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GREEK FARMERS' INTERMARRIAGES WITH ALBANIAN WOMEN: TOWARDS '*TRANS-BORDER SOCIAL HOMOGAMY*'?

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Marriage markets and succession systems in the European countryside have, during the last decades, been transformed as a result of contemporary processes of rural restructuring. In Greece such processes have been characterised by, among others, young women's outmigration thus jeopardising rural families' reproduction and endogenous development prospects. On the other hand, owing to the political change in the Balkan countries there has been a sizeable inflow of immigrants in the Greek countryside who have contributed to the revitalization of the Greek rural economy. The present work aims at exploring intermarriages between farmers and immigrant women, especially Albanians. Such intermarriages are due to certain socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the Albanian women; hence, we put forward the hypothesis of 'trans-border social homogamy'.

Introduction

Migration, in all its forms, constitutes one among the, more or less organised, modes of managing economic, social and political issues. Despite profound differences as far as the reasons, processes and effects of migration are concerned, migration influences, among others, the 'succession' systems and the marriage markets in both the areas of origin and the areas of migrants' placement (Gonzalez-Ferrer 2006; Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Lucassen and Laarman 2009).

These dynamics acquire specific characteristics in (especially European) rural areas where migration influences the local strategies of biological and social reproduction (marriage markets and succession systems). Such strategies are themselves transformed in the course of contemporary rural restructuring processes (Kasimis et al. 2010) or, more generally, the (partial) replacement of conventional agricultural development by a more diversified and integrated paradigm of rural development.[1]

In the context of the restructuring of the Greek rural areas and the considerable inflow of immigrants, the current article addresses the dynamics of intermarriages between Greek farmers and Albanian women and the social consequences for local development in Aetoloakarnania Prefecture, Greece.

Theoretical background

In the case of marriage researchers often use the metaphor of the market. According to the 'social exchange theory' (Becker 1991), people try to maximise their gains though marriage,

i.e. they (rationally) evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of a union and the exchange of resources (Kalmijn 1993; Houston *et al.* 2005; Trilla *et al.* 2008). The phrase 'marriage market', in the sense of an assortative matching process, implies that there is a demand side (individual preferences) and a supply side (opportunity structure) in partnering (Fafchamps and Quisumbing 2008; Niedomysl *et al.* 2010).

According to Kalmijn (1991; 1998) partner selection depends on three factors: preferences, opportunities/marriage market structure, and third-party influence. Preferences imply the search for a potential spouse who is attractive in terms of socioeconomic and cultural (values, opinions, life style, knowledge and worldview) characteristics/resources. Opportunity for contact (i.e. the supply-side, determined by group size and openness), refers to availability and accessibility to potential spouses. The influence of 'outsiders' (with respect to the potential partners) refers to the influence of the family, the community and the state on partner selection. Partner selection in order to maintain or improve aspects of the household's status has often been underlined in terms of the influence of 'outsiders'. (Gonzalez-Ferrer 2006; van Tubergen and Maas 2007; Dride and Lundh 2010)

Literature shows that people tend to choose a partner from their own group (endogamy) and of, more or less, similar social status (homogamy) (Kalmijn 1998; Brynin, Longhi and Perez 2008; Sterbova and Valentova 2012). Therefore, partners are often comparable in terms of characteristics such as age, level of education, ethnic background, religion and socioeconomic status—although women are generally slightly younger. Nevertheless, a perfect correlation, i.e. positive assortative matching, is not always observed. Negative assortative mating occurs when partners compensate unfavourable characteristics (for example, low socioeconomic status) by a more favourable one (such as: attractiveness, age, education, etc.); As Brynin et al. argue '[I]t is difficult for couples to use similarity as a criterion across a wide range of dimensions. If they tried to do so they would soon run out of potential partners' (2008: 26). It follows that various characteristics/dimensions may, more or less, turn into perfect substitutes for other characteristics; moreover, such characteristics are ranked differently by different individuals (Stockdale *et al.* 2000; Çelikaksoy *et al.* 2006). Marriage thus varies, historically and geographically, since '[T]he final match reflects the preferences and strategies of the involved parties including the possible interference of families, but it is also structured by collective norms and legal and religious institutions.' (Dribe and Lundh 2011: 299).[2]

Intermarriage

International migration has altered, sometimes considerably, marriage choices and opportunities due to changes in sex ratios, marriage demographics and, thus, standard arrangements to marriage (Sinke 2001). The structure of the marriage market has been shown to be decisive for partner choice (Kalmijn 1998; Beck-Gernsheim 2007; Dride and Lundh 2011). Sex imbalances and the size of the group in the (partial-local) marriage market are major constraints with regard to partner selection (Gonzales-Ferrer 2006). Moreover, according to Blau, Blum and Schwartz (1982) these two factors do not only determine the possibilities of carrying out certain preferences but the very nature of marriage partner preferences as well.

