

Gender Dimensions of Albanian Migration

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Abstract

Rapid urbanisation has resulted in significant economic, social, and cultural changes in developing countries, leading to certain implications for gender equality and women's empowerment. The study aims to better understand how rural-to-urban migration affects women's autonomy and decision-making. The study looks at how migration might challenge traditional ideas about gender and patriarchal beliefs, based on a survey of 400 rural to urban migrants and 20 in-depth interviews with people who moved from villages to the city. The study discovered that rural-to-urban migration affected and altered gendered decision-making processes as well as gender relations within households to some level. As a result of their migratory experience, women obtain increased autonomy and decision-making power inside their homes. Those who migrate may find new economic and social possibilities.

Keywords: migration, social interaction, urban society, gender relations, decision-making.

1. Introduction

A number of studies have found that migration is gendered and that gender relations shift during the migration process (Çaro 2011; King & Vullnetari 2003; Vullnetari 2012; Fuga & Dervishi 2010). Gender inclusion is essential for a complete understanding of the migrant experience. It is critical to comprehend the gender implications of migration; it is critical to comprehend whether migration disrupts established gender norms or whether migration itself contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality. Migration has an impact on both sending and receiving societies. When it comes to Albania, migration continues to be one of the most important economic, demographic, and social challenges of Albanian society (Vullnetari 2012; Titili & Nikaj, 2012; 2023). Albanian migration encompasses a wide range of migratory experiences as well as a mix of different types of movement (internal, external, temporary, permanent, etc.) and destinations. This study aims to highlight the effects of rural-to-urban migration on gender roles and family interactions in Albanian culture. There has been considerable social and cultural change in Albanian society due to demographic changes induced by internal and international migration in terms of family structure, relations between men and women, gender roles, communication patterns within families, etc. Migration and urbanisation sever traditional family bonds in developing countries (Çaro 2011; King & Vullnetari 2009; Tacoli 2013, Titili & Nikaj 2012). Migration can provide new economic and social possibilities for women migrants, potentially changing the structure of gender-based labour division and leading to increased autonomy and decision-making for individuals migrating. Even though male dominance is a component of the Albanian cultural pattern (King

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&Vullnetari 2009) studies demonstrate that patriarchal relations dissolve after migration experience and women obtain greater freedom and autonomy in their decisions and behaviours (Çaro 2011; Özdemir 2003; Tacoli 2013; Vullnetari 2012, Titili & Nikaj 2012). In this paper, patriarchy is defined as a system of social practises and attitudes in which men control women (Çaro 2011; Fuga & Dervishi 2010; Erman 2001), whereas modernity is defined as the process of transition from a traditional society to a modern society, which is closely related to the “process of urbanisation and the way urban people create their social structures” (Çaro 2011:105). The study focuses on migration from rural areas to Korça City and how migration and integration into urban subculture change gender perspectives and relationships. The paper analyses how the internal migration of people from rural to urban areas impacts gender identities and relationships. This study aims to show that migration may be an empowering experience for women since it moves them away from rural areas where they are subject to traditional patriarchal authority towards urban areas where they can have greater autonomy, self-confidence, and decision-making ability.

2. Albanian Rural to urban migration- A brief description

Studies regarding Albanian migration identify three main phases of Albanian modern migration (Çaro 2011; Gedeshi & Jorgoni 2012; IOM 2007; King & Vullnetari 2003; Vullnetari, 2012). Albanian rural-to-urban migration has occurred in the form of a massive movement of individuals and households from the village to the city, resulting in the depopulation of rural areas and the overcrowding of some urban centres (Titili & Nikaj 2023). According to Albanian Census 2011, for the very first time in the long tradition of Albanian censuses, the number of individuals living in the city has surpassed that of those living in the village (Titili & Nikaj 2023:30). Internal migration in Albania mainly occurs as a consecutive movement in which initial migrants from a particular area lead to further migratory movements from the same area to a certain destination (Çaro 2011; Vullnetari 2007; Titili & Nikaj 2023). This type of migration is known as “chain migration” (Çaro 2011:111). Family and kin ties influence the decision to move, the destination of migrants, and the patterns of integration of migrants into urban life. Chain migration causes what is known as the "herd effect of migration" (De Haas 2010), which occurs when first migrants establish in a new location and are followed by a chain movement of relatives resulting in an increased concentration around a few locations.

