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**Albanian immigration and urban transformations in
Greece**

Albanian migrant strategies in Thessaloniki, Greece

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This paper aims to sketch out our PhD research on Albanian immigration in Greece, and in particular Thessaloniki, which will be our field of study and reference. Within this research, we will try to explore an ensemble of choices – which we will call a “strategy of invisibilisation” – made by a large part of Albanian immigrants in Greece. We maintain that this “strategy” consists in the non-affirmation of the immigrants’ “Albanity”; which probably derives from their desire to facilitate their stay in Greece and to be accepted by and incorporated into Greek society. This specific “behaviour” makes the Albanian migration in Greece quite an exemplary case, since it generates migratory patterns rather different from those of “classical” migrations.

Introduction

Since the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, we have witnessed the re-unification of the European space and the Balkan region, in particular. At the same time, new migrations principally from Eastern and Central European countries in direction to the European Union, continue to take place. Therefore, traditional immigration countries, such as Germany and France, have seen their populations increase due to “new” migratory flows from these countries.

Simultaneously, a parallel phenomenon emerges: Greece, Portugal, Italy and Spain, countries of considerable emigration until the 1970s, face a considerable

inversion of their migratory balance due to the return of their emigrants to the homeland, as well as to their sudden transformation into immigrant-receiving countries.

The most flagrant case of all seems to be Greece, which reaches rates of immigration comparable to those of Germany, all within a very short time span. In addition, to an incomparable extent with other countries of Southern Europe, Greece has been subject to a distinct immigration impact: the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, some of which share borders with Greece. In other words, contrary to the experience of Spain, Portugal and Italy, the vast majority of immigrants actually present in Greece come from former communist countries, which are undergoing transitory processes in order to enter market economies; the principal flows come from a single country, Albania (Cavounidis, 2002: 45, 46).

In this context, Greek cities, countryside and islands witness a considerable increase in their populations related to the migrants' arrival. As a result, they are transformed by the adjunction of various populations and the modification of their ethno-socio-demographic structure, losing, thus, their cultural "homogeneity".

Actors but at the same time witnesses to these evolutions, Albanian immigrants trace different pathways and numerous trajectories within the Greek territory. Having arrived principally in 1991, but also in 1997 after the bank crisis in Albania, they seem to want to stay in Greece, if not for a lifetime, at least for the long-term. Therefore, their migrations persist; the Albanian community¹ in Greece is

¹ We would do better to refer to Albanian "communities" instead of one "community". The use of the plural would then be justified by the fact that the characteristics of the Albanian immigration in Greece, which depend primarily on the departure society in Albania, seem to be considerably different to each other. In this way, it seems more appropriate to speak of "communities" instead of a

actually the most numerous of all immigrant groups (65% of foreigners residing actually in Greece), its number reaching officially 438,036 persons, but according to estimations² attending and even surpassing 650,000 persons to an ensemble of 10,934,097, which is the actual population of Greece³.

Research problem

Albanian migration, apart from its importance for the demographic, social, cultural and economic changes that Greece is currently going through, is interesting for yet another reason; it does not seem to follow the patterns of “classic” migrations, since its diffusion within the national territory is rather “balanced”.

It is evident that Athens constitutes the principal destination of Albanians. However, the difference of these latter from other immigrant groups originating in countries in the Middle and Extreme East or Africa⁴, is that they are found in numerous regions of Greece too; they thus offer a more diffused geographical distribution into the Greek territory (Sintès, 2002).

“community”. However, in order to simplify our research, and because we do not dispose the means to distinguish and then study each different “community” separately – we will refer to one and only “community” of Albanian immigrants in Greece.

² We will be herein referring precisely to estimations made by Baldwin – Edwards (2002), according to whom there are 800.000 – 1.000.000 migrants in Greece; the rate of Albanians in Greece is in general 65% of the total migratory population. See also Appendix.

³ See also Appendix.

⁴ This group of countries offers a concentration to the capital that surpasses 70% or even 80% (Sintès, 2002).

