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# Immigrant “communities” and work representation: The consequences of low-status work of five immigrant groups regarding participation in their work association

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## “Κοινότητες” μεταναστών και εργασιακή αντιπροσώπηση: Οι επιπτώσεις της χαμηλού κύρους εργασίας πέντε μεταναστευτικών ομάδων στη συμμετοχή στους εργασιακούς συλλόγους τους

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### ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the repercussions of work and employment in low-status jobs upon the collective organization and representation of immigrant workers. The micro-sociological analysis focuses on the cases of Egyptian, Albanian, Bangladeshi, Palestinian and Philippine immigrants in Athens and on how the frame of their work and their employment affects their participation in their immigrant work associations and Greek trade unions as well. Evidence from in-depth interviews proves that the majority of immigrants does not acquire membership in their work associations and does not claim its work rights. On the contrary, they are supported by friendly and relative networks in search of solidarity; they develop individualistic behaviors and find alternative solutions for survival and protection.

**KEY WORDS:** Immigrants, low-status work, immigrant work associations, representation, decollectivization

### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το άρθρο επικεντρώνεται στις επιπτώσεις της εργασίας και της απασχόλησης σε χαμηλού κύρους εργασίες στη συλλογική οργάνωση και αντιπροσώπηση των μεταναστών εργατών. Η μικρο-κοινωνιολογική ανάλυση εστιάζει στις περιπτώσεις των Αιγυπτίων, Αλβανών, Μπανγκλαντεσιανών, Παλαιστινίων και Φιλιππινέζων μεταναστών στην Αθήνα και πως το πλαίσιο εργασίας και απασχόλησής τους επιδρά στη συμμετοχή στους μεταναστευτικούς εργασιακούς συλλόγους τους καθώς και στα ελληνικά συνδικάτα. Ευρήματα από τις εις βάθος συνεντεύξεις αποδεικνύουν ότι η πλειονότητα των μεταναστών δεν αποκτά ιδιότητα μέλους στους εργασιακούς συλλόγους τους και δεν διεκδικεί τα εργασιακά δικαιώματά της. Αντιθέτως, στηρίζονται σε φιλικά και συγγενικά δίκτυα για αναζήτηση αλληλεγγύης, αναπτύσσουν ατομικιστικές συμπεριφορές και βρίσκουν εναλλακτικές λύσεις επιβίωσης και προστασίας.

**ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ:** Μετανάστες, χαμηλού κύρους εργασία, εργασιακοί σύλλογοι μεταναστών, αντιπροσώπηση, αποσυλλογικοποίηση

## 1. Introduction: The problem

This article examines the effects of low-prestige occupations on the collective organisation and representation of immigrants. One of the fundamental problems is that of collectivity or more precisely collective identity of immigrant populations in the reception countries. A study of international research bibliography (Castles, 2002, Papastergiadis, 2000, Vermeulen, 2004) indicates that due to the quality and nature of immigrants' work there are significant complications in their work level organization and labour representation mainly because the majority is engaged in low-status/paid occupations.

Nowadays the formation of a workforce cut off from familial relationships and traditions, the development and the emotional and economic bonds within the reception society frames is obvious. This temporary workforce is occupied in casual, non-permanent, low-status/paid jobs. These jobs are defined as not attractive while they offer no social prestige, are marginal and secondary; in other words they are paid or not paid occupations outside the margins of formal employment and since they are not registered they are considered inferior by society (Watson, 1980). They are usually concealed from the state in order to avoid paying taxes, social security and adhering to workers' rights regulations (Bromley and Gerry, 1979, Mingione, 1995, Sassen, 1996, Williams and Windebank, 1998). Social and financial restructuring, along with government policies have led to the development of financial activity which drives this mobile workforce out of the formal labour market (Portes, Castells and Benton, 1989). The problem that is noted, is that the workforce that results is distinguished by its lack of social (Sakellaropoulos, 2006, 2011, Fouskas and Economou, 2011) and political rights. More and more immigrants are becoming a part of a workforce reserve (Burawoy, 1972, Cohen, 1997) that is continually renewed and is divided into sectors according to type of employment. These immigrants, as opposed to previous workforce immigration, facilitate adjustable production, low par technical and technological intervention as well as personal and sentimental contribution in the work effort (Psimmenos, 2011).

