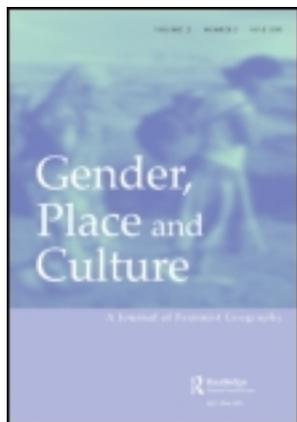


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### Gendered mobilities and border-crossings: from Elbasan to Athens

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## Gendered mobilities and border-crossings: from Elbasan to Athens

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The study of migratory movements, with all their changing features in the context of post-1989 political, economic and geographical restructurings, offers a prime site for reflection on the gendered meaning/s and content of mobilities and borders. Particularly in human geography, new questions and different approaches to established themes in migration research are elaborated in this ‘era of globalisation’. Negotiations of geographical and social borders and boundaries, the speed and ease of movement, but also gender inequalities in choice and cases of immobility and/or enclosure, emphasis on agency and the importance of space and place are some such themes and questions. This article is based on research with migrant women in Athens; it follows the trajectories of an Albanian woman from Elbasan to Athens as a starting point for the discussion of gendered practices and perceptions of migration, (im)mobility and border-crossings. In these trajectories, space is involved, in its material aspects but also in terms of representations and codings. Notions of place, local/global relations and gender identities are re-worked in the efforts to set up bearable everyday lives ‘here’, while maintaining links ‘there’. At the same time, ‘here’ (in Athens) and ‘there’ (in Elbasan) come out as open and temporary while borders are (re)produced, negotiated and challenged in multiple ways and at various spatial scales.

**Keywords:** gender; migration; borders/boundaries; southern Europe

### Introduction

The European elections of June 2009 marked a turning point in public attitudes towards migration, with ultra right wing racist and xenophobic discourse gaining momentum. Stricter border controls and often violent deportations became more frequent, at least in Italy and Greece, while ‘fortress Europe’ seems to appeal to ever larger groups of Europeans. This is not to underestimate xenophobic attitudes and police raids against migrants in the early 1990s (for Greece, see Marvakis et al. 2001; Labrianidis and Lyberaki 2001). The recent turn, however, is significant and disturbing in that it marks a change in political discourse and practices after a period of ‘normalisation’ and the consolidation of a strong anti-racist movement. Meanwhile, over the past 20 years or more, South European societies, and cities in particular, have come to host a multi-ethnic population that now forms a significant part of its ‘residents’. This South European (or Mediterranean) model of recent migrations presents a different set of characteristics that often destabilise accepted formulations in migration research<sup>1</sup>: it is highly diversified, mainly undocumented, urban and marked by a high presence of women.

Migrant groups, with or without legal papers, come to southern Europe from a variety of geographical and ethnic origins, follow quite diverse migration projects and negotiate

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different rights of passage and stay in places which, until not so long ago, were sending migrants to the heartlands of northern Europe. Such multiple typologies of migration raise new questions about negotiations of geographical and social barriers, the speed and ease of movement, but also gender inequalities in choice and cases of im-mobility and/or enclosure, emphasis on agency, and the importance of both global and local processes and conditions. In view of such questions, the meanings and content of mobilities and borders/boundaries and their gendered characteristics seem to be re-defined.

This article discusses gendered practices and perceptions of (im)mobility and border-crossings, following the trajectories of one woman, Mimosa, from Elbasan, in central Albania, to Athens, in Greece (see Figure 1). In these trajectories space is involved, in its material aspects but also in terms of social relations, representations and symbolic codings. At the same time, notions of place and local/global relations are re-defined, as places 'here' (in Athens) and 'there' (in Elbasan) are constituted as open and temporary rather than bounded, permanent or static; borders are (re)produced, negotiated and challenged in multiple ways and at various spatial scales; gender relations and identities are de- and re-composed as this and other women migrants seek to set up bearable everyday lives 'here', while maintaining links 'there'.

