

Migration and Culture: The Impact of Internal and International Migration on Women- Men Relationship

Denisa Titili, PhD Candidate

*Department of Social Sciences
Faculty of Natural and Human Sciences
University "Fan S. Noli" Korça, Albania
xhafkadenisa@yahoo.com*

Irena Nikaj, PhD

*Associate Professor of Sociology
Department of Social Sciences
Faculty of Natural and Human Sciences
University "Fan S. Noli" Korça, Albania
inikaj@yahoo.com*

Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to analyse how internal migration and international out-migration has affected in modeling the relations between women and men in a cultural and sub-cultural plane, based on quantitative and qualitative data through fieldwork. Developments in Albania and Korça region after 1990 are characterized by profound changes in cultural field due to internal migration from rural to urban and suburban areas, as well as due to emigration phenomena. Migratory processes in Korça region have affected the dynamics of relations between subcultures, effects that reflect changes in women- men relationships, changes in woman's status, changes in expectations towards one another, increase of the number of divorces (open and hidden), mixed marriages, etc. This paper draws on a research in three sections of Korça city, section 1, 2, and 3, which reflect a cultural environment where are intertwined trends of the cultural change, caused by migration from rural areas within the city and emigration process to neighboring Greece. This paper represents an attempt which uses conceptual structures of contemporary sociology and anthropology to throw light on several profiles of Albanian culture in general, and local culture in specific.*

Key Words: *internal and international migration, cultural change, women-men relationships,*

1. Introduction

The study of migration effects on women- men relationship in Korca city is selected because of some main reasons:

First, it is believed that there is the necessity for more studies based on social and anthropological approach of relationship between women and men affected by the process of internal and out- international migration. The impact of migration processes on women-men relationship seems to be an attractive field for academic study. The literature and the previous researches on this field are mainly focused on issues such as:

- How gender affects and shapes migration process and the experiences of migrants and their community of both origin and destination places (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2010)
- How spatial change and separation through migration reshapes gender and generational relations (King, R., & Vullnetari, J, 2009)

So there is a need to study and examine the cultural change due to migration processes and the impact of migration on women-men relationship, women's statues, number of divorces, attitude changes etc.

The second reason is that Korca city has experienced a significant internal and international migration flow since 1990, which has had unique characteristics in different aspects of sub-cultural integration. There is a lack of such researches in Korca city, so this study will be a good base for an extent of these researches in the future not only in local level but also in regional and national level.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate how migration process lead to cultural transformation, in particular, in women-men relationship.

Recent research on migration and gender show distinct and disparate behaviors and practices that raise a number of questions and suggest the need for a more complete theory of migration that incorporates notions of cultural dynamics as they relate to behavior and societal outcomes.

2. Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of migration on women-men relationship as well as integration between urban and rural subculture and the subculture of people migrated to Greece.

The study was extended in three sections of Korca city; section 1, 2 and 3. These three sections reflect a cultural environment where are intertwined trends of cultural change, caused by migration from rural areas within the city and migration process to neighboring Greece.

A questionnaire was used to collect the data. It included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. For the management of the data it was adopted a qualitative and quantitative analysis for identification of the problems.

The survey served these purposes:

First, it allowed to identify the subcultural features of people moved from rural to urban areas, citizens of Korca and migrants from Greece in relation to women-men relationship.

Second, it provided sufficient detail of information on impact of migration on improving the woman's status and women-men relationship.

3. Migration and culture

Migration is a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence.

Migration means moving internally within countries, or internationally between countries (from sending to receiving country), maybe a move for short or long term, for economic, political or social reasons. Maybe regular (conforming to legal requirements) or irregular. The migrant may have varying degrees of choice over whether or not they move. (Jolly S, & Reeves H, 2005, p.4) Differences among peoples and among places lie at the heart of migrations.

People migrate for different reasons, economical, political, social, educational reasons etc. Individuals may migrate out of desire for a better life, or to escape poverty, or social or family pressures. There are often a combination of factors, which may play out differently for women and men.

Studies show that the main reason people migrate from rural to urban and suburban areas is the demand for better life and striving to escape the demands and pressure of their collective over the individual while the main reason of emigrating to other countries (Greece) is the improvement of socio-economic standard of living.

For example men may be expected to support the family economically, so migrate to try to earn money while their wives stay behind. Some people may migrate to escape pressure to conform to gender norms or to escape gender-specific discrimination, for example:

- Women wanting to earn more and have more economic independence rather than stay put
- Women migrating to escape sexual violence and abuse, sometimes related to a conflict situation, etc.

The demographic changes caused by internal and international out-migration have brought significant changes to social and cultural dynamics that are reflected in the relations between men and women, issue which is the focus of our study.