By reviewing international research (Anderson, 1923, Danese, 1998, Hamidi, 2003, Holgate, 2005, Rex and Moore, 1967, Jaakkola, 1987, Nyhagen, 2008, Rex, Joly and Wilpert, 1987) it became obvious that immigrants' tendency to form associations constituted an indispensable motivation force for their collective activities. An associations' categorization was provided by Moya (2005) in: secret societies, credit associations, mutual benefit associations, religious associations, hometown associations, political associations and cultural associations. Moreover, some studies referred to immigrant work associations (Sachar, 1993). Significant studies have been compiled for Jewish, Italian, African, Pakistani and Chinese associations and particularly those politically involved and most visible. The result is that researchers have focused on larger and more institutionalised associations, particularly on those with formal functions that participated in official policy or dealt with the state. Apart from formal associations, other collectivities operate informally without offices or statute, but with constant gatherings, in both cases raising questions as to their role.

Even though the majority of scientific literature on immigration to Greece, from the 1990s until today, refers to the existence of immigrant associations or "communities",<sup>1</sup> there are no studies that clearly depict the presence of specifically formed collective organisations of immigrant workers. Moreover, all sociological research stresses the lack of the basic characteristics of the "community" (Cohen, 1989, Cordero-Guzmán, 2005, Sassen-Koob, 1979, Shrover and Vermeulen, 2005, Vermeulen, 2005). There are difficulties interpreting what these collectivises are, how they are formed and developed and what their unification element is: nationality, gender, class, religion, location, culture, occupation or some other factor. Simultaneously, immigrants are exposed to flexible and

non-registered low-prestige labour that is characterised by decollectivization (Fouskas 2010, 2012a, 2012b, Sennett, 1998, Zaretsky, 1984), in other words alienation from collective and communal networks. The work experience immigrants have, and especially that of those employed in the service industry (manual labour, farming, construction, crafts, housework, cleaning services, personal care, street vending, sex industry etc.) is depicted in in-depth studies (Psimmenos and Kassimati, 2007, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2008) at a horizontal level; they are disconnected, detached from the past, with no memory of collectivization or personal efforts and claims.

The article, based on recent research results (Fouskas, 2010, 2012a), focuses on the repercussions of work and employment in low-status occupations upon immigrants' collective organization and representation. The central research hypothesis is that the main characteristics and the morphology of immigrants' work in Greece greatly affect their participation in immigrant work collectivities. What is examined is the way in which immigrants view and interpret the consequences of low-prestige occupations in their access to collectivization, to participation, to representation, to claims of workers' rights as well as what practical means of protection they have developed. Through this, what is analysed is how immigration has affected social protection and collective forms of representation but also how the immigrants themselves view and act within the collective frameworks.

## 2. Methodology

According to the above objectives, the fieldwork research (Fouskas, 2010, 2012a) in Athens conurbation was based on a qualitative method of research (2007-2009)<sup>2</sup> with life stories of immigrants residing and working in the area. It studies the effects of low-status jobs on labour organisation, participation and representation of Egyptian, Albanian, Bangladeshi, Palestinian and Philippine workers in the "work associations" of their nationality: "Union of Egyptian Workers in Greece, EL RAPTA" (UEWG/EL RAPTA), "Albanian Immigrant Workers Union in Greece" (AIWUG), "Bangladeshi Immigrant Workers Union in Greece" (BIWUG), "Union of Palestinian Workers in Greece" (UPWG) and "Union of Solidarity of Philippine Workers in Greece/KASAPI-HELLAS" (USPWG/KASAPI-HELLAS) in Athens, and also in Greek trade unions (see Table 1). In addition, after having included all the immigrant "work associations" in Athens, the research also focuses on Nigerian immigrants and the case of a non-work association, the "Nigerian Community in Greece" (NCG) to support its findings.