Besides the size of groups and sex ratio as well as residential segregation (van Tubergen and Maas 2007), socioeconomic and cultural barriers are also important to consider in discussing intermarriages. Geographical proximity is usually matched by socioeconomic proximity. Intermarriages often occur between partners with the same socioeconomic background. Social endogamy (or class homogamy) tends to occur due to a preference for partners who share

similar values and tastes and thus the ability to share problems, beliefs, interests, and so on (Barbara 1994; Kalmijn 1994; Heaton and Jacobson 2000; Kalmijn and Bernasco 2001; van Leeuwen and Maas 2005). Religious beliefs have a strong effect on intermarriage since intermarriage usually requires the acceptance of a different cultural system, beliefs, and life style. Strong bonds with ethnic and religious background may therefore be negatively correlated to intermarriage. Further criteria may include age (and/or age difference), language skills, marriage order, physical handicaps, etc.

Marital mixture is therefore a complex phenomenon indicating a 'wandering away' from the own group's norms (Barbara 1994). According to the assimilation theory, immigrants go through a process of acculturation and structural integration thereby reducing the degree of dissimilarity (distance) between themselves and the majority/native population which would otherwise inhibit inter-ethnic marriages (Dride and Lundh 2011). Yet, it is interesting to note that the 'segmented assimilation theory' (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Zhou 1993) maintains that migrants assimilate into different cultures rather than into a single 'melting pot'.

Overall, according to Lucassen and Laarman (2009) intermarriage is explained through, roughly, two approaches: a) the contact theory, stating that people have to meet before they can have a relationship and thus emphasising factors such as sex ratios, age distribution, relative group size, and the heterogeneity of the group and, b) the barrier theory, predicting low intermarriage rates when authorities (either secular and/or religious) put up (institutional) barriers to restrict or discourage marriages transcending social, religious, or ethnic boundaries. In this sense, opposition to ethnic intermarriage is considered as a type of ethnic exclusionism while intermarriage represents the ultimate litmus test for assimilation (Alba and Nee 2003; Tolsma *et al.* 2008; Scott and Cartledge 2009).[3]

Marriage Markets in the European Rural World

In rural societies, succession always constituted a particularly complex process for the transfer of economic, social and symbolic capital, personified in marriage candidates (Bourdieu 1980; Barthez 1984; Ponton 1985). The aim was either the configuration of 'alliances' for the preservation or enhancement of the socio-economic status (Salitot Dion 1975; Desrosière 1978; Barthez 1984) or the evasion of a marriage which symbolically was deemed inappropriate (Bourdieu 1980 and 2001). In this respect, both farmers' homogamy and celibacy—as social and parental 'projects', were, more or less, imposed upon candidates.

Partner selection was a crucial (strategic) issue in terms of socioeconomic reproduction. This has resulted in the development of explicit social norms steering individual behaviour in the marriage market in agrarian societies. Factors regulating marriage included socioeconomic origin, age or age difference, and geographic origin (proximity) of spouses. Nevertheless, other factors might also be involved in partnering as is the case of farming grooms who valued brides with farming experience. Further, parents often got involved (either directly or via match makers) in partner selection since parental background variables, among which land was dominant, determined what marriage candidates brought to marriage—particularly the first marriage (Stockdale 2006; Dride and Lundh 2010).[4]

In the present-day, modern rural (European) world, families' succession and marriage systems have been substantially transformed since, owing to rural restructuring processes, the evaluation criteria concerning farming and manual work as well as the educational and social assets/qualifications of candidates (who will stay in rural areas or leave, get married or not)

have been also transformed. Marriage choices often entail conflicts between aspirations and structural limitations, emotions and obligations, interests and (accepted or imposed/enforced) social boundaries (Bourdieu 1993; Champagne 1986 and 1987). In other words, parental projects, weaving social contradictions as well as differential maternal and paternal aspirations, may well lead youngsters into 'personal reproduction crises', that is, tentatively to new forms of celibacy.[5] On the other hand, a 'generation conflict', i.e. 'collisions' between children and parents (or older people in general), has been empirically observed on the occasion of marriage (Barbara 1994),[6] which can be extended to pre-modern and modern partner selection (Illouz and Finkelman 2009).

Such a complex, dynamic process is particularly related with the expansion and improvement of educational attainments which have transformed the reference points of farmers' social position and the refusal of women, especially those with educational attainments, to marry farmers, leading to new celibacy mechanisms (Berlan-Darque 1988). The search on the part of male farmers for women who wish to stay in farming—'women for home' (Lambert 1991)—often utilises immigration as a market comprising 'available and well-disposed' women.

Aim and Methodology

Within the developing research addressing migration in rural Greece, which mainly focuses on the consequences of migrant labour on local development, references to the topic of intermarriages are sporadic and sketchy. This article represents the first attempt to examine migration as an opportunity for the management of (male) Greek farmers' biological and social reproduction. Therefore, the aim is a) to present the general picture of immigration to Greece in the context of rural restructuring processes in Greece and Albania (the main source of immigrant flows to the country) and b) to investigate male farmers' choices in the frame of the local marriage market of Aetoloakarnania Prefecture, especially as far as Albanian women are concerned.

