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### Intergenerational and gender relations in albanian migrant families. The example of household labour division

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INTERGENERATIONAL AND GENDER RELATIONS  
IN ALBANIAN MIGRANT FAMILIES. THE EXAMPLE  
OF HOUSEHOLD LABOUR DIVISION\*\*

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ABSTRACT

*Household labour division in Albanian migrants' families living in Athens constitutes an interesting example illustrating the evolution of intergenerational and gender relations, as these develop under the influence of the labour market conditions. Using the life stories of twenty five members of Albanian families, the present article focuses on household labour division, as it figures in three generations: the grandparents in Albania, the parents-migrants and the children-migrants. To start with, it describes the existing situation per generation, emphasising the role distribution per gender and the subsequent distribution of power per gender and per generation. Then, it points out some emerging intergenerational tendencies of changes observed in the intergenerational and gender relations. The article concludes by drawing attention to those aspects of household labour division requiring further investigation.*

A substantial part of the research on mass migration to Greece after 1990 has focussed on investigating the consequences of migrants' presence in Greek society in general (Hatziprokopiou, 2004: 321-338· Lambrianidis and Lyberaki, 2001: 251-270) and in the Greek labour market in particular (Lazaridis and Wickens, 1999: 632-655· Robolis et al., 2006: 127-156· Josifidis, 2001: 227-246). In this context, research has also begun to be undertaken in Greece –as is already taking place abroad (Rajzman et al., 2003: 727-749, Lindio-McGovern, 2003: 513-534)– on the subject of migrant

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women's employment in the domestic labour market, that is, in the provision of personal and care services to Greek households (Vassilikou, 2007: 91-182; Karakatsanis and Swarts, 2003: 239-270). It must be pointed out that research interest is directed more toward female Albanian domestic workers (Psimmenos, 2006: 157-174). On the contrary, current research has hardly dealt with the opposite side, that is, with the consequences of migration on migrants themselves and on their families, as well as with the extent to which the situation in the Greek labour market affects their internal organisation as national groupings (Canête, 2001: 277-304; Petronoti, 1998: 233-264) and as families. Sporadic references to relevant issues—specifically in relation to Albanians, who mostly migrate as families (Kavounidis, 2003: 89)—are to be found in studies focusing on the integration of the second generation into Greek society (Zachou and Kalerante, forthcoming; Zachou and Kalerante, 2006).

Recent research on intergenerational and gender relations -which had the character of an initial investigation and was conducted with families of Albanian migrants living in Athens—involved collecting information about three generations of Albanians belonging to the same families<sup>1</sup> (Thanopoulou, 2006). These included the grandparents (the migrants' parents, aged 60-80 years), living in Albania and in the context of the study constituting the first generation, the parents-migrants (40-60 years) and the children-migrants (18-39 years), living in Greece and constituting respectively the second and third generations. This initial investigation showed that the intergenerational and gender relations of Albanian migrants—on the level of perceptions held by the Albanian migrants as well as of everyday practices—is an outcome, a continuation and a further evolution of the corresponding relations already developed in Albania; thus in order to understand them it is necessary to relate them to the situation preceding their migration to Greece. A characteristic example of intergenerational and gender relations' evolution is the division of household labour, a common issue in most interviews with members of the Albanian migrant families we approached. Since it refers to the division of gender roles into male and female and the consequent division of power in terms of generation and gender (Bourdieu, 1996: 39-40, Benokraitis, 1996: 99-100,

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1 The relevant field research collected information on the family history of 25 Albanian men and women who have migrated to Greece, by means of three types of interview: interviews with families (18), interviews with couples (4) and interviews with individuals (4)

266-268· Kimmel, 2000: 126-129), the division of household labour illustrates aspects of gender and generation relations within the families. The term “household labour” here denotes unpaid work—comprising a variety of individual tasks—carried out by members of each household for its maintenance and function. It is to be distinguished from “domestic work”, which denotes paid provision of personal and care services in the domestic labour market, that is, professional employment of the same family members outside the household.

