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Arla Gruda

## **Lone mothers in Central Albania during communism and after 1990 – caring and earning responsibilities and regulations**

### **Abstract**

This article discusses how Albanian women – all of the sample here being lone mothers – attempt to balance between their earning and caring activity. The here discussed research reveals how the situation of lone mothers in Albania changed drastically after 1990. As there have always been moderated regulations for support to lone mothers during communism as well as after, the correlation between different factors gives insights into a more precarious need for individual handling of job possibilities without social security on the one hand and acceptance of different sources for social support on the other hand.

### **Introduction**

The main debates about “lone mothers” among Western and English speaking gender scholars evolved around the contested category and the way welfare states adopted legislation for socio-economic policy provision for this category of women. The element which joins all lone mothers in one category is the fact of raising their children alone, without a male figure. Kilkey (2000, p. 68) contested this element by raising the issue of how lone mothers’ households are counted in national censuses when living in joint families with relatives. Rowlingson and McKay (2002, pp. 22–23) contested it by looking at their civil status according to marriage and cohabitation law.

This article explores the lone mothers’ positions in the welfare state in Central Albania during communism and after. It traces historically how the socialist welfare state treated lone mothers with regard to their earning and caring responsibilities. It moreover addresses and shows how lone mothers packaged their incomes during communism and after, and how these incomes regulated the caring and earning responsibilities in both periods.

The study of the Albanian case elaborated in this article<sup>1</sup> is informed by the debate among gender scholars about how the welfare state allows lone mothers to package their income, and the way it positions them as either workers or mothers or both. Knijn and Kremer (1997, pp. 332–333) suggest that welfare states should consider the timing element of care, and grant individuals the right to choose to give and receive care in a life cycle. They advocate considering care as a social right equally important as the right to employment.

Income packaging is a gender scholarship concept developed by Lewis and Hobson (1997, p. 5). They explain that in Western and Nordic European countries there exist three types of income packages for lone mothers: “labor market, absent father and the state” (Ibid., p. 5). However, the picture is different for Southern European countries, such as Italy and Greece, where the family network plays an important role in supporting lone mothers to raise their children (Ibid., p. 5). In other countries, the community or the voluntary sector can become a good substitute for this.

Kilkey (2000) analyzes the employment and care policies for lone mothers as an application of citizenship rights. Kilkey’s research focuses on policies which allow lone mothers to be employed while they have caring responsibilities, to care full time, or to move between care and work. Regarding employment policy, Kilkey concentrates on two types: reconciliation policies, which allow lone mothers to combine care and work, and other financial incentives which stimulate lone mothers to increase their income stability while they are in paid employment (ibid., p. 89). Analyzing these policies, Kilkey concludes that lone mothers are positioned as either carers/mothers or workers within the welfare state (2000, p. 94).

These scholarly approaches are used in this article to explore the income packaging that took place among lone mothers in Central Albania during communism and after.

Terminologically and legislatively speaking, lone mothers (unmarried mothers) in the communist period were present in Albanian social legislation from 1950 until 1966. They returned to the attention (*de jure*) of the government in 2000, under the name “women headed families.” By definition “women headed families” include also those women who are not mothers and the women who have their invalid husbands in the house. The difference between this definition and mine is that I include only women who are mothers and who raise their children alone, without the presence of a partner.

Sociologists and law scholars in Albania of after 1990, mostly in cooperation with women nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in the country, undertook research to observe the reasons for divorce and its implications in the lives of divorced women and their children. For example Beqja and Sokoli (2000) wrote about it in their book *Divorce, observations and reflections*.

In 1995, Grabocka, in cooperation with the women's association *Refleksione*, conducted a survey among 71 women living in the three Albanian cities Tirana, Korça and Pogradeci; 40 of them were divorced during communism and 31 more were divorced after 1990. The questionnaire focused on the thoughts, opinions and feelings of divorced women over a broad range of questions. Fullani and Malile, family lawyers and law scholars, research under the title *Divorce: its causes and outcomes*. They analyzed 7204 divorce files in the courts of Tirana, Durrës, Lezhë, Fier and Korçë during the period 1991–1999. Amongst other issues they raised the problem of the children's alimony after divorce and how fathers can pay it.

In 2009, the UNIFEM (today UNWomen) funded research to analyze the Economic Aid and Gender Equality in the municipality of Elbasan (central Albania) and the Commune of Rrethina in Kukës (North-East Albania). The research in both targeted localities aimed at interviewing separately and in groups women-headed households and men-headed households, parallel to interviews with local and central policy stakeholders and analysis of the policy provision. The research recommended the inclusion of more types of female-headed families, even in cases which are not foreseen by law drafters as fitting the criteria for being named the head of households, in order to receive economic aid.