The first point is dealt with through extensive literature review. As far as the exploration on intermarriages in the research area is concerned, data were drawn from the relevant marriage registers of the 29 municipalities of Aetoloakarnania Prefecture for the period 1990–2005. The data utilised in this work concern inter-ethnic couples living permanently in the Prefecture; couples who live elsewhere (in Greece or abroad) were thus not taken into account.[7/8]

Albanian Immigrants in Rural Greece

Over the last two decades, substantial changes concerning the succession systems and the marriage market in the rural world have taken place due to a process of 'de-agriculturalisation' and the economic and social diversification of rural areas (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005). The latter is reflected in changes such as agriculture's restructuring (i.e., mechanisation, rationalisation, the use of cheap immigrant labour, etc.) and increased flexibility of family labour, notably the increased participation of women in off-farm employment, implying changes in farming family members' roles (Gidarakou 1999; Kazakopoulos and Gidarakou 2003). In parallel, the improvement of educational attainments as well as of the living standards in rural areas have led to increasing expectations particularly on the part of rural youth who display an aversion towards agricultural and, in general, manual work. The combination of these factors leads the youth to look for off-farm jobs, often outside rural areas. This is particularly pronounced in the case of young women who 'vote by their feet' abandoning not only the

family farm but rural areas altogether. This overall negative stance of young women towards farm employment or integration, through marriage, into a farming household creates difficulties in the reproduction of (farming) households in rural areas, especially in the mountainous and less favoured ones (Kazakopoulos and Gidarakou 2003; Kasimis *et al.* 2003; Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005).

On the other hand, immigration is a rather recent phenomenon in Greece. It started as a limited phenomenon in the 1980s and increased in the 1990s due to the collapse of the communist regimes in the neighbouring Balkan countries. Migration from the Balkan rural areas has intensified due to the dramatic changes in the countries' social and economic circumstances such as, land privatisation, market economy, unemployment, social insecurity, etc. (see, Hatziprokopiou, 1996; Carter and Kaneff 1999; Kostov and Lingard 2002; Sotiropoulos *et al.* 2003) which, in turn, aggravated the conditions for reproduction of rural families (Dobreva 1994; Genov 1998; Brunnbauer and Taylor 2004).

Estimations based on the Greek National Census data (2001) place the number of immigrants to around 10% of the country's population, that is, 762,000 of legal and a further 230,000–300,000 of illegal immigrants. Among the 27 migrant ethnic groups, Albanians predominate: their official number is 438,000 people, accounting for 56% of the registered immigrant population or 4% of the total population of the country—although there is reason to believe that this number is quite a conservative estimate (See Lambrianides and Lyberaki 2001; Fakiolas 2003; Nikas and Aspasios 2011).

In Greece, as in other Southern European countries (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005), a large number of immigrants settled in the countryside for a variety of reasons among which the existence of a wide agricultural sector, the Common Agricultural Policy's (CAP) emphasis on multifunctionality and pluriactivity, labour deficiencies, and the persistence of an extensive informal economy covering the needs of rural households and small-medium enterprises. (Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005; Kazakopoulos *et al.* 2011).

According to the 2001 population Census one out of six or seven male as well as one out of eight or nine female immigrants are employed in agriculture. Immigrant paid labour in agriculture accounts for 10% of those occupied in farming. Various studies (Kasimis *et al.* 2003; Kasimis and Papadopoulos 2005; Kasimis, 2008; Kasimis *et al.* 2010; Kazakopoulos *et al.* 2011) have shown that, through the provision of flexible and cheap labour, immigrants, particularly Albanians, have a positive role in the revitalization of Greek farming, and rural economy in general. In parallel, immigrants have contributed to the renewal of the rural social fabric. Research indicates that they have eased the demographic stress, especially in mountainous and less favoured rural areas where farmers, especially stockbreeders, were able to find women to marry thereby improving their living and working conditions.

Transformations in Rural Aetoloakarnania

Such phenomena are particularly interesting for (largely rural) areas such as the Aetoloakarnania Prefecture (West Greece Region). During the 1980s and 1990s, this prefecture experienced significant economic, social and demographic changes. More specifically, in the period 1981–2001, although there has not been a substantial change in the Prefecture's overall population, movements from the mountainous and semi-mountainous areas towards the plain areas are recorded (Table 1).

Table 1. Aetoloakarnania Population (1981–2001).

	Population				%			
Year (Census)	Total	Plains	Semi-mountainous	Mountainous	Total	Plains	Semi-mountainous	Mountainous
1981	219,764	105,517	76,432	37,815	100	48.0	34.8	17.2
1991	228,180	113,924	77,225	37,031	100	49.9	33.9	16.2
2001	219,092	125,557	64,926	28,609	100	57.3	29.6	13.1

According to the 1981–2001 Census data the plain areas' population increased by 20,040 persons (18.99%) while in the mountainous and semi-mountainous areas it decreased by 9,206 (24.34%) and 11,506 (15.05%) people, respectively. During the same period the population of the Prefecture's urban centres substantially increased (Agrinio by 23.48%, Mesolonghi by 26.35% and Nafpaktos by 30.26%).

