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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS

ABSTRACT

The integration of women immigrants and their role in the integration process depends greatly on their “willingness” to migrate, on whether or not they are in the receiving country with their children, on whether they intent to stay temporarily or indefinitely, on the closeness of their relationships with relatives and friends back home – particularly with their mother.

INTRODUCTION

The role of women in migration has until very recently been ignored: the history of migration has been the history of *male* migration. As a result, the migration policy of both sending and receiving countries has been a policy dealing with the problems related to male migration. The main reason for this is the fact which, with time, became a fiction that (most if not all) migrant women follow either their father or their husband in migration. Moreover, immigration policy (i.e. the migration policy of receiving countries) may have differentiated its aims according to the arrival, stay and departure¹ of immigrants with specific characteristics (usually age, education, and provenance – and less often race and religion) but is nevertheless applied to all with the same characteristics. As it became less and less “politically correct” to differentiate in dealing with immigrants (while international control of immigration is becoming stricter and stricter),² immigration policy concerns immigrants in general and includes

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1. These three being the main chapters of any immigration policy – chapters that correspond to those of departure, stay and return of any emigration policy.

2. Particularly as a result of the fear of terrorism – see the Schengen Treaty.

measures designed for dealing with some of the most common problems related with immigration – including problems created by immigration.³

The long tradition of a unisex (yet male) and general (and generalizing)⁴ approach to immigration still pervades both the studies and the policy making. Although we now know that male and female involvement in the migration process is essentially different, this knowledge has not as yet been transformed into specific changes in the law and everyday practices, perhaps because it has not as yet inspired further research into the factors influencing the above involvement. This means not only that no measures have been taken to facilitate the integration of women as well as their role in integration. It also means that little is known about the process of female integration or about women's role in the integration of their family and compatriots.

XENOPHOBIA AND INTEGRATION

Our research⁵ makes possible a more systematic approach to the role of women (migrants and non-migrants) in the integration of migrants. Although the aims of the researchers were different from the one set in this paper, available information leads to the (uncomfortable) conclusion that immigration,⁶ both as a social phenomenon and as a chapter of social policy, cannot be significantly dealt with either at a general or at a specific level.⁷ The margin for either theoretic analysis or policy making is indeed narrow. With this limitation in mind, migration phenomena should be approached with circumspection.

The research dealt with immigrant women from Ukraine and Albania, all domestic workers. The characteristics they had in common were those of

3. These problems are at the base of the growing racism and xenophobia – or else expressions of it.

4. Public opinion tends to generalize negative characteristics: all Albanians are thieves, most foreigners carry diseases etc.

5. The rereference is to the four main research studies carried out under the “Pythagoras” project – namely those of J. Sakellis, I. Psimmenos and C. Skamnakis, M. Thanopoulou, H. Kambouri. I have used material from these studies in this paper. See bibliography.

6. Immigration in general – female immigration included.

7. Years ago I have tried to explain why the macrosociological study (i.e. the study of the phenomenon in general) is inadequate for the understanding of migration and migration processes and this study should be supplemented with a microsociological study (i.e. the study of migration processes in groups such as the family). See Moussourou, 1991.

being migrants, female, employed and domestic workers. But they were also important differences between them. They were different not only in their socio-cultural background (a background clearly differentiating Ukrainians from Albanians – the former being in general better educated and much more ‘modern’ than the latter), but also in their characteristic ways of emigrating and dealing with the status of a migrant.

All four separate research studies focus on the importance of the legality of entry and employment on the migrant, her standard of living, her chances for integration. “Papers” are mentioned by practically all immigrant women as a decisive factor for an acceptable life in Greece – with security, self-respect, better working conditions, social insurance, higher pay. Most immigrant women (Albanians in particular) have experienced illegality – and a few are still living and working in Greece illegally.

On the other hand, all four researches mention the effects of racism as experienced by the immigrants. Racism (or, rather, xenophobia) does not have so much to do with the legality of the immigrants’ presence and employment as with their status as poor “foreigners” and dangerous “others” – Albanians being among the most dangerous “others”. Both illegality and racism are therefore connected with stereotypes prevalent in the receiving society. These stereotypes push the immigrants into behavioral patterns that either hinder the integration process (as they remain aloof from the society that they experience as hostile and closed to them) or, on the contrary, facilitate that process (as they try to prove that they are wrongly considered as inferior).