The *Albanian Association for Women Householders*, in cooperation with the Centre for Civic and Legal Initiatives conducted a survey among 900 women heads of households in six sub-rural areas of Tirana. Its findings were made available to local and central policy makers in Tirana and to civic representatives. The aim of this project and the report they drafted was to analyze Albanian legislation of the provision of rights for women heads of households and to monitor its application in six regions of Tirana.

Unlike the above surveys, this article focuses on analyzing welfare legislation on caring and earning reconciling policies for lone mothers in central Albania for both the communist and post-communist periods. It has a gender perspective in legislation analysis, and it employs a diverse range of methodological approaches. A survey with open, semi-open and closed questions was conducted with 93 lone mothers who raised their chil-



dren without a partner in Central Albania (Durrës and Elbasan) after 1990 to 2013. The survey was conducted via face to face interviews (45 minutes to one hour) among women who answered the prepared questionnaire. 49 women were divorced lone mothers, 15 separated (have not yet formalized the divorce due to lack of financial resources), 14 widowed, 9 abandoned, and 6 others in the process of getting divorced.

The data from 8 lone mothers who raised their children during communism was gathered via face to face interviews (1 hour) through a prepared questionnaire with qualitative questions. For the purpose of the interviewing code of ethics, the names of the interviewed women will not be made public in this article. They are designated as “anonymous” with a consecutive number.

Methodologically speaking, information about legislation was gathered in the city library of Durrës and Tirana National Library and from the Official Gazette. The law changes were traced via rigorous analysis of the legislation, and analysis of the national and international reports on socio-economic growth of Albania.

### **Lone mothers and the welfare state during communism**

#### *Employment and social protection policy for lone mothers in communist Albania*

At the start of socialism, more than 75 percent of the population lived in rural areas. The need for an urban labor force was immediate, as textile, metallurgic, glass, wood, plastic and tractor factories were rapidly built (“New Albania,” 1965, no. 3). The increase of the working population introduced the need to organize the labor force. The first Law on Social State Insurance was drafted in 1946, the first Labor Code in 1948 and the organization of the Institute of Social Insurances started in 1950.

Article 11 of the Social State Insurance law no. 4171, drafted on September 13th 1966, is pertinent to a gender analysis, as it allocated the obligation to care for each other when sick to family members and the right to care for their children to working women. The rights were restricted, and did not apply to those working people who had other family members in the house who could take care of the sick, or when the sick person was cared for in public health care institutes. Also, this right to care was limited in time (three days for sick family members and ten days for children) and reduced the earning power of people who offered it by 60 percent (OGPRA, 29 September, no. 6, 1966, p. 154).

Though the language of the law is neutral and allows for the possibility that both men and women could take care of sick family members,

ultimately the burden to do the caring is placed on the mother, especially for younger children. A second noticeable regulation of this article is the obligatory aspect of care for every family member. The care aspect was also legislatively introduced in the Family Code of 1965 (the first such code in Albania), which indicated the significant role of each individual in the family and the care and financial welfare obligation of every working individual towards those who could not work for certain reasons. Applying the work of Kremer and Knijn (1997) on organizing the welfare state by considering care both as a right and as an obligation for every individual, it can be noted that the socialist government did recognize care as a right *de jure*. Most importantly it considered it as work, however less valuable than public work.

The care aspect was also present in the Labor Code of 1972, the code of 1980, and the code of 1987, the last one before the collapse of communism. The amount of time working mothers could take off to take care of their sick children could go up to three months per year until the child reached the age of three. This care leave was however unpaid (article 31, Labor Code 1972, p. 18). Article 32 of this code treated the period of child-care after maternity leave as follows: *“The woman who has finished maternity leave and was not able to secure a crèche for her child can receive three months of unpaid leave”* (ibid., p. 19). Only in the Labor Code of 1980 the unpaid leave of working mothers was acknowledged as part of their work history for the purpose of social state insurance (ibid., p. 17).

Article 18 of the Social State Insurance Law dealt with pensions for mothers with many children; beneficiaries could also be divorcées or widowed mothers. This law specified that child-rearing and caring for many children were equal to paid labor for the purpose of the social insurance contribution (OGPRA, 29 September, no. 6, 1966, pp. 155–156). Women who worked in agricultural cooperatives only received this same right in 1989, and after two years they could no longer claim it because of the collapse of communism and subsequent changes of the social insurance system (decree 7339, 13 November 1989, on appendance to the fourth article of the Law no 4976, 29 June 1972 for *The Retirement Pension of the Members of Agricultural Cooperatives* [p. 78, OGPRA 1989]).

Concerning this right there are two resources which question its applicability for agricultural women workers. The first resource is an article by Fatmira Musaj (and colleagues 2012, p. 52) which stresses the differences of rights allocation and entitlements application for rural women during communism. The second resource is the history of the divorced

mother Anonymous 1 from the communist period, 73 years old at the time of interview. She is a mother of six children and worked in the collective state cooperatives for 40 years; she did not retire before the de-unionization of the cooperatives, despite having raised seven children (one child died young).