The Korça region, which is the focus of this paper, has a long history of migration in both its traditional types (internal and international) and ranks high as an important sender of internal as well as international migrants. As it is estimated from different studies and Albanian census data, Korça is still an attractive choice for migrants from the southeast part of the country (Vullnetari 2012; Titili & Nikaj 2023; INSTAT 2004, 2014). This high indication of internal migrants heading toward Korça is also connected to the geographical position of the city, which lies on the border of two neighbouring countries Greece and North Macedonia. The number of people in the Korça region has dramatically changed throughout the years due to migratory movements. Korça city represents a migration ‘corridor’ (Vullnetari 2012:31) that links Albania's south-eastern region with northern Greece. According to statistics from 1991 to 2000, 16,646 people migrated from villages to Korça city whereas 8124 people left the city during this period (Statistics Office of Korça Region). Analysing indicators of population mobility by years it is pointed out that the number of individuals who migrated to the city during the period 1990-2000 is very high compared to the number of individuals who migrated to the city in 2000 and onwards. From the year 2000 general political and economic stability has been established in the country. Economic, political, and social developments in Albanian society are reflected in the dynamics and flows of migratory movements within the Korça region. According to INSTAT statistics, the total number of Albanians who relocated from rural to the city between 2001 and 2011 was 280,863 (INSTAT 2014:12). The number of

people who shifted to the Korça region during the same period (2001-2011) was 6.989, with rural-to-urban migration being the most common (Titili & Nikaj 2023:31). For nearly a decade (2001-2011), Census data show that women are more likely than men to move within the country; they account for 59% of internal migrants (INSTAT 2014). For this period, women outnumber men among internal migrants, especially among migrants of younger age. Analysis indicates that women in rural areas are pushed to migrate to cities for family reasons (marriage) and because they are more likely to obtain a job in the city (INSTAT 2014). Internal migration is dominated more by family movements rather than by migrating individuals.

Between 2011 and 2020, major qualitative and quantitative changes in the character of Albanian migration occurred as a result of local and foreign circumstances. Economic and family-related motivations drove migration throughout this time, although their influence decreased. New factors emerged, such as child education and the lack of prospects in Albania. In this decade, neighbouring Greece and Italy remained the major destination nations for Albanian migrants.

3. Methodological Approach to Research

Data for the study was obtained using a combination of quantitative methods of survey and qualitative in-depth interviews. The study of individuals who moved from villages to the city was conducted using systematic probable sampling. Sample size was determined for 5% precision Levels with 95% Confidence Level, and $P=.5$. A questionnaire was sent out to 400 people who have moved from rural areas to Korça city. The questionnaire was first given to 50 individuals to evaluate the respondents' clarity and comprehension. It was also statistically evaluated to demonstrate the correctness of the data distribution and the correlations between variables. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis and interpretation, as well as Pearson's chi-square test to test the relationship between variables; correlational analysis; data crosstabulation, and descriptive comparative analysis. In-depth interviews were used to collect qualitative data. Twenty in-depth interviews with people who have migrated from villages to the city were carried out. The interviews were chosen using the snowball approach, and special attention was taken to ensure that they represented a range of ages, genders, and migratory experiences.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Gender implications of migration

Data analysis and interpretation pointed out the influence of migratory experience on family relationships regarding women's emancipation and decision-making within households and society due to migrants' societal and cultural adaptation to urban subcultures, as well as their emigration experience to neighbouring Greece. This paper analyses internal and international migration as interlinked. Most of the interviewees had migration experience to Greece before moving from the village to the city. Due to historical and trade links, as well as the geographical proximity between the two countries, Greece represents the main entry point for Albanian migrants from the country's south and southeast (Hatziprokopiu 2004; IOM 2007; King & Skeldon 2010; Vullnetari 2012). The interlink between migrating internally and migrating internationally is a typical feature of the Albanian migration pattern (Çaro et al 2014; Vullnetari 2012; Titili & Nikaj 2012). Statistical data from the survey showed that 70.9 % of the respondents had migratory experiences to Greece before moving from the village to the city, after moving to Korça or while living in Korça city.