The research has not clearly confirmed the argument (substantiated by most studies)⁸ that illegality and racism are necessarily responsible for the immigrants’ marginality if not social exclusion. Most Albanian immigrants mention experiences of racist behaviour. Some of these experiences are so vividly recalled⁹ that one cannot ignore, disregard or belittle their inevitable effect on the immigrant’s apprehension of the receiving society and, hence, the dynamic of her integration in it. Yet, such experiences tend to be placed in the past, as something unpleasant and offensive that has certainly happened but now is over and there is no point to dwell on it. Some

8. For the Greek paradigm, see for instance Galanis, 2003; Kassimati, 2006; Papadopoulou, 2006; Psimmenos, 1998.

9. One of the most poignant examples is the way Anna (in Kambouri, 2006: 74) describes her and her son’s disappointment when only one guest appeared at the latter’s birthday party, out of the twenty or so classmates invited.

immigrants blame their compatriots' behaviour for the bad name Albanians have and consider the negative way in which they have been treated as a normal reaction to that behaviour and this bad name. Some recollect with gratitude the warmth of their Greek neighbours – a recollection that may coexist with the experience of the racist behaviour of others. Some refer to good experiences with the National Health Service or with the school their children go to, preferring to forget or to downplay bad experiences.

As Albanians are by far the largest immigrant group and have the worst name of all immigrants, the effect of xenophobia on their integration process is of primary interest. Our data should, however, make us extremely cautious as to the importance of that effect. The Albanian women in our research appear to have overcome their treatment as inferior (not to say criminal), seem to have left bitterness and disappointments behind, and are apparently more integrated in Greek society than most of us think. How can this be explained? One factor may be that these women quickly perceived the higher status women have in Greece as compared to Albania. They have also been very much affected by the integration of their children in the Greek school. Moreover, as their services are needed by the local population, their employment can be continuous and secure¹⁰ and this makes it possible for them to learn (from the inside, so to speak) how Greeks live – middle-class Greeks, with a middle-class way of life, consumption habits, aspirations, etc. On the other hand, as Kassimati aptly puts it, “the professional horizon of these immigrants is limited to jobs whose main characteristic is dependence on private households (...) with all that this implies, with unclear working terms, in particularly difficult conditions and with low pay – particularly when they are illegal. A leveling factor is in operation, equalizing or rather invalidating any individual educational or professional particularity.” (Kassimati, 2003: 165). This factor means that the more educated, qualified and experienced the immigrant the higher the dissatisfaction with her status and less her motivation to integrate in the Greek society. As we shall see this is the case more of Ukrainian than Albanian immigrants.

The above considerations should be kept in mind when considering the main theme of this paper – namely the role of women in the integration process. Moreover, we should note that the role of Greek women in this process is decisive and should not be underestimated.

10. While their husbands' employment has suffered severe ups and downs – and they are more and more frequently unemployed.

MIGRANT WOMEN HAVING EMIGRATED WITH THEIR FAMILY

As already mentioned, important factors for the integration process prove to be the (reason and) way of emigration, its purpose and the willingness to make the effort necessary for integration. This means that migrant women seem to fall into the following three broad categories:

1. Women who have emigrated with their family or because their husband did.
2. Women who have emigrated alone, leaving their children and family behind.
3. Women who have emigrated alone with their children.

However, if one looks closely into these categories, important sub-categories emerge.

The first category is the largest among Albanians and is the category that has been responsible for the long disregard of the differences between male and female migration: since women follow their husband or father into migration, there is no point in treating them separately, they have the characteristics and the fate of the male head of their family. But this large category is far from homogeneous. It includes women in two main sub-categories:

- (a) Those women who had no choice but to emigrate with their husband, the “unwilling” emigrants, and
- (b) Those women who pushed or encouraged their husband to emigrate, the “willing” emigrants.

