

The Greek Review of Social Research

Vol 140 (2013)

Special Issue 140-141, B-C: Migration, gender and precarious subjectivities in the era of crisis. Editors: Athina Athansiou, Giorgos Tsimouris



Coping with precarity: neoliberal global politics and female migration from Bulgaria to Greece (taking the lead from the case of Konstantina Kuneva)

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doi: [10.12681/grsr.66](https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.66)

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To cite this article:

Angelidou, A. (2014). Coping with precarity: neoliberal global politics and female migration from Bulgaria to Greece (taking the lead from the case of Konstantina Kuneva). *The Greek Review of Social Research*, 140, 217–231. <https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.66>

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COPING WITH PRECARIETY: NEOLIBERAL GLOBAL
POLITICS AND FEMALE MIGRATION
FROM BULGARIA TO GREECE (TAKING THE LEAD
FROM THE CASE OF KONSTANTINA KUNEVA)

ABSTRACT

Based on ethnographic study among Bulgarian women migrants in Athens and more particularly on the case of the attack against a Bulgarian cleaner and union representative Konstantina Kuneva, this article argues that female migration has to be understood as the consequence of the demise of the welfare state in former Eastern Europe and as resulting from the subsequent application of neoliberal politics. Most women migrate not only for making money but also to maintain their power and status as independent social actors and to negotiate unfavorable social positions and roles. However, the neoliberal restructuring of capitalist relations in the host country generates conditions of precarity for the migrants, especially for those working in the cleaning industry.

Keywords: *female migration, precarity, postsocialism, Kuneva*

1. INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War signalled the opening-up of new fields of research for anthropologists, among which the study of the integration of Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR to the global migratory system gradually occupied a considerable position. Additionally, a large amount of literature on gender in Eastern Europe has flourished during the last decade¹. Nevertheless, it is only recently that researchers have started to be increasingly

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1. See on this question Gal & Kligman 2000 and Gal 2006.

interested in the gendered dimensions of the migration movements.² In this article, by giving voice to the Bulgarian women migrants in Greece, I will attempt to bring forward the multidirectional aspects of female migration in the context of global economy. Taking as a starting point the well-known story in Greece of Konstantina Kuneva, a Bulgarian cleaner and union representative who was attacked for her union activities with vitriolic acid that caused her severe health damages, this paper investigates migration strategies, representations of labor and gender relationships produced throughout the migration processes from Bulgaria to Greece. It is based on an ethnographic study among Bulgarian women migrants in Athens.³

I argue that female migration can be approached as a response to the collapse of the welfare state in former socialist Europe and the implementation of neoliberal policies that have various social repercussions on women. In particular, the restructuring of the “private” and “public” sphere, the renegotiations of the gendered roles inside and outside the family, and specific family relations motivate the decision to move. Women migrate not only for financial reasons. They also migrate in order to maintain their power and status as independent social subjects and to renegotiate unfavourable social positions and roles. However, in the host country, migrants encounter similar global neoliberal politics that prompted them to leave their country of origin. These processes produce increasingly pre-

2. See, for example, the analyses of Brettell 2003 and Kelly, 2005. More specifically for Greece see Laliotou 2004 and 2006, Papataxiarchis et al. 2008, Sirigou-Rigou (no date indicated), Topali, 2006 and 2008, Tsimouris, 2008. Furthermore, for an overview of the studies on gender in contemporary Greece see the special issue of the review *Syghrona Themata*, 2006, edited by Laliotou and Benveniste.

3. This article is based on data collected during my participation in the research programme PYTHAGORAS II-University Research Groups Support, “Multiculturalism and migration in Greece: Ethnic groups, identities, representations and practices in the era of globalization”, conducted by the Department of Social Anthropology, Panteion University and co-financed by the European Union and the Greek Ministry of Education. The data presented here derive from participant observation fieldwork, interviews and open discussions in Bulgarian with female migrants in the urban area of Athens and the semi-urban area of Marathonas during 2005-2006 and from analysis of the Bulgarian press, including migrant journals. Subsequently, further research was conducted in 2007-2010. Interestingly, although this research was conducted in two places with different social features, the urban area of Athens and the “mixed” or semi-urban area of Marathonas, and although I spoke to women from both urban and rural areas in Bulgaria, I did not observe any important differences regarding their representations and views related to this urban/rural area divide. It is also worth noting that this divide has proved inadequate in the case of this research since many of my co-discussants often move from one area to the other while changing places of work and/or residency.

carious labor conditions and make invisible the most vulnerable parts of the working force, such as the female cleaners. Therefore, this analysis attempts to point the tensions experienced by migrants in their constant quest for meaningful agency in situations in which the global restructuring of capitalism fosters harsh labor relations and inequality.

2. SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN POST-SOCIALIST EASTERN EUROPE AND FEMALE MIGRATION

In recent years, many anthropological studies have focused on the various social effects and unfavourable work and living conditions for women after the fall of socialism. More specifically, numerous ethnographic studies underline a disproportionate amount of formal unemployment among women (Pine, 2000), their ongoing over-representation in underpaid jobs and in survival-related labour (Thelen, 2006), as well as their exclusion from entrepreneurial activities (De Sotto and Panzig, 1995; Pine, 1993 and 1998). Ethnographies point out that women have taken over social services previously provided by the socialist state (Verdery, 1996; Goven, 1993a) and show the rise of nationalistic rhetoric and new conservative discourses on motherhood, often related with losses of reproductive rights (Goven, 1993b; Gal and Kligman, 2000). However, few connections have been made between these devastating effects of the “transition” and women’s mass migration from former socialist countries during the last two decades.⁴ Here I suggest looking at women’s migration in correlation with the transformations of women’s social positions and self-identifications in the post-socialist societies.

2.1. Konstantina Kuneva: an “ordinary” migration story of a Bulgarian woman in Greece

The story of Konstantina Kuneva is to a certain extent typical of female migration from Bulgaria to Greece. Kuneva, a highly educated woman with a degree in history, archeology and ethnography from the University of Veliko Tarnovo, Central Bulgaria, receives her degree at the moment the country faces a severe economic crisis after the fall of socialism and meets severe difficulties in finding a job according to her profession. She is forced to work like a petty trader bringing stocks from Rumania that she

4. Such connections are found in the works of Pine, 1998 and Thelen, 2003.

sells in the market of Veliko Tarnovo. As Kuneva's mother was already working as a domestic helper in a family in Athens, Kuneva arrives in Greece in 2001 to operate her four years-old son who faces some health problems and decides to remain in the country in order to have a follow up of her son's health; she is in her mid-thirties and a single mother. Since her arrival she is forced again to get less qualified jobs, and works in a warehouse of a super-market and then as a cleaner for a private company that is subcontracting workers to various public institutions, among which is the metro company (ISAP).

What is more exceptional in Kuneva's case is that, unlike the majority of Bulgarian women migrants, she was not employed in the private sector of household care, but in a big cleaning company. Additionally, she became an active trade unionist⁵ and starts to receive life threats because of her union activities. She became well known in Greece when she was severely attacked by an unidentified man who threw vitriolic acid on her face and into her throat in December 2008. For many analysts, this event, as Athanasiou states is "an event of *crisis* and of *critique*", which "bespeaks the intersecting powers of racialization and feminization that have historically structured the condition of "becoming precarious" (Athanasiou, 2011), a subject to which I shall return in the following sections.

In general, Bulgarian mass migration to Greece began in the late 1990's,⁶ especially after 1997 when the country went through a deep political and economic crisis which pushed many people to leave their home. As it is common to contemporary mobilities from ex-socialist countries to Greece, Albanian migration excluded, Bulgarian migration is mainly individual and female⁷. In her concise research on migrants from Bulgaria to Greece, Markova (2001) describes the characteristics of this female migration: the majority of women are between 30-50 years-old, some up to 60; they are employed as domestic helpers, mainly taking care of elderly people and little children. They are also employed in agricultural activities.

5. She became member of the Panattic Union of Cleaners and Domestic Personnel (PEKOP) and the first migrant elected secretary of the Union.

6. For a concise review of anthropological studies of migration in Greece see Angelopoulos 2007. For an anthropological approach to cultural difference in contemporary Greece, see Papataxiarchis, 2006.

7. However, we should be cautious not to reinforce a stereotypical image about Bulgarian migrants in Greece since several families are settled down as well as people with high educational levels who come to study and/or to make a career in Greece (mainly artists, intellectuals etc).

Younger ones are mainly employed in restaurants, bars and/or nightclubs⁸.