Moving has many and often heavy costs, including not simply financial cost of transportation itself or even the additional expenses that go with searching for new work and new homes. Among the heaviest costs of all are the severing of personal ties in familiar surroundings to face new economic and social uncertainties in a strange land.

Migration brings new perspectives and enriches cultural diversity. Cultural background affects migration process (migrants' behavior, decision-making to migrate, who migrates, where, how), while migration effects culture patterns of the people migrating.

4. General background- Albania

Migration (internal and international one) is a phenomenon which has characterized Albanian society since 1990. The profound economic, political and social changes country experienced after 1990 brought up a shift of population from rural to urban and suburban areas as well as migration of a large number of Albanians to other countries. Within the 1991-1992 emigrant flows completely uncontrolled (about 300.000 citizens) moved to Greece, Italy and countries of West Europe.

A second wave of emigration belonged to the collapse of pyramidal schemes of 1996-1997 and the economic and political troubles that accompanied this collapse combined with factors such as unemployment, poverty and insecurity. In this period about 100.000 people emigrated. After 1998 the improvement of policies with Greece and Italy led to increase of legal out-migration and decrease of illegal out-migration. According to a census performed by INSTAT Albanian population in 2001 was 3.07 million people and, if there would be no emigration, this number would be 3.78 million. The difference between these two numbers is the estimated number of emigrants, that is 710 000 persons from which 390 000 were males and 320 000 females¹.

Korca region is also affected by the phenomenon of migration of people from rural and urban areas to neighboring Greece and by the mass displacement of population from rural to urban areas. Actually in Korca city there are 51. 683 persons from which 25.478 are males and 26.205 are females².

5. Impacts of migration on women- men relationships

The impacts of migration for women and men depend on many factors, all of which have gender implications. These include: the type of migration (temporary, permanent, irregular, regular, labor, independent or as dependent spouse); policies and attitudes of the sending and receiving countries; cultural features of both sending and receiving counties and gender relations within the household. At the other side gender affects how migrants adapt to the new country, the extent of contact with the original country and the possibility of return and successful reintegration. Gender is one of the basic components of the social system, which includes power relations, inequalities and hierarchies among men and women. (Özdemir E, 2003, p.72)

In our view, culture is an essential component for understanding the meaning given to individuals, their actions and their relationships.

Zyhdi Dervishi says that experience shows that the features of subculture formation affect the whole system of relations between members of a certain culture. (Fuga A, & Dervishi Z, 2010, p.215)

To understand the impact of migration on cultural and sub-cultural integration, it is first necessary to understand the culture migrants take with them from their countries of origin and the culture they find to the country of destination. For example in rural areas (in Albanian society) social and cultural integrative units operate/function on the bases of extended family and kinship within an optimum which provide individuals similar types of behavior in approximate situations. (Bobi G, 1997, p. 63).

A characteristic feature of rural areas is a socio-cultural system based on reciprocal relations between the social and cultural units such as family, brotherhood, tribe, village etc.

Being closely associated with mindsets, culture directly affects the models of behavior of the rural population in the city, its orientation in urban space as well as the relations between social groups with different subcultural backgrounds in such environments.

Traditional gender roles in rural areas assign women a heavily kin-based, domestic role, while young men are expected to be freer from the household.

Urban economic opportunities and the values of urban subculture make women confront with new, urban concepts of gender roles, which stress autonomy, sexuality, and consumerism in contrast with rural identities, which primarily stress obligations to family, sexual modesty, and thrift.

Albanian cultural model is characterized by a male dominant feature. Patriarchy is particularly strong in Albania (King R, Vullnetari J, 2009, p. 22) But studies show that patriarchal ties loosen after migration and women gain more independence and autonomy in their decisions and actions (Özdemir E, 2003, p.71). Job opportunities in the urban areas bring women more socio-economic opportunities. Rapid urbanization in developing countries breaks down the traditional family ties, which allows women to be stronger in their social relations. Also economic modernization positively affects internal migration.

Migration influences women- men relationships, either entrenching inequalities and traditional roles, or challenging and changing them. Experience shows that migration can provide new opportunities to improve women's lives and change oppressive gender relations – even displacement as a result of conflict can lead to shifts in gendered roles and

¹ These data were available at the website of MPCS: <http://www.mpcs.gov.al>

² Population and Housing Census in Albania, 2011 (primary results) http://census.al/Resources/Data/Census2011/Instat_print%20pdf

responsibilities to women's benefit. However, migration can also entrench traditional roles and inequalities and expose women to new vulnerabilities as the result of precarious legal status, exclusion and isolation.