As far as agriculture is concerned, there has been a substantial decrease of both men and women employed in farming. According to the Census data, in the 1981–2001 period employment in agriculture decreased by 23,768 people (–45.16%), i.e. 16,691 men (–50.87%) and 10,018 women (–50.53%), with a parallel increase of employment in the tertiary sector (37.78%) and construction (10.95%). Overall, employment in agriculture (as a percentage of total employment) fell from 70.26% in 1981 to 54.10% in 2001 (from 63.04% to 44.33% for men and from 86.73% to 69.40% for women with women's share in farming labour also falling from 37.67% to 33.98%).

Farming in Aetoloakarnania has been, since the early 20th century, dominated by the cultivation of tobacco. This resulted in a 'tobacco culture', that is, a certain type of social system which determined people's perceptions, images and practices relating to, on the one hand, land ownership and farming as well as succession systems and the marriage market and, on the other hand, the individual and social identity of farmers as men and women in work, family and social relations. In this sense, 'tobacco culture' is a major component of the study area's agrarian culture. However, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform in 1992, created changes in the common market for tobacco, imposed restrictions in the production, marketing criteria, prices and the varieties of tobacco cultivated in the area (Skuras 2001). In particular favouring the cultivation of the commercial/industrial Virginia variety which substituted for the traditional (oriental) varieties ('Myrodata' and 'Tsebelia').

In reality though, the numerous marginal farms which were cultivating the oriental tobacco varieties were subsequently abandoned. In the period 1981–2004, the farm heads occupied in the production of 'Myrodata' were reduced by 4,564 persons (–78.78%) and the ones of 'Tsebelia' by 15,587 (–97.47%) while the heads cultivating Virginia increased by 5,579. Therefore, 14,341 (–64.54%) farming families abandoned tobacco production; a further 2,500 families were also negatively affected as their members were employed in jobs related to tobacco (i.e., marketing and processing).

Such economic, social and demographic changes in both the rural and urban areas of Aetoloakarnania also affected the marriage market (Table 2).

In two decades (1981–2001), according to Census data (Table 2), celibacy for both men and women increased from 7.75% to 15.32% and divorces from 0.15% to 0.73%.

Table 2. Celibacy and Divorces in Aetoloakarnania (1981–2001).

Year (Census)	Population	Age groups	Males				Females			
			Single	Single (% of the total population)	Divorced	Divorced (% of the total population	Single	Single (% of the total population)	Divorced	Divorced (% of the total population
1981	219,986	20–29	7780	3.5	32	0.0	4,623	2.1	55	0.0
		30–39	1,892	0.9	72	0.0	950	0.4	82	0.0
		40–49	834	0.4	52	0.0	963	0.4	40	0.0
1991	228,180	20–29	13,172	5.8	33	0.0	5,658	2.5	94	0.0
		30–39	3,922	1.7	128	0.1	1,232	0.5	161	0.1
		40–49	998	0.4	120	0.1	644	0.3	130	0.1
2001	224,429	20–29	14,383	6.4	50	0.0	8,171	3.6	153	0.1
		30–39	6,674	3.0	253	0.1	2,022	0.9	434	0.2
		40–49	2,312	1.0	358	0.2	813	0.4	383	0.2

Source: National Statistical Service of Greece.

To sum up, in the period under consideration, there has been a move of the population from mountainous and semi-mountainous areas to the plains as well as to the Prefecture's urban centres. This led to a decrease in the rural population and especially the tobacco farming families together with an increased likelihood for men to remain unmarried while women tend to get married and divorce

Transformations in (rural) Albania

Significant changes have also taken place in the rural areas of the Balkan countries, especially of Albania from where the largest migrant flow to Greece comes from.

Emigration has been the result of the opening-up of Albania to the outside world in the early 1990s. According to the 2001 Census, in excess of 600,000 Albanians had left, temporarily or permanently, the country, the true number possibly being considerably higher still (King 2005; King *et al.* 2011). Relevant studies converge in the description of emigrants as being typically young, married males aged 20–30 years or, at least, tending to fall within the age bracket of 15 to 39 who for the most part leave for economic reasons. Further, it is suggested that the emigration of young educated women has afterwards contributed to the number of female migrants increasing (Arrehag *et al.* 2006).

As noted earlier Albanian immigration in Greece is a relatively recent phenomenon, triggered in the early 1990s, owing not only to the demand on the Greek side and the socio-economic developments in Albania (see below) but also to factors such as the ease of entry and geographical proximity of the two countries. As a result, about three-fifths of the Albanian emigrants were destined for Greece (Arrehag *et al.* 2006).