When female migrants talk about their migration, the reasons initially provided regarding their mobility are strictly economic: “*We came for money. That’s it*”, 33-year-old Tania explains. They state that the basic reason for their mobility is the great difference in daily wages between the two neighbouring countries. Many of them stress that they would not have decided to move if there was no such difference.⁹ Moreover, geographic proximity allows a frequent and, to some extent, easy mobility “*I thought that in case something happens, I can reach the Bulgarian border even on feet*” notes Mariana, 34 years-old.

When explaining their migration motives some informants, particularly those who worked in former state-owned factories, which either downsized their personnel after privatisation or closed down entirely, refer to their experience of unemployment. They often complain that there are no jobs today in Bulgaria and that there is no assistance - such as information, training or bank loans - for those who would like to open their own business. They also refer to various other difficulties related to corruption and economic insecurity. For all these reasons, the majority of the population finds hard to shift from wage earners to small entrepreneurs and middlemen, activities greatly advertised by the post-socialist governments.

Interestingly, many of the Bulgarian female informants were not unemployed at their home country, but had left their jobs upon migration. Those who were employed in education or administration consider that the job they left was “a good job given the prospects there”. Nevertheless, for many women, the basic motive for migrating was the fact that existing employment was underpaid. The extremely low wages in Bulgaria did not satisfy their own basic needs and those of their families, such as their children’s education, home repair or the purchase of a house, for example. Many of them state that after the political reforms they did not earn enough to buy the new goods that entered their country. The majority of our informants already owned property (a house or an apartment) prior to their arrival in Greece.¹⁰ Thus, although many were employed and property

8. In the context of this paper I do not include this specific migrants’ category that work in the entertainment sector and sex industry, regarding it as a separate research field with its own particularities.

9. On the creation of values as a consequence of the inequalities between the two sides of the borders, see, Green, 2002 and Kearney, 2004.

10. These were houses they had built during the socialist period or state-owned apartments they have purchased in low prices during the first years of the transition.

owners, they decided to leave Bulgaria because they perceived themselves as “poor” and “unable” to earn up to the new economic standards.

As Chevalier (2001) notes, after 1990 two parallel tendencies have characterized the Bulgarian domestic economy. On the one hand, after the introduction of the “free market” economy, money plays a continuously important role in economic transactions. On the other hand, there is an increase in agricultural production for both family consumption and for exchanging products. The latter two tendencies stemmed from the fact that many pensioners or people close to pension returned to their villages of origin and began anew to cultivate their resituated land in order to produce basic foods for themselves and for their children in the city. Such practices existed since the last years of socialism but have proliferated in the aftermath of its dissolution.¹¹ The younger generation considered this “return” to the countryside equivalent to “peasant” life and thus undesirable. Migration appeared thus as a response to the deterioration of Bulgarian domestic economy.

Besides the immediate economic difficulties, informants, especially the elder ones, faced the uncertainty implied by the degradation of socialist welfare and pension system after 1990. As they considered their future Bulgarian pension insufficient for meeting their basic needs, they saw migration as an alternative way to provide for their old age. Very often, they used their savings, which came from their labour in Greece, to repair and/or refurbish their houses, which they saw again as a way to secure their forthcoming old age. More rarely did some buy property in Greece as an investment.

Therefore, initially, the majority of migrants experienced the crossing of the border as a temporary relocation to a close destination, a solution which they thought would help them cope with the abrupt economic difficulties they faced after the fall of socialism while “waiting” for the Bulgarian economy to improve. Nonetheless, though their economic considerations are central, there are many other factors not strictly related to monetary issues.

2.2. Feminized migration: Working out family matters, gender roles and power relations

Some other motives of mobility advanced by our informants are the so-called “personal reasons” (*lichni prichini*): “*In Bulgaria we used to get marry very young, we did not know how to choose the right man, we would*

11. See on this question Creed, 1998.

marry the first one we encounter on our way... Fortunately what continues to exist out of this story are our children" 55 year-old Rada states. Forty-seven year-old Dana adds: *"If we were a family, would my husband allow me to come here alone to make money? Shouldn't he come along with me? But, this solution was convenient for all of us"*.¹²

As Ventoura and Trubeta remark, "during the last decades some migration flows [...] have been remarkably transformed...[such as the fact] that women's migration as family leaders [...], has drastically increased" (2005: 21). In the case of migrants from Bulgaria, most women migrate neither as dependent members nor in the context of family reunion, but as breadwinners¹³. In a general way, there can be identified two distinctive economic rationales, two different strategies, each of them defining the way female migrants experience the self, mobility and their residence in Greece. The first one is based on a "family-centric" value system, where individuals act as members of a household and they prioritise collective rather than individual interests; the second one is based on an "individual-centric" rationale, where agents emphasize individualism and personal choices. One may observe a correlation between women's age and their positioning, the older women (45-65 years old) following the first value system and the younger ones (25-45 years old) the second one. In all cases their basic concern, as they say, is their children's economic wellbeing.