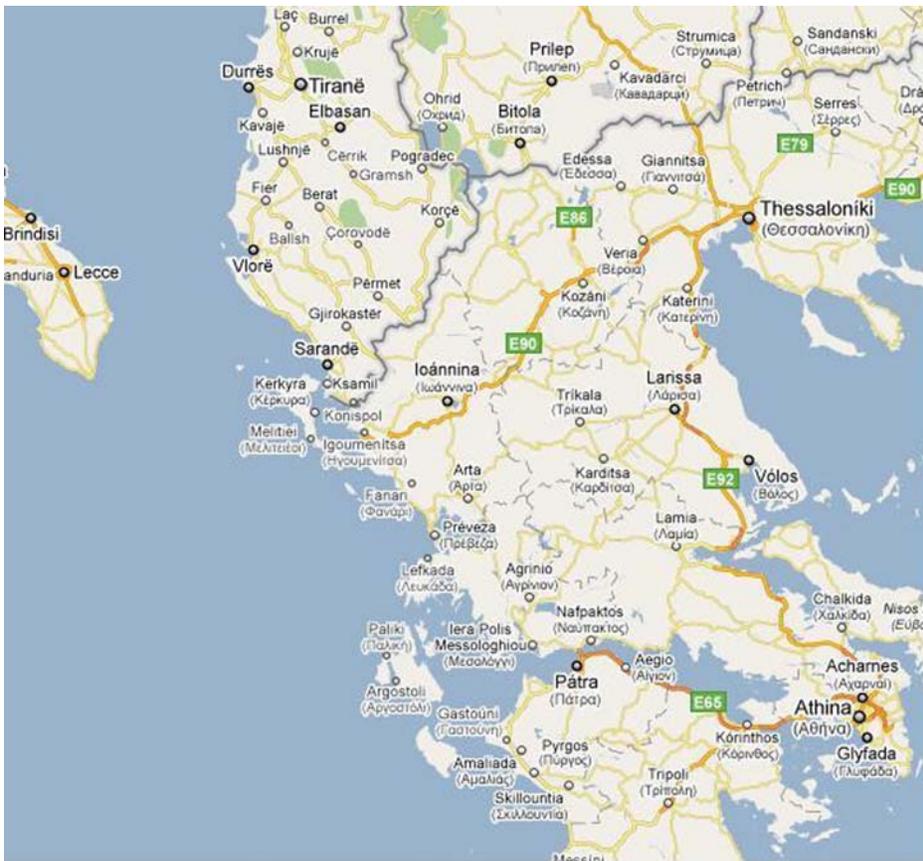


Figure 1. From Elbasan to Athens. Source: Google Earth.

Mimosa is one of those strong women who migrated from Albania to Greece after the 'opening' of the borders, in the context of quite diverse family migration projects and personal aspirations. She is now 50 years old, works as a live-out cleaner in Athens and has a regular residence permit. Over the past two decades, she has crossed the Greek–Albanian border several times, in 'legal' and 'clandestine' ways, she has been through the recantations and gender biases of the Greek migration policy and she has managed to create a new life for herself and for her three children who also live in Athens. Her brothers and sisters in Elbasan are a motive for her yearly visits to Albania.

Mimosa's biographical interview, parts of which are used in the article, is a small part of a research project carried out in Athens between 2005 and 2007 (Vaiou et al. 2007).<sup>2</sup> The project focused on the following interrelated issues: (a) socio-spatial transformations in Athens linked to patterns of migrant settlement after 1990; (b) changes in the lives of local and migrant women whose 'everydayness' intersect through the employer–employee relation in the context of domestic work and caring and through co-presence in and use of urban public spaces and (c) (re)negotiations of gender relations and gendered subjectivities as they are constituted through the everyday and the perceptions, uses, meanings and functions of space and place at various geographical scales.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were deployed, along with an extensive literature review (in six languages). The *quantitative part* included on the one hand elaborations and mappings of unpublished detailed statistical data from the 2001 census (demographic and socio-economic data on migrants and locals), at three levels: the metropolitan area (52 municipalities), the municipality of Athens (detailed data on city block scale) and neighbourhood; and on the other hand detailed field work survey in two central neighbourhoods, Kypseli and Sepolia (land use, housing market, commercial activity, types and uses of local services, etc.). The *qualitative part* included biographical interviews (2–5 hours each) with 11 Albanian and 9 Bulgarian women migrants working as domestic helpers and carers for elderly people, approached through migrant support networks; in depth-interviews (1–2 hours each) with eight of their employers, approached through the migrant women who worked for them; interviews with 14 key informants (migrants' collectivities, elderly residents in the two neighbourhoods, volunteer teachers of Greek language for migrants, real estate agents in the two neighbourhoods); extensive systematic observation in public spaces and local shops and services. Finally, country profiles were compiled from secondary sources for the two origin countries of our interviewees, Albania and Bulgaria.

