In the Name of the Daughter.
Anthropology of Gender in Montenegro

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'Daughters Too Are Our Children.' Gender Relations and Inheritance in Njeguši

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Abstract: The stereotypes of Montenegrin gender relations depict men doing war and women constrained to lead extremely hard lives consisting of reproduction and domestic work. In this study with a focus on Njeguši, the author instead demonstrates how gender relations are characterised by a dynamic process which defies attempts to present a one-dimensional picture. For example, the widespread tradition that sons inherit, to the exclusion of daughters, proves to be linked to the much less problematised principle of virilocal marriages, with the consequence that women are strongly encouraged to leave family property, while men are morally bound to stay on it. The reverse condition is that women are able to enjoy freedom of movement while men have difficulty finding spouses, and once married many of them live apart from their wives. The author also addresses the business of 'importing' brides as well as the phenomenon of brother-and-sister households.

Keywords: gender, inheritance, Montenegro, ethnography

Introduction

Sanja invited my wife Linda and me into the room and to sit at the table. With a sweep of her hand she cleaned the already clean table surface. 'Here, have a taste of this cheese,' she said, cutting large slices of the famous Njeguši cheese. She had made it herself. 'Would you like some wine or juice or *rakija*?' She took some kind of syrup, mixed it with water, and placed glasses in front of us. The wood-fired stove was burning slowly, making an occasional crackling sound. She sat on the

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couch next to the stove, took a large glass jar of rolling tobacco from underneath the bed, rolled a cigarette—with filter—and lit it. At that moment Duško, her husband, entered the house, and sat by the table next to us. We sat talking; about their family in Montenegro and our families back in Latvia. Duško said: 'We've got two children; they both live with us. One's already been married for years and has three children and the other got married just a week ago—there were 150 people at the wedding.' Upon hearing this, Sanja finished her cigarette and moved to the other side of the couch, closer to some large saucepans. There was milk fermenting in them—the first stage on the way to becoming more cheese. Sanja lifted the lid and stirred the white mixture. Duško continued talking: 'Yes; we've got a daughter, too. She's married. But she lives away.' He spoke as if he were talking of some distant relation, someone far from their daily business and outside their field of interest. Sanja went on stirring the pot. Without turning, she shook her head slightly and said in a soft voice, as if to herself: 'Yes, daughters are our children, too.'

Duško was in a good mood, so he went on to talk of many different things. He told us about his life on the *katun*, the traditional summer pastures. He showed us a photograph of himself standing in front of a small white summer pasture house. He was smiling broadly. Sanja too participated in the conversation, adding a remark now and then. At one point she straightened her woollen hat and said: 'Sorry! I've got to wear this hat all the time because otherwise my head gets cold and aches. I don't know why.' She started rolling another cigarette. Duško cracked a joke, poking fun at his wife. 'It's funny isn't it?' he said. 'There's nothing in her head—but it hurts!' We thought Sanja was not amused.

Duško was in his late 70s when we visited him and Sanja, who was about five years younger. To anyone who has read life stories of Montenegrin women, that episode might invoke images of the patriarchal order in Montenegrin society—where the ideal man is a warrior while his women stay in the background and provide support operations.[1] Zorka Milich's collection of life histories of centenarian Montenegrin women testifies to 20th-century-lives of subordination that had very little genuine joy but were packed with extremely hard work and steadily witnessed the horrors of war and death. A similar picture is drawn in studies of Montenegrin hegemonic masculinity.[2] In a sort of 'worst-case scenario',

1 Zorka Milich, A Stranger's Supper. An Oral History of Centenarian Women in Montenegro, New York 1995.

2 Cf., for example, Branko Banović, The Montenegrin Warrior Tradition. Questions and Controversies over NATO Membership, New York 2016; Saša Nedeljković, Maskulinitet kao alternativni parametar etničkog identiteta. Crnogorci u Lovćencu / Masculinity as an Alternative Parameter of Ethnic Identity. Montenegrins in the Village of Lovćenac, *Етноантрополошки проблеми / Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 5, no. 1 (2010), 51–67, http://www.anthroserbia.org/Journals/Article/703. All Internet references were accessed on 22 January 2021.

submission to such patriarchy is interpreted as virtual slavery—as it was by Frilley and Vlahovich for example in the late 19th century when they described Montenegrin women as the 'unfortunate spouse' and the 'slave-wife'.[3]

However, the situation in today's Montenegro is very far from allowing any such one-dimensional conclusions, for the dynamics of gender relations such as can be observed in everyday life are much more subtle. In fact they are to a large degree home-grown, and in many cases linked to economic circumstances rather than ideology. Certain aspects, such as the habit of depriving daughters of their inheritance, have proved stubbornly resistant to long-established equality provisions under the law.[4] I shall demonstrate in the following that such resilience can be understood only if the larger sociocultural picture is taken into consideration, and in particular the virilocal post-marital residence pattern, following which the default position is that a new bride is expected to move to her husband's household.

I wish to avoid the age old trap of arguing along an East–West, or European–non-European line, and I have done so here by paying attention to local dynamics. There is a lasting local as well as international history of arguing the gender situation in Montenegro and the Balkans more generally in terms of backwardness as against modernity, or the oriental Byzantine tradition as against the individualist liberal West.[5] That diffusionist frame within which ideas are conceived in certain centres and then spread to other, more marginal areas is applied equally both by those who are enthusiastic about the 'Western influence' and those who oppose it as threatening local identity and authenticity, based on heteronormativity and 'traditional' patriarchal gender roles.[6] The same framework is used for support both by those who would argue from within the local societies, and by those with an external perspective.