Moreover, none of the women I spoke to are employed in Greece in the sector in which they worked in their own country and most often they are individuals with high-level education who work as domestic helpers or cleaners, like in the case of Kuneva. Therefore, the following questions soon arise: What does drive women to leave their country and to work in jobs considered socially inferior to those they had at home? Why did their husbands accept their wives' departure and the subsequent reversal of the roles that migration causes, as women become breadwinners? What

12. The emphasis is mine.

13. Interestingly, many of the co-discussants commented that in Greece there are no jobs for men because male jobs are taken by Albanians, thereby explaining why the majority of migrants from Bulgaria are women. Some others argued that men do not "deign" to take positions others than those they have in Bulgaria because they regard those in Greece as socially subordinate. For example, rather than coming to work in Greece as agricultural or construction labourers, they preferred to remain in Bulgaria in administrative or management positions that although not well paid, are considered highly prestigious. On the contrary, those couples who prioritised staying together migrated together; in such cases, men would usually find jobs in Greece in the construction or technical sector and in agriculture.

main characteristics of the gender-based differentiation in Bulgaria in the workplace and in interpersonal relations allow or even encourage women to undertake initiatives and leadership and migrate abroad?

It seems that for many informants, and maybe for their husbands,¹⁴ migration is a way of “solving” or easing various family problems such early marriage in socialist Bulgaria and increasing rate of divorces, issues that arose during the socialist period and were sharpened after the fall of socialism. Many of the informants were already divorced or separated, while others asked for a divorce after their arrival in Greece. Underage children remain in Bulgaria under their father’s care, but more often grandparents provide this care, thus reproducing a phenomenon that Verdery defines as “geriatrization” (1996: 65), which grew in strength and number during the socialist period.¹⁵ In many such cases, women state that they do not wish to visit Bulgaria frequently because it often involves unpleasant family encounters. Instead, they prefer to pay for their children’s and parents’ travel expenses to visit them in Greece during vacation. Consequently, for these women Greece is not only an economic way out, but also a way to “escape” (*byagam*) from difficult family conditions, which apparently intensified due to their migration, and to make a “new start” in their lives.

Although, most of those who left Bulgaria intended to return after few years, as the years passed they made Greece their permanent residence. Many women, both divorced and married, created temporary or more permanent relationships with Greek and/or Bulgarian men during their stay in Greece and did not exclude the possibility to marry a native.¹⁶ Perceptions about gender relations and the way of dealing with marriage are quite telling. For example, many women who have long-term relationships or are married to Greeks believe that, compared to Bulgarian, Greek women are in an inferior position because Greek men are more “spoiled” (*raz-glezheni*) and closer to the “turkish-oriental mentality” (*turski-orientaliski mantalitet*). In general, they consider Greek men as much more “patriar-

14. As this research took place in Greece among female migrants, I did not have the opportunity to conduct research among their husbands or relatives in Bulgaria.

15. In socialist Bulgaria, often both parents were employed and retreated grandparents were taking over the care of their grandchildren since there were not sufficient state institutions for this purpose. For a thorough analysis of this topic see Iliev (unpublished manuscript).

16. Similar practices of temporary relationships between Greek civil war refugees and natives in socialist countries of Eastern Europe are mentioned by Van Boeschoten (2000). Therefore, one may wonder about the role of communist ideology in tolerating such “temporarily permanent” relationships during migrants’ and refugees’ stay in a foreign country.

chal” (*patriarhalni*) than Bulgarians: “*They are used to having everything offered in hand, whereas in Bulgaria men help*” 45 year-old Rumiana expresses a typical comment.

In order to understand such perceptions and attitudes we should analytically consider both the socialist and the post-socialist period in Bulgaria when family relationships and gender identifications went through successive changes and redefinitions. As Verdery mentions (1996), socialist regimes raised the demand for social and gender equality. Although this equality has never been totally achieved,¹⁷ relationships between men and women had been renegotiated to a great extent and women gained new roles and identities: they entered the labour market en masse, whereas the socialist state, applying social welfare, took over parts of social care such as the care of children and elderly people, domestic work, medical care, and other roles that used to be taken up by women. The perceptions about these new gender relationships shaped during socialism are echoed in some of our informants words: “*during communism women were equal to men, we believed in this, we became tractor drivers, turners, engineers... maybe that’s why we didn’t have any issues to come here alone*” 49 year-old Violeta, civil engineer, voices a common sentiment.