Mimosa's interview took place at her home, in Kypseli at the time of the interview, and lasted for 3.5 hours. Like all interviews with women migrants in the project, it was based on an interview schedule which served as a guide for the topics to be covered. These included demographic data, reasons for migration and trajectories, life 'there', employment history, family and children, home 'there' and 'here', divisions of labour in the family, leisure, neighbourhood life and living in the city, prospects and hopes. After a brief introduction about the project and our research interests, she was encouraged to speak freely; questions were introduced only when some clarification was needed. At the end of the interview, she was asked to describe her activities (and use of time) on a regular week day and on a festive day. The interview was tape-recorded and complemented by written notes. As with all interviewees, anonymity was promised and kept.

The article is structured in three sections. In the first, parts of the biography of Mimosa's trajectories are briefly presented<sup>3</sup>; the interview material is, of course, much richer than the parts which relate to the issues discussed in the article. In the following section, readings of these issues are proposed and organised under three

sub-headings – mobility, borders and boundaries, the importance of place – with reference to the relevant literature. Finally, questions of gender (re)negotiations are raised in the concluding section.

### **From Elbasan to Athens**

When restrictions of movement collapsed in the former communist countries, massive flows of people from these countries were witnessed all over the European Union (EU), and particularly in southern Europe.<sup>4</sup> Men and women in these countries were not simply ‘free to flee to the West’, but free to go *and* return; and they have used this newly acquired freedom to cope with the harsh conditions of passage to a market regime. Those who move, like Mimosa, cross borders several times, for shorter or longer periods of time, construct and retain social relations, networks and communication channels ‘here’, ‘there’ and on the way, and live lives which extend, materially and symbolically, beyond borders and boundaries. In such synchronic relations, it becomes problematic to identify ‘there’ with ‘then’ (the past) and ‘here’ with ‘now’ (the present) (Karagiannis 2006), or to adhere to a conception of migration in terms of origin/destination or push/pull factors.

In Albania, when the borders opened in 1991, the formerly forbidden road to the Greek border became the most traffic-jammed road in the country; this was ‘at a strange point of an inexistent road map of the country. Buses, trucks, motorbikes, bicycles and cars formed hundreds of metres of queues. All full of people fleeing. Young, old, entire families’ (Kuka 2001, 360). The border zone, inaccessible without special permission during the communist rule, began to witness an unprecedented liveliness. Beyond this initial popular reaction, however, the passage to a (neoliberal) market regime was in many ways painful for broad sections of the population in Albania, as in other eastern European countries. During the 1990s, Albania underwent a drastic fall in all economic indicators, rising inflation, a freeze of industrial activity and privatisation of agriculture, which caused massive unemployment and deprived entire areas of the country from their means of survival (Sokoli, Axhemi 2000; Vullnetari 2007; King and Vullnetari 2009).<sup>5</sup> Horizontal support mechanisms such as agricultural cooperatives, distribution networks, and so on collapsed with extensive privatisations, without any alternatives in place. It is against this background that decisions to migrate were made and articulated. And in these decisions, Greece was not the top priority but rather a close, perhaps obvious, destination. The meaning of the border changed, now becoming an area of connection with a part of the world that was, for a long time, forbidden and also mediated.

The sweeping changes of the early 1990s find Mimosa, 29 years old at the time, married for the second time, with two sons from a first marriage (then 9 and 11 years old). In Elbasan, the former ‘steel of the Party’ industry collapses and jobs become rare.<sup>6</sup> Her second husband, Tiko, decides in 1991 to try his chances in Greece where an uncle of his had already migrated. Mimosa adapts and agrees to this arrangement in a migration project formed more or less explicitly in the context of the extended family. She says,

The borders opened. He came on foot from Albania to Greece, on foot...

A year later, Tiko returns to take Mimosa, but not her sons who are left behind in the care of her mother. She starts the itinerary of migration, the decisions for which bear again witness of the husband’s priorities: without her children, on foot, through his links and choices. He already knows the way and a few words of Greek. They start together with another four men, Mimosa being the only woman in the group. They go from Elbasan to Sarandë on the Albanian coast and from there, after four days of walking in the mountains,

to Igoumenitsa, further south in Greece, where he had previously spent two months working in various small jobs (see Figure 1). Mimosa recalls,

... to Igoumenitsa we arrived at night. In the morning there comes this man [*for whom her husband had worked*] and he knew how to speak Albanian and he says 'how are you? When did you arrive?' And immediately he went to the house and brought bread and food for us... We ate and he bought the tickets for us to get on the bus and come to Athens. So we came by bus to Athens. And from the bus station to Papagou on foot. At that time there were not so many Albanians and we were scared on the road. We had no papers and we did not go on the local bus... and I was telling him 'how far are we going, I am tired, we are walking four hours. Where are we going?'