3 G. Frilleĭ / I. Vlokhity, Sovremennaia Chernogoriia, St. Peterburg 1876, 35. For the French original cf. Gabriel Frilley / Jovan Wlahovitj, Le Montenegro Contemporain (1876), Whitefish/MT 2010.

4 Jennifer A. Zenovich, Willing the Property of Gender. A Feminist Autoethnography of Inheritance in Montenegro, *Women's Studies in Communication* 39, no. 1 (2016), 28–46, https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2015.1113217.

5 For a discussion in depth of this trend cf. Elissa Helms, East and West Kiss. Gender, Orientalism, and Balkanism in Muslim-Majority Bosnia-Herzegovina, *Slavic Review* 67, no. 1 (2008), 88–119, https://doi.org/10.2307/27652770. On Montenegro specifically cf. Danijel Kalezić / Čarna Brković, Queering as Europeanisation, Europeanisation as Queering. Challenging Homophobia in Everyday Life in Montenegro, in: Bojan Bilić, ed, LGBT Activism and Europeanisation in the Post-Yugoslav Space. On the Rainbow Way to Europe, London 2016, 155–177; Branko Banović, (Dis)functional Potential of the Traditional Montenegrin Gender Relations Model in Contemporary Identity Politics, *Sociologija* 54, no. 3 (2012), 463–48; Mary Edith Durham, Some Montenegrin Manners and Customs, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 39 (1909), 85–96.

6 Nedeljković, Maskulinitet kao alternativni parametar etničkog identiteta; Banović, The Montenegrin Warrior Tradition.

My own opposition to that framework is not to suggest that ideas do not spread, for they do; in fact such spreading is one of the most fundamental principles of all human society.[7] However, the sharing of ideas, in whichever direction, always tends to have far-reaching political implications. Thus, for instance, those who wish to promote change in the existing gender situation in Montenegro, often find Europeanisation a useful argument to support their cause. At the same time however, the Europeanisation argument is a potentially fragile one, as it positions altered gender relations as something introduced from outside—from the EU, or more cogently the West; altering the gender situation on those terms is therefore not 'authentic'.[8] Furthermore, those who identify authenticity and lay claim to national identity tend to see such outside forces as endangering national identity.[9]

On the other hand, the 'Europeanisation' perspective too readily ignores the fact that certain processes and debates on gender relations are perfectly 'authentic' in so far as they originate locally. Surely, local dynamics do not exist outside the information and discussions that happen elsewhere, but that only testifies to the artificiality of any such division between 'Us' (locals) and 'Them' (outsiders). Thus, when the openly homosexual Slavko Kalezić represented Montenegro in the Eurovision song contest in 2017, men in Njeguši commented rather grumpily that they were not interested in 'our faggot's' (*naša pederčina*) success. The Eurovision contest takes place of course within an international framework that is known for its liberal attitude to gendered expressions. All the same, Kalezić was accepted as 'ours', not 'theirs'.[10]

Njeguši and Its Genderscape

Njeguši is a small but historically important village in Montenegro. It lies roughly 800 m above sea level, above the city of Kotor. The Bay of Kotor on the Adriatic Sea is only a few kilometres away as the crow flies, but the winding mountain road takes at least 40 min to travel by car. The steep mountains rising all around have throughout history made Njeguši difficult for invading armies to conquer, so that the area has been the cradle of Montenegrin independence movements, while its location on a major trade route once gave it an important economic role. However,

7 Maurice Bloch, In and Out of Each Other's Bodies. Theory of Mind, Evolution, Truth, and the Nature of the Social, Boulder/CO 2013.

8 Kalezić / Brković, Queering as Europeanisation, Europeanisation as Queering.

9 Čarna Brković, 'Floating Signifiers.' Negotiations of the National on the Internet Forum Café del Montenegro, *Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society* 57, no. 1 (2009), 55–69.

10 Cf. the video of his Eurovision performance, Slavko Kalezić – Space (Montenegro) LIVE at the first Semi-Final, 9 May 2017, *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rQ1BXJpfa4I.

a census of 2011 showed that the village had only 35 residents,[11] although by my estimate approximately 150 people live there permanently, or almost permanently. When I was doing my fieldwork in 2017 the village played a significant role in the local tourist trade and, despite its dwindling population, remains an influential hub for the production of the Montenegrin ham known as *pršut*, the name being a corruption of *prosciutto*, the Italian word for ham. The meat is salted, smoked, and dried for at least a year.[12]

The historic importance of the village is derived from the fact that it was the birthplace of many of the former prince-bishops (*vladika*) and secular rulers of the Petrović-Njegoš dynasty who dominated the Montenegrin political scene from the 17th to the early 20th century. An obvious example of such individuals is prince-bishop Petar II Petrović-Njegoš, also known simply as Njegoš (1813–1851), who is a canonical literary classic in the Yugoslav realm. In fact, Njegoš's cultural legacy is truly staggering. As early as 1923 Milivoy Stanoyevich was describing him as the 'Magnus Parens of modern Yugoslav poetry'.[13] In 1998, in his book on the literature and cultural politics of Yugoslavia, Andrew B. Wachtel featured on the cover a photograph of Njegoš's monumental mausoleum which stands on top of the nearby Lovćen mountain and was designed by Ivan Mestrović.[14]