Gender roles shift depending on the pattern of migration and length of stay in the place of destination, whether men migrate individually and bring wives or whether migration occurs as a family:

- For migrants where the women also work, marital relations improve in the place of destination, in that there is more sharing of decision-making and cooperation.
- Non-working wives of seasonal migrants suffer because, separated from their kin, they become more dependent upon husbands in the place of destination.

The status of women becomes an inevitable issue in migration studies to be considered.

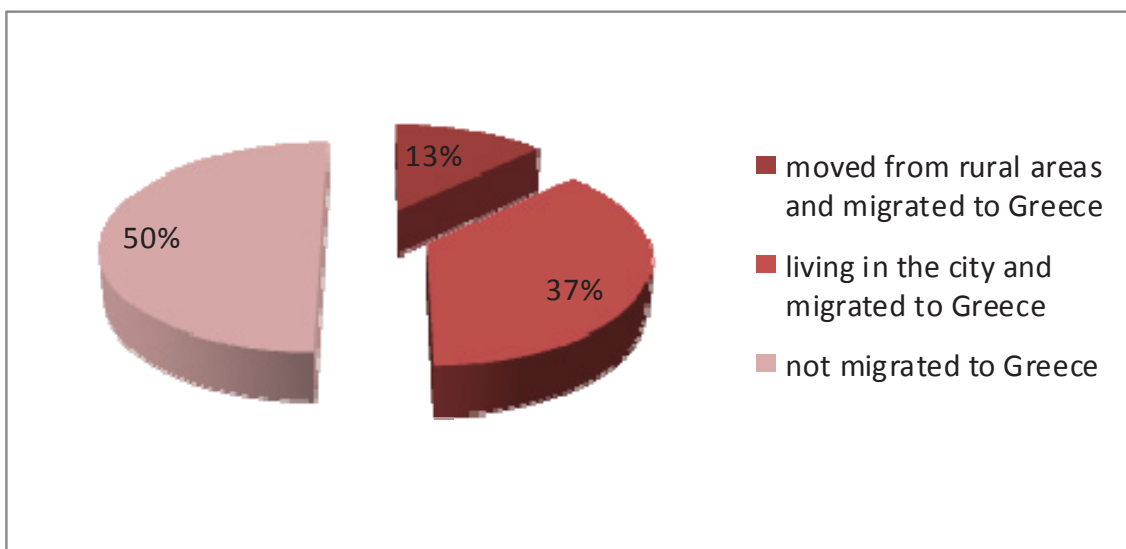
A main component to measure the status of women is the extent of interaction with the outside world and the level of autonomy in decision-making within and outside the household.

6. A brief review of the survey

Referring to the study extended in three sections of Korça city results that 20% of the respondents have moved from the rural areas to Korça city and have been living in this city for a long period of time since 1991. 17 % of them have secondary education while 3 % of them have higher education. All the respondents who have moved from rural areas to Korça city claim that the main reason of their movement was economic conditions and improvement of living.

The data from the study indicate that 50 % of the respondents have migrated to the neighboring Greece.

Figure 1- Respondents migrated to Greece and not migrated to Greece (in %)



The survey data show that family and social status of women is higher in urban areas compared with the status of women in rural areas. The factors that determine this high level of women's relates to the quality of life, economic independence, autonomy and emancipation of society in urban areas.

Regarding this a girl of 18-24 aged- groups with higher education says:

"Women living in the city are gaining more and more rights not only in family terms but also in social and professional terms. This is evident in the increasing number of women participating in political decision-making".

An important indicator of high status of women living in the city is family decision-making. 84 % of the respondents claim that the family decisions are taken by both spouses. Women take decisions on matters related to expenses and the way of upbringing and educating the children, while men decide on matters related to the decision to emigrate or receiving bank credit, etc.

An essential component that determines the wellbeing of the status of women is of course fertility. High fertility can be seen as a tool of patriarchy and fertility decline might be used as an indicator of the improvement of women status within the household because it shows that birth becomes a common decision of spouses rather than a decision of husbands. This is reinforced by the survey data: the majority of the respondents claim that both partners take the decision on the number of children.

One feature that distinguishes urban subculture from rural subculture is the attitude toward divorce as a way of resolving a relationship. Studies show that people living in rural areas are less likely to accept divorce as a way of resolving a relationship, especially when divorce is required by the woman. While under the influence of urban subculture these attitudes appear more tolerant. So 87 % of the respondents accept divorce as a way of resolving a relationship, 10 % of them respond against divorce (the main reason is related to the effects of divorce on children), while 3 % do not respond to this question.