The research was conducted following the "snowball sampling" method, an approach according to which each immigrant interviewee leads the researcher to other immigrants from his friendly, work or wider social network in the city. Through the fieldwork research process it became possible to conduct 104 in-depth interviews (non-statistic sample) with immigrants, with Greek being the language of communication, and to gather a relatively large and rich amount of information in the form of field notes from observation, participation and lengthy discussions with the immigrant association representatives and Greek trade union officials. The research was limited to the study of immigrant "work associations" that are based in Attica. The Athens area was selected because it holds the vast majority of the immigrant population of Greece. Furthermore, the immigrant "work associations" are based in the centre of Athens and are the only ones in existence in Greece. There is insufficient data concerning immigrants in Greece and the study is based on official and previous research estimates.

The in-depth interviews with Egyptian (17), Albanian (21), Bangladeshi (18), Palestinian (19), Philippine (16) and Nigerian (13) immigrants in Athens were obtained through two semi-structured

interview guides containing mainly open questions [one for the immigrants (non-members and members of “work associations”) and another for the representatives of the immigrant “work associations”]. The interview guides were formatted according to the principles of biographical approach and were based on a detailed time relation (past-present-future). The purpose of the interviews was to obtain basic information on the immigrants’ employment arrangements in Athens, their position regarding their “work association”, as well as their perceptions and attitudes towards collectivity and work rights claim.

The immigrant groups interviewed were chosen according to the existence of an immigrant “work association”. The selection of the immigrant associations was determined by the fact that they are formed around the occupation and nationality of the members as stated in their title. In the research, the number of interviews per immigrant group and “work association” oscillated up to a point of saturation. The role of key informants proved to be particularly important for the completion of the research process. Total confidentiality and anonymity were at all times guaranteed and this was a necessary precondition for obtaining any information, given the semi-legal status of the majority of interviewees.

Apart from the snowball method used in order to obtain interviews, other methods were used as well. These were participant observation at the immigrant “work association” offices, at various immigrant areas, settings and residences and by interviewing immigrants in their work environments. A multi-method approach was desirable because it enabled the research to enrich the information obtained through interviews and to capture, to a great extent, the general picture of the employment situation of the researched groups of immigrants.

### 3. Low-status jobs and decollectivization

According to the results of empirical research carried out with immigrants from Egypt, it appears that one characteristic of their work is their concentration in construction work, small businesses and other manual labour. These are non-registered and low-prestige occupations in combination with lack of permanency concerning accommodation and working permits. With regard to their labour rights, they experience intense instability not only in the workplace but also in their relationships with fellow Egyptian workers. Concerning the representative and the members, the main reasons that one should become a member of UEWG/EL RAPTA, are work permits and generally financial and employment problems. The majority of immigrants are not members as they do not believe this association will aid them in their problems. Asraf (42) stresses:

*No. I am not member, because they do not offer any help. When I was arrested by the police and was detained at Immigration, even after two weeks, no one came for me, not even to offer me some food or a packet of cigarettes, or a coffee. No one came. Now, they will help me with other work problems? (Fouskas, 2012a:309)*

Many prefer to become members or to turn to the Greek trade union that specifically deals in their sector of employment, a basic factor being adequate knowledge of the Greek language, and not to UEWG/EL RAPTA. Moreover, the general belief is that they should trust no one and that they themselves should verify opinions.

Employment for immigrants from Albania is characterised by multiple employers and variation concerning the type of employment, the workplace and the co-workers. When a building construction or contract is completed and if the worker is not a member of the contractor’s team,

he must seek employment elsewhere. However, it appears that most workers seek to work with one specific contractor not only to achieve the optimum in payment and social security but also on the basis of trust. Their work has no prospects of improvement, it is of low-prestige and is characterised by horizontal rather than ascending or downward progress in the same type of employment. The majority is informed of their rights as workers by their family, friendly or co-worker environment and also by Albanian newspaper articles or television. The representative of AIWUG reported that the vast majority of workers is occupied in jobs with no social security. The members believe that AIWUG can represent them and claim their workers' rights with "just one phone call". They express their trust in their association and its representatives and many have asked for and received aid resulting in success of their particular issue. In spite of this, the majority has not applied for membership at AIWUG or at any Greek unions of their field of work. Mihal (52) cites:

*They are liars; they are an illusion, they are nothing. I do not know what he does for living, where he gets his money from and where he spends it, but they are all liars.*

*They are representatives of a phantom association; there is no association with only 3-4 members (Fouskas, 2012a:397)*

What is stressed is that, generally the workers' associations do not offer them the feeling of security and there is a general feeling of disappointment which expresses itself in indifference towards collective associations.

