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Domestic Violence against Albanian Immigrant Women in Greece: Facing Patriarchy

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Abstract: Immigration is becoming an increasingly important policy concern in Europe and in many other nations. Importantly, there is an ever-growing number of women who migrate, many of whom are undocumented. Violence against immigrant women is nearly impossible to estimate. However, immigrant women who are abused face multiple barriers to seeking legal protection from the abuse as a result of their migration status, their positions within family and the host country. This paper examines the issues related to intimate partner violence within the Albanian immigrant community in Greece. It explores how the situation in Greek society and the labor market (such as social policies, xenophobic attitudes, job segregation and the prevailing economic crisis) changed the traditional gender roles and distribution of the power within Albanian families and increased intimate partner violence (IPV). The study found evidence of an increase in IPV in the aftermath of the economic crisis, which could be explained by the ideology of familial patriarchy. Battered immigrant women also face challenges in the Greek criminal justice system, which is also influenced by patriarchal values, when they are seeking relief and assistance in cases of interpersonal violence.

Keywords: Greece; migration; Albania; gender; immigrant women; intimate partner violence

1. Introduction

Violence committed against women by their current or former intimate partners is a problem that knows no geographic borders. For the past several decades, the movement to end violence against women in the United States, Canada, and Western European countries has achieved some success in challenging cultural and societal norms that tolerate violence between intimate partners, in creating and reforming legislation, establishing legal institutions to protect victims, and in enforcing sanctions for offenders. There are still some countries, however, where the issue of battered women remains relatively invisible and, as such, it is usually ignored and underreported. For example, very limited systematic research has been done in Greece [1,2] and Albania [3].

What is even less explored is the issue of intimate partner violence (IPV) against immigrant women: its extent and causes, how immigrant women experience violent intimate relationships and what legal barriers they face if they want to leave their abusive partners. Like many women, immigrant women are at high risk for IPV, but due to their immigration status, they may face a more difficult time escaping abuse because of restrictive immigration laws, language barriers, social isolation, and lack of financial resources [4]. Additionally, gender roles and cultural beliefs play a significant role for immigrant women who seek relief from violent situations. Some cultures are based on traditional patriarchal attitudes and make it more difficult for battered women to challenge their status and find solutions to their situation [5].

The current study addresses some of these issues in relation to Albanian immigrant women in Greece, which has been a major migration destination country since the early 1990s. About 60% of

Greece's foreign population comes from Albania [6]. Over half a million Albanians currently reside in Greece [7], with about 40% of them women. The problem of IPV in Albanian immigrant communities is serious and shows no indication of abating. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with Greek social workers, government officials and prosecutors, this study seeks to explore the forces and barriers that stand in the way of making meaningful progress in the fight against IPV violence in Albanian immigrant communities in Greece.

The paper is organized in the following way. First, several brief background sections provide an overview of Albanian migration in Greece, especially focusing on the migration of Albanian women and the gender roles that structure family life in Albania. The literature review also highlights the effect that the global economic crisis has had on Greece's labor market, and the problem of domestic violence in immigrant communities. Then the methodology of the two fieldwork studies in Athens, Greece is presented. The two studies, conducted in 2009 and 2013, were not explicitly concerned with Albanian immigrant women. However, given the concentration of Albanian migrants in Athens and the magnitude of the interpersonal violence problem in immigrant communities, the interviews yielded much information on the topic. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings and their implications.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Greece a Migration Destination

In the late 1980s, Greece became a popular destination country for immigrants. The liberalization and unraveling of the communist regimes in the countries of Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union led to an unprecedented influx of immigrants to Greece and several other Southern European countries. The flow of immigrants reached its peak in the early to mid 1990s. Between the years 1991 and 2001, "the population of Greece increased by 7%, while the immigrant population—both legal and illegal (undocumented)—more than tripled, to account for 7.3% of the entire population in 2001" ([8], p. 81). What made Greece a particularly attractive country for immigration? Research seeking to answer this question focuses on the country's large informal economy and its segmentation into hundreds of small, oftentimes family run businesses that are in need of cheap labor [9]. Other factors include the seasonal nature of labor in many sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, construction and tourism; and the unwillingness of Greek citizens to man these labor intensive, unskilled, badly paid and low-status jobs.

The Greek government had been caught unprepared to deal with the massive migration phenomenon legally, politically and socially [10–12]. Until 1997, no migration policy had been implemented besides the deportation of illegal immigrants. However, as massive deportations did not stop the flow of irregular migration into Greece, the Greek government enacted several regularization policies in 1998, 2001 and 2005. The first regularization program was harshly criticized for bureaucratic delays, the excessive burdens put on applicants, and preserving the arbitrary power of employers over immigrant workers who applied for legalization [13].

Subsequent regularization efforts have attempted to overcome these shortcomings, but not always successfully. For example, prior to 2005, immigrants involved in the informal economy were not able to obtain a formal employment contract, which was a requirement for regularization. Recognizing this challenge, the Greek government finally permitted these individuals to individually purchase security stamps to fulfill the requirement for regularization without employer involvement. However, this procedure was criticized as expensive and also as discriminatory because it shifted the obligation for purchasing social security from employer to employee [14].

In the past two decades, a number of research studies have explored the positive and negative effects of the large-scale migration experienced by Greece, both in the short and long term (e.g., [8,13]). The consensus is that, overall and at least where the economy is concerned, migration has had beneficial effects. First, migration has contributed to the growth of the GDP [8,15]. Second, many small and medium businesses were able to increase their competitiveness and profits relying on immigrant

help. Third, the country's agricultural sector has significantly benefitted from immigrant workers. Finally, researchers also cite among the benefits "the dampening of inflationary pressures" and the strengthening, although short term, of the social security system [8]. An important caveat is that most of these studies were done prior to the Greek economic crisis of 2008–2009.

