divides if its (male) members agree among themselves to do so. Families stayed together when it was financially to their advantage and separate when it was not. In a few cases former members of a family, such as widowed sisters with children, were reintegrated into the family if the head of that household (the eldest son; it was almost never a woman) was still a child. When the family was evacuated, it was accommodated with a host family unit. One such family, 28 persons including a widowed sister and her child, the (nuclear) families of four brothers, unmarried siblings and a servant was taken in by a family of seven in Zhulaj which included relatives, possibly a sister or an aunt, of one of the sisters-in-law.

In 14 of the 18 houses in Sulaj there were ten or more persons and in three of the houses there were 20 persons or more; however, overcrowding had not reach the high levels it had in Zhulaj as there was more space and many of the houses would be larger. Overall in Mallakastër the median number of persons per house hosting one or more displaced or refugee family was 15 but more displaced families than hosts lived in overcrowded conditions. The median number of persons in the household for displaced families staying with non-kin, that is just over half the families, was 16, for those staying with kin it was 17. For host families the median was 12, both for those accommodating kin and those accommodating non-kin, host families were roughly equally divided between the two. The higher medians for the displaced are due to the presence of more than one displaced family in a house, each of which counts in calculating the median, but in most cases only one host family. Both the displaced and the hosts were used to living with people around them, just with men and women separate. Their most personal selves would be maintained in their heads, as 'something properly concealed in apartments, temples, and tents' (Geertz, 1983:68).

### **Making a living and paying one's way**

The displaced were received into people's houses as guests, and initially they, to be more precise the men, would be treated as such. In the larger houses the master of the house would entertain male guests in the guest room where women would only be seen when they came in to serve food. The women in the house would be busy cooking the food over a smoky fire, hauling buckets of water and doing other chores, most likely with the assistance of the women members of the families of the male guests. Even now, in the Albanian countryside women will not be seen to be idle, and these women would have participated in the work of the women residents within a very short space of time.

There would be no talk of payment or money when the guests arrived (c.f. McDowell, 2008:17), or even for a few days afterwards, that would offend the hosts, but it would be the guests who

broached the subject of household arrangements. This could take two forms. Initially, it might be a discussion about whether and in what ways the guests could contribute to the host's household.

Neither would want to be beholden to the other nor patronized. The two heads of households would work out an arrangement that took account of their respective circumstances. For kin there was the knowledge that they could be called upon to offer generous hospitality to their host in the future, so they could be relaxed about paying, but there would also be an expectation that they too pay their way eventually, just as they would repay debts. For non-kin, there was no such obligation to reciprocate that could be used to save face, just the expectation they would do the same for others, and they would not want to be seen as dependent on their host. In the case of the evacuees there was the added factor that accommodation had been sought at the behest of a third party. This had no precedent in customary law but it altered the relationship between host and guest in such a way as to slightly distance it from customary hospitality.

As the guests were likely to stay for some time, the discussion might go further, though perhaps at a later date, and may revolve around whether the guests should continue to be part of the host's household or if they should separate their housekeeping while remaining in the same house. This is the procedure used by extended families when they decide, invariably because they see it as to their mutual economic benefit, to divide. One might speculate that such a division of households had preceded the establishment of independent dwellings by refugees and the displaced.

In the census every family was recorded individually, with the details for each family reported by the head of household. Therefore, we cannot be certain that all were necessarily separate entities for housekeeping purposes, though this is how they appear. Hosts as well as guests might just as well benefit from staying together as from separating. Families appearing to be of limited means had taken in large and probably quite well-off families who also brought their servants (who would have continued to work), might have been seen by their hosts as an asset.

Whatever arrangements were arrived at by individual families, the census shows that those who normally worked outside the domestic sphere did so, and would therefore be expected to contribute to their keep. We can take it as given that women continued to work as they always did as this was vital to the very existence of their families.