The 'new era' (1990s) found Albania with 50% of its active population engaged in farming. With unemployment as high as 46% the country was suffering from galloping inflation, deterioration of public expenditure, intensification of parochial conflicts, employment uncertainty, social insecurity and political distrust (Veremis and Nikolakopoulos 1995; Saltmarshe 2000). Additionally, in rural Albania, the redistribution of land in 1992, did not

satisfy either the common sense of justice of former proprietors or farmers' survival needs (Christensen 1994; Stanfield and Kukeli 1995; Hatziprokopiou 1996; Nientied 1998). To this, the socioeconomic, in general, inferiority of the rural vs. urban society along with the hard working conditions and poverty in agriculture have to be added (Balli 2011).

Women, in particular, were further burdened due to the conflicts arising from the emerging divergence between, on the one hand, the traditional roles of the family and the symbolic system of patriarchy and, on the other hand, the entrance of the society into the market dynamics. Coupled with the aspirations for social mobility this led to the increase of intra-household conflicts and divorces (Kloep 1995; Lawson *et al.* 2000). Within such a framework, Albanian rural women's migration, towards either the cities or abroad, seems to have been, more or less, a joint decision in the framework of households' livelihood or coping strategies (Arrehag *et al.* 2006). Migration thus concerns the management of complex economic, social and demographic problems within the inescapable transition from the 'socialist' to the 'free-market' agriculture.

Marriage Registers Analysis

For the period under examination mixed marriages concern 245 Greeks (229 males and 16 females) who got married with immigrants from the Balkans and the ex-soviet states. The analysis of the occupations of Greek spouses[9] is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Greek male's spouses occupational status.

Occupation	No.	%
Farmers	79	34.5
Employees	35	15.3
Free Lancers	34	14.9
Technicians	25	10.9
Pensioners	18	7.9
Manual Workers	16	7.0
Unemployed	3	1.3
Other	19	8.3
Total	229	100

Source: Marriage registers of Aetoloakarnania municipalities (authors' elaboration).

Following the data in Table 4, the farmers in mountainous areas got married mainly when aged up to 35 years old (58%) with none getting married over 45 years old. Most of these were first marriages (88%), had a religious wedding (80%) and were mostly in the 1998–2001 period (52%). They largely married a woman of Albanian origin (64%), who was orthodox (100%), between 20 and 30 years old (60%)—32% up to 25 years old, and primarily occupied as a 'housewife' (88%).

As far as farmers in semi-mountainous areas are concerned, they mainly got married when between 31 and 40 years old (51%), for the first time (60%), had a religious wedding (55%), predominantly in the period 1998–2005 (65%)—40% after 2001. They largely married a woman from Albania (55%), orthodox (95%), chiefly between 20 and 30 years old (70%) —with 40% being over 25 years old, and occupied as 'housewife' (100%).

Table 4. Farmers' intermarriages characteristics (n = 79).

	mountainous areas (n = 25)	semi-mountainous areas (n = 20)	plain areas (n = 34)
Farmer's age			
20–25 years	12.00	5.00	5.90
26–30 years	26.00	0.00	23.50
31–35 years	20.00	31.00	20.60
36–40 years	20.00	20.00	26.50
41–45 years	22.00	29.00	5.90
over 45 years	0.00	15.00	17.70
Type of wedding			
Religious	80.00	55.00	41.20
Political	20.00	45.00	58.80
Marriage line			
First	88.00	60.00	79.40
Second	12.00	40.00	20.60
Time of wedding			
1990–1993	5.00	15.00	8.20
1994–1997	15.00	20.00	15.30
1998–2001	52.00	25.00	29.40
2002–2005	28.00	40.00	47.10
Bride's origin			
Albania	64.00	55.00	32.40
Romania	20.00	10.00	29.40
Russia	8.00	15.00	11.80
Other	8.00	20.00	26.50
Bridge religion			
Orthodox	100	95.00	85.30
Muslim	0.00	0.00	2.90
Other	0.00	5.00	11.80
Bride's age			
20–25 years	32.00	30.00	26.30
26–30 years	28.00	40.00	35.30
31–35 years	16.00	10.00	17.70
36–40 years	12.00	8.00	12.20
41–45 years	10.00	7.00	6.70
over 45 years	2.00	5.00	1.70
Bride's occupation			
Housewife	88.00	100	82.40
Other	12.00	0.00	17.70

Source: Marriage registers of Aetoloakarnania municipalities (authors' elabortation).

Finally, farmers from plain areas largely married between 26 to 40 years old (70.59%), for the first time (79.41%), had a civil wedding (58.82%), mainly in the period 2002–2005 (47.06%). They married an orthodox (85.29%), mainly between 20 and 30 years old (61.76%)

and largely occupied as 'housewife' (82.35%); almost one-third of them (32.35%) got married with a woman from Albania.

It follows that farmers in the mountainous areas of the Prefecture when compared to the rest of their colleagues with mixed marriages got married at a rather younger age (58% between 20 and 35 years old), for the first time (88%), had a religious wedding (80%), rather earlier in time (82% by 2001)—mainly in 1998–2001 (52%), with women of an Albanian origin (64%), orthodox (100%) and preferably younger (32% up to 25 years old).