Bangladeshi immigrants are drawn to any type of low-prestige job, working endless hours for low pay, without workers rights and at locations far from their fellow countrymen. The majority works as tailors, a craft they learnt working in illegal workhouses on their journey to Greece. They are usually paid by the number of items they complete. These immigrants tend to be rather passive and refrain from claiming their rights. Many are in a semi-legal, non-official state, while some have never received social benefits. The representative of BIWUG explains the necessity of the association's services by stating that its members are in dire need of these services, since most do not speak the Greek language, they have no knowledge of whom to turn to for their workers' rights and the resolution of problems. The members participated after being informed through other workers as to their rights, while employers paid them no wages or social security benefits. They regard membership in BIWUG as vitally important and they believe that the association can find work for them, help them with obtaining legal documentation and aid them in problems at work; they plan for the future relying on the contribution of the association. The priority of non-members is to obtain residence permits, and without these they do not wish to attend any association or any mosque, for that matter. They stress that BIWUG representatives have no time to deal with their issues or that when they did approach the association there were too many other immigrants there seeking help. Jahangir (27) explained:

*The problem, firstly, is the papers. If I do not have paper[s] I cannot, I do not want to go an association. If we had papers, we would all go. I went for my papers but they could not help me. There were too many people and I went 2-3 times and they had too many, thousands, and they could not help me. I brought my papers much later. I was too late for me and they could not help me (Fouskas, 2012a:474)*

Other reasons for not going to the BIWUG's offices were physical fatigue and lack of time due to endless working hours, as well as self-inflicted isolation in their homes for fear of being arrested by the Authorities. The majority of Bangladeshis are not members of the association.

Palestinian immigrants are faced with intense unsettling factors in their way of life and their future progress. The fact that they are not recognised as refugees, or that they are selectively

recognised as such, renders them cheap labour. Since they are not granted any political or economic rights, they are excluded and marginalised from any economic or work activity, both in their country of origin and in Greek society. The majority is occupied in manual construction labour with no social benefits or workers' rights. According to their representative, UPWG's role is that of mediator between Greek trade unions and Palestinian workers and does not replace the former. The main reason for UPWG's existence is to defend the workers' rights and to promote the Palestinian Issue. Members participate due to the fact that they are not capable of obtaining residence and work permits on their own and they also did so in hope of other benefits. Members stress that UPWG has helped those who have sufficient knowledge of the Greek language. However, the majority does seek membership due to UPWG's internal problems and also because they feel that the association cannot contribute to the solution of their problems. Talib (29) says:

*They cannot help at all. All of the representatives have residence permits and passports but I do not have either of these. And they do not know what to do, they cannot help. Each of them cares for himself. How can they care for others? They want to earn something. The association is only for collecting monthly subscriptions; and we will gain nothing. It is better for me to go alone to learn the procedures, the rights; I prefer to go to the Greeks, because the Greeks do not ask anything from you (Fouskas, 2012a:554)*

Some were not acquainted with the representatives, did not know where UPWG was located or had not had positive feedback from other compatriots who had sought the association's help, while others had nothing in common with the older members of the association.

Immigrants from the Philippines are directly employed as live-in domestic workers. Most reside in the homes of their employers or rent other accommodation sharing with other compatriots. They work long hours and rarely claim workers' rights. They often leave their employer without having received full pay and they blame themselves for not looking into the details of their employment conditions beforehand. Even though the association USPWG/KASAPI-HELLAS was founded for the very purpose of representing immigrants from the Philippines in Greek society and to claim and fight for workers' legal rights, no action is taken to help its members. Instead it limits its action to information and advice as to how to obtain workers' rights and legal documentation, offering also legal support. Members wished to participate through the need to be part of a group, the need to belong somewhere and to receive help and support and they knew it was an association they could rely on. Non-members chose to belong to a religious group and do not believe USPWG/KASAPI-HELLAS could aid them in solving their employment problems, except, perhaps, through advice via a legal representative. Tess (54) describes:

*I was a registered at KASAPI in the past, when we did not have papers and we were in danger of being deported; I joined for protection. I did not ask them anything for me, because they are unable to do anything without me having papers. In the past they were able to help us, but now we can help ourselves, to deal with our employers by ourselves. It is not important for one to be member of KASAPI. We also do not have time. The "Charismatic Outreach Ministries Foundations Inc." (COMFI) is more important, because there God exists and we serve him. And God helps us a lot in our difficult times. COMFI cannot do anything for our work rights, but God can help us. (Fouskas, 2012a:655)*

Many of those interviewed had taken out a private insurance, managed their legal documents on their own and therefore felt that USPWG/KASAPI-HELLAS was unnecessary, since once their residence

permits expired only they themselves could get them renewed. They pointed out that one need not be a member of USPWG/KASAPI-HELLAS since they had become familiar with the procedures. The majority believed, moreover, that the Greek trade union offered a more comprehensive representation although, according to them, indigenous workers were given preference.

The majority of Nigerian immigrants worked as hawkers or peddlers. They are introduced to this occupation by their fellow countrymen who are already in this line of work and resort to this since they are unable to find anything better. Many had suffered long term unemployment, and desperately sought any type of job, be it low-prestige, low pay and with no social benefits. Even though many of them had been provided with legal residence permits, due to their work and legal instability, apart from a minority, they never claimed workers' rights. The main function of the hometown association NCG has been the provision of financial aid to its members until such time as they managed to work as peddlers or elsewhere. The representative made it clear that the association was not in a position to intervene in labour issues. The members participated because "every Nigerian is a member", while some regard their participation of vital importance. However, most claim to be non-members and have ceased to participate preferring the exclusivity of the "community" of their town (e.g. "Rivers State Association"). Ordu (27) clarifies:

*NCG is not in order to claim my rights from Greeks, from employers. You become a member simply to meet people, to talk about the homeland, to meet your brothers. Each month they have a meeting and we meet as we have not seen each other for some time. [NCG] cannot help on work issues; they cannot help even if you have a problem with the police. They cannot help this community. They do not know about your problems. In the meetings, they only congregate and talk about Nigeria or Greece; they are nothing. What they are supposed to do, what the community is supposed to be, is for someone who has problem, to go to him for help. The current chairman does nothing and we want someone to correct things, because he does nothing. (Fouskas, 2010:772)*

All in all, a tiny fraction of them wish to participate in Greek trade unions, albeit with doubts and hesitation.



**Table 1: Total non-statistic sample of research**

The demographic and social characteristics of immigrants						
104 in-depth interviews						
Nationality	Egypt	Albania	Bangladesh	Palestine	Philippines	Nationality
Total Interviews	17	21	18	19	16	Total Interviews
Age*	41	37	33	30	45	Age*
Gender*	Males	Males	Males	Males	Females	Gender*
Entry date in Greece*	1988	1994	2002	2000	1993	Entry date in Greece*
Religion*	Muslims/ Christian Copts	Muslims	Muslims	Muslims	Christian Catholics	Religion*
Education*	Compulsory/ University	Compulsory/Tech- nical School	Compulsory/Uni- versity	Compulsory	Higher/University	Education*
Familial situation (Origin country)*	Single	Single/Married with 1 child	Single/Married with children	Single	Married/Single	Familial situation (Origin country)*
Familial situation (Greece)*	Married with children/Single	Married with children	Single/Married (alone)	Single/Married (alone)	Married/Single/Sin- gle-parent families	Familial situation (Greece)*
Origin country	Employment status*	Services/ Unskilled work	Agricultures/ Manual work/ Casual employment	Unskilled/Casual work/Services/ Unemployment	Services/ Piece-rate work/ Casual employment	Employment type*
	Work type*	Teachers/ Employees/Tech- nicians	Farmers/Workers/ Employees/Unem- ployed	Technical- Building workers/Painters	Saleswomen/ Employees	Work type*
Immigration way*	Individual/ Organized	Group/ Unorganized	Group/ Unorganised	Individual/ Unorganized	Individual/ Organized	Immigration way*
Immigration reason*	Economic/ Job seeking	Economic/ Job seeking/ Family unification	Economic/Job seeking	Economic/ Job seeking	Economic/ Job seeking	Immigration reason*
Entry authorization*	Student visa/ Illegally	Illegally/Tourist visa	Illegally	Illegally	Work contract/ direct hire	Entry authorization*
						Services/ Unskilled/ Casual work
						Workers/ Drivers
						Individual/ Organized
						Economic
						Illegally/ Tourist visa