In the present article we focus on the division of household labour, as this is manifested in the three generations of Albanian migrant families we studied, using the data collected from the abovementioned research. To start with, we will refer to the division of household labour by describing the situation per generation, firstly in relation to the grandparents’ generation in Albania and secondly in relation to the following two generations that have migrated to Greece, namely, the parents and their children. Then, we will point out the first emerging intergenerational tendencies regarding changes in gender and generation relations, deriving from comparisons among the three generations both on the level of perceptions and practices. Our ultimate objective is to highlight those aspects of the division of household labour in Albanian migrant families requiring further systematic investigation.

## 1. THE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOUR IN THE GRANDPARENTS’ GENERATION

According to the existing indicative literature (Hasluck, 2003: 25-26, 117-124· Kanuni, 1989: 14-58), intergenerational and gender relations in Albania before the Second World War—time of the first socialisation of the grandparents’ generation—were regulated by a common law,<sup>2</sup> still in force even today. The intergenerational and gender relations are predetermined and prearranged according to this common law. They are founded on the hierarchy of gender (the man prevails over the woman) and generation (the older prevails over the younger) as well as on the distribution of power on the basis of these hierarchies. Thus, control of the household belongs to the eldest man in the house or to his eldest brother. Moreover, the duties of the eldest woman-spouse of the household’s head include preparation of meals,

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2 The rules of this common law were collected and codified in 1913 by the Franciscan scholar friar Shtiefen Gjecou, whilst the relevant book was published in 1933 (Hasluck, 2003 13, Kanuni, 1989 XIII)

laying of the table and food allocation, childcare—when the other women of the house are at work—, assignment of tasks to the other women in the household (such as washing, cleaning, etc.) (Kanuni, 1989: 14-18).

Our information concerning the division of household labour in the grandparents' generation comes from Albanian migrants aged 40-60 and 18-39, the second and third generation of our investigated families.<sup>3</sup> Their narratives confirm what has already been indicated, namely that inter-generational and gender relations in the grandparents' generation were regulated by the common law and the tradition developed through complying with it. Deviations from the traditional model of those relations were only minor and exceptional, as in the case of marriage “for love” (rather than an arranged marriage), which, however, in no case affected the traditional division of household labour. In the grandparents' generation this division was based on a rigorous segregation between male and female roles, even more so in families where the majority of members were female. More specifically, the women in the grandparents' generation assumed responsibility for all the tasks related to household maintenance: cleaning, caring for children and elder, etc., that is, all the tasks traditionally regarded as female.

It should be emphasised that in the grandparents' generation the division of household labour, functioning on the basis of the traditional model, was directly related to the extended family (Kanuni, 1989:14); this model included also cohabitation of the generations (cohabitation with the parents-in-law and the spouse's unmarried brothers and sisters).<sup>4</sup>

## 2. THE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOUR IN THE PARENTS' GENERATION

The generation of parents—aged 40-60, who are today migrants in Greece—was born and socialised in Albania mainly following the rules and values provided by the common law.

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3 “Men's and women's jobs were separate. The jobs that were for the man, were only for the man, the woman should not get involved with them. That is, he never helped the woman at all with the housework and he never bothered much with the children” (Extract from an interview with a woman aged 30)

4 The consequences of this termination of the generations' cohabitation—due to migration—on the aged parents who stay behind in Albania have already been studied (King and Vullnetari, 2006: 783-816)

According to the common law, intergenerational and gender relations in Albania are regulated, as has already been indicated, by the traditional model based on generation and gender hierarchy. At the same time, considering that this generation's socialisation coincided with the first years of the Communist regime's establishment in Albania in 1944 (Sherman, 2000: 64-67), we may suppose that it has also been subject to new influences, which, however, do not seem to prevail over those of the common law. On the basis of our recent research findings on intergenerational and gender relations, the dominant traditional model in the parents' generation weakened under the influence of some transformational factors in Albanian society. Such factors are internal migration of the rural populations from the countryside to the city for employment reasons, the improvement in the educational level of the urban middle strata and urban middle-strata women<sup>5</sup> and the migration of men from these social strata abroad for further studies.