It seems to us that Albanian migration within Greek cities and more particularly Greek metropolises – Athens and Thessaloniki – follows the same process: “classic” migrations are often interpreted by a geographic concentration that ethnically marks the space. Regarding Albanians, the characteristic diffusion into the ensemble of the national territory seems to be reproduced in a smaller scale, this one of the urban space. Therefore, it seems that there is not any precise geographic territory within cities, reserved to Albanians, i.e. “Albanian neighbourhoods” or “enclaves”. If this is the case, we should then suppose that Albanians are not subjected to a supplementary form of exclusion that numerous other migratory groups are familiar with: spatial segregation and ghettoisation based on ethnic-national origin.

Nonetheless, we firmly believe that the spatial diffusion of Albanian immigrants in Greece is part of a more global “strategy” that they use to adopt into the host society, in order – according to us – to include themselves into this latter as easily as possible. This “strategy” consists in an ensemble of choices, such as names and /or religion changes, preference of the Greek language instead of the Albanian, etc., that seem to have a common objective: the invisibilisation of the immigrants’ ethnic –national identity, i.e. their “Albanity”.

Academic significance of and reasons for choosing the subject

Immigration from Albania to Greece is a major theme within the actual Greek socio-political scene, firstly because immigration itself is a new phenomenon for the Greek society, having provoked, already, several shocks to this latter; secondly because the study of actual migration flows in and their impacts on Greece cannot

ignore Albanian immigration due to the number of Albanians currently residing and working in Greece.

In addition, although a considerable number of studies – academic research, in particular – have dealt with relevant themes, very few of them have had Thessaloniki as their field of study. Nevertheless, Thessaloniki is the second largest Greek metropolis, a historically important urban center of the Balkan region and the second destination of Albanian immigrants coming to Greece, after Athens⁵. For these reasons Thessaloniki will be the field of reference for the present study.

Additionally, most existing research principally examines Albanian immigration and its effects on Greek society and its economy, without considering the actors of these phenomena, i.e. Albanians themselves, their practices and modes of life.

It should also be pointed out that, hitherto, no research has coped with the geographical “patterns” that Albanian migration takes, nor the justification of such “patterns”. Therefore, it seems to us essential to deal with the present topic, as it will be herein outlined.

Theoretical background

Apart from these clarifications of methodological order, explanations and definitions should be given, regarding some of the notions and terms to be used within this essay. In addition, the principal references used in order to form our theoretical background should be mentioned.

⁵ However, in both cities, Albanians are approximately 5,5% of the population (6,49% of the Athens’ population and 5,43% of Thessaloniki’s), (ESYE, 2001).

As Sayad (1999) proposes, we consider that immigration and emigration are the “two sides of the same coin”, as well as the two components of one and only “total social fact”⁶. For that reason, an immigrant in a receiving country is, first and foremost, an emigrant of his/ her own country of origin. As a result, we cannot look on immigrants simply as such, totally ignoring, thus, their emigration from their homeland. That is why, instead of the term “immigrant”, we are going to use, further on, the term “migrant”, which represents – for us – the total fact of the emigration – immigration process.

Additionally, one should consider that if migrants take on such “invisibilisation strategies”, it is very probably because pressures on the part of the autochthon society force them to do so. The Greek society, traditionally being rather religious and very xenophobe, probably because of the mass and unexpected arrival of migrants and refugees, plays a primary role in Albanian migrants’ attitude. We strongly maintain that Albanians, since their arrival in Greece, were not at all welcomed by the receiving society, but on the contrary were very often rejected; after being identified as criminals, thieves and “barbarians”, they finally chose to “moderate” their Albanity and tried to “peter out” those elements of this latter that could – in a way – pass unnoticed. As we perfectly agree with the thesis distinguishing “dominated” and “dominant” groups in the migratory processes⁷, we strongly believe that Albanians’ vulnerability regarding the “autochthon” society confirms their “domination” to this later and also explains their efforts to “moderate” their ethnic-national identity. Therefore, we will be using the term “dominated” to

⁶ Marcel Mauss is the first to talk about a “total fact”.

⁷ Sayad (1981, 1999: 125)

indicate the migratory group and the term “dominant” for the “autochthon” society within this study.