When interviewed, most immigrants who are in Greece with their family gave no explicit indication¹¹ which of these sub-categories they belonged to. However, the following extracts of “**unwilling**” immigrants’ interviews not only inform about the fact that the decision to emigrate was not theirs but they also reveal very traditional roles and relationships – and very traditional values conserving these roles and relationships.

The first extract is from the interview with an immigrant who came in 1993 with no papers, speaking no Greek at all, with two little girls:

11. The degree of “willingness” or “unwillingness” to emigrate has not been included as a variable to be explored. Only in the Psimmenos and Skamnakis research are some relevant clues provided by the answers to a question about how and why the interviewees emigrated to Greece. All examples cited are thus taken from their research.

“My husband was manager in a company, and was telling me that with this salary here, because of the devaluation, we wouldn’t be able to live. And he comes first, he comes three times. And then he came to take me, all the family. And we are here since, twelve years now”. (11th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 194)

The second extract is from the interview with a 31 years old immigrant, who came to Greece in 1994 and whose daughter was born here in 1997:

“...I have not decided myself, my father decided for me to marry and because I was too young he gave me to marriage with a man I did not know, I had met him once or twice, and then we got married and came, but thank god he is a good man and a good husband and father, that’s why we are married for 11 years now and that’s how I came to Greece, I haven’t decided myself to come”. (42nd interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 738)

On the other hand, other (fewer, perhaps) immigrants seem to have had a more active, if not decisive, role in the family’s migration. This important category of women have often emigrated first – the husband and even the children following after a while. These **“willing” immigrants** seem to have a more prominent role both in the family (in general) and in the decision to migrate (in particular). Two examples of this category of Albanian immigrants.

The first example is of a woman who came to Greece illegally in 1998:

“I paid a lot of money to come here. I took one child with me, I left the other there. There was another woman, we were three women in the car coming here. On the road we did not have any paper, and my husband’s brother was here and I went there. My husband with the elder child stayed in Albania. And I say to myself ‘will I arrive, will I not arrive, will the police get me, will I get through’, I was anguished. And I arrived. I finally came here with a child (...). ...and I call my husband and tell him ‘well? Will you come or not?’, he tells me ‘I cannot come, we don’t have the money’. The boy was 12 years old. And [they came] on foot, one night and one day”. (12th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 203)

The second example is of a woman now 30 years old, who came legally to Greece with her husband and two babies in 1999. She describes her life in Albania, how her husband did not want to migrate to Greece but to Italy and how **she** prevailed with the help of her mother-in-law. She says:

“...the man is good, perfect, but all right we also have our complains, but thank god the family has a role that before coming here I came to the point to divorce from my husband because things were not as I wanted them. I wanted to come, he did not want to, I couldn't go hungry there and beg for food, eh, I can not, I can not do this and I told him either you come to Greece with me or we divorce and so I came four months earlier only with the children and I took my children, my children are above everything, them and my husband are my family, but there are men, one can change the man but not the children that's it”. (41st interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 737)

The “unwilling” emigrants seem to be more traditional in their values and behaviour, more dependent upon the opinion of male and female family members both in Greece and in Albania. The ‘willing’ emigrants seem to be more modern in their values and behaviour, more independent of the opinion of male and female family members. Yet, even when they have emigrated “willingly”, Albanian immigrants may still remain traditional in their roles, relationships and behaviour. The following example is of a woman who (apparently) came willingly (and legally) in 1993, who is very critical of her brother's attempt to control her behaviour in Greece and who, although having changed the way she dresses, is nevertheless critical of the way women compatriots in Greece dress and behave.