Table 5. Albanian women's intermarriages characteristics (n = 86).

	mountainous areas (n = 20)	semi-mountainous areas (n = 25)	plain areas (n = 41)
Woman's age			
20–25 years	40.00	24.00	22.00
26–30 years	20.00	32.00	41.50
31–35 years	5.00	12.00	9.8
36–40 years	5.00	0.00	7.30
41–45 years	10.00	20.00	8.20
over 45 years	20.00	12.00	11.30
Woman's religion			
Orthodox	100	96.00	92.70
Muslim	0.00	0.00	2.40
Other	0.00	4.00	4.00
Woman's occupation			
Housewife	95.00	76.00	75.60
Other	5.00	24.00	24.40
Marriage line			
First	80.00	68.00	68.30
Second	20.00	32.00	31.70
Time of wedding			
1990–1993	12.00	16.00	18.10
1994–1997	13.00	20.00	28.20
1998–2001	45.00	28.00	31.70
2002–2005	30.00	36.00	22.00
Husband's age			
20–25 years	10.00	12.00	12.20
26–30 years	25.00	16.00	19.50
31–35 years	15.00	24.00	7.30
36–40 years	20.00	16.00	24.40
41–45 years	20.00	12.00	14.60
over 45 years	10.00	20.00	22.00

Source: Marriage registers of Aetoloakarnania municipalities (authors' elaboration).

As far as Albanian women who got married to Greek farmers in Aetoloakarnania are concerned, our analysis (Table 5) points to the following. In the mountainous areas of the Prefecture, Albanian women equally married males under and over 35 years old (with the

relative majority (25%) being in the age cohort 26–30 years old); they got married for the first time (80%), had predominantly a religious wedding (80%), mainly got married in the period 1998–2001 (45%), were orthodox (100%), largely ageing up to 30 years old (60%)—with 40% being between 20 and 25 years old, and declared 'housewives' (95%).

Those of the Albanian women who got married in the semi-mountainous areas got married to males up to 35 years old (52%), with the relative majority being between 31 and 35 years (24%); they got married for the first time (68%), largely had a religious wedding (76%), got married chiefly between 1998 and 2005 (64%)—with the relative majority in the 2002–2005 period (36%), were orthodox (96%), mainly up to 30 years (56%)—with the relative majority in the cohort 26–30 (32%), and largely occupied as 'housewives' (76%).

Finally, those who got married in the Prefecture's plain areas mainly married men over 35 years old (60.97%)—with the relative majority in the age group 36–40 (24.39%); they largely got married for the first time (68.29%), had a religious marriage (65.85%), got married mainly after 1998 (53.66%)—with the relative majority between 1998 and 2001 (31.71%), were orthodox (92.68%), mostly aged between 26 and 30 years (41.46%) and declaring 'housewives' (75.61%).

It follows that women immigrants from Albania who got married in the Prefecture's mountainous areas as compared to those who got married in the semi-mountainous and plains areas were rather younger (40% in the group of 20–25 years old), got married mainly in the 1998–2001 period (45%), for the first time (80%), are 100% orthodox and had a religious wedding (80%); they got married to slightly younger males (35% up to 30 years old; only 10% over 45), and are housewives (95%).

Discussion

The ageing of the rural population and, particularly, the difficulties faced in the farming succession process are major problems in Greek agriculture. This problem is more acute in remote, mountainous rural areas where outmigration and depopulation jeopardise the prospects for endogenous development—owing to the lack of appropriate human capital. The presence of, chiefly, young households, fulfilling many critical functions—from production to reproduction—is thus extremely important. Hence, a lot of emphasis in rural areas is put on marriage—and thereafter on children (Stockdale 2006; Fafchamps and Quisumbing 2008).

In this respect, native women's rejection of farming and living in rural areas results in an exodus to urban centres which leads to a 'lack of women' in rural areas and constitutes a major problem for rural household reproduction. Young men who 'stay-behind', on top of work-related and masculine identity challenges owing to rural and mainly farming restructuring processes, are further psychologically distressed (especially those in remote areas). They feel unable to meet individual and societal expectations as far as marriage and the formation of a household is concerned which, in turn, contributes to feelings of isolation, depression and declining self-esteem (Kaberis and Koutsouris 2013).

Such a situation is confirmed by the case examined here. Indeed, since the 1980s, economic and social transformations in the rural areas of Aetoloakarnania Prefecture (West Greece region), due to 'de-agriculturalisation' processes, have influenced the marriage markets and resulted, among others, in a 'lack of women'—as indicated by the increasing numbers of male bachelors in the area. Our field research shows that under the pressure of under-employment young rural men mainly sought access to local off-farm employment networks while young

women looked for a spouse or employment in urban centres. On the other hand, the males who stayed in the rural areas, or were forced to return under the pressure of unemployment in urban centres, were obliged to accept the new economic reality with all its concomitants as far as the limits of the marriage market were concerned.