Yet, we acknowledge that “autochthon” is not a neutral term, and in order to use it appropriately we should first examine the “autochthony” of the “autochthons”, i.e. Greeks. However, we will not address this type of questions in this essay, since it is not our objective herein.

Furthermore, the use of the term “strategy” stresses the necessity to examine if Albanian migrants’ attitudes really constitute a strategy⁸, i.e. an ensemble of coordinated actions and operational objectives, chosen so as to implement a pre-defined and designed policy for a particular purpose; we will not look into this question either, because it goes far beyond the purposes of the present paper. Nonetheless, it does seem that these kind of “survival” choices and actions made by Albanians, although undertaken individually or in a family context, as practiced by many households/ persons/ families, etc., finally become an “individually” collective and conscious practice, as well as a predefined plan with a particular purpose, i.e. a strategy.

Another theoretical and more precisely terminological choice is after Psimmenos’ (2001 : 88) thesis, to use the term “undocumented migrants” in order to illustrate those who did not succeed in being regularised, by one of the two Regularisation Programs, in 1998 and 2001 respectively. In other words, we do not

⁸ *Strategy: 2. planning or managing any affair well, 3. plan or policy designed for a particular purpose (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 1989). But also, Stratégie: 2. Ensemble d’actions coordonnées, de manœuvres en vue d’une victoire. 3. Ensemble d’objectifs opérationnels choisis pour mettre en œuvre une politique préalablement définie. (Le Nouveau Petit Robert, 1993).*

accept the term “illegal” migrants, because it has recourse to the classification adopted and used by the Greek Police; moreover, such a term stigmatises and criminalises *de facto* the migratory act, as well as a considerable number of people who were forced to migrate.

Regarding the references used within the preset research, our principal theoretical “input” from migration studies, sociology and urban studies are Sayad Abdelmalek (1981, 1999), Psimmenos Iordanis (2001), Tarrus Alain (1992: 16, 17, 122), and Castells Manuel (1983).

As mentioned above, Sayad (1981, 1999: 125) insists on the dominance of the host society upon the migrant group, respectively naming them the “dominant” and the “dominated”. Psimmenos (2001: 186) goes even further, affirming that name changing, even when done voluntarily, symbolises the first rupture of Albanian immigrants with their personal history, which is considered by the “dominant” society as a “serious social drawback”. Therefore, the migrant, by changing his/her name and thus rejecting his/her history and identity, tries to “correct” his/her social position.

Nevertheless, all this does not signify that migrants are at the autochthones’ mercy. Migrants’ “power” is found in that they influence the history and future of the cities in which they settle. Indeed, in a way, they are the “architects” of some of the economic and political transformations of those cities, and – according to Tarrus (1992) – they constitute the initiator subjects of specific centralities.

Tarrus (1992: 16, 17, 122) suggests that minorities “*disarrange established orders and hierarchies*” due to their mobility/ non-stability. Therefore, he continues, “*the future of migrant groups refers more to a capacity of perpetuating a relation between nomadism – immovability, which destabilises ‘sedentarities’ and narrow vicinities of autochthon populations, than to a ‘sedentarisation’ process*”. This is the

reason why we should not “*consider migrants as objects at the mercy of local, endogenous and, in general, historical approaches of urban development and migrants’ incorporation. {...} The absorption according to ‘natural’ processes, which are very often put into practice, is out-of-date. Migratory populations are initiator subjects of specific centralities prone to establish profound restructuring of urban and social morphologies, and they do so by departing from “elsewheres” very exterior to the receiving agglomeration: identity networks, ethnic or professional cultures are kept in distance with autochthon approaches, without being, on the other and, isolated; quite the opposite, the links of economic and social networks with their sites of origin are very intense*”.

Still, it is evident that Tarrus is not the only one to renounce incorporation and assimilatory processes, either “natural” or forced, as the essential *modus operandi* towards the acceptance of the migratory fact by the receiving society. As De Villanova (2004) stresses, migrant mobility – when seen from the host society’s perspective – is a drawback, a marginality form destined to “disappear” into incorporation, passing through “sedentarisation”. This idea is essentially related to the principal of the national territorial unity and its political frontiers. In other words, mobility jeopardises the national unity, exactly as cultural pluralism threatens the integrity of culture. In fact, she continues, the notion of incorporation is politically and ideologically constructed against the principal of mobility, nomadism and even the double nationality.