In the parents' generation also, the weakening of the traditional model of intergenerational and gender relations is observed mainly in relation to marriage. In this generation a proliferation of marriages "for love" (as opposed to arranged marriages) is attested. Nevertheless, the model of intergenerational and gender relations remained traditional since, even in the case of marriage "for love", the parents' cohabitation with the grandparents (the in-laws), the management of the household finances by the mother-in-law and the traditional division of household labour continued to prevail. The same also applied in relation to women's employment outside home. The violation of the rule of women's non-employment outside home was counterbalanced by the maintenance of the traditional, gender-based division of household labour, according to which household tasks were women's tasks and obligations. There are few cases of violation of this traditional division of household labour, which arose when women in the household did not suffice for all the household tasks. In those cases the deficit was covered by the men in the household who offered to help with household tasks –mainly the husband and the young sons–, that is, by their participation in tasks traditionally assigned to women. This happened necessarily for the purpose of safeguarding the

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5 Although the society, under the Communist regime, appears 'classless', what comes out from the narratives is a clear differentiation of some educated urban strata occupying important positions in the social hierarchy of that time (military officers, engineers, etc )

family's function, which constitutes a supreme value in the context of the traditional system of values.

When the parents' generation migrates to Greece after 1990,<sup>6</sup> the traditional model is again weakened due to the influence of objective factors. Separation from the grandparents (parents and parents-in-law of migrants aged 40-60), in most cases occurring de facto because of objective conditions, suspends the old rule of cohabitation with parents-in-law and transfers economic management of the household to the women of the parents' generation.

Furthermore, the situation in the Greek labour market and the employment opportunities by gender and age available to Albanian migrants constitute additional significant factors influencing intergenerational and gender relations in the parents' generation. More specifically, the Greek labour market offers fewer employment opportunities to Albanian workers above 40 years old.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, far more employment opportunities are offered to Albanian women of the same age groups<sup>8</sup> in the field of domestic work in Greek households, as a result of Greek women's mass entry into the labour market and the resulting changes in the Greek family (Symeonidou and Magdalinos, 2007: 70; Maratou-Alipranti, 1999: 131-159; Moussourou, 1999: 5-19). As a result, the male members of the parents' generation remain unemployed at home, whilst their spouses go out to work. What is more, due to these new circumstances the traditional division of household labour is partially and de facto suspended. In other words, a partial reversal in gender roles is observed when female members of the parents' generation find work outside home and are absent for many hours every day, whilst their husbands, having no chance of finding work due to

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6 The majority of them has been in Greece for more than ten years (Thanopoulou, 2006)

7 According to data from the 2001 census, in the total of Albanian foreign workers residing in Attica the highest percentage (65.4%) belongs to the 20-39 age group, whilst the lowest percentage (27.6%) belongs to the 40-64 age group. Source: National Centre for Social Research, National Statistical Service of Greece, 2005. Panorama of Census Data 1991-2001 Database and cartography application

8 Respectively, in the total of employed Albanian women residing in Attica, again according to 2001 census figures, the percentage of employed women aged 20-39 is 63.5%, rather lower than the corresponding percentage of men, and that of employed women aged 40-64 is 30.8%, rather higher than the corresponding percentage of men. What is more, in the total of 40-to-64-year-old employed Albanian women the percentage of Albanian women employed in domestic work (59.4%) is much higher. Source: National Centre for Social Research, National Statistical Service of Greece, 2005, op cit

their age, partially substitute them in their role of housewife (cooking, looking after grandchildren, shopping, setting the table).<sup>9</sup>