In parallel, since the 1990s, there were dramatic changes in rural Albania in the transition from 'socialist' to 'free-market' agriculture. Such transformations have influenced local marriage markets and resulted, among others, in a 'surplus of women' who may take the decision to migrate, most probably towards Greece. Our research confirms such a situation in rural Albania, where a 'surplus' of women emerged in both the local labour markets (i.e. women previously working in state farms) and marriage markets (i.e. women not able to get married due to, among others, the break of traditional networks of either ethnic homogamy or mixed marriages).

The findings of research in Korce district (south-eastern Albania, bordering Greece) in late 2002 confirm such arguments (Arrehag *et al.* 2006). It is shown that households with migrants are more common in rural than in urban areas (42% vs. 28%) with around 85% of rural and 84% of urban emigrants destined to Greece. Furthermore, emigrants are largely driven by economic rationales (almost 85% for rural emigrants vs. around 69% for the urbanites), particularly men (87% vs. 56% for women). As far as women are concerned, a quarter of those with a rural domicile as well as almost two-fifths of those from urban areas were single. Furthermore, female migrants tend to be slightly younger than men while urban women are accustomed to a freer life and have received better education compared to rural women (Arrehag *et al.* 2006).

Therefore, the 'gap' on the supply-side of the Greek local marriage markets (i.e. sex imbalances) seems to have started to be (at least, partially) relieved by the 'supply' of immigrant women. Women immigrants from Albania, comprising the largest women flow in Greek rural areas, thus became the prime target for mixed marriages on the part of rural men. Nevertheless, besides access, single male farmers also search for women with, as far as possible, suitable characteristics, i.e. familiarity with agriculture, wishing to stay in rural areas and not substantially objecting to the native symbolic system (i.e. converting to the orthodox faith, Kaberis 2006).

In this respect, women immigrants from rural Albania are 'suitable'. They are already familiar with mixed marriages (a pet practice of the communist regime in order to manage ethnic conflicts), the change of names (continuing measures of the regime to impose 'Albanian' names), religious neutrality or tolerance (enforcement of atheism by the regime) as well as with rural life and farming (Kretsi, 2003; Tsitselikis and Christopoulos 2003; Panagiotou 2011). Moreover, Gjonka, *et al.* (2008) along with Doja (2010) argue that Albania, particularly its countryside, still remains a traditional society with respect to marriage patterns and for Albanian women marriage continues to be regarded as almost universal. Therefore Albanian rural women are 'available' to get married to a farmer.

The preceding analysis of marriage registers in Aetoloakarnania shows that such a case is especially relevant for the mountainous areas of the Prefecture. Farmers in these areas have been (at least up to 2005) marrying primarily women originating from rural Albania due not only to availability (i.e., the large size of this group *vis-à-vis* other ethnic groups) but to socioeconomic and cultural proximity as well. It is worth mentioning that in these areas, according to our field research, there has not been a conflict between parents and their children who intermarried, given the anxiety of families concerning the continuity of the

lineage and farm succession. The small number, if any, of indigenous brides, resulted in the relaxation of social controls—and probably the restructuring of initial male candidates' preferences. The socioeconomic and cultural proximity of rural Albanian women, specifically their willingness to get christened before getting married and have a religious wedding, facilitated intermarriages. In this sense, no secular or religious barriers hindered intermarriages. Overall, it can be argued that, in mountainous areas, proximity (geographic, socioeconomic and cultural) allowed for intermarriages between Greek male farmers and rural Albanian women thus resolving the pressing problems of families and communities as well as males' reproduction crisis. It further points to a break with hegemonic conventions as well as to the emergence of reflexive and flexible identities.

Therefore, our research in Aetoloakarnania is in line with much of the literature addressing the factors influencing partner selection, especially in the case of intermarriages, underlining the decisive role of the structure of (local) marriage markets, the importance of socioeconomic, cultural (especially religious) and, to a certain extent, geographical proximity along with the lack of (institutional) barriers, and so on, with the only exception concerning 'generational conflict' over intermarriages.

Finally, despite the low numbers of intermarried male farmers, as presented in this article, if the overall situation is taken in account (i.e. remote, mountainous areas characterised by scattered villages (or even settlements), low population density and lack of youngsters) such numbers comprise a social indicator underlining a breakthrough in marginal rural societies' socioeconomic processes. Indeed, our field research indicates, in line with previous research in Greece, that mixed marriages have had a positive influence in (especially mountainous) rural areas. Despite their complexity, they created rather optimistic social and demographic dynamics. They allowed for quite a few males to stay in these areas and make a family without profound changes in the social and symbolic systems such as those of the religious marriage. Furthermore, successful marriages with Albanians are taken as a positive experiment which allows for further mixed marriages, within the same or neighbouring communities, with women from Romania and Russia.