In 2017 I spent a total of four months in Njeguši, three in the spring and one in the autumn. A stroll through the village always gives me the impression that I am in a nearly men-only space, for about two thirds of the permanent residents are male, while of the remaining third of women only a handful are younger than 50. The rest are distinctly elderly and are almost never to be seen outside their homes. However, there are other women, women in a kind of split households whose husbands live in Njeguši while the women themselves live elsewhere. During my fieldwork I had dealings with approximately 20 of the women in Njeguši, either in informal conversations or in a more structured interview format. Some of my interlocutors lived permanently in Njeguši, while others travelled there only for shorter periods.

On an average day the village in fact seems largely abandoned. For instance, in the settlement of Raičevići I counted 77 houses, of which only about 17 were permanently inhabited. The village of Njeguši includes a number of smaller settlements (*selo*), of which the liveliest currently are Erakovići and Raičevići. Other hamlets, such as Velji and Mali Zalazi, are completely abandoned, while still

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11 Monstat, Uprava za statistiku, n. d., http://monstat.org/cg/pxweb.php.

12 Cf. Njeguški pršut, Delicious Montenegro – Delicious Food of Montenegro, https://deliciousmontenegro.me/product/njeguski-prsut-smoked-ham/.

13 Milivoy S. Stanoyevich, Modern Yugoslav Literature, *The North American Review* 217, no. 806 (1923), 96–106, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25112922.

14 Andrew Baruch Wachtel, Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation. Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia, Stanford/CA 1998.

others, such as Žanjev Do, are inhabited only during weekends or the holiday season.

Women are chiefly remarkable by their public absence from the village's everyday outdoor routine. While, as I have mentioned, most of the women living in the village are rather older—I saw no woman younger than 30 living permanently anywhere in Njeguši, and at the most only three were younger than 50—more or less the same thing applied to the men there, although a ten-year-old boy and a young man in his early twenties lived there. However, at least 15 of the men were between 20 and 40.

The absence from village life of young people, particularly young women, and of children, is partly linked to the pattern of split-family residence. Women and their children do indeed live in Njeguši: their husbands respectively fathers are there, and so it is natural to assume that a family's home is there. However, the situation is not always clear and the truth tends to depend on what perspective one takes. In fact, almost all the wives and children have moved to nearby towns, where they live most of the time, where they work, and where the children go to school. For large periods therefore spouses live at a quite significant distance from one another, in a split-family arrangement. Women take the children to visit their fathers and grandparents during weekends and at holiday times, while spending most of their everyday lives in the nearby towns.

One rationale for the split pattern is that there are no schools in Njeguši. There used to be two, but both are now closed, the buildings abandoned and slowly decaying. Shortage of pupils closed the last school officially about 10 years ago, and this lack of schools only makes it so much more difficult for the few remaining families to live together in Njeguši. Indeed, in spite of the fact that property in Njeguši is significantly cheaper than in urban Kotor or Cetinje, only one family with a school-age child had lately bought property in the village, making them the only recent incomers. It seems that no others were prepared to brave the 40-min daily drive to school in Kotor along an always hazardous road made positively treacherous by snow and ice during the winter months. That lack of a school is a comparatively recent reason for the exodus of other young families, which is itself a result of a pre-existing draining away of inhabitants.

A longer-term and more permanent reason for the village's abandonment is that many perceive a life in the city or nearby towns as more desirable than that of the Njeguši countryside. Njeguši has many amenities, such as electricity, heating, running water (at least in most cases and most of the time), sewage and a refuse disposal system. The inhabitants have access to a reasonably priced Internet connection and most have mobile telephones. They have satellite television and own cars. However, life in the village can be lonely and tedious. The only public places in which to socialize are the few restaurants, and only one of them is open

all year round. Moreover, the restaurants too are the almost exclusive territory of men. As a consequence therefore, the centre of life for most villagers is either Kotor or Cetinje, rather than Njeguši. The cities are also where there is a far greater chance of finding a job. The fact that so few of either gender have stayed in the village and that most remaining inhabitants are pensioners or approaching retirement, is testament to the generally dwindling appeal of rural life.

The men who do live permanently in Njeguši do not do so solely because they wish to sacrifice their lives on the altar of family well-being. Rather, a specific perception of freedom attracts them to the village, as was made clear to me by restaurant owner Milo when I spent an afternoon with him enjoying the sun in front of his establishment. As we sat drinking *rakija* and listening to a performance by Srdjan, a local *guslar*, Milo told me that some years before, he had moved down to Kotor and had started working for a private company. As he explained it, prospects had seemed good until he came into conflict with management:

> 'When they started accusing me of things I hadn't done, I said 'Good-bye!' and came back here where nobody can order me around. This is freedom: that we can sit here with Srdjan [the musician]; we feel safe and secure and nobody can tell us what to do. It's quite different from the cities where you've got to watch every move you make and every word you say.'