Research has also revealed a number of negative consequences. First, the large number of immigrants employed in the informal sector resulted in an expansion of the underground economy [8]. However, immigrants cannot be blamed for sustaining the shadow economy; it had existed and was quite developed prior to their arrival. Second, studies have explored whether the influx of immigrant workers contributed to lower wages or even unemployment of native Greek workers. In regards to the compression of wages, the research consensus is that while skilled (professional) Greek workers were not affected, the unskilled and semi-skilled workers' wages suffered as a result of increased immigrant presence in the labor market [8]. One can easily imagine how this has been exacerbated after the economic crisis.

The situation with unemployment is more complex. The general public in Greece has espoused sentiments that immigrants are taking their jobs, but research has repeatedly pointed out that immigrants are taking jobs that the Greeks are not interested in [11]. However, there is no doubt that the competition for employment has increased in the aftermath of the Greek economic crisis, and the antagonistic sentiments have gotten worse. For example, one respondent in Michail's study said "Albanians who manage to undertake some construction projects are seen as foreigners who 'steal the bread' from the locals at a period that 'there is not enough bread not even for the Greeks in Greece'" ([16], p. 272).

2.2. Albanian Immigration to Greece

The mass wave of Albanian immigration to Greece began in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the country's political regime. Albania's economy at the time was in a disastrous state: GDP kept falling, salaries were miniscule and the inflation rate was at 350% [17]. Invigorated by the "wind of change" in the air and fleeing the economic hardships, tens of thousands of Albanians, mostly young men, left their country [7,16,18].

Stemming from the geographic position of Albania, the two primary destination countries for migration were Italy and Greece [7,14,17]. While the former might have been the preferred choice for many Albanians, the overwhelming majority have settled in Greece. This occurred because the long mountainous border between Greece and Albania was easier to cross than the sea border between Albania and Italy [15] for it was not as diligently monitored, and the costs of travel were relatively low compared to the costs of buying boat transportation [11]. Interestingly, the bulk of Albanian immigration to Greece in the 1990s was through illegal channels. Barjaba writes that "during the 1997–1998 in Italy, there was 1 illegal immigrant for every two legal immigrants; while...in Greece, there were 40 illegal immigrants for each legal immigrant" ([17], p. 61). This imbalance to a large extent was due to the underdevelopment and deficiency of Greek immigration policies.

There are no precise statistics on the magnitude of this early wave of Albanian migration to Greece. There are, however, data on the two regularization programs administered by the Greek government in 1998 and 2001. In 1998, 241,561 Albanians applied for legalization in Greece. Researchers have surmised that although the number of those who did not apply for legalization is unknown, it was considerable [7]. According to the latest data from the 2011 Greek Census, there are about 480,000 Albanians living in Greece. This represents 60% of all foreign nationals living in Greece [6].

The patterns of Albanian employment in Greece closely follow those for other immigrant groups in Greece. Immigrants in Greece are employed in a highly segmented labor market—especially in construction, heavy industry and agriculture. Many of the jobs are temporary or part-time, often with difficult or dangerous working conditions [13]. They... "are paid less than native workers, work under difficult and often hazardous conditions, and are mainly employed by small firms...as well as by

households" ([8], p. 87). According to the data from 2001 Census, the bulk of males were employed in construction (42%), followed by agriculture (13%) and industry and tourism (at 12% each). Albanian immigrants have the lowest education compared to other immigrant groups [8].

Greek response to the influx of Albanian immigrants has been mixed. While not hostile at the very start of Albanian entry, the attitudes of the Greek population have soured. The media has repeatedly referred to the migration as "Albanian crisis" and made active use of the term "Albanophobia" [11,15,18,19]. One explanation for the antagonistic Greek attitude towards Albanians is the poor image of Albanian immigrants in Greek collective imagination. Albanian immigrants are viewed as scheming, deceitful, primitive and inferior to Greeks, heavily involved in crime and dangerous [13,20]. The idea of Albanian heavy involvement in crime is exaggerated. Researchers agree that the share of criminal activity for which Albanians are responsible is directly proportional to their percentage in the Greek population [15].

The negative media coverage subsided in the early 2000s and some studies cite a softening of the xenophobic views of Albanians by the Greeks since the 2000s [10,18]. Other studies, however, maintain that racist and discriminatory attitudes remain a persistent challenge for social integration for Albanian immigrants [9,13,21] and are routinely faced every day, including by Albanian children in Greek schools [22].

2.3. Albanian Immigrant Women in Greece

Existing research agrees that the nature and patterns of Albanian migration have changed in the 21st century [16,18]. The proportion of illegal immigration has decreased and changed to family migration instead of a male-led phenomenon [18]. As male immigrants settled in Greece and obtained legal status, they were able to bring their families over through the newly created family reunion policies. According to data from the Ministry of Interior, the number of residence permits for spouses of Albanian legal residents increased from 45,758 in 2004 to 69,266 in 2008. Ultimately, women comprised about 40% of all Albanian immigrants [23]. Vullnetari argues that it would be too simplistic to explain female Albanian migration solely through the lens of family reunion. Albanian women "emigrated for a variety of reasons that reflected their position and status in Albanian society, including poverty, lack of economic opportunities, improvement of career prospects, personal advancement, being with their family, as well as in order to escape the constant surveillance of their local communities and the social consequences of practices related to 'honour' and 'shame'" ([24], p. 173).

It is necessary to point out that a spouse who had been granted a residence permit through the family reunion clause became dependent on the legal status of his/her spouse "sponsor". In order to apply for an independent legal status, he/she must reside in Greece for five years. Albanian migrant women entered the labor market in increasing numbers. According to the 2001 Census the predominant area of immigrant female employment was housekeeping (52%). Lazaridis in her study of Filipino and Albanian domestic workers in Greece writes that prior to the 1990s migration influx, most of domestic workers were native Greek working class women from rural areas [25]. Improvement in living standards and education levels of Greek women, coupled with the influx of migrants, led to the abandonment of this work by Greeks, who entered the labor market themselves. Migrant women stepped in to fill the void.