Taking this all into consideration, it is to be noticed that we are less interested, herein, in Albanians’ incorporation into Greek society than in the strategies that they implement in order to succeed in that, as well as in the impact of these strategies upon

the city. In other words, we intend to explore “why” and “how” these strategies are put into practice and what migratory pattern is thus generated.

Theoretical assumptions

Every emigration – immigration is originally provisional, even if the return to homeland can, afterwards, be prolonged perpetually. In the case of Albanians in Greece, regardless of their migratory project, initial or actual, the situation in Albania – past, present and future (that does not assure – in the short term – any political and socio-economical evolution capable of attracting emigrants back to Albania⁹) – results in a potential return to Albania in the short/ medium term which appears to be unlikely.

In addition, the geographical proximity of Albania to Greece reinforces this fact; it upholds several cross-border movements between those two countries rather than a definitive decision of settling to Albania. Besides, an important part of Albanian migrants seem to have decided to find a place for themselves in the Greek society. As a result, and in order to succeed in being included into and more accepted

⁹ Some data: 200.000 retired persons benefit from a rural pension of approximately 20 euros per month, 370.000 urban retired persons benefit from a pension of approximately 60 euros per month. The unemployment aid does not surpass the amount of 35 euros per month. One third of the population is actually found below the limit of poverty (Nasi, 2004). A doctor in a hospital earns monthly 250 euros, the unemployment is situated between 18% and 30% and the informal economy, according to International Monetary Fund, occupies 40 to 60% of the general production (Arosio, 2003). Dozens of children “dive” every day in the garbage of the coast city of Durrës, in order to assure their daily bread (Kallço, 2005). To get a global idea of Albania’s present political and socio-economical situation, see also Zeneli (2005).

by the receiving society, they seem to adopt a sort of a “strategy” which seems to intend to dissimilate their ethnic-national identity.

Our **principal assumption** is centered on this hypothetical tri-fold “strategy”: religion¹⁰ and name changes; a decreasing utilisation of the native language by the youth, very often with the parents’ encouragement; and the non-formation of Albanian neighborhoods within Greek cities, Thessaloniki, in particular.

As far as the **first component** is concerned, there is some evidence that Albanian migrants in Thessaloniki, as well as other places in Greece such as Athens, have proceeded in name and/ or religion changes. Indeed, it seems that in many cases Albanian migrants in Greece, when they are Muslims, change their religion to Orthodox Christian and /or their first names, in order not to sound Albanian or Muslim (Psimmenos, 2001: 184, Lamprianidis, Lymperaki, 2001: 173-185, De Rapper Gilles, 2002b).

It should be clarified, however, that for Albanians, either Muslims or Christians, religion is not a purely religious question or a matter of faith, but more of a tradition related to origin and parental affiliation. In other words, belonging to a religious conviction seems to be, for Albanians, a form of societal organisation and of collective belonging that is expressed by the fatherly descend. Religion, thus, indicates a common origin and the common cultural traits of a specific group. It is, then, “*inseparable of a certain ‘nature’*”. As a consequence, since it is a ‘nature’, this

¹⁰ By “religion changes” we intend to signify a more complicated phenomenon: Albanians, and essentially those who are Muslim, often declare themselves Christian Orthodox; this does not necessarily mean that they have converted to Christianity, nor that they are baptised (even though sometimes they really are). More frequently, this is part of a purely theoretical discourse, with no real evidence to support it.

cultural and community belonging goes beyond and is different from the religious faith (De Rapper, 2002a: 2-3).