The “house-husband” of the parents’ generation comes into utter conflict with the traditional image of man and masculinity at the level of values, perceptions and practices. Due to migration to Greece, the parents’ generation is, de facto, called upon to become re-socialised in the host country. In other words, it is called upon to transcend the conflict between, on the one hand, traditional values and gender role models it already possesses and, on the other, contemporary values it necessarily needs to adopt in order to adjust to the current survival conditions in Greece. Consequently, a sort of men’s ‘partial feminisation’ and a sort of women’s ‘partial masculinisation’ occurs de facto so long as women do not fully abandon their traditional role in relation to household labour; they simply share it with the available men in the family—men of the parents’ generation—, their husbands, who are deposed or excluded from the Greek labour market.

However, as may be inferred from the findings of this initial investigation, the violation of the rule, that is, of the traditional gender division of household labour in the parents’ generation—particularly in some families with a lower educational level— is counterbalanced by the observance of other rules. In this case the men of the parents’ generation exercise control over younger men—their sons— regarding their coming-home time, their friends, their relations with the other sex, etc., thus asserting their dominance over the younger ones and reaffirming the rule concerning the generations’ hierarchy and the supremacy of the older over the younger. It is worth noting, however, that the violation of the rule concerning gender division of household labour is here counterbalanced by its observance by the next generation, the children’s generation, that is, by the family’s boys. This generation continues, de facto, to observe the rule of male supremacy in the public domain and the traditional gender division of household labour in the private domain, by not participating in household work when there is an adequate number of women in the house.

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9 “Here (in Greece) the men have started to do the work that the woman used to do in the house. In Albania both men and women were working and it was shameful for the man to do household chores, because they were for women. But here things have changed. They realised that because it was rare for elder men, 50 or 60 years old, to find a job here, it was necessarily women who went to work and men who helped in the house” (Extract from an interview with a woman of 30)



Thus, in the parents' generation the traditional model remains strong, as it does in the grandparents' generation, so long as the parents live in Albania. However, it begins to recede after their migration to Greece, gradually and necessarily, under the pressure of the new circumstances that weigh heavily particularly on the male members of this generation. What occurs in this case is a gender role reversal in the couples of the parents' generation or a kind of substitution of one generation by the other, when the younger man occupies the older man's place in the public and private domains, with the older man gradually becoming marginalised.

### 3. THE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOUR IN THE CHILDREN'S GENERATION

The children's generation (migrants aged 18-39), as is the case with the parents' generation (aged 40-60) –based on data from our research about Albanian migrant families–, has also been born in Albania. Thus, it has already been socialised in Albania by various institutions and agents of socialisation: the family –also via the grandparents' generation due to cohabitation–, the Communist Party and the youth training mechanisms, the education system, etc. (Vickers, 1997: 267-289).

In the children's generation, as came out from our research, the intergenerational and gender relations are subject to both the traditional and the contemporary relational model. Already in Albania this generation has contracted marriages, sometimes arranged, sometimes “for love”, breaching the religious taboo on marriage between Orthodox and Muslim with greater easiness. Specifically concerning the division of household labour, the boys have been socialised by their mothers to participate in household labour and to help them, mainly when there are no other women in the house (mother-in-law or sisters), due to the intervention of internal migration involving members of the extended family or separation of households<sup>10</sup> (Hasluck, 2003: 47-65).

Migration to Greece and the process of the younger generation's adjustment to the Greek society seems to function in a twofold manner, on the one hand, in strengthening the contemporary model of intergenerational and gender relations and, on the other, in reinforcing the traditional one. The strengthening of this contemporary model is effected through the re-