Other immigration scholars argue that women are most often concentrated in domestic work ("female jobs") and in the lowest paid sector of employment because immigrants are presumed to be deficient in terms of education, professional status or work experience [26]. A number of studies focus on gender differences in job achievement in destination countries and identify structural barriers in occupations for immigrants, which limit them from using their education and skills [27]. Female migrants, regardless of their level of education in their country of origin, often accept jobs or positions below their skills, knowledge or education levels. For example, Campani argues that migrant women in Southern European states who entered the country for family reunion typically began to work within a strongly gendered labor market, which further narrows their opportunities [28]. Similarly,

Cavounidis ([29], p. 653) argues that because European labor markets remain closed to migrant women from non-EU countries, it results in the deskilling and disqualification of many female laborers.

2.4. Effects of the 2008 Economic Crisis

The global economic recession of 2008 had not been sharply felt in Greece. The Greek economic crisis hit home a year later in 2009 and had more to do with the structural defects of the Greek state and economy: low competitiveness and productivity, high segmentation of the labor market and steeply rising public debt [16,30]. The Greek government has implemented a number of measures as part of the adopted bailout programs, however, without much success [16,30].

The effects of the economic crisis and the undertaken austerity measures have been devastating for the Greek population both materially and psychologically [30]. Between 2008 and 2011, the unemployment rate has almost doubled for native Greeks (8.3% to 15.9%) and almost tripled for immigrants (7.4% to 19.8%) [30]. Since the real estate market crashed, the construction sector—where a large proportion of male immigrants had been employed—was hit very hard. A large proportion of immigrants faced the threat of losing their legal status since renewing their stay permits was connected to having legal employment and insurance [16]. Many immigrants face the alternative of remaining in Greece in a status of illegality or returning to their home country. According to the latest research and media reports, many Albanian immigrants are choosing the latter [30].

Women immigrants were also undoubtedly affected by the economic crisis. The tourist industry, where many of them were employed, has sustained a hit, but was quicker to recover compared to the construction industry. In Michail's ethnographic study one female respondent said that "very few women manage to earn as much as before and these are usually envied by others" ([16], p. 272). However, there is indication that immigrant women's income remained more stable than that of men. In fact, some women became the main breadwinner for their families, which is in contrast to traditional values [16,23], and were able to remain in Greece while their husband returned to Albania [30].

2.5. Gender and IPV in Albania

Albania is a country with an especially conservative outlook on gender roles. Gender roles and the position of women have been historically regulated by traditional patriarchal rules [31,32]. Males occupy the dominant position in Albanian society and women are taught to obey the key male figures in their lives—fathers, husbands and other male relatives. This traditional cultural orientation is particularly salient in the Northern part of the country where many people still adhere to *kanun* ("canon")—a compilation of unwritten rules and norms formulated in the 15th century, that regulates all aspects of life and has been linked to the discriminated position of women in Albanian society [23,33]. In regards to women, the *kanun* proclaims gender subordination and a "clear division of rights and duties between husband and wife in the family" [31]. A recent survey of Albanians ($n = 726$), living both in Albania and abroad, revealed a moderate support for selected principles of the *kanun* especially among the older, less educated male respondents [33].

Under the communist regime, women were declared to be formally equal with men. They had the same access to education and employment. However, this equality in the public sphere did not translate into the private sphere, and the patriarchal structure continued unchallenged [23,31]. The collapse of the communist regime did not bring about further liberalization for women. In fact, there was a rollback since women's emancipation became associated with the discredited communist regime. Women's participation share in the labor market and in public life has declined. Thus, women's employment rate fell from 80% in 1989 to 51% in 2002 [23,34].

Until recently, IPV was not regarded as a social problem in Albania. It was seen as a private issue, a normal part of married life, deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and customs, and definitely outside of the criminal justice system's domain [3]. Two recent national population-based surveys were conducted to measure the nature and extent of IPV against women in Albania and the help-seeking behavior of victims of IPV [35,36]. Data from the 2013 survey [36] revealed that 59.4% of the 3589 surveyed

women have experienced some form of IPV in their lifetime and 53.7% are currently experiencing it. The prevalent type of IPV was psychological violence with 58.2% of respondents reporting experiences of verbal abuse, psychological threats, controlling behaviors and/or economic abuse in their lifetime. About a quarter of the sample (24.6%) reported lifetime experiences with either physical or sexual abuse, and 16.2% of women admitted to current experiences of these types of abuse in their relationships. Women who did not work outside the home, who did not have a university education, and women from rural areas were significantly more likely to experience IPV.

2.6. The Problem of IPV in Greece

In the public sphere, Greek society has been steadily moving towards gender equality, predominantly as a result of the increase in the level of education among females and the overall rise in the number of women active in the labor market. However, in the private sphere, similarly to Albania, Greek society continues to rely on traditional gender norms. The emphasis on the patriarchal structure of the family, protection of the family and marriage, and maternal care for large families remain very strong in Greek society. For example, historically in Greece refusal to fulfill the male spouse's sexual needs could be considered a reason for divorce and carried heavy social consequences for a woman [37]. Thus, until 2006, the law did not recognize the crime of marital rape since sexual intercourse was traditionally considered a general obligation of marriage.

True estimates of IPV in Greece remain unknown since no comprehensive national data about victims or the number of cases of domestic violence is collected. Data from the governmental agencies are piecemeal, not very informative and underestimate the extent of the problem. For example, Office of the General Secretary for Gender Equality reported that in 2009, the Consultation Centers in Athens and Piraeus received 1661 telephone calls and had 657 appointments with women who sought and received psycho-social support and legal consultation regarding issues of domestic violence [38]. Conversely, the World Organization against Torture estimated that there were 4500 rape cases yearly (including marital rape). Only 270 cases were reported to the police; 183 led to the arrest of an offender; and fewer than 10 offenders were convicted of the rape crime and sent to a detention facility [39].