Asked about the post-divorce support she received from the government concerning child-care, housing or other essential living benefits during the communist period she answered:

*At that time I was a farmer. All those years I ate bread with peppers, onions and salt with my children. My father died young, I had no brother to take care of me. I worked on the farm from its start to the end for 40 years. The state did not give me housing or anything.* (Interview with divorced mother Anonymous 1 from the communist period in Shushicë, Elbasan, on 13 November 2012)

This divorced mother Anonymous 1 did not know anything about the existence of these laws. Moreover, she was poorly educated (she had attended only elementary school), and therefore the application of the law to her situation was left in the hands of those who knew how to proceed accordingly. In the communist period information about women's rights was provided by local branches of the Women's Union of Albania (WUA). This was a national women's organization, lead by communist ideologues with the mission of enforcing women's rights in the country and supporting socialist policies at the community level.

The history of this anonymous divorcee makes clear that this law for women farmers with many children had not been applied in her case. The reason for the non-application of the law can also serve as an illustration of the differences that existed in the social protection of workers in urban areas and those in agricultural cooperatives. Moreover, the benefits deriving from the rights allocated to women in 1989 ceased to exist in 1993 when the Social Insurance System was reformatted.

The Article 29 of the Social Insurance law was dedicated to the family pension, which granted orphan's pension and family pension to the women and children whose head of the family had died (OGPRA, 29 September, no. 6, 1966, p. 159). This article, drafted for the benefit of widows and their children, was similar to Article 11 with regard to care. Like Article 11, Article 29 is neutral in language regarding the spouse (i.e. whether the spouse is male or female). Nonetheless, though the allocation of cash

benefits relating to the care of children in the home does not specifically indicate women, it is clearly implied. There existed an intention during communism to acknowledge legally the care regime of women as a right, although within certain restrictions.

The decision of the Council of Ministers of the People's Republic of Albania no 829, 2 October 1950 (with the Ministry of Health's proposal to improve the health of children in pediatric permanent crèches and to reduce infant mortality) acknowledged the right of women with children born out of wedlock for their newly-born children to be accommodated in permanent crèches. The unmarried mothers were offered accommodation and a basic diet while breast-feeding. When willing to breastfeed other children they were paid an amount of 200 lekë (15 cent) per liter of milk and also a richer diet (OGPRA, 18 October, no. 68, 1950, p. 2). This law did not mention the working hours of unmarried mothers with breast-feeding children; nor did it mention that they had only the caring task to perform. Due to the universal obligation to work in the communist period, and since it is explicitly contradicted, it can be taken for granted that these lone mothers were both workers and carers, but due to lack of housing and a male partner to support them they were offered accommodation and food. Health care was a free universal right.

The first decree on state economic aid for mothers with many children (married and widowed) and lone mothers (non-married) dates to 10 October 1950. This was a state cash-benefit for those lone mothers (non-married) who could not get children's alimony from their partners, and therefore the state fulfilled this role. The same children's alimony was also given to some widowed women who because of their deceased husbands not having had social protection could not have a children's pension. For both lone and widowed mothers the monthly children's pension was given until the child was 12 years old. When these lone mothers had more than three children they could also benefit from the children's pension for mothers with many children. If these women were to start an official relationship with another man who was willing to contribute financially to their children, they could choose to either keep his contribution or the governmental contribution. It should be noted how the socialist government treated lone mothers in its first decades. Until the regulation of the labor force took place and fathers were obligated by law to pay children's alimony via direct governmental withdrawal from their salary, the state had assumed this role. Later on this law ceased to exist, also because of the price regulation of every-day consumer goods. These welfare policies of the first two dec-

ades were quite similar to the family and child allowance for lone mothers in the UK and the Netherlands (Kilkey 2000; Rowlingson/McKay 2002). The difference lay in the provision of the right to care, which was not the case for Albanian lone mothers. In Albania the welfare policies treated them as workers first and then as carers.

Decree no. 1472 of 29 May 1952, which adjusted some of the cash benefits for lone mothers, was banned with decree 4158, of 8 August 1966. Another law of the same period, the decision of the Council of Ministers, no. 43, of 15 July 1966 "On some changes on the monthly economic assistance for children," might have had a direct impact on suspending the monthly allowance. This decision explained that the government would suspend the food stamps system and reduce the prices of everyday consumer goods, and as a result of these two measures the monthly economic assistance for children, which was initially intended to replace food stamps, was no longer necessary for workers and civil servants (OGPRA, 23 July, no. 4, 1966, p. 110).

Until now it has been analyzed how the socialist government regulated the labor and care rights of working women with care responsibilities, including working and caring lone mothers. The next section of the article will focus on observing how the socialist government regulated marriage and divorce, which had direct implications for earning and caring responsibilities.