Milo had sacrificed the benefits of the city, which from his perspective were dubious anyway, for personal independence. He could now go hunting whenever and however he wanted. He showed me a picture from his latest hunting expedition into the surrounding mountains, showing a wild goat kill, seen through the telescopic sight of Milo's hunting rifle. This was what Milo meant by freedom, but otherwise he did the same as most other middle-aged men in the village—he worked there, ran his restaurant and operated a *pršut* production business, and so provided for his family who spent most of their time living in Kotor.

My exchange with Milo reveals then, not least, the fragilities of masculine identity, for among other considerations it was Milo's idea of masculinity that he felt was much more threatened by life in the city than in Njeguši. There were times in the city when he would always find himself positioned outside the box of what perceived wisdom saw as the appropriate male social position.[15]

For women on the other hand, the appeal of freedom might make town-life more attractive, effectively taking them in the opposite direction. In addition, a split household with women and children mostly living separately from husband and father might offer some escape from patriarchal and therefore male-dominated family structures.[16]

15 On the fragility of masculine identities in Montenegro cf. Banović, The Montenegrin Warrior Tradition.

All the same, none of that necessarily means that women in Njeguši are bound to domestic chores, nor are they completely absent from public life nor the economy. A number of women in Njeguši run their small tourist-oriented souvenir businesses and have their own stands in the *pijaca*, as the Montenegrins call the village 'square'—another word derived from the Italian, in this case, *piazza*. Such women too have therefore, at least to an extent, entered into a sphere that would otherwise be occupied exclusively by men. For instance, during my fieldwork a number of women who owned stands on the *pijaca* were as a result able to join in a mostly male citizens' meeting convened in one of the former school buildings.

Some women work on their family farms and are often left completely in charge of the small local trade in the farm's produce. Sanja's and Duško's family for example, whom I introduced in my opening vignette, engaged in such trading. Sanja was in charge of cheese-making, as well as trading the cheese and meat produced by Duško and other male members of the family. When she had too little cheese to sell any of it, her daughter-in-law stepped in with produce of her own. Typically, neither of the women's husbands had any part in their trading. If the men were even present during the transactions, they mostly engaged in small talk with their 'guests' who were the clients. Whenever there were discussions of price, the men seemed almost oblivious of the whole process; and in fact if the lady of the house was not at home, their men simply refused to engage in any discussion of business. Clearly, their women's trading activity was not within the men's sphere.

Regarding economic engagement in the village, therefore, a gendered scale emerges that largely oscillates between divisions into male-and-female, and public-and-private. On the one end there is the home-based trade pursued only by women, while on the other end there is the high-volume public trade controlled exclusively by men, in goods like *pršut* or the running of restaurants. While this short sketch of the economic division of the genders might not quite capture the whole picture, it does emphasise how gender relations, so far from excluding women actually provide them instead with a great deal of self-sufficiency and flexibility.

16 While I have no ethnographic data of my own directly touching this issue, I have borrowed this idea from the Russian ethnographer Pavel Rovinskiĭ, who observed life in Njeguši in the 1870s. He too described a pattern of seasonally split families, where women formed temporary female-dominated households in the *katuns,* the summer pastures. Cf. Pavel Rovinskiĭ, Niegushi, *Russkaia Mysl'* 2, no. 1 (1881), 364–390*;* Pavel Rovinskiĭ, Chernogoriia v eia proshlom i nastoiashchem, vol. 2/1, St. Peterburg 1897, https://runivers.ru/lib/book3573/42941/.

A Man's Home and Its Consequences

There is another significant factor influencing the number of women in Njeguši, and that is the tradition of excluding daughters from inheritance, one of the most persistent informal institutions in Montenegro and one that stubbornly evades state regulation. Lawmakers have been attempting to fight the practice since the early 19th century, and even today it not only still exists but is widespread. As my fieldwork observations show, the resilience of the practice is due to the existence of a link between the exclusion of daughters from their family's property schemes, and another tradition, that of virilocal post-marital residence, which is itself complementary to discriminatory inheritance practices.

Ervina Dabižinović writes that according to the Law of Prince-Bishop Danilo of 1855, in terms of inheritance a daughter would receive only her dowry. In 1898 the law established that there should be no difference between men and women in the matter of property rights or transmission, but as Dabižinović notes, discrimination continued in practice.[17] Legally, the situation was quite different in the region of the Bay of Kotor which in 1797 had gone from Venetian governance to becoming part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. There, Austrian law emphasized that inheritance should be divided equally between sons and daughters, even if the daughter had moved to a different country.[18] Yet despite those century-old legal regulations the informal practice of inheritance continues to be strongly biased in favour of men.

Jennifer Zenovich has described a dramatic first-hand experience of a daughter suddenly facing family politics excluding females from inheritance.[4] Zenovich is a fourth-generation immigrant to the United States, but her family maintains close contact with their kin in Montenegro and they refer to themselves as Montenegrins. In the episode that Zenovich relayed, her father and she were involved in dividing part of a property in Montenegro. The house had been owned by the Zenovich family for generations, even before her great-grandparents left for the United States. In her text, Zenovich refers to the property as 'the family house' in which she had spent many childhood summers. Part of the house was inherited by Zenovich's grandfather and when he died, a decision had to be taken about who would be the next to inherit it. A family meeting was organised in Montenegro, and as one of the next in line Zenovich believed that she should participate in the talks. However, she was soon banished from the male-only room, an event that began a succession of unexpected further developments.