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<sup>10</sup> Various articles have been written on the division of household labour per gender and per generation within another social reality (e.g. Vertsson, 2006: 431-434)

socialisation of the children's generation in Greece. Institutions and other agents which play an important role in this re-socialisation are the labour market and, more specifically, the domestic labour market, in the context of which foreigners are employed in the households of Greek families, television, other Albanian migrants who have already integrated into Greek society, etc. Furthermore, in case members of this generation have attended Greek schools, the Greek educational system, as well as their own peer groups, must also count as agents of re-socialisation. In the context of this re-socialisation, a further weakening or change in traditional values and models occurs; however, this process has probably begun before their migration, under the influence of those factors that contributed to the initial socialisation of the children's generation in Albania. At the same time, a certain reinforcement of the traditional model seems to occur in this generation, which is directly related to the employment opportunities for members of Albanian migrant families in the Greek labour market. As has already been mentioned, since fathers (the parents' generation) remain outside the labour market and are impelled to move away from the traditional stereotype of the "man at work", their place is taken, *de facto*, by their sons (children's generation), who are at an employable age, according to the demand conditions in the Greek labour market. The sons "take their place" in the labour market and at the same time also substitute their fathers in their traditional role within the household.

Although the sons of the children's generation have, in many cases, been initially socialised in Albania to participate in household tasks, in Greece they retain the traditional male role in the context of the gender division of household labour. This role is weakened only when their wives are not in a position to respond fully to their traditional female role concerning household labour. Yet, this weakening has a different significance from the one observed in the generation of the parents-fathers. To begin with, the socialisation of the children's generation has also occurred on the basis of the contemporary model of male participation in household tasks, in contrast to the socialisation of the parents-fathers' generation, which has occurred only on the basis of the traditional model. Moreover, the masculinity of this generation, also related to the "man at work" stereotype, is not threatened so long as the men of this generation are employed in the labour market and contribute to the family's maintenance.

Consequently, the division of household labour in the children's generation, when conditions permit it –that is, when there are women safeguarding the established order–, remains traditional despite the new values and new models for gender and generation roles.

#### 4. DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOUR: INTERGENERATIONAL TENDENCIES

The example of the changes observed in the gender division of household labour shows that the families of Albanian migrants are going through a phase of transition from the traditional to the contemporary model of intergenerational and gender relations, a model less rigid and more adaptable to emerging new conditions (de Singly, 1996; Moussourou, 2005: 24-25, 67-83). The indications from this study lead us to the conclusion that the intergenerational transmission of values presents continuities and discontinuities<sup>11</sup> (Scabini and Marta, 2006: 85-87) and that the occurring changes in these relations are gradual. More specifically, in the *grandparents' generation* changes and weakening in the gender division of household labour are not observed. The same is also true of the *parents' generation* while they live in Albania. What comes out from our data is that some mothers, having to adjust to the new conditions –resulting from internal migration, the division of households or the women's absence in the family–, “modernise” their boys' socialisation concerning the division of household labour, training them to participate in women's tasks. Yet, within the same generation the effected changes are rapid and catalytic when it migrates to Greece. More specifically, the men of this generation experience a devaluation both as workers, so long as they remain outside the labour market, and as men, so long as they, *de facto*, undertake to cover their household deficit by household labour, when their spouses-housewives go out to work in the Greek labour market, where there is a demand for provision of domestic labour. On their part, the women of this generation experience the change in the traditional models of their daily household practices, also devaluating their husbands, who traditionally occupy a higher position in the gender hierarchy within the household. These changes continue to be seen in the *children's generation*. This generation is on the borderline between traditional and contemporary models. Outwardly at least, it adopts more contemporary models on the level of perceptions and values. In practice, however, when it comes to the division of household labour, it functions in an essentially traditional manner, unless the traditional gender hierarchies at home are overturned, that is, the women do not suffice to fulfil their

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11 Various articles have been written on the specific subject of intergenerational transmission of values in migrant families (Nauck, 2001: 159-173)

traditional roles. In this case, the husbands of this generation come to function in an auxiliary manner also, occasionally substituting their wives in the traditionally female roles the latter assume in the context of the division of household labour. This shift of the men in the parents' generation to traditionally female roles serves to defend the maintenance of the established order. Exactly the same is true of the temporary shift of men in the children's generation to female roles, since this generation is also going through a transitional phase. Although it aspires to transmit contemporary values regarding gender and generation relations (e.g. non-cohabitation with in-laws)<sup>12</sup> to the next generation (the fourth generation in the context of our study), in practice it continues to function on the basis of traditional values and models, such as the traditional gender division of household labour. In a time of rapid changes recourse to what is already known seems in this case to be a sort of refuge. Actually, in this transitional phase it seems that the pace of changes exceeds the adaptive possibilities of the children's generation or their possibilities for re-socialisation on new terms, those of a free market society.