### *Marriage and divorce regulation in communist Albania*

The first law on marriage regulation dates to 18 May 1948. The second article of Law 601 announced the legal protection of marriage by the state. The fifth article declares that both spouses had the same rights with regard to their children; they have an equal obligation to raise and educate their children. While every aspect of the joint life was expected to be based on mutual and equal contribution, the dispensation regarding property allowed both spouses to individually administrate the property they had owned before marriage. In cases where there was a conflict or the couple divorced, the court decided on the separation of the joint contributed properties in the years of living together, also taking into account the share in the household work and child-rearing.

Under the law of 1948, the minimum age for marriage was 18, for both boys and girls, and under special circumstances could be allowed earlier. Later on, with the Family Code of 1965 and 1982, the age of marriage for girls was lowered to 16 and for boys remained at 18. With the New Family Code of 2003, the age of marriage returned again for both girls and boys to



18 years. Marriage dissolution could be requested by either of the spouses, and could be granted in the case of the death of one of the spouses, the absence of one of the partners, or divorce. With the dissolution of marriage, and when there were children involved, each parent had to share in child-rearing, based on their economic abilities. The non-guilty spouse who was not capable of work, or was jobless for the moment could request in the court to be allocated a food payment from the guilty spouse. However this right was suspended when the spouse remarried (OGPRA, 21 July, no. 76, 1948, pp. 1–6). Children's alimony was allowed to be paid in kind (*ibid.*, pp. 8–10).

The Family Code of 1982, due to its communist ideology regarded, the property of men and women before marriage as a unity once they got married. Article 101 on the dissolution of marriage stated that the court has the right to decide on the request of the ex-spouses for the division of the matrimonial household. However, the law makes no reference to the fact that in most cases, the matrimonial household was not property of either spouse but belonged to the parents of the man who was filing for divorce. Clearly in such situations, in a country that denied the existence of individual property, it was very difficult to resolve property disputes when marriages dissolved.

Of the seven divorced mothers of the communism period I interviewed, six were paid children's alimony, or their former partner found a different way to contribute to the costs of child rearing. Three of them answered that the children's alimony was deducted automatically from their ex-husbands monthly salaries by the government and given to them.

Seven out of eight women had entered into marriage via arrangement and only one had married out of love. In the beginning of the marriage all of them had belonged to extended families in which they lived with their parents-in-law. Two of them had stayed with their in-laws for one to three years, two others for four to seven years, and three of them had lived for eight to fourteen years in joint families. Only one divorced lone mother of this period says that she lived with her in-laws from the beginning of her marriage until they died.

Two lone mothers who remained alone in the communist period each raised six children on their own, two of them had three children each, two others two children each and the last two each raised one child.

In the coming paragraphs I will offer two testimonies from the interviewees on how the government supported lone mothers after divorce



and how they managed to combine the care and earning aspects of their lives.

The divorced mother Anonymous 2, 75 year old and retired at the time of the interview, originally from the city of Përmet (South-East-Albania), says regarding her marriage, her divorce and the support from the government:

*My grandmother and my parents arranged a marriage for me when I was 16 years old, in the village of Malçovë. I went to live in the house of my husband with my widowed mother-in-law and my husband's uncle. We moved to the city of Durrës (Central Albania) in 1961 when I was 21 years old. In Malçovë I worked as a farmer in cooperatives, in Durrës I did not work until I got divorced. After eight years of marriage we got divorced because he fell in love with another woman, and after three years of their affair I filed for divorce. After divorce the state gave me a job in communal services and they gave me 2500 lekë a month, the children's pension they were taking from his salary. They also gave me a house. The first secretary of the Central Council in Durrës came to meet with me. I was the niece of a Second World War martyr. The state could not abandon me in the street. (Interview with divorced mother Anonymous 2 in Durrës on 11 November 2013)*

When she got divorced in 1966, her children were eight, five and three years old. She was the only one to take care of them, as her family did not support her choice. She tells about the care aspect of raising her children and having to combine work and care:

*My mother told me leave my children and go out to find a husband. But I did not have an appetite for a husband, I had an appetite for food. My parents never came to visit me, they did not support my choice as they wanted me to re-marry. So I raised my children with my monthly income and the children's alimony the government was deducting from the father of the children. The first daughter I could take to school myself, the other one I gave a key necklace so that she could go to school and return home herself. My little three-year-old son was in kindergarten. For families like me with low incomes, the state reduced the subsidies we needed to pay the kindergarten. (Interview with the anonymous2 divorcee in Durrës on 11.11.2013)*

A 62-year-old woman at the time of the interview, a mother of two children who divorced in 1978, when her daughters were eleven and eight years old, tells of the support she received from the government:

*I was given a letter to start working as salesperson. I was privileged having completed high school. If I were not this educated they would have found me a more difficult job. I started to work immediately. In that period rights were given to divorced women, but it was difficult to secure a house. Since I was in my city, and my cousins were in good positions in the government, they secured a room for us in another house. I lived together with my little daughter with another family until I was given an independent household. My ex-husband took the eldest daughter and he took care of her in another city, in Vlora. (Interview with divorced mother Anonymous 4, in the city of Elbasan, on 15 November 2012)*

As the interviewees explain, they were supported during communism with subsidized childcare, access to employment, and with children's alimony. Housing was also granted under special circumstances and when family members of the lone mother had important political connections. In the coming section, the education and employment situation of the interviewed lone mothers will be addressed, as well as how they packaged their incomes during communism.