A study on the prevalence of IPV in Greece, conducted from October 2002 until April 2003, reveals that 56% of 1200 interviewed women experienced verbal and/or psychological violence and almost 24% of women claimed that they know relatives or friends that are victims of IPV [40]. The findings also suggest that battered women were very reluctant to call the police (only 16.6% would do so) but instead were more likely to report their abuse to relatives or friends. When incidents of IPV were reported, the cases were usually considered as private matters by the criminal justice system, and women were often encouraged to settle the case through mediation procedures [2,41].

Despite the alarmingly high prevalence of IPV in Greece, The Greek government only recently recognized it as a social problem. An action plan was created for years 2004–2008, in which emphases were placed on combating gender inequality in the labor market, education, and women's participation in decision making, in addition to preventing and combating violence against women [42]. In addition, several legal reforms were enacted in order to eliminate gender inequality, discrimination and violence against women. For example, the law 3500/2006 on Combating Domestic Violence, for the first time established harsh penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence, defined marital rape as a criminal offense, and ensured the protection of battered victims such as the immediate removal of the offender from the home. However, the Greek government was repeatedly criticized for either not enforcing the gender-based laws or for not taking full comprehensive measures to eliminate violence against women and trafficking [41,43,44].

Interestingly, belief in the sanctity of the family was incorporated into Greek domestic violence laws. Specifically, victims of IPV are offered an opportunity to solve "family problems" through a mediation process, a new institution where the General Prosecutor brings the victim and the offender together, aiming to resolve the problem of violence. It is necessary to point out that this "mediation process" was not created in order to provide couples with the environment in which they can resolve

issues of divorce or child custody. The idea behind the “mediation process” was to keep and save the family as a unit. If the victim would agree, the batterer would be sent to therapy. Greek social workers in Wasileski’s study raised serious concern about power imbalances during mediation and pointed out the incompetence of the person who led the mediation (prosecutor), and the poor quality of therapy offered to the batterer [45].

Immigrant women are particularly vulnerable when trapped in violent relationships, afraid to reach for help due to language and cultural barriers, fear of deportation and other legal consequences, and have a poor understanding of the law in the host countries [4,40,44–47]. In many instances, immigrant women are financially dependent on their spouses either because they lack work permits as a result of their immigrant status, or they are employed in the low skill, low paid informal economy. In turn, shelters and other public service providers are often mandated to report undocumented residents or they could risk losing government funds or face financial sanctions [48].

Scholars argue that undocumented or legally dependent female immigrants experience IPV in different ways from that of citizens [4,49] and at much higher rates than in the general populations [50]. Similar to other battered women, female immigrants fear their batterers, but their anxiety is exacerbated by their legal and political vulnerability [4,51]. For example, some undocumented immigrant women are legally dependent on an abusive spouse for access to social and health services. This leads to women’s further alienation and marginalization. Furthermore, some shelters that provide help for victims of IPV cannot accept undocumented immigrants because of threats of losing government funding [48,52]. Additional difficulties include having no civil legal protections, such as restraining orders or orders for batterers to vacate the residence regardless of who owns the residence, no monetary compensations for medical and legal fees, and no provisions for temporary custody of children to be awarded to the mothers.

Migrant women’s vulnerability to IPV can be viewed through the lens of gender and constructed gender roles that exist in the host country and country of origin. A number of studies on gender roles have emerged in the migration literature. Overall, these studies focus on how societies construct and reinforce roles for male and female immigrants and how immigrant women reconcile the differences in their roles between the origin society and host country. For instance, Baluja’s research found that the gender roles of Bangladeshi immigrants change significantly after migration [53]. Immigrant families, on the one hand, stress traditional gender expectations such as female childcare providers and male as household breadwinners. However, on the other hand, these female immigrants exercise more freedom of movement without males than do their counterparts in Bangladesh. Thus, in the receiving country, immigrant women can potentially alleviate some of the burdens associated with their own culture’s traditional gender roles.

3. Methodology

Data used in this study was collected by the second author of this study in Greece during the fall of 2009 and then again during the summer of 2013 as a part of two broader projects concerned with criminal justice agency responses to IPV among the immigrant population [2]. Consequently, this study draws from two separate samples: thirty semi-structured interviews with migration lawyers, representatives of NGOs and social services providers in Athens, Greece that were conducted from September to November 2009 and eighteen in depth-interviews with public prosecutors in the court of first instance and social service providers conducted during summer months in 2013.

The first study conducted from September to November 2009 in Athens, Greece sought to explore whether gender plays a role in obtaining legal status through different migration policies such as regularization and family reunion. Namely, the study uncovered how the migration status of immigrant women affected their alternatives for seeking relief from IPV. In addition, the study focused on the ways that the legal system can be mobilized for helping immigrant battered women and provide assistance and safety. The main goals of the second study conducted during the summer of 2013 was to understand more about the common practices of prosecutors with cases of IPV, to explore the potential

challenges that public prosecutors face in their work and consequently the impact of their decisions on victims and offenders [2].

3.1. Research Site

During both studies, Athens, Greece was selected as a research site for a number of reasons. The first rationale is the density of the population living in Athens. According to the Greek Census of 2011, the majority of the population is concentrated in two major urban areas: Attica and Central Macedonia (Thessaloniki). Consequently, the main governmental and non-governmental branches are concentrated in Athens. It is also a flourishing center of commerce: approximately half of the national GDP is produced in the Attica periphery [54]. Thus, the majority of job opportunities are found in the metropolis of Athens. Second, almost half of the immigrant population lives in the metropolis of Athens (Attika). The immigrant/population ratio for Attika is around 11% as compared to 7.3% for the entire country [55]. In particular, 17% of the local population in the Municipality of Athens consists of immigrants [14]. The Municipality of Athens hosts a majority of Albanians, Georgian, Filipinos, Poles, Ukrainians, Indians, Pakistani, and Egyptians immigrants [55,56].