The demographic and social characteristics of immigrants

104 in-depth interviews

Nationality		Egypt	Albania	Bangladesh	Palestine	Philippines	Nationality	Nigeria
Residential status (type/floor/rent)*	Apartment/With others/Alone/2nd floor/€287	Apartment/With family/Relatives/2nd floor/ €271	Apartment/With others/2nd floor/€274	Apartment/with others/Alone/ Basement/€307	Employer's room Boarding houses/With others/2nd floor/€429	Greece	Housing (type/floor/rent)*	Apartment/With others/Alone/ Basement/ €291
	Employment status*	Casual/Piece-rate work/Part-time/Unemployment	Piece-rate work/Casual/Part-time employment	Unemployment/Piece-rate work/Part-time/Casual employment	Unemployment/Piece-rate work/Casual employment			Full/Part-time/employment/Piece-rate work
Work type*	Painters/Builders/Broilers/Part-time Arabic teachers/ Technical jobs	Building-technical workers (men)/Live-out domestic workers/Cleaners (women)	Tailors/Pot-boys/Street vendors	Painters/Building-technical work	Live-in domestic workers/Careers (women)/Gardeners (men)	Greece	Work type*	Street-vendors/Removal workers/ Employees/ Small businesses
	Employment type*	Multi-share employment	Multi-share employment	Multi-share employment	Single/Multi-household employment			Employment type*
Work hours/ week*	10	8	9	12	12	Work hours/ week*	9	
Work days/ week*	6	6	6	6	6	Work days/ week*	6	
Work income/ month*	€610	€518	€451	€502	€800	Work income/ month*	€525	
Insurance*	Social Security Institution/ Unstable social security stamps	Social Security Institution/ Unstable social security stamps/ Self-insurance	Social Security Institution/ Unstable social security stamps	Uninsured work/ Unstable social security stamps	Social Security Institution/ Unstable social security stamps/ Self-insurance	Greece	Insurance*	Social Security Institution/ Unstable social security stamps/ Self-insurance

The demographic and social characteristics of immigrants

104 in-depth interviews

Nationality		Egypt	Albania	Bangladesh	Palestine	Philippines	Nationality		Nigeria
Duration of stay/ years*		10	10	6	8	10	Greece		8
	Legal situation*	Residence permit/ Unstable legal situation	Residence permit/ Unstable legal situation	Undocumented/ Unstable legal situation	Undocumented/ Non-recognition of refugee status/ Unstable legal situation	Residence permit/ Unstable legal situation	Legal situation*		Residence permit/ Unstable legal situation
Immigrant work association		Union of Egyptian Workers in Greece, EL RAPTA	Albanian Immigrant Workers Union in Greece	Bangladeshi Immigrant Workers Union in Greece	Union of Palestinian Workers in Greece	Union of Solidarity of Philippine Workers in Greece, KASAPI-HELLAS	Immigrant hometown association		Nigerian Community in Greece
	Membership in immigrant work association	Yes 5	No 4	Yes 5	No 4	Yes 5	No 11	Membership in immigrant hometown association	Yes 5
Membership in Greek trade union		Yes 1	No 3	Yes 1	No 2	Yes 0	No 16	Membership in Greek trade union	Yes 1
		No 16	Yes 18	No 17	Yes 17	No 17	Yes 17		No 12

\* Average from interviews  
Adapted from: Fouskas, 2010, 2012a

## 4. Conclusion

Immigrants of both genders are exposed to all forms of exploitation, to flexible working hours and a makeshift lifestyle. They are employed in low-prestige jobs that distance them from any kind of collective organisation, action or workers' claims. The breaking of family ties in the reception country which formed the binding ties of the "community" in their country of origin, have a great effect on the collective organisation of the immigrants. What is created is a worker whose work is based on the employer's specific needs or those of the employer's household. This labour is characterised by exhaustive working hours, especially low wages, non-permanent employment with frequent changes in employers, no social benefits, isolation from compatriots and inability to achieve union representation. Moreover, there are subjective difficulties such as the development of individualistic practices and views regarding collective organisation, with emphasis on religion. They therefore seek advice and help not from the associations but through informal networks thus avoiding or failing to claim work rights and benefits.