Among the displaced and the refugees many probably brought assets with them. Those whose houses had been requisitioned received payment and thus had the means to pay for an alternative, including paying a host. Among the first to arrive, the refugees, were several families from villages whose inhabitants went on *kurbet*, work migration, in the old Ottoman Empire, and who had temporarily lost that means of livelihood, might have had savings which they brought with them. It is not clear if they also practised their profession as masons while they were refugees, but one would assume they probably did, for their reputation would be known.

Among both refugees and the local population were families that had relatives working in either Turkey or America. They could not legally return, if they did they would be imprisoned (some were), but then as now there were illegal movements (Kaucky, 1916). In any case, their earnings could be offered as security for debts. It is not known if any of the refugees, managed to bring livestock with them, but there were some who set off with their animals (Sonne, 1916:39, 40). Those who had come furthest, i.e. from the South-East, had followed well-established transhumance routes, so it is not inconceivable that they arrived with some sheep or goats, indeed this might explain why they did not go further.

The locally displaced, except for those evacuated first, also brought animals, though for all concerned the herds had depleted due to the demands of army procurement. A few of the displaced and a refugee family managed to rent land and set up independent households, but this option was not widely available. There are also indications in the census that the undertaking by the army to allocate land to evacuees (E.V. Nr. 2866 Verwaltungsbericht pro Feber, 18./III. 1918) had been honoured. Numerically, there were far more opportunities for day labourers, refugees were over-represented in this category. About 70 refugees, ten per cent of all refugees, described their occupation as day labourers.

Outside agriculture, which in one way or another occupied most people, refugees earned a living in much the same way as local people, whether displaced or not. As with self-settled refugees elsewhere (c.f. Hovil, 2007), but with the advantage of enjoying full citizenship, they were free to earn a living as they wished, subject only to the restraints set by local conditions. In theory the army was an employer. Throughout the occupation it had sought to stretch its manpower resources with the formation of Albanian battalions (Nicholson, 2006:143) but from the point of view of Albanian families there was little to gain as the pay was poor and manpower was needed in agriculture, so recruits were prone to desert. At any one time the proportion of refugees conscripted was about the same as non-refugees (separate figures for the locally displaced cannot be calculated). In creating the work units the Austrians kept the refugees occupied and out of mischief (such as fighting with irregulars, perhaps on the enemy's side); in addition, in joining such units men avoided being conscripted and deserting if they were obliged to go into the army.

A more favoured option was to join the gendarmerie, though they were paid less than non-Albanians; five of the 36 gendarmes resident in Mallakastër in 1918 were refugees (Nicholson, 2006:140). Refugees who could read and write found employment as scribes (most of the population was illiterate). Thanks to the presence of the army and its horses five refugees, all Roma, made a living as blacksmiths as did two men who repaired shoes. A few others made a living in occupations such as carpentry. One woman, unusually, also had an occupation, which described her as a stocking knitter. The only adult man in her household was, for reasons not given, in the French occupied part of Albania, and thus cut off from the family, so she sustained it from home. This is perhaps the clearest indication that it had become normal for the displaced to support themselves, even when they had to use some ingenuity to do so.

The refugees and the displaced who lived in their own houses had moved one step further from separating their household from that of their hosts and were resident in a house of their own. About a quarter of the day labourers had done this, which would suggest that this was not a decision that had been forced on them but rather one that had been mutually agreed. Some of the blacksmiths and a shoemaker also had their own dwellings, which enabled two of the women in their households to add to the family income by taking in laundry (as Roma they were freer than Albanian women to work).

Also living in their own houses was a small, but conspicuous category of refugees who had been able to conduct their trade or profession in Mallakastër. There may have been opportunists among them, but a more accurate characterisation would be that, faced with the destruction of their livelihoods and possibly their lives, they had sought out possibilities for continuing both. One man from the south had set up a water mill and, in addition to his own family, employed an internally displaced family, a family of refugees and some local young people.