“I am in Greece now, I wear clothes accordingly but when I see women from Albania with their stomach showing, I tell them where do you come from, are you not ashamed, yesterday you did not have anything to eat, today you show your stomach here. Eh, because you come to Greece you do what you want, that is not [right], one does what one wants with oneself but has to think about it not like that, fine I come to Greece who notices what I am doing. Eh, that is not [right]”. (34th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 599)

Although a long stay in Greece necessarily brings the immigrants closer to the ways of women in the host country, it is the willing immigrants that are the most influenced, that most admire the behaviour and the opportunities that women have in Greece. This does not mean that they have altogether stopped being old-fashioned. The example of A. a “willing” immigrant that has remained rather traditional in her views is interesting. A. was born in Albania and came to Greece at the age of 18, some twelve years ago. She was the first to come and her family followed. She describes how it

is mainly her mother who makes the decisions and exercises control – through the men of the family. A. says:

“I like the woman to be serious, I don’t like her to say ah! And oh!, it is all right if she sits with a woman friend to speak and to laugh together ... I am also old-fashioned, I want certain things for my daughter to have from old times”. (A., family A, Thanopoulou, 2006: 54)

It is important to remember that the immigrants in our research, domestic workers as they are, become to familiar with the standards of living and the way of life of the Athenian middle class women. The “willing” immigrants seem more ready than the “unwilling” ones to admire the freedom that the lady of the house enjoys. Moreover, it is the “willing” immigrants that do not anticipate a return home, that prefer to stay in Greece. Consequently, “willing” immigrants are more open to the influences connected with their employment than their “unwilling” compatriots.

Migration changes women more than it does men: both “willing” and “unwilling” immigrant women become critical of, and even reject, their traditional role and the traditional submission of women to the authority and will of their husband. And although one cannot say with certainty what the main factor of that change is (is it, for instance, the security of the woman’s employment as compared to the insecurity of her husband’s? is it the slackening of the traditional social control because of distance and the novel circumstances?), the change has obviously taken place and the immigrants are conscious of it.

Donika exemplifies this (conscious) change. She is 36 years old and came in 1997 from Albania with her husband and two children.¹² She believes that her family role has greatly changed with migration – and she says:

“First of all, when I was in Albania I was ... I got married when I was about 20 ... I was very young. I did not make decisions because my husband is about 10 years my senior, I was saying to myself he is older he must know .. that is he is the man let’s do what he wants, but with time I saw that he was not always right ... life couldn’t be nice for me too, I couldn’t feel good when I was saying ‘do what you want... whatever you want, whatever you want ...’ and I came to the point to say ‘that’s it, from now onwards it is what I want’”. (Donika, in Sakellis, 2006: 96)

12. Donika gives a vivid description of how they all came on foot, over the mountains, the children being two and six years old at the time.

Another example is of an immigrant who divorced and remarried. She has two grown up children from her first marriage (the ex-husband lives in Albania now) and a young one from the second. She says about the first husband:

"... I was living with him here, eh, we lived together for five years here, we separated he was jealous, very jealous he was, he was, he gave too much importance to his family, what I worked for he says give the money to me, that is whatever his family decides, he was very much like this (...) he has brought all his brothers here to live with us and they spent all the money I earned and I couldn't take the blows any more and so I decided to separate, we separated and now I am calm, tranquil". (40th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 701)

K. is 36 years old and came to Greece 14 years ago, after her marriage. She describes the difficult relations of Albanian women with their mother-in-law (with whom they usually cohabit – as is the custom in Albania) and how things change with emigration:

"Of what I hear, most girls here do this, they take command themselves here, because a friend we have here says that when she came she changed because there she was working and giving all the money to her mother-in-law, I left and escaped..." (K., family B, in Thanopoulou, 2006: 116)

Even more interesting is the mentioning of the oppression by relatives (the mother-in-law and the father, in particular) but also by the community of origin. Migrant women express their feeling of suffocation because of the above oppression. The narration of A. is an example of this. A is 40 years old, of Greek descent. She came illegally to Greece in 1992 and maintains that her husband did not want to come. She took a divorce and she is now married to a Greek. She feels that it would be difficult for her to divorce had she not left Albania:

"... because there they are all acquainted, and as I told you before life there is totally different, is more old-fashioned, why has she divorced and now I was here and there they said all they wanted and as they wanted it. They left nothing intact and they even said things that I couldn't imagine, hence I would be worse there and do you believe that when I go to Albania I become very sad. I don't know, I cannot explain it, I am embarrassed, why tight trousers, they should be large trousers and I was wearing tights and the tights were too tight, no my father said if you do not change trousers I do not go out with you". (A., family D, in Thanopoulou, 2006: 237)