#### *Education, employment status and income packaging of lone mothers under communism*

The history of the divorcée Anonymous 1 demonstrates a strong connection between the age of marriage, number of children and the education and employment of lone mothers. She had only completed an elementary school education, married at 16, and therefore could not continue her education. Four lone mothers married at ages between 15 and 18, three of them between 19 and 24, and one mother was married at the age of two. "Marriage in cradle" was a phenomenon present in Albania from the fifteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. In remote mountain areas where female birthrates were lower than males', arrangements were made between male heads of households to promise their daughters in marriage from the moment of birth to other families who needed brides to reproduce and to work in the fields.

None of the eight lone mothers had university degrees, five had high school diplomas, two only had elementary school educations and one of them had a secondary school education.

The jobs they performed in the communist period are presented in the table 1.

**Table 1** The jobs lone mothers performed in the communist period

Number of mothers who performed this job	Type of job	Type of education received
Anonymous 1	Farmer in cooperative for 40 years	First elementary school
Anonymous 2	Farmer in cooperative and in communal services	First elementary school
Anonymous 3	Responsible person for the arboretum for more than 20 years	Second elementary school
Anonymous 4	Technologist at the control room in the metallurgic industry for 15 years	High school
Anonymous 5	Photo-lab developer for more than 20 years	High school
Anonymous 6	Norm-rater in cooperative for more than 20 years	High school
Anonymous 7	Farmer in cooperative for 1–5 years	High school
Anonymous 8	Teacher in the first-elementary education for 18 years	High school

As shown in the table, during communism lone mothers with a low education performed simple jobs, therefore their incomes were low, especially for those who worked in cooperatives. The legislation quoted and analyzed and the interviews testify that lone mothers could count on their own income, thanks to their participation in the labor force. They could also rely on the family pension or orphan's pension after the death of their husband, due to his social insurance contribution. Moreover, if they were divorced they could rely on children's alimony paid by their ex-husband, automatically withdrawn by the government from the father's salary. Furthermore, although the housing situation made it difficult to create an independent household, under special immediate circumstances the government offered lone mothers and their child/children the possibility of living with another family, or provided them with an individual household, in cases where the lone mother's parents could not help her with accommodation. To conclude, lone mothers under communism packaged incomes from their own salary and the alimony paid by their ex-husband. In the first decades, when it was not possible to gather the children's alimony or children's pension from the biological father or the social contribution of the deceased, the state undertook this role. In a few cases, the family also played a financial role, if they had a good financial and housing situation.

In the next section, the article will offer an overview of the socio-economic situation of lone mothers after 1990.

## Lone mothers and the welfare state after 1990

### *The reformation of the social protection system in Albania after 1990*

The new government, which came into power after 1990, had as its first priority to reduce the poverty level and grow the national economy. Given that one third of the Albanian population were poor by 2001 (INSTAT 2004, p. 7) it was difficult to tackle the problem thoroughly. The government developed three programs from 1993–2013: poverty reduction, economy growth and international cooperation strategies. The Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility instrumental program of 2001–2004, the National Strategy of Socio-Economic Development (NSSED) of 2004–2007 and the National Strategy for Development and Integration of 2007–2013, of which The Social Inclusion Crosscutting Strategy is a component, were some strategic steps undertaken over the last two decades. These programs are drafted, implemented and supported in close cooperation, guidance and monitoring of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, UN Agencies and EC bodies operating in Albania.

The three main elements of the first poverty reduction strategy were economic growth, human, urban and rural development and access to basic services. The human development plan integrated strategies in the health-care, education, and social protection and child poverty sectors. The social protection plan of the government included cash-benefit social assistance and social-care community programs, also for single mothers and children without parents.

The big leap of the NSSED was its incorporation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Stabilization Association Agreement (SAA). The poverty reduction strategies needed to be maintained, however they needed to be shifted towards the EU goal. It thus meant that the poverty reduction and economy growth strategy was adjusted to EU criteria for political stability, economic development and adaptation of *acquis communautaire*. The Albanian National Social Policy from 2003 onwards should therefore be looked at as influenced by EU enlargement criteria.