Based on the theoretical framework that migration challenges traditional gender roles and its impact on shaping family relationships the study pointed out three different typologies of migrant families:

Type 1- includes migration histories of families where the young men of the family first emigrated to Greece. During their stay in Greece, they got married and took their wives to the new destination and after returning from Greece, they moved to the city, while their parents continued to stay in the village, or moved with them to the city. These family types are more often encountered since the main feature of Albanian international migration is the departure of young men who first took the risk of emigrating and faced the challenges and difficulties of living in a foreign country, while the other members of the family stayed in the village. While living in the new country (Greece), integration into the host society resulted in changes in their worldview and mindset, allowing them to be more tolerant of their future spouses. These attitudes are reinforced due to the social and cultural integration of their wives to the new destination (Vaiou & Stratigaki 2008) which increased demand for autonomy and decision-making, attitudes which continue to be preserved even after returning and moving to the city.

Type 2- includes migration histories of men who emigrated while their spouses, children, and parents moved to the city. This migration trajectory highlights the influence of remittances on migration from rural to urban areas. Remittances generated by international migration in most cases encourage and maintain internal migratory movements. In these types of families, the absence of the husband is associated with an increase in a woman's responsibilities (toward her children and husband's parents), autonomy, and decision-making in the family, especially in terms of economic control of the family, mainly in cases when she is the recipient of the husband's financial remittances.

This 'temporary' status is maintained even when the husband returns, as a result of his social and cultural integration into the host country. In cases where remittances are received by the husband's mother (mother-in-law), the economic control of the family and the woman's decision-making are limited only concerning the children, but once her husband returns, she gains more access to family decision-making.

Type 3- includes international migration to Greece of the whole family (spouses and children) and their movement to the city after returning from Greece.

Emigration of the family unit mainly characterizes the third phase of Albanian migration. The exposure of the Albanian family to Greek society's family pattern, the difficulties of integrating socially and economically into the country they migrated to, as well as women's employment all contributed to a significant improvement in marital relations in the country of destination, in terms of increased cooperation, tolerance, and shared decision-making (Titili & Nikaj 2012). These changes in family relationships continued to be present while moving to the city after their return from emigration.

Based on these typologies of migratory stories the Chi-square test was applied to examine the impact of migration on increasing decision-making of women within families shifted from the village to Korça city. The variable 'increase in the decision-making of women' was created by grouping several other sub-variables (decision-making for family expenses; parenting decision-making, decision to migrate, loaning decision-making). Cronbach's Alpha was applied to evaluate the degree of reliability (internal consistency of survey scales) or the extent to which every affirmation of the test measures the same concept. (Alpha = 0.739). This number indicates that the test scales are internally consistent. The result of the Chi-square test revealed a statistically significant link between variables 'migratory experience' and 'increasing of women decision-making within families shifted from the village to Korça city;

$\chi^2 (6, N = 400) = 14.37, p = .026 < .05.$

This result supports the assumption that migration leads to changes in family relationships and increases women's autonomy and decision-making within the family unit. It is worth noting that while migratory experience causes a shift in gender roles and relationships within households, it is not essential. Data from the study showed that decision-making within households related to finances and family expenses concerns most women rather than men. This is mainly linked to the fact that women being closely related to the household identify the lacks and needs of the family, as well as determine the priorities in the way of spending income within the household. When it comes to the decision to migrate or the decision to get a loan, men mostly have control even though women participate. This complies with the assumption that Albanian migration is gendered (INSTAT 2004; King & Vullnetari 2009; Vullnetari 2012). Although there is an increase in women's decision-making within households, society still attributes men a greater role in making the most important family decisions. The above analyses and data interpretations support the findings of other studies indicating that relationships between women and men in the south-east of Albania are somewhat more balanced than in other parts of the country due to migration (De Rapper 2002; Vullnetari 2012), but some gendering does occur concerning certain decisions.

4.2. The Impact of Urban Social Environment on Gender Relations

Urban social environment is of great importance in the emancipation of women and girls who moved from the village to the city and breaking down traditional family ties. Urban social environment includes a set of relationships and social interactions that individuals establish in both family and social contexts. In addition to social interaction with citizens in terms of mutual family visits, and relations between neighbours or colleagues, women find greater opportunities in the city to be socially active. Urban social environment allows women who have shifted from rural areas to the city to socialize with other women by meeting up, organizing parties, joining organizations, attending mutual courses, and so on. As Ernam (2001) states, socializing with other women constitutes an emancipation strategy for them as it enables the creation of a support network for women to negotiate their freedom. According to study results the major activity in spare time for women who have migrated from the village to Korça city is meeting friends in bars or restaurants. Women feel less isolated and more active in such meetings since they can share their problems, dissatisfactions, and solutions.