Merchants were the most numerous in this category and there would be merchants in Mallakastër from towns in neighbouring districts with their own booths at the main market place; in the census

they and local merchants were outnumbered by those from the districts that were exposed to conflict, 26 out of a total of 43. The latter were no doubt already familiar with trade in Mallakastër, and they would be well aware of the opportunities presented by proximity to the frontline, notably in the smuggling of goods (Veith, 1922:530) and probably food from the Italian side. Besides, the refugees from the south were at an advantage in Mallakastër, in that more of them (though not a large number) were literate and had some education (there were more schools in the south). This enabled them to take up positions that few of the local people were qualified for, such as local administrators. It was already common for professionals to be recruited from the south. By moving to Mallakastër when they fled from the south they not only found accommodation they bought or rented but a source of income as well.

Reading between the lines of the data, these ‘success stories’ notwithstanding, it can be seen that at the other end of the spectrum proportionately more refugees and displaced people were to be found than those who had not been displaced. It is true that several non-migrants were recorded as beggars, but only one refugee, but recording of beggars was haphazard. In the poorest occupational group and the one usually associated with not having one’s own home, servants, among which there would also be orphans, widows, widowers and others without family, refugees were over-represented. They were over 10 per cent of the total, compared with their share of 2.8 per cent of the population. The locally displaced are also slightly over-represented, perhaps reflecting the consequences of the evacuation in winter and, indirectly the deaths that occurred because of this winter time evacuation.

Another indicator of hardship is the number of young people under 20 who were either alone or had only siblings under 20 but no adult relatives. Among refugees they made up 12.3 per cent of young people under 20. Some sibling groups and a few individual young people were classified as households and most were accommodated by a local family. Probably, if they had no work, they would help out their hosts, they could not just be idle. Among the locally displaced they are just 3 percent, but this is higher than the rest of the resident population, where it is 2 percent.

One reason for the discrepancy between the refugees and the rest is that in the local population some children are looked after by grandparents, there are 14 families of this type. Comparison of the age structures of the three populations (there are no vital statistics) reveals older people experienced the highest mortality rates of any age group among refugees. They had either died on the way north or remained behind and were murdered when others fled, leaving a gap in care provision.

The relatively high proportion of servants who were refugees is just one indication of the alternatives that can be provided in a society in which the family is the main institution of civil society so that ideally no one, and in practice very few are left alone and without shelter. When considering how the displaced find shelter, practices such as these also have their place and should be taken into account.

### **In place of a conclusion**

Seen from the outside, the accommodation of the displaced in Mallakastër could be seen as an exercise in putting roofs over people’s heads where there could be no recourse to the institutional solution of camps organised by outsiders. From the point of view of the residents and the displaced themselves, they were engaging in a range of familiar and normal practices embedded on the local

social structure to solve a major problem over a considerable period of time, under difficult circumstances.

Thus study has shown that several processes were at work relating to, among other things, kinship as well as social conventions of how to treat strangers. Accommodating the displaced was not just an expression of a straightforward, unquestioning custom of hospitality. The situation faced by the displaced was well understood by the families that took them in and, while no one knew how long the war and the foreign occupations would last, both sides knew that the arrangement would only be temporary. Customary law was broadly similar in Mallakastër and the areas from which the displaced came, so there was a shared understanding on how to deal with the dilemmas they faced.

This is, however, just one case and it gives us just a limited range of answers. A broader range of case studies is needed to determine their wider applicability, as well as what other factors were significant. Some data already obtained for other purposes might repay re-analysis. There are also questions that could not be asked in a historical study. Given that host families inevitably incur considerable costs, research is needed on the longer-term consequences, whether or not their capital assets (e.g. in the case of small farmers) were eroded. However, it is not enough to consider only the families accommodating displaced people but also try to find out more on cases when and why displaced people are refused hospitality (see note 9), and this leaves an important gap in our, still limited, understanding of why they do.

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