A very important factor, cutting across both sub-categories is the existence and age of children: both “unwilling” and “willing” immigrants are greatly influenced by the existence of children that were either young at the time of immigration or were born in Greece. The integration of Albanian children (and immigrant children generally) in the Greek school is very important not just for the immigrants themselves and their prospects but also for the host society and the optimization of the asset of immigration. The main obstacle in the struggle of immigrant children to integrate is the negative reaction of many Greek parents (Galanis, 2003:238; Moussourou, 2006: 236-7). Once they integrate, however, they are motivated to become good students – and many of them do. These integrated children are more Greek than Albanian – to the despair of the “unwilling” immigrants and the “pride” of the “willing” ones.

Linda, a “willing” migrant, who came to Greece legally and has two children, both very young at the time of their migration to Greece, says:

“[We speak] Albanian with my husband. With the children Albanian and Greek, because sometimes you speak to them in Albanian and they reply in Greek, and without thinking you reply back in Greek as well. But my children, between themselves in Greek only”. (4th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 82)

Another “willing” migrant, 35 years old with two children (9 years and 18 months respectively) expresses her anguish at her personal estrangement from her country as she speaks of her children not being able (or willing?) to learn and respect some of the Albanian traditions. She says:

“They can keep nothing [of the Albanian culture]. Because they don’t go [to Albania]. They go let us say once in three-four years. They don’t have the love I have. And me now little by little ... Of course at your place you have, take ... You want to see the place, everything. When they get blurred because they are not .. The first thing is that there are no jobs there. What to tell the child? Up there they don’t have a home of their own to go for a vacation. At Christmas to... What to tell them?”. (9th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 159)

The reaction of “unwilling” migrants does not seem to be much different. One of them says:

“... the children were 2 and 4 when we came. They know nothing of Albania. So ... when I say to Alexandra something, she tells me ‘all right your Albania’. All right she loves her homeland because she has been

there so many times, but here comes first. It is Greece that she knows". (11th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 201)

Linda came definitively¹³ in 1997, she has a daughter of 13 and a son of 9 and she visits her home in Albania only because her mother is living there and she goes to see her for a week or so at a time. She says:

"... And we speak mostly Greek, we don't speak Albanian because the children get confused. And I sometimes speak Albanian to my son and he tells me 'what is this?' If I speak in Greek he understands immediately". (14th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 230)

It is important at this point to note the predominant role women have for the socialization and, indeed, the molding of the children's national identity (Stratigaki, 2007: 179-180). It is this role that makes migrant women both precious for their society of origin and vulnerable: what is expected of them (and what they expect of themselves), though practically impossible to achieve, is enforced by continuous and sometimes extremely harsh attempts to control their behaviour¹⁴ (Moussourou, 1993: 52). However, one of the main changes brought about by migration is precisely the questioning if not the rejection of the above control and, to a certain extent, of the values that it seeks to enforce. With the weakening of the control over them, with the discovery on their part that their status and role can be different from what they have been brought up to see as being proper for women, they are more open to the changes that their children are exposed to, they are more likely to be influenced by their children's integration into the receiving society than they are to influence those children so as to prevent their integration. To the extent, therefore, that immigration policy is more concerned with the integration of men than of women immigrants¹⁵ (Stratigaki, 2007: 183) or

13. She had come with her husband two or three times before that, staying for a few months each time.

14. As we noted some years ago "a network of informal relationships ensures the preservation of family cohesion (and of national identity). Neither the extent of the network (in terms of the degree of kinship and in terms of its activities) or the intensity of commitment to it (particularly in correlation with gender and age) have been satisfactorily studied. This deficiency has had unfortunate side-effects, particularly in Europe, where in the '80s it began to be realized that the dynamic of migrant (ethnic) minorities is to a large extent independent of the policies covering them – and is thus out of control." (Moussourou, 1993: 51).