As regards to the religious beliefs of Albanians, no generalisations should be made. However, there is some empirical evidence, provided by some surveys that for the majority of Albanian interviewees who actually live and work in Greece, religion is of no importance or leaves them indifferent (Tzortzopoulou, 2002: 150, 151, Lamprianidis, Lymperaki, 2001); yet, it is possible that they declare their beliefs in such a manner in surveys and opinion polls in Greece without being entirely sincere. Nevertheless, the indifference towards religious matters, if true, would be no surprise, given that Albania experienced 50 years of strict atheism during the regime of Enver Hoxha. Besides, the parallel existence of three religions (Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim) throughout Albanian history before the communist regime, could explain Albanians' attitude and tolerance for a multi-confessional society (Doja, 2000: 425)

On the other hand, we should relate this particular attitude of Albanian migrants as regards to religion to the precise context of the host society, in our case the Greek society. Indeed, such phenomena and practices do not occur or have not been reported in Italy, which is, after Greece, the second principal destination of Albanian migrants. The Greek society is apparently a very religious one since being Orthodox is particularly valorised and can even constitute a reason for solidarity¹¹.

Besides, we should not forget that the Greek society is traditionally an emigration society, and until very recently a very "homogenous"¹² one. It can then be

¹¹ We recall herein, as an example, the very popular pro-Serb leitmotiv, heard in Greece during Belgrade's bombardments: "Greece – Serbia – Orthodoxy".

¹² In the sense that the great majority of the country's population was Greek and was speaking the Greek language, even if, there were minority groups having other "parallel" identities to the Greek

understood that the massive arrival of migrants, Albanians in particular, has provoked a shock to the local population, since it has disturbed the existing equilibriums. The reactions to this shock were not so much racist acts of violence (even if many such incidences are constantly reported, especially accusing the Greek police and army), but the emergence of chauvinism and xenophobia, or better “Albanophobia”, that was also seriously nourished by the media. Therefore, Albanian migrants in Greece have found themselves in a rather hostile context, where being Albanian was seriously undervalued by the receiving country.

As Psimmenos (2001: 186) stresses, being Albanian is considered by the dominant society as a serious “social drawback” that the migrant tries to “correct” by changing his/ her first name, an action that symbolises a rupture with his/her history and identity. Indeed, many researchers report such phenomena of name changes (Psimmenos, 2001: 184, Lamprianidis, Lymperaki, 2001: 173-185, De Rapper Gilles, 2002b, Tzortzopoulou, 2002: 150-151), which – it should be clarified – are not official changes with the support of documents proving such changes, but mainly a figure of speech.

Apart from these reasons, which are related to the Greek society’s specificities, psychology (Grinberg *et al.*, 1986: 161, 165) provides some

ethno-national one; for instance the Vlacks consider themselves both Greeks and Vlacks. However, it should be pointed out that for the Greek official position regarding minorities, there are not any minorities in Greece in the exception of the Turk minority of Thrace. All other populations using the Greek in their everyday life, even if Greek is not their native language, are considered by the Greek State as Greeks (Παρέσογλου, 1995: 816, 819; Poulton, 1993). However, this does not necessarily mean that they automatically have the right to the Greek nationality. For more, see Grammatikopoulou (2000).

supplementary explanation why Albanians¹³ would try to conceal their identity of origin, or at least some elements of this identity; in other words why they try to “moderate” their “Albanity”, by proceeding in name and /or religion changes. Indeed, the desire to mingle with others so as not to feel marginal or “different”, together with the fact that being Albanian is underestimated by the Greek society, is essentially a first considerable cause for concealing one’s Albanity.

What is more, Rokeach (1960)¹⁴ affirms that *“foreign persons are poorly received when one judges that they deviate from the values of the majority group on important aspects of the belief system”*. More generally, we could accept that in the perceptions of the autochthon society there is certainly an “ideal” foreigner (migrant, refugee, etc.), i.e. one who “deserves” to acquire asylum or other rights, because (s)he shares “our” ideals and way of life, and another kind of people who are “threatening” because, by their actions, they most obviously do not share a commitment to “our” values, will not adopt “our” way of life, and, thus, can never assume “our” identity. It is then evident that the former would stand a better chance at inclusion from the latter (Harris P. and Williams V., 2003: 215). Or even, as Sayad (1999: 112) suggests, we could distinguish between the “good” migrant and the other – the not so “good”, the former being like “us” in his/her family life and cultural “moral”, his /her social life and so on; the latter, on the other hand, behaving completely differently from “us” in his/ her family and social life, giving him/ herself family and social structures entirely

¹³ Methodologically, it does not seem accurate to us to reduce them to a group, pretending that these practices are generalised amongst all Albanian immigrants in Greece. However, our objective here is not to quantify this phenomenon, but to analyse it, and to try to understand why and how it occurs.