In Papagou, a middle class suburb, her husband's uncle is working as a gardener and has come to know a number of local people, still 'taken aback' by the increasing presence of migrants. Through his contacts, Mimosa and Tiko find daily small jobs, taking care of gardens or doing small repairs for a minimal pay. They sleep in a car abandoned under some trees. She says there was money

... only to eat and nothing more. We could not even rent a flat.

Mimosa could not cope with such conditions and returns to Albania in three weeks, following her own needs this time. In these three weeks, she crosses the border between Albania and Greece in clandestine and rather dangerous ways, which since then have developed into an informal set of practices linked to a whole border economy<sup>7</sup> (Vatavali 2008).

Back in Elbasan, Mimosa finds out that she is pregnant, gives birth to a girl and stays 'back' for two years. Then Tiko comes again to take her and their daughter. The new migration plan follows again the man's priorities and choices; she has to go without 'her' children but with 'his' daughter, through his connections, to his chosen destination. They arrive at the border, from Korçë this time, and, paying an exorbitant amount of money to a taxi driver, they cross over to Greece. They arrive at Kypseli in Athens, a very centrally located and socially mixed neighbourhood, which has since become the most multi-ethnic neighbourhood of the metropolitan area, with 25% migrant population, according to the 2001 census. The uncle hosts them until they can settle on their own; he even babysits for their daughter so that they can go to work. Again in Papagou, an area they are familiar with, Mimosa recalls:

... we knocked on doors again asking for 'doulia, doulia' [*work, one of the few words of Greek that they knew*] (...) Before... they would not let me in so much... they would not say 'come in', because they were afraid. Strangers. They were right, but little by little, as I was working in the garden, they came to know me...

Although her husband makes fun of her, Mimosa decides to learn the language, a few words every day so that the barrier of language becomes more penetrable in her everyday life. She says,

If you know the language you can find the rest (...). An old lady once tells me 'come on my dear' and I ask him 'what is this – my dear'. Don't make fun of me I say, I work and I have to learn... every day one word... And then I learned. Every day one word, I learned. It was a little difficult in the beginning.

As Mimosa gets to know local women, her employers, she crosses yet another boundary: she is let 'in' and starts to clean houses. Through these acquaintances, she manages to take her daughter to a private kindergarten in the area without paying fees, they rent a flat in Kypseli and start a 'regular life'. But they do not have legal papers and she is afraid to go about in the city.

Gradually, her job as a cleaner becomes more stable than Tiko's occasional jobs in construction or in the gardens and she ends up being the real 'breadwinner' (on this see also Vaiou 2003; Vaiou and Stratigaki 2008). In the developing new hierarchy, he feels, she recalls, that he is losing control in the family, which soon leads to violent behaviours. She, on the other hand, feels strong enough to make her own decisions: she crosses the borders once again and brings her sons to Athens (she pays for fake papers for all three of them), thus fulfilling what she considers to be her duty as a mother. She says,

Look, all his brothers, his family were with us... and I had to work to feed them. He was wondering around, he was not working... He wanted me to be like a slave. That is, I had to work, he would take my money and spend it with his family. This is what we call slave... His family was telling him 'you work to raise her sons'.

The new conditions between the two of them, and her husband's negative attitude towards her sons, gradually become unbearable for Mimosa. But she does not dare to leave him, because the legal papers they manage to get in the meantime are family papers: if she divorces, she becomes 'sans papiers' again.<sup>8</sup> Finally, violence leads her to a second divorce (in 1999) – and to new crossings of boundaries, which have to do with the constitution of her identity as a woman in Albania, but also with fissures in that identity linked to the different everydayness that she lives 'here', including personal income and contact with the attitudes of local women. She says,

I divorced... this is not good – to ruin my life, but I could not bear any more the bashing, the violence. If I stayed, he would beat me in front of my sons... and the children have grown [by then 17 and 19 year old] and they could not bear to see him beat me. It would become... bad.

After the divorce, with the help of one of her employers, she manages to get a personal residence/work permit and rent her own flat, again in Kypseli. In the following years, Tiko chases her, trying to show in every possible way that this woman still belongs to him and exercises violence against her and her sons. He often waits in front of the houses where she works and abuses her both verbally and physically; he takes their daughter to Elbasan without Mimosa's consent; and he quarrels violently with her sons and one of them ends up in hospital. Finally, he snatches her passport and papers and denounces her to the police as illegal. When she goes to the police to declare the incident, she is detained and soon deported, before her lawyer has the time to bring a copy of her permit.