However, as Kligman (1992), Goven (1993a) and Gal (1994) argue, in most socialist states, in the context of very low birthrate and high expenses for social care, problems that appeared as early as the 1980s, if not earlier, a gradual “refeminization of nurturance” began (Verdery, 1996: 67). Although the Party’s rhetoric presented women as having the same capacities and activities as men, the media emphasized motherhood as a special female duty and benefit. After the fall of the socialist regimes the above tendencies were reinforced. A “retraditionalisation” has appeared – a return to “traditional values, family life, and religion-” (Kligman, 1992: 400), along with the rise of nationalist rhetoric (Goven, 1993b), as well as with a pressure for women’s disappearance from public spaces and their return to private ones and to agricultural works where power once again belongs

17. As Verdery remarks, “despite reorganizations of family roles, [...] the structure of power and the larger division of labor in the socialist family remained decidedly gendered. [...] [T]he state apparatus was heavily masculine. The core sectors of socialism [...] were almost wholly male, especially at the apex, and were represented as such. [...] Women were indeed brought into political office, but generally at lower levels and in areas deemed appropriately female: education, health care, and culture. Thus although these ‘female’ roles had been to some degree taken out of the hands of mothers in nuclear families, they remained feminized in the broader division of labor” (1996: 66-67).

to men.¹⁸ Thus, for the majority of women, the post-socialist march towards market economy signified a double loss of rights and power, in both the family and public space. This background partly explains why many women mention the socialist past with nostalgia, emphasizing the security, liberty and independence they would enjoy during that period.

In addition, as Verdery argues, in contemporary western economies domestic work has been commercialised and has been transformed into service and thus it is neither characterised as unpaid labour nor is it defined as non-labour. In contrast, post-socialist Eastern Europe returns to a “housewife-based domestic economy” (1996: 81-82) which had been abolished from socialism as well as late capitalism. Additionally, many migrant women from Eastern Europe took up jobs related to social services as maids, cleaners and health care workers. In Greece, as in other South-European countries, migrants covered in that way an institutional void regarding social care, which Greek women do not fulfil anymore, since they are orientated towards wage labour outside their homes.¹⁹ Nevertheless, in the case of migrants, care is transformed into wage labour which allows them to claim emancipation and independency in relation to the position they would have had had they stayed in Bulgaria. It permits thus many women to remain in the labour market and regain their autonomy and the power *vis-à-vis* their husbands that women lost because of unfavourable for them policies in their country. Moreover, in many cases labour is the means they prefer, in comparison to marrying a native or in combination with it, in their attempt to integrate into Greek society.²⁰

3. NEOLIBERAL SUBJECTIVITIES AND PRECARIOUS WORK

Women who seek through migration to escape the negative implications of the neoliberal policies in Bulgaria, face however the negative effects of similar policies in the host country, in particular increasingly degrading

18. The connection between re-emergence of “traditional” models and values with nationalistic rhetorics is more limited in the Bulgarian case in comparison to other countries, such as Romania or Hungary. For this reason we are not going to proceed with a further analysis of this issue.

19. The extent to which Greek women claim autonomy and power, inside and outside their families, by setting aside their domestic responsibilities constitutes a subject needing further analysis. In many cases, working outside the home does not necessarily mean abandonment or sharing house responsibilities with men. However, such an analysis surpasses the aims of this paper.

20. In other cases however, especially among elder women, care work is transformed into a means of supporting their family in Bulgaria not by renegotiating gendered roles and relations inside family, but rather by reproducing them.