Conclusion

The basic trends of intermarriages between farmers in the mountainous areas of the Aetoloakarnania Prefecture and Albanian (immigrant) women indicate that the 'social trajectories' of the candidates, up to marriage, have similarities or/and tend to meet. Women mainly originating from mountainous and less favoured rural areas in Albania, coming from poor families with little land or excessive female labour hands, who cannot find employment in the local markets but are familiar with farming meet males, mainly farmers, who are looking for available, well-disposed and manageable 'woman power' in order to secure their biological, social and economic reproduction. In this respect, it might be appropriate to approach such intermarriages as a form of 'trans-border social homogamy'. This (recent) phenomenon, in turn, enables particularly young males to stay at their villages, form a family and continue farming. It thus intercepts such areas' socioeconomic decline and through the emerging dynamics tentatively contributes to endogenous development.

As indicated right from the outset of this paper, this study has just begun exploring intermarriages in the Greek rural space. Therefore, besides the need for further cross-country research to complement our findings, a number of issues call for further investigation. In the first place, given that the speed of assimilation in their husbands' social world is particularly

intense for women in intermarriages the case of family breakdown should be explored. Additionally, qualitative research can shed light to the intermarried partners' backgrounds, trajectories and critical incidents (including the role of emotions) which allowed for or dictated their decision to get married. Furthermore, intergenerational analysis would also be of interest, although at the moment, given that the historical perspective in migration in Greece is short, it is rather early to venture hypotheses about second-generation patterns *vis-à-vis* intermarriages.

Finally, it has to be underlined that the situation has been evolving in the years following our research. Indeed, our research took place at a time when the overall economic situation was favourable as far as immigration in rural Greece is concerned. On the contrary, nowadays, the Greek financial crisis is more likely to push a number of immigrants out of the country —a development already observed but not assessed.[10] In this sense, following Gialis (2011: 321) it may be argued that '[I]t is as yet unclear what the repercussions of this new situation will be on migrants'. We therefore conclude with the argument that the tendencies presented in this piece of work are certainly in need of more systematic, in-depth, holistic and updated investigation.

Notes

1. According to the European Union Regulation 1257/1999 emphasis has, officially as well, moved from agriculture as the sole lever for rural development to the integrated nature of development along with new concepts such as multifunctionality, endogenous and sustainable development etc. as well as a reduction of the previous protection afforded to agriculture.
2. Exchange theory has been critiqued for 'its inability to account for the great persuasive and compelling nature of "love"' (Owens, 2007: 269). However, research suggests that romance has been thoroughly intertwined with consumerism (Boden and Williams 2002), that the ideal/model of romantic love should be treated 'more as ideology than as reality . . . [given that practices depend] on specific economic and social processes underway in local settings' (Patico 2010: 374) or that emotions (including romantic love) are intimately intertwined with cognition, and 'the interaction between emotion and rationality varies . . . depending upon the cultural context' (Illouz and Finkelman 2009: 403).
3. Given the relative unanimity among scholars on the relationship between marriage patterns and assimilation, it is predicted that, unless institutional barriers stay in place, the second and subsequent generations of migrants will intersect more with the native population; see: Gonzalez-Ferrer 2006; Lucassen and Laarman 2009.
4. Especially for marriages in rural Greece see, inter alia, Friedl (1962; marriage negotiations), Du Boulay (1974; marriage as a social act), and Just (2000; proximity and social engineering).
5. It is worth mentioning that there appears to be a link between marital status and men's suicide rates in rural areas; rural restructuring has been found to contribute to high male suicide rates, while on the contrary, marriage is protective of men's psychological health; see: Ní Laoire 2001.
6. It is interesting to note that contemporary rural restructuring processes undermine traditional identities, especially hegemonic masculinities associated with the power of farming and traditional household divisions of labour. Concurrently, within the modernist discourse, 'to be something in life' is often synonymous with 'moving away' or 'leaving'; to 'stay behind' implies backwardness while to 'move away' modernity and progressiveness. See, Ní Laoire 2001.
7. For each mixed marriage data such as the date of birth, type of wedding (political or religious), the wedding line (first, second or third marriage), the wedding date, the occupation and the place of inhabitancy were available and thus recorded for males (all of whom are Orthodox Christians). As far as women are concerned data such as the country of origin, the date of birth, religion, the wedding line, nationality and occupation were available and thus recorded.
8. Further, some of the insights gained through field research (unpublished material), carried out in the study area (2000–2005), are utilised to shed light (in the Discussion section) to aspects of the phenomenon under study.

9. As far as the occupation of males is concerned the following groups were compiled: farmers (plant and animal breeders), employees (in private businesses), free-lancers (such as bakers, automobilists, booksellers, practical tradesmen and traders, contractors), technicians (i.e., painters, marble workers, smiths, electricians, carpenters), pensioners, manual workers (manual workers including builders and stevedores), unemployed and other (university students).
10. According to Kasimis (2011) the decision of an immigrant to stay in or to leave the country depends on quite a number of factors, such as the degree to which the crisis affects on the one hand the immigrant's employment, position and income and, on the other hand, his/her home-country; the immigrant's flexibility and mobility; his/her marital status and the family's transfer (or not) in Greece; the ease of and the costs related to the return to his/her country, etc.

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