Finally, in order to adjust to the Greek society, the parents' generation, although imbued with traditional values and models, is forced to adopt contemporary practices in relation to the gender division of household labour. By contrast, their children's generation, for the same reasons, although gradually developing contemporary values and models regarding gender and generation relations, in practice it adopts traditional practices, resorting to tradition and the traditional value system. The common law functions as a stable reference framework in a world undergoing transformation (Navridis and Christakis, 2005· Psarrou, 2003: 106-130· Albanis, 2005: 82-83), a world where rapid changes are occurring, amongst others, in the nuclear family, in kinship,<sup>13</sup> in the gender and generation relations (Symeonidou, 2006· Moussourou, 2005· Moussourou, forthcoming).

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12 "I just want, because I don't know if I've managed it, I want him (her 9-year-old son) to be able to take care of himself if this becomes necessary, if something happens and he finds himself on his own, whether because of studies or for some other reason. To be able to care for himself in relation to food, clothing, everything in fact" (Extract from an interview with a woman of 36)

13 In one of his recent works Godelier (2004) refers to the changes that have taken place in kinship relations and the forces that have operated upon them over the last thirty years

## 5. NEW FIELDS FOR INVESTIGATION

The initial investigation of intergenerational and gender relations in Albanian migrant families offered some useful indications enabling us to approach the interdependence between the public and private spheres in the lives of Albanian migrants. In particular, it highlighted aspects of the consequences the situation in the labour market has on their households' organisation and partly revealed another aspect concealed behind the reconciliation between the professional and family life of Albanian migrants. Of particular interest for further research is the phenomenon of partial reversal of gender roles in the parents' generation, when women assume the role of the family "breadwinner" (Kelly and Shortall, 2002: 337-339, 340-341) and men that of "housewife", termed "house-husbands" in the international bibliography (Siperstein, 1985: 262-287). This phenomenon illustrates the difficulty men aged 40-60 experience in their transition from the traditional to the contemporary model. These men seem to experience degradation and devaluation in their lives not only as a result of their downward social and professional mobility, associated with their migration to Greece, but also as a result of the changes observed in the generation and gender hierarchy in the context of the family. It also seems that these men "are integrated" into Greek society in a particularly painful way, on account of unemployment, on account of adopting practices offending their masculinity as well as on account of the overturning of their social and gendered status. It is, thus, worth drawing our attention to these withdrawn figures of fathers who struggle—whilst compromising—not to become worthless within the family, as has already been the case in relation to the labour market. It is also worth drawing our attention to their particular "integration" into Greek society which occurs through the adoption of a modern male behavioural model.

Furthermore, the changes observed in relation to the division of household labour (Kimmel, 2000: 148-149, 199) illustrate the clash between tradition and modernisation experienced by the Albanian migrant families investigated in this study as an everyday reality in Greece; this clash is also reflected in intergenerational and gender relations. In conclusion, of particular research interest is the comparative investigation of intergenerational and gender relations, comparing Greek (Sakka, 2003: 39-65) to Albanian families<sup>14</sup> in their traditional and modern form, thus highlighting potential convergences and divergences as well as cultural affinities in the wider Balkan area (Alexakis, 2004: 35-60).

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14 It is also of considerable interest to compare the changes in intergenerational relations and in gender relations in families of Albanian migrants by host country (King R , Dalipaj M , Mai N , 2006)

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