The NSSED also gave attention to families lead by one parent, female heads of households, and early childhood education and care. Regarding early childhood education and care, which is a serious impediment to female employment in Albania, the report recommended the setting of future goals to build up the institutional and administration capacity of crèches and social-care services for children of 0–3 years old. The Ministry of Education and Science set a goal in 2003, of aiming to bring

50–70 percent of the children of from 3–5 years and 100 percent of the children from 5–6 years old into a preschool system (NSSED 2004–2007, p. 62).

In 2004, the Ministry of Labor revised its social protection and care system, focusing on cash-benefit assistance to women who are heads of their families, parallel to providing professional training (NSSED 2004–2007, p. 64). It also recommended that agreements with other member states, to where biological fathers have emigrated to, need to enforce the payment of children's alimony to the custodian parent should be introduced legislatively (NSSED 2004–2007, p. 62).

Social policy was a third aspect of the improvement of quality of life. The establishment of employment offices' infrastructure, operation, and coordination with other institutions and companies, as well as monitoring were put in place during 2003 with the support of the Swedish National Employment Agency and ANPE-France, the French National Employment Agency (NSSED 2002–2005, p. 87). Vocational training as an alternative form of secondary education in response to market needs, and employment and labor access promotion for poor groups at risk were yet other measures taken to promote economic growth and reduce poverty (ibid., p. 118). Similar to other Western countries, especially regarding the welfare benefits for lone mothers (in the UK, the Netherlands, and Norway), in 2003 the Albanian government stated as a long term objective to "reduce public expenditure on unemployment benefits and social assistance and increase spending on active labor market programs" (NSSED 2004–2007, p. 88). The government aimed at drafting a legal framework which gave priority to social services over financial aid in cash.

The social protection system faced two major changes in 1993 and 2003. The social protection law of 1993 introduced unemployment benefits not available before, providing individuals who lost their jobs with one year of unemployment assistance. However, interviews conducted with lone mothers of the 1990s onwards demonstrate that not all of them who lost their jobs after 1993 drew on this unemployment benefit, especially the female former workers of agricultural cooperatives. The law required 42.5 percent coverage for the social insurance to be paid by the employer. Only state enterprises and institutions could pay this coverage. This was a high expense for the new informal economies; therefore most of the employees working in the private sector were not covered for many years. The social insurance system of 2003 introduced new forms of protection, such as the voluntarily protection scheme and the scheme for the self-employed persons. This law reduced the burden of social protection for the employer to



38.5, 11.7 percent of which was paid by the employee. Nevertheless, many people still could not pay their coverage percentage due to the low levels of their wages, nor was the private employer willing to contribute its part.

From a gender perspective the Labor Code of 2003, as compared to the former codes of 1972, 1982, 1987, improved on the provision of maternity leave in terms of time available, financial incentives and acknowledgment as a contributive year. However, this code does now allow for reconciliation policies, which would ease the working and care responsibilities for working mothers, including lone mothers. Moreover, mothers who have not been paying social contributions cannot claim maternity leave. Neither the Labor Code of 2003 nor the Social Protection Law of 2003 cover the aspect of caring for sick children. Sick leave protection is available only to working people but not to family members, which had been allowed, though with limitations, during the communist period. Due to different types of employment, such as seasonal jobs or part-time jobs, there is a need for flexible working hour arrangements, especially for lone mothers.

For example a 30-year-old divorced lone mother with a ten-year-old son, registered at the employment office in the municipality as a job seeker, due to her low income needs two jobs with flexible hours in order to acquire higher incomes. She prefers to pay no social insurance for any of them, otherwise she cannot be flexible. This comes because Albania Labor Code hasn't regulated the flexibility hours yet at least until 2013 that my research studies. She presents her situation and her needs when she is asked to give her comments on the employment service and the type of jobs she is looking for:

*They have tried to find a job for me but all the jobs they find are with social insurance. I want something to work for few hours to be closer to my son. My job currently is at Vollga [in one of the coastal areas of the city] and I need to walk from Spitalla to Vollga and back, which is two hours or even more per day. I cannot take the bus as it becomes expensive and I want to spend that money on the rent. Now I do not have a second job and I cannot afford to pay the rent and to eat. (Interview conducted with divorced lone mother Anonymous 5 in the city of Durrës, 18 February 2013)*

For her situation the formal jobs which cover a social insurance are poorly paid and do not have flexible hours, therefore she needs two jobs to be able to pay the bills at the end of the month.



The data gathered demonstrates that 72 out of 93 lone mothers, or 75 percent, experience problems with the social insurance contribution. 4.1 percent (or three lone mothers) have been working in the black market for one to five years. 12.5 percent (or nine) have been working in the grey market for one to five years. 12.5 percent worked in the grey market for six to ten years. 41.6 percent (or 30) declare that they have received no social contributions for more than ten years. 11.2 percent (or eight) report that they have been without work for more than three years and therefore pay no voluntary contributions. And 19 percent (or 13) have received no contributions for more than 16 years. As can be seen from the data, the social protection of lone mothers is very problematic. They are not covered for sickness, nor are they able to gain the full retirement pension. In my definition, the black market includes women who find jobs as housekeeper or in elder care in their communities, jobs which are without a formal contract and therefore they cover no contributions. The grey market refers to those women who find jobs in private companies, but without a formal contract and paid insurance. The difference between the private companies and the families entails that the companies are registered as private businesses.

