

Gender Alliance for Development Center, *To be a Woman ... in Albania, after 1990*. Tirana, 2007. 92pp + 10lpp.

The dual language publication consists of a collection of seven contributions on women's issues in Albania (all but one by Albanian women), with a foreword by the Center's Executive Director, Eglantina Gjermeni. Several of the contributors had worked in the US for terms of up to a year on specific projects.

The first chapter is by Enkeleida Tahiraj, the former Head of Albanian Studies at University College of London, on 'Gender and social change in Albania's Transition', discussing the feminisation of poverty. She addresses the situation whereby women have borne and are continuing to bear the burden of the cost of changes more than men. She finds that overall women are now more tired and proportionately poorer than prior to 1990, due to the fact that there is now less support than previously. With the break-up of multi-generational families, women can no longer rely on grandparents to participate in childrearing. Tahiraj refers to several recent studies showing that rising unemployment together with less provision of childcare have forced women back into the home, but without financial support, whereas the employment situation for men remains barely changed. She concludes by suggesting that men will need to be active in continuing current threads of change in order for the position of women to improve.

Delina Fico was the first woman hired as a diplomat in Albania after 1990. Her 'Gender Equality Legislation and Policy: do they Matter?' gives the historical context in the advancing of gender equality. As a participant in the landmark UN conference held in 1995 in Beijing, Fico has followed up on the issues discussed there. She comments that tremendous advances were made in Albanian legislation following

1995, as well as initiatives such as the National Strategy on Domestic Violence. However, that has not led to much action, or enforcement. She puts this down to the fact that no secondary legislation was drafted, 'killing the law from the start' (p. 31).

Elona Dhembo, a qualified social worker and social policy advisor, contributes the chapter, 'Citizenship as a Profoundly Gendered Concept'. She discusses how under Communism citizenship actually did not exist, and therefore Albania is now wrestling with putting it into place from all angles: civil, social and political. Of particular concern is how gender is included into all of these. She finds that women's civil rights are even less guaranteed now than before. On political rights, Dhembo gives a chart showing Albania, along with Romania, to have the lowest participation of women in parliament (in 1991), down to 4% from 44% just one year earlier. It will be interesting to see some later figures. Concerning social rights, Dhembo finds that the gap between women's and men's rights is widening, although it is less obvious. The widening is due to the lack of benefits allowed to women who are thus prevented from taking employment while looking after children and the elderly.

Saemira Pino, long time active in women's movements in Albania and lecturer at the University of Tirana addresses 'A Missing Debate'. She explains that too little attention is paid to the fact that women are overburdened by the expectation of their full time work expected both in the home and in employment. Since marriage and the family have such a high importance in Albania, this adds to the strain on women. She comments that there was an expectation that with the move to democracy, there would be gender equality; however, the reality is that the situation is only just starting to be addressed. Although some women are gaining independence through employment, those who are not employed are even more dependent than ever on their husbands. She points out the very large difference in the living situation between urban and rural

families, noting that women in rural areas have even more work (collecting water, firewood for heating, etc.) than women in the towns. She also notes that a few well educated women do have greater opportunities to choose to go into business, diplomacy, police and sometimes highly paid work.

‘The Changing Form of Patriarchy in Northern Albania’ is based on anthropological research. It attempts to trace the change in women’s role from that of extreme subservience to one of a little more importance, due mainly to the transforming changes dramatically unfolding since 1991. There is also discussion of ‘sworn virgins’, a social phenomenon supporting patriarchy, with the speculation that with the weakening of tradition, the social need for a male to head a family will gradually lessen.

Linda Meniku, Fulbright scholar and linguist is author of ‘Analyzing Media Discourses on Women’s Trafficking and Violence Against Them’. Much of her piece is devoted to showing how the phrasing of media reports can entirely alter the stress and even meaning which is conveyed to the reader or viewer. She gives 35 examples.

Aurela Bozo’s concerns and expertise lie in law and civil society as they relate to women. Her ‘The Coordinated Efforts: A Challenge Among all Actors Working to Address Domestic Violence’ results from applying experiences from the US. She stresses the importance of having well trained professionals to address the high rate of domestic violence in Albania, noting that too many professionals (judges, police and even those responsible for children in care) are very poorly prepared for their responsible positions, sometimes even exacerbating an already difficult situation. She also notes that many women refrain from complaining about abuse for many reasons, first because honour serves as a strong force in her attempting to shield her husband/family/community from bringing shame, secondly she fears all will place the

blame on her, thirdly because (rightly) she feels she will gain nothing, and could even make the situation worse by drawing attention to it. Bozo ends her piece by pinpointing what needs to be done to improve this situation.

Unfortunately several of the contributions suffer from poor translation into English. Nonetheless, the book serves as an important document for all with an interest in the situation of women in Albania today.

Antonia Young, University of Bradford.