Mimosa stays in Albania for 20 days and comes back. She says,

I paid money and came back... Well, we went for a few hours on foot and then by car. If you pay... all is possible...

In Athens, the copy of her residence/work permit is ready. She begins the odyssey of renewing it every year, but also a new life in conditions of legal stay and gradually without the harassment of the former husband. She says,

How did I not divorce so many years... I was with him for ten years... A big decision. And how did I take the decision? I say thank god. I went to the court in Albania, we divorced, but he managed to take our daughter... he took her because I was not there, in Albania, at that time, when it happened...

The daughter is yet another piece in the puzzle of power relations with Tiko, who stops the girl from going to school, leaves her for a year in Elbasan and manages to get custody. Then, he decides to bring her back to Athens, together with a young woman whom he later marries.

In the following itineraries, Mimosa crosses not only the borders between the two countries, which are now familiar to her, but also a number of socio-spatial boundaries

which determine, among other things, her own mobility. The border line on the map and on the ground has very material connotations: she crosses it with difficulty, on foot, by paying a lot of money and accumulating debt. At the same time, other rules determine who migrates, when and how: first, it is the husband who decides, when he judges that the time is right, initially without her sons. They go to the big city, where most Albanians are directed, but also he has contacts. She is employed to do gardens, 'out' of the houses, and only gradually she is deemed adequate to be let 'in', as a cleaner. She has to cross the boundaries set by her gendered existence as a woman from Albania: the boundaries of male imposition, the gender division of labour at home, and the control on her sexuality and her income. But then, moving in response to her own needs and desires, she says,

You know what all this means? I am saved from hell.

At the same time she crosses borders and boundaries every day, as in her mind and in her life experience 'here' is continuously compared and connected to 'there', 'then' to 'now' and to the future. Living her everyday life in Kypseli and across Athens, to and from her employers' houses, the thread which links Athens with Elbasan is always present. As Mimosa says,

Let us go to Albania, not to forget our country... I say I will work as long as I can. When I grow old, we will go back, but when I am really old, in the last years...

### **Patterns of mobility and border-crossing**

Mimosa's experience in migration includes complex mobilities and a multitude of crossings, but also constructions, of borders and boundaries at various scales, ranging from the body to the global. The crossings are not limited to border lines between countries; they extend to the spaces of the everyday, where institutional 'gaps' leave room for passages, albeit risky and temporary. They also continuously involve negotiations of gender relations and adaptations of identity over spaces and places, 'here' and 'there' (see also Pedreño and Torres 2009). Borders and boundaries in this sense have very different permeability and reflect different 'geographies of control', as they are connected to combined hierarchies of gender, class and ethnicity (Silvey 2006).

### ***Mobility***

In Mimosa's narrative mobility, as it is laid out in the project of migration, is decided in the context of an extended family, in which the man's opinions and choices are largely decisive about who migrates, as well as who is left behind, when and under what conditions. It seems that initially she conforms to this gender arrangement determining her own mobility, prospects and aspirations. It is only later, when she starts earning an income of her own, when she masters the foreign language and establishes relatively stable connections that she starts to re-consider the power relations involved in the breadwinner/homemaker scheme. Still later she is able to envisage mobility plans of her own, yet fear and reservations are always present, as is her deep sense of duty as a woman, mother and daughter.

In migration literature, mobility is often approached as a 'window of opportunity' to escape the dominance of the state and capital, or of cultural and other constraints (e.g. Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999). As the experiences of a great number of women migrants, like Mimosa, indicate, such arguments tend to over-emphasise choice, resistance and freedom to move, while underplaying the ways in which gender institutes major

restrictions on mobility (Anthias 1998, 2001). Such restrictions have to do with the constitution of gender identities in different places, which permeate women's and men's attitudes, decisions and perceptions; they also have to do with conceptualisations of migration in which the model of migrant-traveller is already conceived as male (Pratt and Yeoh 2003).