The Family Code of 2003 improved the property rights of female children; however it still lacks the secondary enforcement mechanism to retrieve the children's alimony from biological fathers. The default marriage dissolution system was banned, which according to female family lawyers (Fullani/Malile 2000) worked against divorced women to claim ex-wife alimony when they are not able to work due to caring responsibilities or are unemployed.

These were some of the main measures undertaken by the Albanian government in recent decades. The next section of the article will examine data gathered from mothers who raised and are raising their children alone from 1990 to 2013 and see how these written strategies are implemented *de facto*.

### *Marriage and family typology of lone mothers after 1990*

The arranged marriages in Central Albania for the category of lone mothers are still considerable, making up 49.4 percent of marriages after 1990. Despite this old tradition from the past, in the last decades Albanian girls prefer to marry at a more mature age, representing 63.9 percent of women who married after their 20s.

Concerning the number of children, 77 lone mothers have one to three children, and 16 others have four or more children. Regarding the

age of the children at the time of interviewing the mothers, 29 lone mothers have children under the age of 13, 29 have children from 14–25 years, 6 women have children of 26 years and above and the rest of the 22 women have children in all these age groups.

Albanian families are often extended families, where people from three generations such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, new couple and their new born live together in the same household. The lone mothers I interviewed repeated certain patterns regarding living together either with their in-laws or their parents. Their life history shows that they are incapable of creating independent households, especially those lone mothers who are unemployed and have no other means of income but their families. The data gathered indicates that 17.2 percent of the 93 women created independent households with their husbands at the start of the marriage. 76.34 percent created extended families with their parents-in-law, and the rest had situations of living together with their sisters or parents and afterwards living together with their parents-in-law. One Roma lone mother reports having no home and living in the street.

The previous data indicators manifest a high level of economic dependency on the family of origin for couples who get married in Albania. The housing arrangement upon entrance into lone motherhood continues to manifest economic dependency on the family of origin. Thus only 16 percent of all groups of lone mothers live in rented houses. The second most used type of accommodation is the living-in situation with parents, brothers and sisters, and their own children. 19.9 percent of all groups of mothers have created living-in situations with their parents, brothers and sisters and in-laws. Lone mothers who bought houses either themselves or with their former husbands represent 14.3 percent of the interviewees. Other housing arrangements are presented by different sub-groups of lone mothers and named “other housing arrangements” in the survey, include mothers who have built a house on land owned by their parents, or have been bought a house by their emigrated brothers and sisters; this category makes up 23.2 percent of all interviewees. The remaining 26.6 of lone mothers have situations of living in the same household with their divorced or separated partners, a few of them at the time of the interview lived in shelters or social housing and yet others live in the houses of their cousins or brothers and sisters who are emigrating abroad. Housing accommodation is one of the main expenses lone mothers need to pay via their income packaging, therefore in situations where they are supported from other sources this support is considered as in-kind contributions.

*The education and employment status of lone mothers after 1990*

The correlation between education and employment status of lone mothers indicates that 17 women in the survey, or 14 percent of mothers with second-elementary education are employed full time, as compared to 20 percent of women with high school diplomas, and 35 percent of women with university degrees. 5.71 percent of lone mothers with second-elementary education and 5 percent of mothers with high school diplomas have part-time or seasonal jobs. Of the unemployed women, 22.86 percent have second-elementary education, 18.33 percent have high school diplomas and 10 percent have university degrees. This data shows that the employment rate after 1990 is very low, and the majority of lone mothers have to rely on other sources of incomes to make a living.

*Income packaging for lone mothers after 1990*

After 1990 the income packaging for divorced and separated women differs from that of widowed women. Concerning the children's alimony from the biological father, only 26.5 percent of divorced, in the divorce process, separated and abandoned lone mothers receive it, versus 73.5 percent who have no access to this alimony. Eight lone mothers or 57.1 percent of the 14 widows in the sample could receive a children's pension from the government after the death of their husbands. The rest could not claim it because their husbands had not made social insurance contributions due to having worked in the black market.

Financial support from parents makes up 54.8 percent, and financial support from brothers and sisters is received by 60.2 percent of all lone mothers. Support by parents-in-law makes up 9.6 percent and 8.6 percent report that they are supported by brothers- and sisters-in-law.