and precarious labor conditions. To return to Konstantina Kuneva's case, her incident, the murderous attack against her due to her activities in the labour union, became a highly symbolic spot among Greek intellectuals, students and social movements. As it took place some weeks after the riots provoked by the murder of a school-boy, Alexis Grigoropoulos, by a policeman in the city centre of Athens, it set off a wide range of protests and public discussion regarding human and working rights, the interrelation of gender, nationality and class in the construction of citizenship in contemporary Greece and the role of the state in these processes. Furthermore, as Kambouri and Zavos (2010) note, the incident with Kuneva gave the opportunity to shed light on the cleaning industry, an "invisible" and "silent" work sector, and on the harsh working conditions in which the Greek state-owned enterprises employ people. Migration to Greece in the 1990s occurred in a period when the Greek economy was preparing to become a member of the euro zone, and thus was gradually privatizing state-owned enterprises and was cutting down state social welfare provisions. This had an immediate negative impact on the working conditions of the cleaners' profession.²¹ Over the last fifteen years in Greece, many public-owned enterprises have outsourced their cleaning services and big private companies employ an increasing number of migrants ready to work for lower salaries than Greeks and who often do not know their rights and how to defend them, e.g. they do not speak Greek and cannot read the contracts they sign, and accept to be declared and paid for less hours than those really worked.

The bad conditions of work in such companies explain why the majority of women choose a job in the family sector. Some of the few Bulgarian women working for one of the big private cleaning companies in Athens to whom I spoke to explained that they prefer working for such companies because of the relatively regular and official contracts they are offered in comparison to the more insecure household jobs. Some note that this was not a "real" choice; they just found a job and took it. For some others, this was a way to become better integrated in the Greek labour market and society as it gave them the prospect to settle down in Greece. Interestingly, many women, especially among those working in the household cleaning and caring sector, expressed their fear, indifference or even opposition to unionise and claim better conditions of work. The most educated and po-

21. Of course, this is not a Greek specificity. For a worldwide critical overview of the transformations of the cleaners' profession in the neoliberal context see Aguiar and Herod, 2006.

liticised ones refer to Kuneva as a model and a source of inspiration and encouragement. However, several others were quite critical to Kuneva's attempt "*to get involved into such things*".

The experience of vulnerability and precarity among Bulgarian migrants in Greece was thus present even before the Greek economic crisis. As Athanasiou remarks "before being recognized as a generalized consequence of neoliberal crisis and policies of financial austerity, precarity — as the normative violence that determines the terms of subjectivity and liveability — had been already established (albeit not recognized) as a profoundly gendered and racialized mode of differential exposure to injury, violence, and poverty" (2011). Most women whom I interviewed before the breaking of the crises expressed since then uncertainty, lack of long term planning about their working prospects or absence of dreams about their lives.

Nevertheless, the Greek economic crisis is worsening the precarious and unfavourable conditions of work and life of migrant women. As time passes, they reassess their working and leaving conditions; they do not make any plans, professional or personal, but wait to see how things will develop both in Bulgaria and Greece; others have already begun their repatriation. Many feel trapped as their income in Greece has been drastically diminishing during the last months, but they still believe that the working prospects in Bulgaria are worse and they see no perspective in returning. Some seek to move further westwards but believe that under the actual bad economic circumstances all over Europe this is not simple either. In all cases, they feel that their achievements in terms of power, status and autonomy, gained through their movement in Greece, are once again challenged.

4. CONCLUSION

Women's mobility from post-socialist countries to southern and north-western Europe are predicated on disordered social conditions, political and economic instability, ideological and value crisis that followed the fall of socialism. Accordingly, as Kuneva's example shows, Bulgarian migration to Greece came as a response to circumstances during which large portions of the population experienced the degradation of the working and living conditions they had acquired during socialism. Women were among the first victims of these changes. Migration was then viewed by the actors as an attempt to regain or maintain some of these conditions and to secure an uncertain future. Moreover, they migrated not only for purely economic reasons, but also in order to challenge the unfavourable social positions

they undergo, as a consequence of the diminished welfare state and of social dissolution, and to maintain their power and status as independent social subjects in both their home as well as in the host country.

In addition, female migration is not one-dimensional and is often related to both family and gendered roles, whether inside or outside of the family. For some women, migration constitutes a family strategy which secures sustaining their family's cohesion against a more general tendency of dissolution and social disruption. For others, it is an individual strategy allowing them to escape from "traditional" roles, prompted by post-socialist, neo-liberal and nationalist politics, which, in turn, contributes to further family dislocation. Nonetheless, ironically, the same global processes of neoliberal politics follow the migrants in the host country and threaten their life plans and prospects. Kuneva's incident shed light on the precarious, vulnerable and disempowering working terms female migrants face in Greece as parts of the new global care industry. Moreover, as the economic crisis deepens and social security and the welfare state get dismantled in Greece too, the prospects for the migrants further worsen and get unpredictable. The case of Konstantina Kuneva shows thus that international female migration is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon which produces emancipation and liberation, as well as relations of inequality and dependency.

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