The existing residential patterns of immigrants, the work and housing availability in Athens, and the concentration of government agencies create an environment conducive to clustering immigrants in this region, facilitating a growth of a concentration of immigration lawyers and NGOs who operate in Athens.

3.2. Sample

In both studies the sampling of participants was purposive. In the 2009 the sampling began with identifying a list of shelters in Athens that provide help to victims of violence and a list of NGOs that focus on women and immigration issues. Both the list of shelters and NGOs list were retrieved from organizational material about women immigrants from DIOTIMA.¹ The organization identified five shelters in Athens and eight NGOs that work with women and immigrants. Initial contact with the shelters and NGOs were made via email, inviting employees to participate in the research directly and asking for their assistance in recruiting additional participants. Everybody contacted agreed to participate and meet for interviews during the field study phase in Athens. The initial contact information for immigration lawyers in Athens was obtained from published reports about refugees' situation in Greece. The four lawyers who co-authored this report were contacted and all agreed to meet and participate in the study. Key contact persons from relevant governmental offices, such as the General Secretariat for Gender Equality, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Justice, were also invited to participate in the study. This was done because shelters for battered women in Greece usually fall under the auspices of the state government or, even if they are operated by NGOs, they still receive some financial support from the state.

A total of 30 interviews were completed. Six interviews were conducted with lawyers, five with shelter providers, and 19 interviews were completed with various NGOs members and governmental officials. The overwhelming majority of the respondents (90%) were women. All but one of the respondents were white and native Greeks. One female respondent was black, but had resided in Greece for over twenty years.

¹ DIOTIMA is a civil nonprofit organization that focuses on gender equality issues and participates actively in social and political actions both in Greece and abroad. Contact with DIOTIMA members was established personally in December 2008 through April 2009.

For the 2013 study, prosecutors of the First Instance Court² in Athens and Piraeus were contacted with the cooperation of governmental organizations providing social service to battered women. In total, eighteen interviews were conducted. Fifteen interviews were with public prosecutors at the courts of first instance (12 were female prosecutors). The large number of female participants, whether they were social service providers or prosecutors, might be explained by the role of women in the social and legal professions, in that social providers are not paid very well and that women are more likely to be family lawyers than corporate lawyers [57]. Additionally, three respondents from state organization of social services were recruited through personal contacts from the previous study. All of the participants were Greek.

Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. The length of the interviews ranged from approximately 1 hour to 1 hour and 40 minutes, with an average length of 1 hour and 15 minutes. Interviews were conducted until the point of saturation or until no new information emerged from the respondents and no other questions were needed. All of the respondents in Greece agreed to be audio taped. In addition, handwritten notes were taken during all of the interviews.

The interviews were conducted in English. Even though none of the participants had English as their native language, all but a few participants were fluent and competent in English language. Thus, some interviews were conducted with the support of an interpreter. The interpreter supplied no oral translation during the initial interview so as not to interrupt the process. The interpreter participated at a later stage, transcribing the interviews and translating the interview transcriptions. Conducting research in Greece with its different culture and language could produce methodological challenges and limitations for a researcher that uses English as a second language. In order to limit these possibilities of misunderstanding, the researcher ensured that participants were able to understand the questions and ultimately the purpose of the studies.

The interview transcripts from both studies were analyzed by the authors based on inductive coding. At the beginning of the coding process, every question in the interview schedule was identified with open-coding methods. Particular attention was given to broad categories such as battered immigrant women, gender roles, immigrants and the job market, economic crisis and gender equality. Specific codes were then assigned to the responses. Therefore, more specific themes emerged within broad thematic categories. Researchers made use of the Key-Words-In-Context technique, searching for certain words (e.g., "Albanian") but relied more heavily on a broader social science query approach to identify the themes that are more subtle and do not explicitly appear in the text [58]. For example, the theme of "patriarchy" included coding for the dominance of a father/husband over a family, sanctity of the family institution in Greek society, and comments on women occupying lower social status than men. In addition, a second reader (the researcher's Greek colleague) independently analyzed the transcripts in order to establish the patterns and themes within the transcripts. Following grounded theory techniques [58], three themes emerged from the data. Themes that emerged from the data were counted as themes if at least half of the informants within respective groups (social workers or lawyers/prosecutors) raised the issue.

4. Findings

4.1. Challenges of Migration that Reinforce Traditional Gender Roles

All respondents in the 2009 study commented on the high prevalence of domestic violence among the Albanian immigrants and many explicitly acknowledged that Albanian culture is based on

² The Greek court system consists of three levels: courts of first instance, Court of Appeal and the Areios Paghos (Supreme Court in civil and criminal matters). However, only the public prosecutor of the court of first instance has a duty and jurisdiction to prosecute. As a result, since public prosecutors at the Areios Paghos and the Courts of Appeal only have the power to mandate the public prosecutor at the court of first instance to prosecute a case, these other type of courts were eliminated from the study [2].

traditional patriarchal attitudes that prevent women from challenging their status and situation, even if they are battered. The majority of the respondents noted that: *“Albanians are like Greeks in [the] 1950s and 60s. Very traditional and they don’t speak out. They don’t talk about what is happening in their home. And I believe, that is the case why [we] did not have any Albanian battered woman as a client for all these years.”* One social worker shared:

“In summer, immigrant from Albania killed his wife because she wanted to leave [him and get] divorced; in other case Greek man killed his Albanian wife because he thought that she has a lover.”

A male psychologist discussed:

“I had a case of Albanian couple, he battered his wife because she was smoking. He was actually [the] person who taught her to smoke. But, once they got married, she shouldn't smoke because a good wife and mother does not smoke. She worked and the family lived from her salaries, because he was unemployed for three years already. So he abused her for a long time only because she smoked.”