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17 Ervina Dabižinović, Diskursi o ženama Boke Kotorske: rodni identiteti (1815-2015), PhD thesis, University of Novi Sad, 2017, https://nardus.mpn.gov.rs/bitstream/handle/123456789/9138/Disertacija.pdf?sequence=6&isAllowed=y, 8. For the law, cf. Opšti imovinski zakonik, 1898.

18 Dabižinović, Diskursi o ženama Boke Kotorske, 14.

In her autoethnographic description and feminist interpretation of her involvement in the inheritance process in Montenegro, Zenovich emphasises the helplessness she felt as she experienced such discrimination. She describes how she was sometimes rather unscrupulously manipulated by her male relatives, including her own father. Zenovich interprets her experience through the lens of the symbolic place of women in Montenegrin society, which excludes her not only from the right to inherit property but by implication also from belonging to Montenegrin ethnicity. She describes her link to Montenegro as mediated through property, for if she has a claim to property she is therefore in a position to claim Montenegrin ethnicity. However, she says, 'women […] remain without property and serve as the instrument of inheritance through which male property passes'.[19] In that view the role of women is reduced practically to the role of 'instrument' through which sons are 'produced', who then pass family property from one generation to the next.

My own study adds another layer to this context. As I show below, the gap persists between formal regulation and informal practices of post-marital residence. Being unregulated by any law, post-marital residence practice has remained unchallenged and continues to influence, perhaps even determine, the practice whereby men inherit the bulk of property.[20] In the following, I have contextualised the situations of the inhabitants of Njeguši.

Željko is a married man in his mid-fifties. He was born in Njeguši and has lived most of his life there. With his brother and nephew he owns a *sušara* (a smoke-house for producing *pršut*) and a restaurant that they open during the long tourist season. Meanwhile, his wife Ljubica and two of their three daughters live in Kotor, where they own a flat. Their oldest daughter Marina is at the university in the capital city of Podgorica pursuing a Master's degree and so lives there most of the time. Their youngest daughter Anđela is still at school. While usually resident in Kotor, when in Njeguši Ljubica runs the local post office, part of which has been converted into a souvenir shop and of which she is the only employee. In winter the post office opens only on certain days, but does business daily during the tourist season. Nevertheless, her job as manager of the post-office-cum-souvenir-shop does not imply that Ljubica will be visiting her husband as a matter of course every time she is in Njeguši, although Željko lives barely 500 m from the post office. In fact Ljubica usually goes no further than her post office and then heads back to Kotor. Their middle daughter Jelena, who lives with Ljubica and studies in Kotor, is also seasonally engaged in the

19 Zenovich, Willing the Property of Gender, 38.
20 Klāvs Sedlenieks / Ieva Puzo / Diāna Dubrovska, Informal Institutions in Everyday Life. Montenegro, Riga 2018.

tourist souvenir trade and although during the summers she too travels up from Kotor every day, she goes to see her father only at weekends.

However, Željko does not live alone, for on her retirement his unmarried sister Milena returned to Njeguši to live with Željko in their parents' home, which he now owns. Just a few metres from Željko's house is the house of Milutin, his mother's brother. Milutin, a pensioner, is divorced but has children living in a nearby town. Božena is Milutin's sister, and she lives in Milutin's house, together with Oggy, her French poodle. So as well as being related to each other they are neighbours too, and like any good neighbours, they visit each other quite often. Željko's house has a large kitchen separate from the rest of the house, so Božena and Milutin often visit Željko's and they all sit in the kitchen exchanging news, and chatting about recent events, or they might watch television in the living room. From a traditional Montenegrin point of view, Željko's situation is problematic because he has three daughters but no son. As the opening scene to this study demonstrates, in many cases daughters have either not been counted among the children or mentioned only in passing. Contemporarily, though, many Montenegrins including Željko himself would distance themselves from this kind of attitude.

Traditionally, if they can, newlyweds move into the husband's house. It is a principle not necessarily often and clearly discussed, but is assumed as part of the natural order of things. Thus, for instance, one day Milena, Željko's unmarried sister (I will talk more of unmarried sisters later), made pancakes—the favourite delicacy of Željko's daughter Jelena. While happily munching her share Jelena joked, 'When I get married, I'll have to take Milena with me. I don't know how I could live without her looking after me all the time!'

The force of Jelena's remark was that she was implicitly acknowledging that she will have to move elsewhere when she marries—and most commonly that 'elsewhere' would be expected to be provided by her new husband. In the case of Željko's household of course, 'home' also means the place where the family conducts its business of *pršut* production and runs the restaurant (the *sušara* and living quarters form one continuous complex), but the relationships with the business are gender-specific. Since Jelena studied tourism management, I assumed that she might want to take over the family business, which is closely linked with tourism. However, when I asked her about it, she was genuinely surprised at my question and declined such a prospect. Although again not directly stated, it was quite clear too that none of the other daughters had any idea of taking over their father's business, nor did their parents expect any such thing.

