



Weekly Briefing

**Albania social briefing:
Albania and gender (in)equality
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Introduction

If the entire society in Albania is somehow struggling and perpetually on a crossroad, the heaviest burden of it all would go to the Albanian women. History and reality has not been kind to them and while striving for equal rights and better life conditions, women in the country has been unheard, under pressure and often marginalized. A famous quote would state: "*You can judge a nation, and how successful it will be, based on how it treats its women and its girls.*" If we apply this logic as metric on judging and projecting the future of the country as it clearly appears, there is a long way to go and a lot of work to do in order to include, rehabilitate and empower Albanian women.

Albanian women in time

Going back centuries, Albanian women have been leaders (Queen Teuta of Ardiaei tribe in Illyria 231 BC), inspirational figures for legends (the ballad of Constantine and Doruntina; at the very center of the Rozafa Castle of Shkoder there is a woman, whose name baptized the castle), stoic and heroic (the Castle of Gjirokaster holds the name of Argjiro, after the woman supposed to have lived in the 15th century and jumped off the castle in order to avoid being captured by the invaders). However, with the advent of the Ottomans in the country, for almost five centuries, Albanian women had to abide to the rules of the empire, meaning, being considered second-class citizens. As per state documents, after the World War II and the installation of a socialist society, in a population of population of 1,122,044, the number of illiterates was 911,410, or 81.22%, and of course, the few ones who could read and write were mostly men. During almost 50 years of socialist rule, women in Albania were considered equal to men when analyzing the working force and contribution to society.

With the changes of 1991, a new wave of problems hit the society, thus women. Public disorder, extreme structural insecurities, emigration and revival of old customs, to mention a few. In very thorough research on gender inequality and post-socialist societies after 1991, Kahlert and Schäfer concluded that, in almost 20 years of transitional societies, democratization *per se* did not guarantee advancement in gender equality. On the contrary, post-socialist democratization produced backlashes in many areas of gender inequality such as the **feminization of poverty**, the revival of traditionalism due to the revival of nationalism, and more. ⁱ

The above observation can be applied to Albania as well; many national and international organizations have stressed the awakening of traditionalism in the country and unfortunately the traditionalism with Albanian characteristics does trace back to the dark centuries of the ottoman rule. Meaning the core of the society, the family is extremely patriarchal, where the main male figure dictates and others obey, the daughter and the wife are considered as an extension of this male not as human entities *per se*.

General data

As for the latest data available, Albania's population in 2019 is 2.862.427, out of which the women population accounts for 50.1%. There is not a distorted sex ratio, however some statistics are quite indicative, 53% of Albanian women get married up to the age of 24, and up to 80.5% of them by the age of 29. This explains the relatively young age for marriage at 25.5 years old for women. On the other hand, 54.6% of men get married up to the age of 29, and 82.4% of them get married by the age of 34. The average age for marriage is 30.2 years for men. Employment rate for the population aged 15-64 is 66.7% for men and 52.4 % for women. Women and men belonging to the 15-64 years old age group are mostly employed in the agriculture sector, of which 42.3% are women. Marriage is considered important by the entire society and the majority of Albanian women consider to live in a country with patriarchal values.

Women and domestic violence

The new 2019 Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Index analyses 167 countries on women's equality, reveals trends in women's wellbeing across 11 indicators.ⁱⁱ In this report Albania ranked 57th – if compared to other nations of the region it is observed: Bosnia and Herzegovina 56th, Montenegro 40th, Bulgaria 39th, North Macedonia 37th, and Serbia 24th (the leading countries, respectively no. 1 and no. 2 are Norway and Switzerland and the last ones, respectively no. 166 Afghanistan and no. 167 Yemen).

This positioning of Albania in world ranking is also tied to many cases of domestic violence. As per national statistics regarding the damaged persons of criminal offences, data indicates 19,101 damaged persons, of whom 4,997 are women, about 26.2% of total. Meanwhile 1,248 are juveniles, 342 are girls and 906 are boys. Out of the total of injured persons, juveniles account for 6.5%.