15. In fact, since migrants are economic migrants, immigration policy is mainly policy concerning their integration into the labour market. Although women are part of the

children (Moussourou, 2006), disregarding the mother's influence on the children but also the children's influence on the mother and, through her, on the father – to the extent, in other words, that immigration policy does not take into consideration the complex and far-reaching relationships, bonds and dynamic of family and kinship, the hoped for results will not be achieved and the policy will fail.¹⁶ The effect of such failure on the receiving society could be devastating.¹⁷

The impact of the integration of the children in Greece on the mother is therefore very important and, as we shall see, it is more pronounced in the case of immigrant women having come to Greece alone with their child. This is most obvious among Ukrainians.

WOMEN MIGRANTS HAVING EMIGRATED ALONE

The second category is where most Ukrainians belong. At the time of migration, they were on the average older than the Albanians. Many and perhaps most of them are well educated with university degrees. They usually emigrate alone, decided to work as hard as necessary in order to provide for a better life for their family back home. Sometimes this makes them appear as victims of their family and their family's needs and wants.

One characteristic case is that of Nadia, a 59 years old widow who came to Greece 11 years ago, went back to Ukraine for two years and then returned to Greece. She says that she would like to go back to Ukraine but in order to do so she feels that it would be necessary to have

“...money, because now I don't have a pension and if I ever get one it will be small. And I want to put money aside – but for ten years now I have been unable to. I don't know whether I will have enough money. My son got married, my husband died, my father was ill and then died, my mother is sick I continuously send, send, send [money]. In order for them to buy a house, for some other reason and I will not have the time to put aside [any money]. Today I have 3000 euros. This is what I saved these last years, because I decided to send nothing, because I have to save

labour market (and immigrant women are an important part of it), the labour market is still seen primarily in terms of male workers and their characteristics and needs.

16. As, indeed it is failing all over Europe: can we so easily forget the violence, the hatred, the despair of the young immigrants in the degraded suburbs of French towns two years ago?

17. Not to mention the unfortunate effects that it might have on the migrants themselves.

something. And for ten years now, I have not saved anything". (Nadia, in Sakellis, 2006: 226)

Also characteristic is the case of Alexandra who came to Greece when her husband died and she was 59 years old. She has two grown up sons and most of her money goes to them. Although she goes to Ukraine every year, she does not intend to leave Greece for good as yet. It seems that her children prefer her to stay here – presumably so that she can send them money. She says:

"Yes, [they want me] to stay for as long as I can. I want that as well. The children say, mummy you are there for more than six years come to live with us for a bit. I tell them how is it possible for me to come, life [in Ukraine] has not become any better, it is the same. We thought that after five-six years it would become better, but no". (31st interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 538)

One gets the feeling that they are being exploited – that they work hard, homesick and lonely to send money to relatives who have come to depend on it. An employer is very critical of the way her employee is being victimized – as she sees it:

"She has a husband who does practically nothing. A brother who asks all the time for loans. A child in school. That means that she tries desperately to earn as much money as possible not to buy clothes let us say but in order to help her relatives. Her relatives are permanently angry because they understand her efforts to do something as abandonment. She has a lot of problems with her family. One cannot easily understand the reasons of her being here". (Joanna, in Kambouri, 2006: 30)

Some would like their husbands to come but believe that there are no jobs for men in Greece. Such is the case with Maria, a university graduate who left her husband and four sons in Ukraine and migrated to Greece six years ago. She says:

"I miss my children very much, very much I miss them. And my family I miss very much but there is no other solution because if I bring my husband here what would he do? What would he do? It is very difficult to find a job for a man". (24th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 381)

They all dream of the day when it will be possible for them to go back home – hence they are not at all motivated to learn the language or to

integrate. One Ukrainian, no longer in this category,¹⁸ provides a very good explanation for this attitude of her compatriots. She says:

“I think that the first and most essential is that Ukrainians are [here] temporarily and that is why we live not [with the prospect of] staying here but [with the prospect of] going back to our homeland tomorrow. The more you think going back, the more you miss what is Ukrainian, what is yours.

...