Observing who does what illuminates the future prospects of whoever might take over any business with its property, and that whoever would come from available young men. Despite having no son, Željko works hard to expand and modernize his *sušara*, the smoke-house for preparing his *pršut*, and while his

daughters remain in Kotor and Podgorica preparing for life outside Njeguši, his main allies are his brother Saša and Saša's son Gojko, none of whom lives in the village either. Thus, when Željko discovers that new regulations will require him to cut a door in one wall of the *sušara*, it is Gojko who spends a week burrowing an opening through the sturdy limestone. In fact, the restaurant in the centre of Njeguši is jointly owned by Željko, Saša, and Gojko, and although Gojko lives with his family in Podgorica he comes to Njeguši fairly often—indeed during the tourism season he travels the hour's journey from Podgorica to Njeguši and back almost daily. It seems quite evident that Gojko will be taking over the business after Željko, especially since Željko and he are already partners in it. However, Željko's daughter Jelena too is involved in her parents' business, through her work in the souvenir trade. She too comes often to the village during the tourist season, but almost never visits the restaurant where Željko and Gojko spend hours on end managing things—or simply passing the time with other men.

Virilocality, or the expectation that a bride will move to the home of her groom, means that it is impractical for women to inherit property. If the inheritance were to consist only of money and other movable assets, it would be relatively easy to divide everything among all the heirs, in accordance with the law. However, a field, a house, a farm, or a forest need to be looked after, and the people who attend to property of such kinds need to be within striking distance of them, or the property will tend to decay. That is evident from the state of many of the houses in Njeguši where in time even the sturdy stone buildings disintegrate and become ruins if there is nobody to even visit them regularly, let alone to invest time, effort, and money to maintain them. Virilocal post-marital residence patterns therefore cement as logical and practical the rules of inheritance by which sons inherit property.[21]

Virilocality therefore has very problematic consequences for gender equality and is clearly detrimental to women—particularly any who might find taking over their family's property and business a desirable proposition. Moreover, moving into her new husband's household makes a woman more vulnerable, leaving aside the fact that she will have less say in decisions concerning her husband's property. Željko's daughters have no claim to the family business, nor any particular interest in it. That limits their career opportunities but on the other hand opens up or

21 Cf. Ulf Brunnbauer, Unity in Diversity? Historic Family Forms in Southeastern Europe, *Historijski Zbornik* 64, no. 1 (2012), 95–148, 115, who writes that the property is inherited by those who live on the land, that is sons or husbands. Jennifer Zenovich, in her account, illustrates that this tradition goes beyond this logic, though, when, for instance, those male descendants are included in the calculation who have long moved to, or lived in, the United States. Zenovich, Willing the Property of Gender, 38.

perhaps even pushes them onto more fluid and mobile life-paths. They might end up in a career in the city, or move abroad; they might work in one of the professions, or own a business. The rules of inheritance then, although male-centred, do not always benefit men, for in fact they limit men's choices and life chances. As Željko's nephew, Gojko is in many ways the head of the family business, but that role also binds him to the family's property—and the almost abandoned village of Njeguši.

An example of how a man can come to be saddled with the obligation to look after property, whether he wishes to or not, is Mirko. Mirko worked at the mausoleum of Njegoš, which looks down on the village of Njeguši from the national park of the Lovćen mountain. Mirko was a guard there, on a four-day shift pattern with 12 free days which he usually spent in the village, where he looked after his *sušara* or worked around his house. Mirko's wife and children lived in Kotor. A former colleague of Mirko was Tomo, and it was not too surprising that he was unmarried, given the difficulty of finding a woman of marriageable age in the village. As Radovan, another villager, confessed to me: 'I had to bring a Bosnian woman here.'

Finding a wife is a common problem for men in many rural areas where the same basic rules of inheritance and post-marital residence apply. For instance, there are ethnological and journalistic reports from the Sandžak region in Serbia and northern Montenegro telling of cases where brides are 'imported' from nearby regions of Albania.[22] Professional match-makers visit villages in Albania and paint an attractive picture of a prosperous life and the richness of the prospective groom, but even an elaborate and expensive match-making scheme might still result in desperate grooms being left with neither money nor bride. If success does result, the hopeful groom eventually visits his intended bride, makes proper family introductions, and finally takes his prize away with him. However, such brides are not deprived of any choice in the matter. Indeed, a bride may change her mind and run away either on the way to her future husband's house, or even after spending a short time there. In the meantime though, the 'match-maker' has had the money.

Men are thus bound to the village by their duty to look after their ancestors' property. However, many, like restaurant owner Milo above, will see that as representing the freedom that life has to offer. Women, by the same principle, are

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22 Armanda Hysa, Srpsko-albanski mešoviti brakovi: kada patrijarhalnost lomi barijere nacionalizma, in: Aleksandar Pavlović et al., eds, Figura neprijatelja: preosmišljavanje srpsko-albanskih odnosa, Belgrade 2015, 243–258; Aida Skorupan, Bez novca i obećane nevjeste iz Albanije ostalo nekoliko muškaraca sa sjevera, *Vijesti*, 6 February 2019, https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/drustvo/85305/bez-novca-i-obecane-nevjeste-iz-albanije-ostalo-nekoliko-muskaraca-sa-sjevera.

forced—or free, depending on their point of view—to pursue their lives in a wider world. Pero, another of my interlocutors, had met his wife away from Njeguši. 'We're here for now, but I expect he [Pero] will buy a flat for me in Kotor soon,' she told me. It was not clear whether she meant it would be a place just for her and their potential children, or for all of them. Most probably Pero would be expected to continue managing the mid-size farm that he would eventually inherit from his father. But it was understood that it was Pero, the husband, who, having inherited the property, was expected to buy the flat in Kotor. His wife, who had already come from outside, preferred to stay in Kotor, like most other Njeguši men's wives.