In absolute terms in Albania, are a total of 3,414 violated women. The highest percentage of women subject to domestic violence is concentrated in prefecture of Tirana with 37.2% violated women, followed by Durres with 14.3%, while the prefecture of Kukës and Dibra

marked the lowest percentage with respectively 0.8% and 1.4 % violated women. If we express the number of violated women as a proportion of their population, the rate of violated women in prefectures of Durrës, Vlora and Tirana accounts for the highest rate of violated women, respectively with (34.1), (28.6) and (28.2) expressed per 10 thousand women inhabitants. Meanwhile, the prefecture of Kukës (7.2), Dibra (8.4) and Shkoder (14.3) constitute the prefectures with the lowest rate. Cases of domestic violence reflect the number of denunciations made to the police, a phenomenon which may even cause a person's death. Thus, out of 51 murders, about 19.6 % of them are homicides as a result of family relations (in most cases women are the victims).ⁱⁱⁱ

A case that identifies deeper ramifications of backwardness

In February 2020, an appalling family crime disheartened the entire country: a 45-years old man, emigrant in Greece, after turning back home and having a conflict with his wife killed her in the heat of moment and in the presence of their children. The day after he surrendered and confessed to the authorities, the motifs of the crime have been classified as “on the bases of spouse's jealousy”. Now there are three children with a dead mother and a convicted father, the tragedy is not over. That man killed the future of his children, killed himself, and killed the dream of a happy life with the family – but why?

There is no simple or single answer to the question, as usual, it is complicated, laying into the intersections of individual vs. society. In the personal dimension, jealousy is a derivate of low self-esteem; in a wider dimension opinion of the others in the community, role models of patriarchalism, emigration – altogether are a recipe for disaster. As horrific as it sounds, unfortunately, this is not an isolated case; it has been an integral part of Albanian society for the last 30 years. Three other similar cases were recorded in January 2020, and for a population of less than 3 million people the figures are disturbing. According the State Police, the main motifs for this crime within the family (per order of higher to lower reported cases) are jealousy, betrayal, conflicts with the husband's family, conflicts over economic status, the impact of alcohol and other illicit substances.

Some sociological evaluations

A very distinct Albanian sociologist, Gezim Tushi, argues that it should be acknowledged the seriousness of the situation and names the phenomenon a “social shame”. He claims that domestic crimes have taken alarming proportion and have become one of the most disturbing acts of the society as a whole. The very nature of this type of crimes is linked to many economic and social factors, tradition and development as well as culture and typology of Albanian

families. Many family conflicts aggravate to the extreme and become major crimes as a result of the jealousy fueled by the surrounding environment, the small community, where the rule of law is lived and perceived as fiction.

Especially the poor areas of the cities or villages, almost always experiencing breakdown of social structures, leading to an increase in family crime. It happens that crime has a concentric system, with expanding circles of "hell", ever-increasing violence and terror in the family. Stressed, disillusioned people is one thing however, depressive states in humans are not immediately created but are formed with time and circumstances. Beyond these murderous, extremely shocking and destructive outcomes in the current state of Albanian families, there are causes, motives, and other reasons with social, psychological, and economic reasons that require analysis and conclusions that scholars of all fields and policymakers have to deal with.^{iv}

Conclusions

Miserable act such as the killing of women from family members are the shadiest side of the Albanian society. Certainly, these acts do not define the country as a whole, yet, when they occur, they should be taken at face value and it should be tried to identify the underlying motifs and of course neutralize them to the core. In the path to modernization, some sections of the society are left behind, are left in the darkest sides of the reality and women (especially the ones with no financial means) are the first to suffer. To the most vulnerable of the society it should be paid the more of attention, granted care and assured support.

ⁱ Kahlert, H., & Schäfer, S. (Eds.). (2011). Engendering Transformation: Post-socialist Experiences on Work, Politics, and Culture. Verlag Barbara Budrich. Pp. 105-106

ⁱⁱ Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security 2019. Available at: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WPS-Index-2019-20-Report.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Report in cooperation with UNWomen and INSTAT. Available at:

<http://www.instat.gov.al/al/publikime/librat/2019/burrat-dhe-grat%C3%AB-n%C3%AB-shqip%C3%ABri-2019/>

^{iv} Interview with Gezim Tushi. Domestic crime is taking lives. Translated from: <https://www.botasot.info/opione/1025169/krimi-ne-nbsp-familje-po-merr-jete-nbsp-njerezish/>