Pearson Chi-square test was applied to examine the connection between the variables "social interaction with citizens" and "friendship with citizens" with the variables "women's decision-making and autonomy" and "change in family relationships" concerning the impact of the urban social environment on gender relationships. The test findings revealed a statistically significant association between the variables "social interaction with citizens" and "increase in women decision making and autonomy":

$$\chi^2 (16, N = 400) = 33.03, p = .007 < .05,$$

The chi-square test findings also demonstrate a statistically significant link between the variable "friendship to citizens" and the variable "increase in women's decision-making and autonomy" within households:

$$\chi^2 (8, N = 400) = 36.45, p = .000 < .05.$$

The Chi-square test findings revealed a statistically significant link between variables 'social interaction with citizens' and 'change in family relationships':

$$\chi^2 (16, N = 400) = 26.38, p = .039 < .05.$$

The findings of the Chi-square test also pointed out a statistically significant association between the variable "friendship to citizens" and the variable "change in family relationships":

$$\chi^2 (8, N = 400) = 30.74, p = .000.$$

Urban social environment impacts and facilitates the level of integration into urban culture, due to the social interaction of internal migrants with the host society. It is worth noting that the social interaction between rural-to-urban migrants and urban society depends to some extent on their location within the urban area. Internal migration in Albania can be characterized as ‘chain migration’ (Çaro 2011; INSTAT 2014; Vullnetari 2012; Titili & Nikaj 2023). Social networking which relies on kinship and family links as well as economic and social help continues to play an important role in the integration of rural-to-urban migrants into urban life. ‘Chain migration’ creates what is known as the ‘herd effect of migration’ (De Haas 2010) which results in increasing spatial concentration of migrants within urban areas. Data from the survey showed that 48.5 % of the respondents claimed that pioneer migrants had helped them adjust to urban life at the very beginning of their migratory experience. The herd effect reduces social interaction between citizens and those who have migrated from rural to the city. The tendency of migrants clustering based on family and kin relationships gives new migrants who migrate from villages to urban life a sense of connection to a rural mindset and lifestyle even when living in the city.

5. Conclusion

Regarding the impact of migratory experience on gender roles and gender relations the study pointed out certain aspects of modelling gender relationships within households in terms of women’s emancipation and decision-making as well as family communication patterns. The potential benefits of migratory experience differ for migrant women based on their goals, requirements, level of education, social and cultural capital, and so on. The study indicated that when living in the city women and children show greater decision-making within the household. Breaking away from the influence of the elders as a result of migrating from rural areas to urban centres leads to changes in the roles and decision-making power of women within households. Family size is decreasing while the economic opportunities of urban areas expand. Due to migration, the vast majority of women included in the research faced a shift from an extended family to a nuclear family, leading to significant changes in family relationships and decision-making. Even when an extended family moves from the rural to the city, women's integration into urban life as well as their active involvement in the urban economy results in increased responsibilities and decision-making of women within households. Among the main factors to be considered when highlighting the change in gender attitudes and gender relations due to coexistence with urban subculture are the social urban environment and migration experience to neighbouring Greece.

The urban social environment involves all the relationships and interactions among rural-to-urban migrants and citizens. The social interaction of rural-to-urban migrants with citizens is also a result of the spatial settlement of migrants in the urban space. Chain migration is a distinguishing feature of Albanian internal migration. This trend of spatial settlement of rural to urban migrants based on kin and family ties acts as a support system for their structural integration at the beginning of their migratory experience. On the other hand, it limits their social interaction with urban society and their cultural integration. The study also showed a significant impact of international migration to Greece on changing gender roles and increasing women’s decision-making within households among people who moved from villages to Korça city. Most of the respondents claimed that they had experienced migration to Greece before moving from the village to Korça city. While living in the new country migrants try to integrate into a new cultural pattern that is characterized by tolerant attitudes towards women, shared decision-making, and consumption-oriented behaviour and norms. This leads to a change in gender relations within households, which continues to maintain and strengthen even when moving to the city. The study showed a statistically significant relationship between variables

“emigration to Greece” and “change in family relationships” which shows a significant interlink of rural-to-urban migration with international migration in Albania.

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