I don’t know what I would do in their [the Albanians etc.] place. Were I planning to stay here I would perhaps hurry to learn the Greek culture, would I perhaps hurry to learn the Greek language?”. (22nd interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 348)

Far better educated than the Albanians, with working experience in white collar jobs, they find it very hard to come to terms with the fact that they are appreciated not for what they really are but for what they do. Their social life revolves around official (associations) or unofficial (friends) gatherings of Ukrainian women.

It is important to note that Ukrainians often seem to regret their decision to emigrate – certainly more often than Albanian women do. Their regret in many cases appears related to their perception of their marginality:

“With time I regret more [my coming to Greece]. Now I think I should have stayed there. Overcome the difficulties there, because I will be nothing more than a foreigner here. And as I am away for so many years I have lost much of the things [happening] there. I am a person who is nowhere, I do not belong here nor there anymore”. (25th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 403)

It is rare for any of them to mention willingness to stay in Greece. When one of them does, it is to underline the fact that it wouldn’t be possible for her husband to find a job in this country – hence she regards the whole matter as irrelevant. It is to be noted, however, that in the interviews they mention their parents and their children – and much less (if at all) their

18. Some time after her migration (in 1995), her husband and two grown-up children came to Greece. She nevertheless still intends to go back to Ukraine. In this respect she differs little from the others.

husband: research aims did not include the degree of satisfaction of relationships as a factor for emigration.

An important exception to the non-integration characteristic of this category is to be found with the Ukrainian women who are widowed, divorced or single and are considering starting a new life here. Olga, with two daughters in Ukraine and living with a Greek man whom she hopes to marry says:

“... when I go to Ukraine my mother tells me ‘don’t you have any money to buy a dress? You always wear trousers’. She does not understand. We change habits and we take the habits of Greece. So do I. I cook Greek and not Ukrainian dishes”. (Olga, in Sakellis, 2006: 80)

Though extremely important for the study of the migration phenomenon and processes, this second category of immigrants is of no particular interest to this study, as they do not care to integrate and they do not contribute to the integration of their family members.

MIGRANT WOMEN HAVING EMIGRATED WITH THEIR CHILDREN

The third category involves smaller numbers of immigrant women but is of a great interest. Women emigrating with their children are either widowed or divorced.¹⁹ They have considered emigration as a means for survival – theirs and their child’s. They had few choices, the one to emigrate was, from certain points of view,²⁰ the one that required the most courage. In a sense, these women are not just what we have called “willing” migrants : they are survivors. If surviving necessitates integration into the host country, they will do everything in their power in order to integrate. At the same time, they feel their exclusion much more strongly. A Ukrainian immigrant remarks:

“When I am working I think I am a house-cleaner. When I come to the association, I am a university graduate. With my poor Greek I cannot speak in the houses I am working about cinema, the theater and I feel inferior because of this”. (22nd interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 346)

19. No immigrant stated that she is an unmarried mother. We do however know from international data that a number of women emigrating with one child belong in this category.

20. From another point of view, emigration may have been the only way out – not only economically but also socially or even emotionally.

There are both Ukrainians and Albanians in this category. And the aforementioned remarks are characteristic of immigrants from both countries: with women in this category, the similarity of the migrant condition is much stronger than the important differences (cultural, educational, etc.) that they have. The main factor for integration, common to all the women in this category,²¹ is the integration of their children in the Greek school and the Greek society.

Natalia, a divorced Ukrainian woman who came to Greece with her young boy, says:

“Yes, it has been very difficult, one should have a lot of courage, it was madness that I got up and came with the child, but I never thought to stay for so long. When one comes alone, one hopes to go back after a while. But when one comes with a child, with children, one has to stay here because the children go to school here, make friends here, they bind one to this country. I wanted to go back but my little boy does not want to. He has acquired the Greek mentality, he has friends here and how to get up and go away from here? And now it may be our second homeland”. (32nd interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 540)

Though Albanians are more easily integrated than Ukrainians, it may be that the proximity of their homeland is an important factor in their prospects. A divorcee of Greek descent, who came to Greece alone leaving her two children in Albania, only to bring them to Greece after her mother died, says:

“I consider Greece as my second homeland. But the first is Albania. I say second homeland because I am Greek! And as [in Greece] they do not distinguish us from Albanians I feel somewhat offended. I grew up in Albania and cannot say ‘ah, I am not Albanian’. Since I am from Albania. I grew up in Albania.