Regarding the immigrant "work associations" that have been formed, a new type of collectivization has appeared based on work and on nationality. The majority of these associations exist in the city centre where immigrants are gathered. Their formation does not derive from the structure of the social relationships that the immigrants experienced prior to emigrating. It is an important finding that while these "work associations" were formed to overcome certain difficulties in the work sector, they have proven unable to do so or simply do not undertake such matters. Within the associations' framework, clientele relationships are formed. The representatives appear to have some degree of understanding of the Greek labour system, which corresponds more to the official collective organisational groups and not to individuals. Moreover, immigrants did not seek membership in Greek trade unions. The majority would not become members because they strongly believed that Greek unionists would be indifferent to their own problems providing unsatisfactory solutions. Regardless of how well informed the representatives are or how well the "work associations" organised are, there is general doubt and criticism on behalf of the immigrant workers. The interviews also showed movement towards and entrapment of the members of immigrant "work associations" in specific occupations. All "work associations" do not have a sufficient number of members.

For the most part, the results of this research (Fouskas, 2010, 2012a) have indicated that the work and occupation of immigrants in low-prestige positions is responsible for: *firstly*, the creation of individual behaviours, values, habits and prototypes, *secondly*, the creation of a patronage relationship between workers, employers and the associations' representatives, *thirdly*, the total alienation of immigrants from collective and social support networks, *fourthly*, the formation of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours concerning themselves and the others around them in Greek society, which greatly limits the social interest of immigrants to claim, gain and protect their rights as workers and *finally*, the manifestation of habits, ways of life and the pursuit of alternative (informal or marginalised) forms of security and collective cohesion.

Difficulties that appear are: (i) the framework of immigrant labour (long working hours, low pay, appalling working conditions, lack of social benefits, numerous employers), (ii) inability to acquire residence permits, (iii) fear of arrest and deportation, (iv) bureaucratic obstacles in matters of reuniting families; all these are determining factors not only in the fragmentation of collectivities and immigrant networks but also in isolation and departure from individual or organised labour claims.

In other words, what is formed is an immigrant labour force that acts individually and not collectively as it is isolated from its compatriots and co-workers in the workplace. This workforce

is characterised by individualism and exists with no work rights, is not registered and is incapable of forming collectivities and of trusting and becoming organised with other workers and with compatriots. Moreover, this labour force is unable to state any claims and intervene on labour issues in a collective and organised manner and is exceptionally vulnerable to alienation, exclusion, ill treatment and to extreme exploitation.

What is proved from the research (Fouskas, 2010, 2012a), is that employment of Egyptian, Albanian, Bangladeshi, Palestinian, Philippine and Nigerian workers in low-prestige labour, alienates them from specialisations and collectivities. Due to these ramifications of their work, immigrant workers are cut off from claiming workers' rights and from collective work forms and they resort to individual practices and attitudes. Locations of worship, informal networks and gatherings in homes, open air venues, cafeterias as well as friendly and relative networks have replaced any collective effort of organisation either in unions or syndicates, thus keeping immigrant workers far from workers' unions and all organised claims. The absence of permanent work positions and the restriction of workers to temporary, low-prestige occupations, lead to the dwindling of the possibilities of individual but also organised claims. Immigrant workers are thus urged to seek alternative means of ensuring survival in Greek society, choosing individual methods of regulating their difficulties and workers' rights, far from collectivities and often resigning from them completely.

## Notes

1. See Anderson and Phizacklea, 1997, Bagavos, Papadopoulou and Symeonaki, 2008, Chtouris, Psimmenos and Tzelepoglou, 1999, Gropas and Triandafyllidou, 2005, Kassimati, 1992, Maroukis, 2010, Petronoti, 2001, Petronoti and Zarkia, 1998, Romaniszyn, 1996, Tonchev, 2007, Topali, 2008, Tsakiridi, 2009, Zachou and Kalerante, 2009.
2. The study (03/11/2004-18/01/2010) is a PhD project which empirically focuses on the ramifications of work and employment in low-status jobs upon the collective organization and representation of immigrant workers in Athens, Greece.

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