Raising mobility to a paramount value in the era of globalisation and in the context of recent migrations tends to undervalue the power relations involved in moving and the cost both for those who move and for those who stay back; part of this cost is only revealed when the different involvement of men and women in such practices is examined (Hondagneu Sotelo and Avila 1997). Women and men moving across borders often live intense gendered experiences, as they face different behaviours and expectations in the different places they cross and/or settle for longer or shorter periods of time. Gender ideologies and practices are modified as subjects collaborate with or confront each other, their past and the changing economic, political and social structures linked with migration (Mahler and Pessar 2001; Donato et al. 2006). In this context, gendered experiences of mobility are constituted at various geographical scales, from the local and familiar to the national and the global, as Mimosa's trajectories also indicate.

### ***Borders and boundaries***

Mimosa narrates a very material experience of border-crossing between Albania and Greece, walking the mountains and riding buses and taxis, overcoming the obstacles of visas and permits. In her first itinerary, however, she faces impenetrable symbolic boundaries of isolation: she has to sleep in an abandoned car and work outside (in the gardens) and not in the houses of the locals where other migrant women, e.g. from Poland, had already penetrated. Boundaries were formed through lack of income and language, through a body inadequate to penetrate 'our' spaces, through limits set between 'familiar' and 'strangers'. In her subsequent itineraries, she has found ways to work on and often cross these boundaries and establish an everyday life which bears the imprint of day-to-day experiences 'here' and eluding memories from 'there'. In this reading of Mimosa's story, borders are used as a reference to institutional restrictions of passage between countries/states, in this case Albania and Greece. Boundaries on the other hand refer to social, symbolic, perceived obstacles in the deployment of different types of mobility – although the two are not strictly distinguishable.

Borders in this sense are seen as lines, over mountains and seas, which set clear limits to the mobility of 'others' (Allen 2003). Such lines produce a bounded space, which encloses a 'we' determined in various ways, but also geographically, that is to say with direct reference to the border it creates: there is an identification with place and an alleged homogeneity of ethnicity, language and religion. Belonging, in this line of argument, which derives from perceptions of the nation state, is conditioned by a set of rules about acceptable origins, features and behaviours – it defines 'us' as well as 'others', while playing down, even suppressing, internal difference.<sup>9</sup> Border zones thus remain in many cases dynamic places of ideological, cultural and very material conflicts (Mitchell 1997). It is there that sharp inequalities between states are played out, including the incommensurate power to determine and permeate borders, as well as to control or channel movements.<sup>10</sup>

Boundaries on the other hand refer to socio-spatial and symbolic limitations which determine movement and access and are constituted, at least in part, in relation to particular notions of gender and gender practices (Silvey 2006). Decisions about who is to

move/migrate, under what conditions, with what goals, have strong gender determinants, expressed and negotiated in the process of shaping and materialising a migration project. Mobility or immobility, access or barriers to particular places and activities, processes of inclusion/exclusion are imbued with ideas and practices to do with gender. At the same time, they contribute to reformulate masculinities and femininities and often strengthen gender inequalities (Pratt and Yeoh 2003; Kambouri and Lafazani 2009). Mimosa's stories about borders and boundaries are quite instructive of the often 'forgotten' gender limitations in the experience of crossing.

### *The importance of place*

In her narrative, Mimosa makes ample reference to notions of place, in which 'here' and 'there', local everyday experiences and practices and global processes that instigate movements are always present. Going away or settling is linked to particular places, where the local is intertwined with the global and personal experiences with broader socio-spatial transformations. Thus, she lives the troubled political and economic transition of Albania, loses her livelihood in Elbasan and the co-ordinates of a 'familiar world'. She walks the mountains to an unknown place, Igoumenitsa, where some stranger helps her and her companions; she travels all the way to yet other unknown places, Papagou and Kypseli. Her practices, feelings and perceptions turn these previously unknown locations into a familiar part of her everyday life – they form the locale of her routines, actions and interactions, which, in turn, contribute to (re)construct and transform it (see Castree 2003).

In this sense, Mimosa's narrative, materially and symbolically connecting places to each other, points to what Massey (1994) calls 'a progressive sense of place', that is to say a conception of place not as a bounded area but as a meeting point and as a particular moment in the intersection of multiple social relations, 'nets of which have over time been constructed. Some of these relations will be, as it were, contained within the place; others will stretch beyond it, tying any particular locality into wider relations and processes in which other places are implicated too' (p. 120). Thinking place in these terms emphasises openness rather than a defensive putting up of barriers. However, openness (or its lack) is imbued with power relations, including gender. At various levels and scales in a geographically varied and uneven world, places are constituted, permeated/crossed, transformed, challenged by the practices of women and men.