Not all men remain stuck on their property, however, particularly if there are job opportunities in the towns. For instance, Veljko, a man in his forties, has spent most of his life in Tivat, another town in the vicinity and by the sea. He too owns a house in Njeguši, which he keeps as a summerhouse and occasionally rents to seasonal workers or tourists. He has always had the idea that he would one day go to live in Njeguši, but only if he could find a proper job. His children are adult now and no longer live with him and his wife, so it is up to the two of them to decide where they end up. In Tivat they must pay for their accommodation, while their house in Njeguši is paid for. However, Veljko was not prepared to lead the life so many of his peers do, with his family at a distance, so that when a perfect opportunity finally came his way in the form of a job offer as a guard at a local tourist resort, he declined it, saying 'Well, perhaps *sjutra* [tomorrow]…'. But he is an exception. The principle of virilocal post-marital residence and property inheritance are bound up with each other and so naturally tend to influence the movement of men and women differently. Women are more mobile and move to urban centres, while remote sites of agricultural production such as Njeguši are populated with single or 'semi-single' men.

If a woman is unmarried there is no need for her to move away from her parents' household. She therefore stays and effectively (although not legally) inherits her share of the property through usage rights. In Njeguši that principle has resulted in the above-mentioned phenomenon of brother-sister households which so puzzled me during my fieldwork. The concentration of the arrangement there was unexpectedly high. In the hamlet of Raičevići for example, which is one of the livelier parts of Njeguši, six of the 17 households followed that pattern, with all the women concerned in their late 60s or older.

The children and grandchildren of the men were living away permanently and visited only occasionally. Every such visit was a source of pride and happiness, the children's fathers and their spinster sisters talking of the children as if they were their own. In one such household, Milena, the sister, had spent all her adult life in Podgorica, studying at the university and then working as a medical professional.

Never having married, when she retired Milena returned to her family home. She lived there with her brother and his family, doing the domestic chores and assuming the usual activities of an adult woman in the lives of her brother's children, such as the occasion mentioned above when she made pancakes for her niece Jelena. The only other inhabited houses in the immediate neighbourhood were both occupied by brother-sister couples. In one of them the brother was married and his children lived elsewhere, while in the other both were unmarried. As that pattern seemed unusual, I asked some of the people about it, but the villagers could offer no explanation. However, more contextual analysis shows that such living arrangements are a logical consequence of complex principles of inheritance and marital residence. Most women leave their parents' home on marriage to join their husband's family or to form a neolocal residence together with their husbands. Married women who might then have been expected to move to Njeguši according to the tradition of virilocality, instead move to nearby towns. Thus, unmarried sisters either stay in the new locations they move to or, like Milena, return 'home' on retirement.

Men and Women Negotiating Power

What I have described up to now might well be interpreted as a concrete set of practices, part of Montenegrin culture within which various matters, female emancipation among them, are impossible—a view that could lead down that well-beaten discursive path of an 'East vs West' interpretation, or 'tradition vs change'. However, what I saw in Njeguši and elsewhere revealed a lively process of negotiation of gender and power relations. Interestingly and importantly, my observations echo those of the Russian ethnographer Pavel Rovinskiĭ who did detailed fieldwork in Njeguši as long ago as the 1870s. Rovinskiĭ, in demonstrating their independence, boldness and lack of fear, contested the view then popular that Montenegrin women were 'enslaved'.[23]

The only time I heard raised voices during my stay in Njeguši was between a father and son who were the only members of their household. Perhaps it was because there were so few people below pensionable age that communication was mostly in hushed tones. But somewhere in that silence Duško would make a sexist joke and Sanja would quietly oppose him. Opposing a husband's opinion is not rare in Njeguši, but its mode is of wide range. Mirko and Marija too, who live a few hundred metres from Duško and Sanja, have their different views of gender roles and relations, but where Sanja speaks only in the background, Marija openly jokes

23 Rovinskiĭ, Niegushi; Rovinskiĭ, Chernogoriia v eia proshlom i nastojashchem.

about the supposed omnipotence of the male head of the household, as the following vignette illustrates.

Mirko is about 80, his wife Marija about 70 years old, an age difference that corresponds to the normal pattern locally, where headstones in the cemeteries around the village reveal that a fair number of wives were at least 10 years younger than their husbands.[24] Mirko is rather proud of his choice of wife, but instead of referring to himself directly he speaks from what he sees as his wife's point of view: 'She made the right choice, she married a true man, a man that would….' At this point he clearly stumbles on the truth of a matter he is not quite sure how to explain in a more or less correct or polite way, but Marija laughs along with him. 'Come on,' she says, 'Tell him what you got up to and how come we've ended up with three sons!' Mirko is clearly feeling somewhat uncomfortable by now, but his wife has helped him out of his embarrassment. The whole manner and relationship between Mirko and Marija is considerably more relaxed and playful than that between Duško and Sanja.