“According to my opinion divorce is a very effective way of resolving a marital relationship when it is over. Divorce ends up problems between partners who are aware of the fact that their relationship does not work” (a married woman of 46-55 aged-groups who has moved from the country to Korca city 20 years ago).

Data from the District Court of Korca indicate a growing number of divorces which shows a more tolerant attitude toward divorce under the influence of migration.

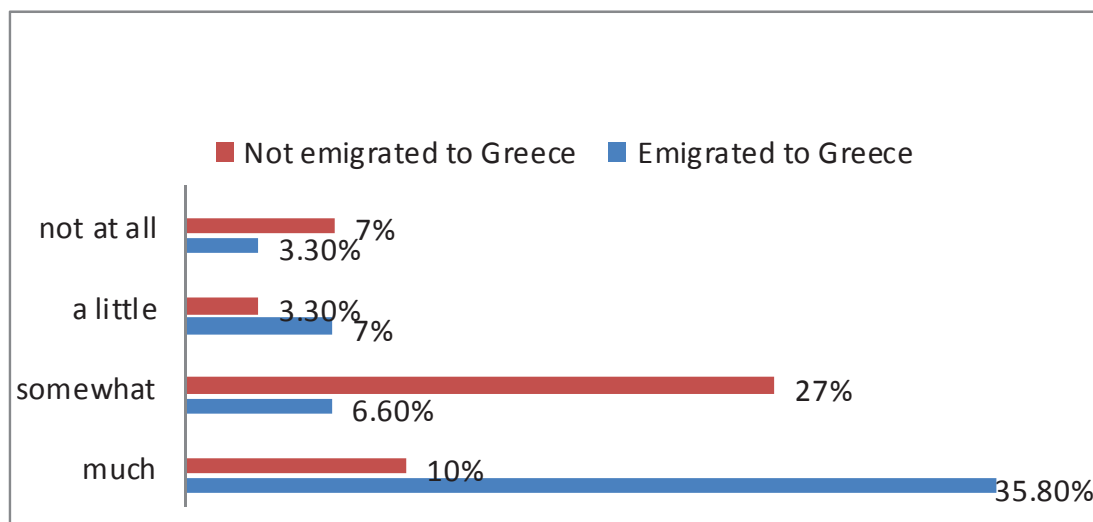
Table 1 – Number of divorces in Korca city from 2000-2011

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of divorces	151	141	201	209	196	191	223	224	227	282	237	295

Source: District Court of Korca 2011

Most of the respondents who have migrated to Greece claim that they have noticed differences in Greek population related to women-men relationship. According to them Greek culture is characterized by tolerant and respectful women-men relationship, better communication between them, higher level of independence and decision-making of women.

Figure 2 – How much does the phenomenon of emigration influence the improvement of women’s status?



46 % of the respondents who have migrated to Greece accept that their relationship has changed due to migration to Greek society. While 54 % do not accept that their relationship has changed due to this fact. (They are all citizens of Korca)

This is related to the fact that the status of women in Korca city has been more estimated before the 1990s. The decline of women's status is not deep, but it is complex, diverse and shows deformations in modeling the behavior of the Albanian from Korca. In neighboring Greece the status of women is formatted on the basis of human rights, and in such an environment, traditional attitudes cannot be displayed so often, but it can be concluded is the increase number of women employed outside home, compared with the employment rate of men, and this may lead to the assumption that

we will have an increase of women independence, increase the number of divorces, open or hidden, as will lead to higher rates of mixed marriages.

So the answers to the question "Would you accept the decision of your child to marry a partner of Greek nationality?" are: 70 % of the respondents (33% of them have migrated to Greece, 37 % of them have not migrated to Greece) agree, while 27 % disagree.

The survey found that due to migration process values and cultural perceptions are transmitted.

7. Conclusions

- Migration is a worldwide phenomenon, one that possesses both opportunities and challenges for migrants and those in receiving societies alike.
- Based on the research data we came to the conclusion that migration processes can actually challenge gender roles.
- International migration can create international people, who identify with kin, friends and fellow emigrants virtually across the world.
- Returning migrants may bring new skills and new ideas.
- Migration can provide a vital source of income for migrant women and their families, and earn them greater autonomy, self-confidence and social status.
- Migration changes the expectations of women and men to one another and lead to more tolerant and respectful women-men relationship expectations
- The increasing number of women employed outside home leads to an increase of women independence, increase the number of divorces, higher rates of mixed marriages
- Socio-cultural integration should be understood not only as cultural adjustment of a particular group. Integration does not mean "melting" or sticking the parts to create a greater part, but the process of creating a common framework, the establishment of the relationship between parts through which parts are completed as a whole and do not derogate.

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