In this process, gender relations are continuously de- and re-composed (Nash, Tello, and Benach 2005). Women and men have different experiences of and inhabit places in different ways. These ways are connected with a whole range of displacements, inclusions and exclusions across varying porous borders and boundaries; they are also connected with divisions of labour which take particular forms, often extreme, in the effort to make a home in unfamiliar places, while maintaining links and connections to a home elsewhere – the latter gradually becoming remote but being always present (for an elaboration on this, see Vaiou et al. 2007, chapter 6). Behind such interlocking spatialities, one may find what Dyck and McLaren (2004) call 'women's landscapes of home', that is to say the constitution of places within places, which are both material and symbolic sites stretching beyond localities and bridging over borders.

### **(Re)negotiations of gender**

Approaches that incorporate women's experiences and gender perspectives pose difficult questions to engagements with mobility and border-crossing – and to migration research

in these terms. Gender, and its intersections with 'race', class and other axes of difference and inequality, determines to a large extent which bodies belong where; what kinds of spatial experiences different individuals and groups form; what techniques of exclusion correspond to what bodies, making them 'out of place'; and who are 'strangers' in a place – strangers who are not simply unknown to 'us', but constructed as such even though they are painfully familiar (Ahmed 2000; also Athanasopoulou, Papataxiarchis, and Topali 2008, especially 'Introduction'). Such questions illustrate (formal and informal) socio-spatial arrangements through which borders and boundaries are constituted, determining unequal conditions of access and exclusion at different scales.

At the same time, images and representations of people who move, migrate, cross borders and boundaries are also gendered. Social attitudes differentiate migrant men and women, while migrant men and women themselves do not tell the same stories, nor do they recall the same memories of migration experiences. Gender also permeates the working of institutions (law, practices of the administration) and of participation in civil society. Migration, on the other hand, tends to constitute a strong parameter in the re-negotiation and/or change of gender: it modifies the material and institutional framework of gender relations and at the same time disrupts and questions accepted practices and attitudes, from the micro-scale of the body and the home, to the neighbourhood, the city, to the spaces of movement between 'there' and 'here' and to the global space in which migratory movements are formed (Vaiou and Stratigaki 2009).

Can we talk, then, about a change of paradigm with regard to mass migrations, taking on board women's and men's diverse mobilities? In what changing conjunctures in the countries of origin and in the countries of destination do these movements correspond? How do the prospects of women migrants figure in a project of migration? Migrant women are not a unified category, nor do they unconditionally adhere to traditional values and behaviours (Lutz 1997). As the narrative of *Mimosa* indicates, experiences and practices are much more complex; in fact, quite often new hybrid subjectivities are formed in and through the deployment of (even traditional) gender roles in paid work and in the family (Garcia Armand 2005; Kasimati and Mousourou 2007). Women migrants are not passive victims of global processes either, but rather active agents in projects of migration and in processes of settlement 'elsewhere' (Yuval-Davis 1997; Charles and Hintjens 1998). Such projects are not determined only by family strategies and economic imperatives, although these occupy a prominent place in women's narratives. They also include complex negotiations of gender, at the place of origin, on the road, at the place of residence and within social networks, which involve submission, adaptations and consent, as well as resistance and challenge.

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### Notes

1. See Tastsoglou and Maratou-Alipranti (2003), Zontini (2005), Bettio, Simonazzi, and Villa (2006); also see earlier formulations in Anthias and Lazaridis (2000), King, Lazaridis, and Tsardanidis (2000).