Mirko is old now; he is a little deaf and moves slowly, leaning heavily on a walking stick. Marija therefore does quite a lot around the house. One day as we talked, Mirko wanted to know the situation with marriage in my native Latvia, and in particular with divorce. 'Do you have many mixed marriages over there?,' he inquired and explained what he meant: ethnically mixed. Such marriages, he supposed, would indicate greater likelihood of a divorce. Marija did not agree and said that marriages are not dissolved because they are 'mixed' but because people do not get on with each other. I said that some people in Latvia divorce because of the 'empty nest syndrome'. Marija found the term funny and laughed aloud, but Mirko was rather worried. 'That must be horrible when old people get divorced. I'd never divorce! I'm old and I can't do much around the house, so my wife does almost everything.' 'Oh, is that so?!' Marija pretended to be outraged; but she was laughing again, really. 'But I don't care. If I could find a rich man, I wouldn't think twice. I'd get divorced immediately!' But she added, 'It wasn't like that in the old days.' She explained what she meant:

> 'For example: in the old days it wasn't seemly for a woman to drive a car, she would be ashamed. Only men drove. Women had to work hard. Some of them [and here she made it clear that her husband was among them] would like it if that was still the situation. But I was never going to allow that to happen!'

24 Brunnbauer explained this tendency by pointing to a characteristic of Christian families in the Balkans, who expected the husband's household to be established by the time of his marriage, Brunnbauer, Unity in Diversity?, 127.

Similarly, among men there is a range of attitudes towards the power dynamic between genders. One day, when I was talking to Petar and Luka, I mentioned the meeting of Njeguši citizens, which I referred to above. Neither of the two men had been to the meeting, but Petar said, 'We've already given them too much power.' He meant of course women in general and was using the meeting of citizens as an example. His friend Luka, also his business partner and neighbour, disagreed. 'It's only on paper, not in reality,' to which I replied that effectively there had been three women at the meeting. 'You see!' said Petar triumphantly. Luka still did not agree. He thought that by giving the example of just three women among 30 men at the meeting, Petar was clearly contradicting himself in saying that women have more power than men.

The discourse that women are subordinated was occasionally touched lightly upon in conversation, but not always in the same way. When I asked Željko to relate his ancestral lineage, it was no surprise that we spent an hour or so enumerating the members of the male side, even consulting his wife on the telephone from time to time. However, he then asked me if his mother's line would interest me as well, adding, 'The mother's line is actually more important. The most important features are inherited through the mother and, in fact, out of both parents one can only be absolutely sure about one's mother.' I nevertheless have not yet got round to compiling his mother's line. It is quite possible that Željko did not know much about his mother's lineage, although that was not the only time I heard him emphasise its importance. The fact that he even mentioned it contradicts the typical assumption about the patriarchal Montenegrin society—something about which Željko himself tried to demur.

Conclusion

When Russian ethnographer Pavel Rovinskiĭ wrote his description of Njeguši as far back as the late 19th century, it was vehemently repudiating accusations made by his contemporary ethnographers about the extremely cruelly used and undignified place they thought women held in Montenegro. To counter their view, he provided descriptions of women in Njeguši who showed inherent dignity, independence, boldness, and even impudence.[25] In my own fieldwork in the Njeguši of 2017 I found I was able to tease out a range of attitudes and dynamics in the points of view of men and women alike, regarding what one should or should not do and what the actual or desirable balance of power is between the genders.

25 Rovinskiĭ, Niegushi; Rovinskiĭ, Chernogoriia v eia proshlom i nastoiashchem.

What I observed was a village of men most of whom were middle-aged or older. The women I met who lived permanently in the village were all at least 40 and most of them considerably older. However, most of the men mentioned their women and children who lived in the nearby towns of Cetinje and Kotor, or in the capital Podgorica. I could see that there was some mechanism in operation that kept the women away from the village while simultaneously holding the men there, and eventually traced it to the patriarchal principles of inheritance. However, the persistence of a practice that has been outlawed for nearly 200 years must be viewed in the context of the complementary practice of virilocal post-marriage inheritance. As no laws regulate where newlyweds may live and how they should arrange their households, the practice lingers unchallenged and is crucial to keeping inheritance traditions alive.

There are advantages and disadvantages to these practices for both men and women. Women have the arguably dubious freedom of lacking both inheritance and the associated ties that would have bound them to property in rural areas. Women are therefore able—or perhaps indeed they are effectively obliged to—engage in the urban life with its many features generally enjoyed by people in Montenegro. Men on the other hand, while they do indeed inherit, must manage the burdens that come with it. For instance many find it difficult to establish families of their own or, if they already have families, in fully participating in family life. At the same time however, life in the village can offer men freedom from the sort of constraints found in professional life in town. Meanwhile, the exclusion of women from inheritance by the principles of post-marital residence implies that if women do not marry there is no need for them to be deprived of property. By staying in the household women maintain their right to the use of it and are as effective a part of it as their brothers and any children they might have.

My study of the village of Njeguši must be seen to present the general outlines and overall principles of only Montenegrin gender relations. As the ethnographic examples demonstrate, internal dynamics do exist. Sanja clearly felt obliged to remark that daughters too were their children, but then for his part Željko contributed by adding that women were his ancestors, too. Thus both showed that they had in a sense broken with an old tradition. Similarly, every day, men and women, husbands and wives, talk among themselves, negotiating their relations and the power they have over their own lives and over each other. The levels and intensities of their negotiations differ, but they certainly demonstrate that the oft-used 'Europeanisation' discourse as one of required change is inadequate. Montenegro is much more differentiated than suggested by interpretations that would position it as lying somewhere between tradition and modernity, or between East and West.

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Bionote

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