A major finding of the 2009 study was how the Greek immigration policies at the time disadvantaged immigrant women, particularly with regard to access to social support and criminal justice agencies. While written in a gender-neutral language, these migration policies actually made it less achievable for Albanian immigrant women to benefit from migration, and increased their burden if they lived in an abusive relationship. The study of 2009 showed that many Albanian women entered Greece through the family reunion migration legislation³, which was the second major legal channel to enter Greece [49]. However, having one’s legal status dependent on the legal status of one’s husband (the sponsor), forced women into a subordinate and vulnerable position within their family and the larger society. They had little or no access to institutional and economic resources or to information about the legal system in the country. As one female social worker pointed out:

“[The] Problem of battered immigrant women is very bad because immigrant battered women is an area which [the] law basically does not address. There are many issues, for example, family reunion...it was for many women the way to be legalized, especially for women of certain nationalities such as Albanians. So you have many Albanian women that came to Greece within family reunion and they have no way to reach for safety and protection. They legally depend on their spouses.”

Another social worker expressed:

“If [a] woman is married with dependent status, almost everything is in her husband’s name, the medical insurance, the tax return. She cannot even document her financial situation without her husband’s signature. The tax office would not even deal with her.”

In addition, Albanian immigrant women were frequently employed in the informal sector—performing domestic work that was not attractive for the native population because of its associated low salaries and long working hours. Since Albanian immigrant women often lacked necessary work permits as a result of their immigrant status, employment in the informal, or underground, economy was their only alternative. However, work in the underground economy typically involves a lack of legal protection from employers’ exploitation, no access to welfare benefits, and low salary. In addition, the long work hours and the typically poor working conditions of immigrant women contributed to their social isolation.

As a female social worker discussed:

³ Albanians constituted the majority of immigrants entering Greece through family reunion (ranging from 61.7 percent in 2004 and 55.5 percent in 2008). However, those entering through family reunion depend on their spouses for at least five years [59].

“Women working in domestic services are not protected by labor inspection because the labor inspection is not allowed to entry the household, so woman worker can’t prove that she had been abused by her employer. For Albanian housekeepers the situation is even worse because they are working in several different houses. They are no live-in. So, it is more difficult for them to prove that they have been abused, that they did not get paid for their work etc.”

Another female women’s advocate elaborated:

“The domestic services is also [a] very segregated market. The employer has [a] hierarchy of which nationality is good or not. Albanian women usually clean houses. You don’t have many Albanians looking after children. But many Polish or Bulgarians, [or] Russians are looking after children because they are considered to be educated, they have higher culture, they are more civilized.”

These factors—lack of solid footing in terms of the legal status and being employed in informal economy—push immigrant women into subservient positions and undoubtedly affect immigrant battered women’s decision to leave their batterers. Respondents in the 2009 study strongly agreed that the situation of immigrant Albanian battered women compared to battered Greek women was dismal.

4.2. Migration Experience as Emancipatory; Evidence of Backlash

Despite the challenges cited in the previous section, many respondents working in the shelters in the 2009 study also revealed that Albanian battered women are increasingly starting to find the power and courage to leave their batterers and seek help. They noted that a growing number of Albanian women who have suffered abuse are coming to their shelters for help. The respondents attributed this to the liberating effects of the Greek culture. As one female social worker commented:

“The [majority of] immigrants here in Greece are Albanians, they live in Greece now for 10–15 years. So, many Albanians women work, have different life now from life in Albania, because Albanians are patriarchal society. So they [Albanian women] are more opened to Greek culture and they want to be more independent. But, Albanian men don’t accept these changes. So, there is a problem.”

Similarly a male psychologist elaborated in the 2013 study on the same issue:

“It seems that Albanian man beats his wife because it is common and accepted culture, the culture of male dominance. And yes, we all know that, but there is another reason. Now, those men cannot control their wives. Those Albanians wives are influenced by the Greek culture. Those women work, they earn money and they are more likely to work than their husbands because it is easier for them to find a cleaning job even during [the] economic crisis.”

Many of the 2013 study participants commented on the fact that Albanian immigrant women who have been victimized by their husbands or intimate partners are increasingly turning to the criminal justice agencies. The respondents saw this as gaining power and agency not only within their own families, but also within the larger Greek society. For example, a female prosecutor concluded:

“Albanians commit crimes of domestic violence due to their mentality, which is very patriarchal, alcoholism, and frustration from economy. Albanian women mostly press charges because most of them are not illegal immigrants anymore, they are not afraid, and also because they are influenced and integrated in the Greek society and their mentality has changed over the years.”

As opposed to the findings from 2009, the study of 2013 uncovered that migration status is no longer the biggest challenge facing Albanian immigrants. Majority of undocumented Albanian

immigrants were legalized and have been on their pathway to integration into Greek society for over a decade. Instead, the economy became the primary source of concern. The majority of participants in the 2013 study discussed the economic crisis and how any “crisis in the society always turns against those who are helpless. So, usually against immigrants, its children and women.” Thus, one female social worker summarized:

“Albanian women are the breadwinners for the family. 90% of Albanian women work like dogs. Cleaning 2–3 houses each day, 2–3 house per day and then going home and doing practically the same. And I can tell you from the personal experience, when the time was good with that entire boom for construction work in Greece, the most of Albanian men had work. Now, due to the crisis, the construction sector is very low, 90% of them stay at home and drink all day long. And women work like dogs and when they come home they have to do everything. Because that is their job, their obligation. They also have to accept any brutality from their husbands. It is very common in Albanian family, more often today than before. The economic crisis increased the violence in families.”

As mentioned earlier, many Albanian men employed in agriculture and construction sectors had lost their jobs after the Greek economic crisis. However, Albanian women were able to hold on to unskilled and low paid job in cleaning and other service sectors. Consequently, many respondents discussed the intimate partner violence in Albanian family as a result of shifting gender roles and viewing violence as a way of reestablishing control over women and family issues.