...

My children not. My son wants to do his military service here. He is like that. He tells me ‘I will go to Albania only to meet my father’. They grew up here, they have their friends, they will find jobs here, they will have their children here”. (10th interview, Psimmenos and Skamnakis, 2006: 192)

21. And certainly present, as we saw, in many of the immigrants’ of the first category decision to stay in Greece.

Although there are no conclusive findings, it may be that this category of women is the less influenced both by male and female control.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Integration of the child into the Greek school is the strongest factor determining a decision to stay in Greece – a factor much more important than having a job. Because her child is happy in Greece and does not want to return to the country of origin, the mother is willing to stay – despite nostalgia and the possibility of a job not liked.²²

The future of the children and the prospect of a stable financial situation in Greece are very important factors behind any decision to stay. Albanians of Greek descent are more ready to dream for a future in Greece and not in Albania. Sophia, 50 years old with two grown up sons, came to Greece in 1991. She and her husband have worked hard. The two sons have done well in school, both are having affairs with Greek young women. She has no contact with Albania.²³ The family owns the place that they are living in and have purchased with the aid of a loan. Sophia dreams of the future:

“I bought my place, isn’t this a future? Eh, with...I will be working for as long as I can. Then I want our children to grow up, our boys to grow up, my husband to retire, to live here, to take care of the house, the children, that, what else is there?”. (Sophia, in Sakellis, 2006: 196)

It is very important to note the impact of the personal relations with their (female) employers on the immigrants’ prospects and motivation to integrate. As Galanis (2003: 258) notes, women have generally a more emotional attitude towards the immigrants – and one might say that immigrant women have a more emotional attitude towards their employers. Although feminist studies have tried to eradicate what has been regarded as a gendered stereotype, we believe that scholarship should respect the reality of feminine characteristics (gendered or not).

In fact, the role of women in the integration of their family may be more important than generally estimated. In spite of the traditional attitudes and

22. There is an important difference between Albanians and Ukrainians on this point: Albanians feel that if they return home they will have earned a life of leisure there. Ukrainians on the other hand abhor the kind of work they have in Greece and hope to return to a job better suited to their qualifications and aspirations.

23. In this she is rather the exception.

the more or less strict control by both male and female relatives and community members in the home country, women are greatly influenced by two main factors: their economic independence (and all the kinds of freedom that it entails) and the degree of their children's integration.

Children and their future are the main concern of migrant women. When born in Greece or very young at the time of migration, they are easily integrated and do not have any strong ties with their country of origin. Moreover, they influence their mother by transmitting to her the way of thinking (along with language, culture, customs) of the receiving country – and also by insisting on staying in this country, which they feel to be their own. When older at the time of migration, children are quickly concerned with their integration in the work market and unwilling to risk going back to a country in crisis. To the extent that they wish to find jobs in Greece and keep them, these children are motivated to speak the language well and to behave as locals do. They influence their mother both by their wish not to return and through their aspirations for integration in the receiving country. When the children have not emigrated, their needs are the main motive for their mother's migration and may keep her in the receiving country for much longer than she would personally like. And though in the latter case the immigrant woman has no incentive to get integrated and no emotional reason to be, the longer the stay the stronger the probability that she will acquire some of the local characteristics – not enough perhaps to lead to her becoming integrated (which is after all something she does not want) but sufficient to make her feel somewhat estranged from her country of origin.

For most migrant women their own mother back home is a very strong incentive for visiting their country of origin and a very strong tie with the traditions and culture of their homeland. The relationship is much more important than the strictness of the control potentially exercised – a control, the reaction to which may accelerate the process of integration into the receiving country. The eventual death of the mother is crucial, as an important tie with the country of origin is broken (particularly for women who have emigrated long ago) and the forces of integration get free of an important obstacle.

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* All references are in Greek, unless otherwise stated.