State support comes in the form of economic aid, which is a cash benefit from 1 000 lekë (7 Euro) for lone mothers in rural areas, to 3 600 lekë (25.2 Euro) in urban areas. 23.6 percent of the women and their children have become part of this scheme. Social housing or housing with soft loans from the bank is given to only four women of the 51 (54.8 percent) who have requested this state service. Four lone mothers receive a disability pension for their children; however, they are not paid for the time spent in care, nor is their care time recognized as contributive years in the social insurance scheme.

51 lone mothers (or 54.8 percent) have received socio-economic services from local women's NPOs. Provision of food and clothing, free legal assistance for divorce, free psycho-social assistance for lone mothers and their children, shelter services where everyday expenses are provided

for lone mothers and their children, assistance with documentation provision to file for local governmental social services, and vocational training are offered from local women's NPOs. 24 lone mothers (25.8 percent) have received health-care services and computer – and foreign language training for their children, children's pension, medication, and food and clothing from religious institutions (Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, Protestants and Evangelical operating in the country).

The care for the children of lone mothers (with children younger than three and of school age) is provided either by the lone mothers themselves or by their parents. None of them refer to having had sufficiently large incomes to bring their child to public or private kindergarten.

## Conclusions

Both under communism and in the period from 1990 to 2013, lone mothers were first considered as workers and then as carers. In Albania, lone mothers were not offered the opportunity to choose between mothering and working, legislatively speaking they are expected to work while also caring for their children, unless they are on maternity leave. The reconciliation policies which entail arrangement for flexible working hours, care policies for children and the elderly and the maternity and parental leave for younger children have had different historical trajectories.

In both periods, lone mothers earned welfare legislative attention, either through universal or categorical entitlements. From 1950–1966 lone mothers received cash-benefits for their children and they were treated similarly to the category of mothers with many children. After 1966 the provision of economic aid for their children ceased to exist, justified by reduction of the prices of consumer goods. The Labor Code and the Social State Insurance law in communist Albania in the first two decades recognized limited time for child-care and care for the elderly as a right. However, as a type of work, care was less valued than paid work. In the third decade of the socialist welfare state, the care dimension disappeared from the legal policy vocabulary. It was implied indirectly and moreover it lost even its reduced economic value. In the fourth decade, until the collapse of communism, care time earned credit on a par with work time for the purpose of employment history in the social protection system.

The socialist government in the first decades offered accommodation and basic food provision to unmarried abandoned mothers and their crèche-age children. After taking control of and starting to regulate the institution of the family through the Family Code of 1965, and after regu-

lating the automatic withdrawal of the children's alimony from the fathers of children it stopped providing these benefits. The lone mothers with children at school age had to arrange for the care of their children with family members during the hours the children were not in school. For lone mothers with adult children, the government provided jobs for their children. Concerning housing, the socialist government played a biased role. It gave privileges to those lone mothers with connections in the government. The situation of lone mothers in rural areas was different due to a different social insurance regulation for work in agriculture. Thus under communism, lone mothers packaged the income from their own employment, from the children's alimony contributed by the children's biological father, and until 1966 from the state. From 1966 onwards the lone mothers relied on their income and the children's alimony. In cases when their families of origin were able to help financially they could thus supplement their income package.

The situation of lone mothers since the 1990s changed drastically due to socio-political changes, the closure of public enterprises, and national and international migration. While divorced and widowed mothers made up the main sub-groups of lone mothers during the communist period, since the 1990s other sub-groups such as separated mothers, mothers undergoing divorce, abandoned and teenage lone mothers have been added. Due to consecutive years of unemployment, more than 60 percent of lone mothers are not able to enjoy the social protection package, because they have a gap in social contribution. There is also a high unemployment rate among the biological fathers of their children, therefore neither divorced lone mothers nor widows can rely on children's alimony or children's pension from their former partners.

The income packaging of lone mothers since the 1990s reflects different patterns with respect to employed lone mothers and those who receive the children's alimony. The income packaging can come from different sources, depending on the situation: 1) self-employment; 2) children's alimony; 3) family support; 4) support from local women's NPOs; 5) support from religious institutions and 6) economic aid, social housing, health-care, child-education, child-disability pension from the government. Though lone mothers can package income from different sources, most of the time all these sources together hardly allow for an economic survival of mothers and their children.

The needs of lone mothers with younger children concern their child-care, since they either have to rely on their parents or stay at home to take care of them, because child-care has been privatized and there are



very few public crèches or kindergartens. The most accounted expectations from lone mothers is access to labor market for jobs which create the possibility of a minimum standard of living, and facilitating access to temporary social housing or housing schemes with soft loans. Lone mothers in Central Albania want to work to provide for their children, therefore they do not ask for services which are offered for free, but rather they need access to work and training which can prepare them for the skills currently required in the market.

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## Annotation

- 1 The academic guidance on theoretical and methodological aspects of my PhD research is generously provided by Prof. Dr. Berteke Waaldijk, to whom I am

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