4.3. Patriarchal Orientation of the Greek Society as the Main Challenge for Albanian Battered Women

Data from both the 2009 and the 2013 studies revealed that a lot remains to be accomplished in regards to combatting the problem of IPV against immigrant women, and that the progress has been slow. On the one hand, the Greek society has been confidently moving towards gender equality with more women obtaining higher education and being active in the labor force. Similarly, legislation passed in 2006 designated domestic violence as a separate offense. On the other hand, the patriarchal outlook on the proper place of women and emphasis on the traditional structure of the family, protection of the family and marriage institutions remains very strong. Recognizing the offense of domestic violence on paper did not automatically translate into rigorous enforcement of this law. A female lawyer explained:

“The new legislation about violence in family does not change a lot in reality. Actually nothing changes at all. Women are more likely to press charges than before, perhaps they are more aware of the problem. However, very few if any of the perpetrators are actually prosecuted because many prosecutors undermine the problem of domestic violence.”

Unlike the social workers or victim advocates in the 2009 study, some of the prosecutors who were interviewed in 2013 seemed less sensitive to the extent and the negative consequences of interpersonal violence for the victims and children witnessing the violence. Thus, one respondent stated that women reach the courts and press charges against the perpetrator because they “need alimony and upper hand in custody legal procedures.” This mindset could be due to the lack of appropriate training on gender violence or could also be a reflection of the larger patriarchal culture. Some prosecutors regarded the problem of domestic violence as a private issue, one that women can adequately handle on their own. For example, one female prosecutor argued:

“Many women change their testimony in the court, so many perpetrators are released and never prosecuted. I believe that when women press charges and then change her testimony, she wants to give the husband another chance. I believe she knows the conditions of her decision. She knows him and her situation, so if she sees that he isn’t consistent and he is violent again, she will press charges again.”

Another female prosecutor concluded:

“I imagine that some women, of course, would feel threatened and in danger. Although, I think that many women have always in the back of their mind that they will continue to live with their husbands.”

Thus, while many immigrant Albanian women challenged their spouse’s dominance within their families by leaving and reaching for help from the violence, they faced an impediment in the Greek patriarchal society, in which men exercise more power and hold more privileges than women. The majority of shelter workers who participated in the 2009 study discussed how the Greek society’s beliefs in traditional gender roles and strong individual ties to the family are regularly enforced through legislation and social practices. For example, a female social worker in the 2009 study argued:

“A lot of Albanian women will eventually go back to their husband, not only because many of them are legally dependent on their spouses, but [because] their children are totally dependent on their fathers. [A] Child is always recognized only under the father name. So if [the] mother wants to travel abroad with the kids, she needs her husband’s permission...in many offices the father’s presence is necessary...If you don’t have [sole] legal custody over [your] child, you need [the] signature of the father for almost everything.”

Similarly, another female social worker in a shelter discussed the hard to resolve difficulties that battered immigrant women might face in Greece:

“Most of Albanian battered women are married, what is also a difficult part because of their children. If children do not have [a] father, for example, if [the] child was not recognized by its father, there is no legal obstacle for the mother, because she is solely responsible for the child. But, if [the] woman is married or [the] child has a father, then [the] woman needs legal advice how to deal with the custody and in many instances there is a problem. Until they obtain legal custody for their children, they have problems to change a school for their child: the new school will not accept that child without permission from [the] other parent etc. Both parents have the same rights over their children.”

The Greek state has demonstrated little inclination to address the issues faced by immigrant battered women. Perhaps, the reason behind this indifference is a widely spread belief in the sanctity of family institutions and patriarchal values, which inhibits a much needed response to the prevalence of domestic violence. As one female lawyer expressed:

“Recently I had a case where [a] battered woman lost custody of her two children. The family was from Albania. She lost custody because the social workers from some NGO wrote report to the court where they described her as a bad mother. They wrote that while she was in hospital, she did not call [her] children very often, so the children should be given into custody of the grandparents. And she lost the custody. And I think that she lost custody because she decided to leave her husband because of violence. So for the Greek NGO, I think, the fact that she decided to leave her husband and she had [an] affair...[made her]...a bad mother.”

Similarly, a female sociologist from a state run shelter comments on the Greek cultural allegiance to the sanctity of the family institution:

“It is a narrow minded assumption that immigrant women are not battered. But, the Greek society whatever it does not like, will put under the carpet. So we don’t have illegal immigrants, we don’t have a problem of domestic violence...Because then we have to go back to the sanctity of family...People even of my generation, and I am close to 50, were brought up to believe [in] the sanctity of the family, of the country, and of one religion. These things you don’t touch, they are sacred and they are perfect.”

The Greek patriarchal approach and the influence of cultural attitudes towards the role of Greek women to keep the family together still play a strong role in the practices of criminal justice agencies. According to the 2009 study respondents, the undocumented immigrant communities lack any support from the community-based advocates, police, prosecutors, hospitals, and social service agencies. Out of the thirty respondents interviewed in 2009, more than half mentioned that gender discrimination is not only a legal problem in Greece, but also a structural problem. For instance, one female sociologist from a state run shelter stated:

“ The police are the problem because it is quite well known that police officers beat their wives. So, of course they protect the batterer, the husband. And they start to harass the women; something like oh it is nothing...just go home...it will not happen again.”

Another female social worker from a non-governmental organization stressed:

“There are two kinds of police men. Some of them, very few of them want to help women, but they don't know how to do it...And this behavior is in Athens. So, it is even worse in small villages and other rural parts of Greece. I don't think that any police officers would help women in other Greek towns or small villages. The situation in small isolated villages and towns is worse. People are more traditional, patriarchal, and they don't care about women. But women who are victims of domestic violence just don't go to the police. Police have some limited training about domestic violence. Police, the same like we do, have the list of shelters, lawyers, and other services that they must to give to the woman if she will come to report the violence. But no one does it. They have guidelines but they don't follow them. Only very few of them do it because most of them have the same ideology toward women like a perpetrator.”

A female social worker from a state run shelter pointed out:

“...some police men are also very bad and they treat these women like garbage, they don't speak nice to them, regardless how many seminars they had attended. Maybe some of them beat their own wives.”