2. This project is part of a broad and on-going research effort on gender and migration in Greece, in which teams in several universities and other research institutions have been involved since the mid-2000s. In this context, interesting debates have developed, bringing together researchers and activists, while numerous books, articles and conference papers form part of a voluminous and expanding literature. It is to this literature, which is less familiar to the readers of *Gender, Place and Culture*, that this article purposely makes reference, along with the better known literature on the gendered geographies of migration (see among many Athanasopoulou, Papataxiarchis, and Topali (2008), Kasimati and Mousourou (2007), KETHI (2007), Vaiou and Stratigaki (2009). For a review in English, see Liapi and Vaiou (2010).
3. Mimosa has been interviewed also in 2001, as part of a preliminary research stage; see Vaiou (2003).
4. In this article, I do not touch upon the most recent waves of refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq – which are yet another round of very different movements, mainly of men and young boys, and of different migratory projects from war zones.
5. Research in 10 areas/cities of Albania showed that conditions of poverty worsened after the introduction of ‘adaptation measures’, and especially after 1997 when the collapse of ‘pyramid’ savings schemes bankrupted a large number of households and initiated violent reactions (De Soto et al. 2001).
6. In the context of the planned regional specialisation of the Hoxha regime, Elbasan was the centre of steelworks (and heavy industry in general) and the ‘steel of the Party’ was a major steelworks complex.
7. In the early years of Albanian migration, such practices included, among many other transactions, networks of mediators who ‘assisted’ prospective migrants through the border, provided them with ‘legal papers’ (at a high price), sometimes directed them to small jobs locally, made arrangements with taxis to drive clandestine migrants far from the border – all generating high incomes in the area. Since then, intensive commercial relations have developed across the border and around the city of Ioannina on the Greek side and Gjirokaster on the Albanian side (see Figure 1), as well as important construction and land development activities.
8. For a detailed discussion of the gender biases of migrant policies in Greece, see Zeis and Liapi (2006).
9. The EU outer border, the line composed of member-states’ borders to ‘other’ countries, also encloses a politically agreed upon ‘us’ vs. ‘others’, despite the lack of homogeneity in these terms. In the process of European integration, internal borders (between member states) have become more relaxed, while external ones are continuously rigidifying, particularly vis-à-vis migrants from ‘third countries’.
10. Looking at migration, and recent migrations to southern Europe in particular, the power of (national) borders and nation-states seems to be continuously re-affirmed and at the same time painfully challenged by people desperately seeking to escape poverty, repression and war.

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## ABSTRACT TRANSLATIONS

### Movilidades y cruces de frontera generizados: de Elbasan a Atenas

El estudio de los movimientos migratorios, con todas sus características cambiantes en el contexto de las reestructuraciones políticas, económicas y geográficas post 1989, ofrece un lugar privilegiado para la reflexión sobre significado/s y contenido/s generizados de las movilidades y las fronteras. Particularmente en la geografía humana, se elaboran nuevas preguntas y diferentes enfoques para temas establecidos en la investigación sobre migración en esta “era de la globalización”. Las negociaciones de las fronteras y los límites geográficos y sociales, la velocidad y la facilidad de movimiento, pero también las inequidades de género en la elección y los casos de in-movilidad y/o encierro, el énfasis en la agencia y la importancia del espacio y el lugar son algunos de esos temas y preguntas. Este artículo está basado en una investigación con mujeres inmigrantes en Atenas; sigue las trayectorias de una mujer albanesa desde Elbasan hasta Atenas como punto de partida para la discusión de las prácticas y percepciones generizadas de la migración, la (in)movilidad y el cruce de fronteras. En estas trayectorias, el espacio está involucrado en sus aspectos materiales pero también en términos de las representaciones y las

codificaciones. Nociones de lugar, de las relaciones local/global y las identidades de género son re-trabajadas en un esfuerzo para hacer soportables las vidas cotidianas “aquí”, mientras se mantienen los lazos “allá”. Al mismo tiempo, “aquí” (en Atenas) y “allá” (en Elbasan) resultan abiertos y temporarios mientras las fronteras son (re)producidas, negociadas y desafiadas en múltiples formas y a varias escalas espaciales.

**Palabras claves:** género; migración; fronteras/límites; Europa del Sur

### **性别化的流动性与跨界：从爱尔巴桑 ( Elbasan ) 到雅典**

有关迁徙活动之研究，随着1989年后政治、经济及地理的重组而逐渐变异，提供了反思性别化的意义以及流动性与边界内涵的重要场域。特别是在人文地理学中，在「全球化的年代」下，对于迁徙研究中已建立的议题提出新的问题意识及不同的取径已受到详尽的阐述。例如地理及社会界线与边界的协商、移动的速度与容易性、选择权的性别不均等、非流动性以及 / 或限圈的实例、强调施为者及空间和地方的重要性等，皆属这些议题与问题意识之一。本文基植于对于雅典移民女性的研究，追寻阿尔巴尼亚女性自爱尔巴桑 (Elbasan) 至雅典的路径，做为探讨移民、(非)流动性与跨界的性别化实践与认知之起始点。这些路径牵涉空间的物质面向，亦同时涉及空间的再现与编码。地方、在地 / 全球关系与性别认同受到重构，以在「此地」创造得以容受的每日生活，同时维系与「他方」的联结。于此同时，「此地」(雅典)与「他方」(Elbasan)呈现出开放且瞬时性，边界则受到多种形式、多重空间尺度的再生产、协商与挑战。

**关键词：**性别、迁徙、国界 / 边界、南欧