The majority of the study participants stressed the fact that police officers view family violence as a private matter that falls outside of their mandate. Even though specific police guidelines about how police should deal with cases of domestic violence were distributed across the police departments, according to the study's respondents, those guidelines are insufficient, very limited, and probably unknown to police officers. One female member of a non-governmental organization specified:

“...There is an official letter from the Hellenic Police Headquarter addressed to police stations with instructions how to behave in the case of domestic violence. But, if you go to the police station nobody knows what kind of instructions, or where the paper from the Headquarter is located. Only very few police officers know about it. I have a battered woman and when I call to the police station and explain that I have a case of a battered woman, the police officer usually asks me: what do you want me to do with it? Police officers are just not interested in interpersonal violence.”

People turn to police for protection. Police officers have the authority to protect victims, to legally apprehend or remove offenders, and to initiate the investigation of a crime. In order to find justice, every victim of interpersonal violence must deal with the police and required legal procedures. However, battered women, particularly immigrant battered women, can be re-victimized by police officers. The majority of respondents in 2009 study claimed that battered women in Greece generally could not rely on police protection. Since the Greek society views domestic violence as a private matter, police officers are not trained to respond appropriately and sufficiently, and often reinforce the general patriarchal view of women role in family and the society as whole.

5. Discussion

Since the special issue on women in migration that appeared in *International Migration Review* in 1984, there has been a growing body of scholarly literature in the United States and Europe that places gender at the center of inquiry about migration, emphasizing the importance of gender for the causes and consequences of international migration and how migration, its processes and outcomes, differ for males and females [9,31,60]. However, the issue of violence against immigrant women has received comparatively little scholarly attention.

The findings of this study confirmed that intimate partner violence against Albanian immigrant women remains a serious concern in Greece. Furthermore, there is indication that the Greek economic crisis might have led to an increase in family violence, a backlash to the growing emancipation of immigrant women. However, this finding has to be interpreted with caution since it was revealed by Greek prosecutors and shelter providers and not by Albanian immigrant women themselves. This might be regarded as a weakness of the paper. Nevertheless, scholars of IPV have long insisted that this form of violence should not be studied only at the level of individual behavior, but rather should be approached from a political-economic perspective [61]. Shelter providers, social workers, attorneys and prosecutors—workers at the frontlines of gender-based violence—are well equipped to expose how “culture and structural inequalities shape the ways that gender-based violence is defined and approached” ([61], p. 8).

Patriarchy has been a central concept in feminist explanations of violence against women since the 1970s [5,62] since it explicitly focuses on gender hierarchy, societal power arrangements and dominance. Hunnicutt defines patriarchy as “social arrangements that privilege males, where men as a group dominate women as a group, both structurally and ideologically” ([62], p. 557). Violence against women can be used as a tool of social control. Furthermore, scholars have argued that violence against women could be employed as a tool to compensate for one’s weak social status: “The more disenfranchised men are from legitimate positions of dominance, the more they may use violence to reinforce quite possibly the only position of domination available to him” ([62], p. 560).

Scholars have differentiated between familial patriarchy—male dominance in domestic settings, and social patriarchy—male control at the societal level [63]. As the study revealed, for Albanian immigrant women both forms of patriarchy remain a challenge. At the familial level, their victimization is culturally determined since Albanian culture dictates traditional differentiated gender roles with explicit or tacit approval of family violence. However, research has commented on how migration process has the potential to confront and transform gendered relations by altering “status and power within or outside the household” [24,31]. This is what happened in some immigrant families where moving to another country contributed to the growth of women’s expectations, elevation of their status and expansion of their choices. One might doubt whether simultaneously working several difficult jobs with meager pay could be interpreted as a pathway to an increase in autonomy and empowerment. However, gender and migration scholars have repeatedly pointed out that paid employment could lead to an increase in self-esteem and agency [24] and be “a new source of power within their households and a basis from which to negotiate individual identities and gender relations. It is also a source of stress for men, especially during periods of unemployment” ([64], p. 129).

The recent global economic crisis contributed to worsening of employment opportunities for many immigrants. As discussed, the construction sector, which tends to employ many Albanian immigrant men, experienced a significant decrease in demand. In addition, immigrants might not be covered or protected by unemployment services, which further increased their vulnerability for poverty. Consequently, it became more difficult for immigrant men to accomplish their culturally expected roles of protectors and main breadwinners. When the patriarchal organization of the household is crumbling, domestic violence could become a way of enforcing women’s conformity.

This finding is in line with existing quantitative research on the ideology of familial patriarchy being a powerful predictor of violence against women [63,65]. For example, Burazeri and colleagues surveyed a representative sample of 1039 married women in Tirana, Albania [32]. Thirty-seven

percent of the sample have experienced violence at the hands of their husbands. The study found that being married to men raised in rural areas, having a college education, working in a white-collar job, and having an education level higher than that of the husband elevated respondents' risk of being victimized.

Patriarchy at the social level becomes the second barrier for those Albanian immigrant women who have found the courage to report their abuse. In Greece, IPV is not a public problem, it is an issue to be addressed within the family context to preserve the family as a social unit. Even though Greece, as a part of the European Union (EU) community, has to comply with EU requirements in the areas of gender and racial anti-discrimination policies, the international pressure is usually limited to enacting appropriate legislation, not enforcement of statutes. Because access to legal remedies for immigrant battered women depends upon individuals within the legal system, including police officers and prosecutors, these women are vulnerable to the personal prejudices of individuals. The study uncovered that police officers and prosecutors are influenced in their interaction with immigrant battered women by their personal attitudes, potential biases and broader patriarchal norms. Some of them are gender biased and this could be particularly harmful when they are called to domestic violence incidents. When the patriarchal challenges that Greek women confront in their families and society are combined with a single Greek identity, immigrant battered women are even more vulnerable to violence and abuse. This vulnerability is therefore experienced at multiple levels, not only in their intimate family relationships, but in broader Greek society as well.

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