¹⁴ Cited by Wagner (2001: 35).

bizarre to “us” and a “moral” in which we cannot recognise “ourselves”, such as the extended family, the endogamy or polygamy, etc.

Regarding the **second component** of this tri-fold strategy, i.e. migrants’ native language, Albanians do not express the need to teach, in schools, the Albanian language to their offspring. On the contrary, these latter are fully integrated into the Greek school system, without any apparent difficulty; in fact, Albanian pupils maintain high-performing school records and in many cases they do better than the indigenous pupils. Parents insist on their children studying in Greece and they even manifest the ambition of seeing them enter the Greek University.

Indeed, the proportion of Albanian pupils in the multicultural schools of Athens and Thessaloniki (respectively 7 and 6 schools) is considerably lower than those of other nationalities. Some immigrant communities, for instance the Poles, have created special schools where their native language is taught in addition to the Greek language (Tzialas, Xaralampakis, 2001: 155).

According to theory, in the migratory process, identity is quickly associated with a language, after which stigmatisation can promptly emerge (Schippers, 2001: 21-22). This could provide a good explanation as to why some immigrant groups opt for the non – practice of their language of origin in public, in the receiving country. It could equally be regarded as part of a more global choice – an entire strategy – of non-revealing one’s identity, in order to facilitate acceptance of and inclusion into the host society, as well as to hold over exclusion and hostility. Moreover, the absence of identity/origin “markers” such as skin colour, coupled with a good knowledge of the language of the receiving society could potentially turn concealing one’s identity into a not so difficult task.

Considering all this, we firmly believe that the tenacity shown on the part of Albanians regarding their children's Greek education is relevant to the fact that education – and university degrees more precisely – has always been the principal means for social ascension in the Greek society. It is also the most secure way of inclusion into this society. Therefore, Albanians do not require the need for an Albanian education for their children, nor do they insist that their children learn their native language.

Regarding the **third component** of Albanians' strategy, it seems to us that the Albanian community hardly makes up a precise geographical substance in the Greek city. Albanians' geographical concentration is explained by their socio-economic characteristics; this – if true – considerably differentiates them from other immigrant groups in Greece, such as the Poles, the Pakistani, etc. who – in geographical terms – prefer to constitute rather precise communities. On the contrary, Albanians are rather “diffused” within the urban territory (Lamprianidis, Lymperaki, 2001: 208-210, Hatziprokopiou, 2004: 330).

However, the city not being homogenous nor isotropic, we expect to find more Albanians in certain areas of the city than in others; but this is essentially explained by their financial capacities. Therefore, Albanians seem to reside principally in the central and the west parts of Thessaloniki, in proximity with other populations, Greek or not, who present similar socio-economical characteristics.



Source : MapPoint.net, our rectification.

Apparently, no “enclaves” or Albanian neighbourhoods have been generated in Thessaloniki. In addition, the patterns of Albanian migration do not seem to result in any kind of “centrality”, where Albanian practices could be exposed and recognised. But, as Castells (1983) suggests, there are some communities which favour a network of acquaintances that links its members, instead of a “centrality”, i.e. a place within the city where they and their modes of living could be recognised. Even if Castells refers to gay and lesbian communities, the former holding up a “centrality”, whereas the latter a network of acquaintances, we could project his thesis to the migratory process.

Hence, **our second hypothesis** is that Albanians’ “invisibilisation strategies” do not lend themselves to the formation of an Albanian centrality in Thessaloniki, but instead favour an informal network of acquaintances which circulates information principally about employment and accommodation.

Analytical structure

The present research is structured in four major parts:

1. The Greek “specificities”

We will try to enlighten, herein, some of the motivations, but also the favorable conditions that lead Albanians to the “invisibilisation strategies” analysed hitherto. In other words, we will deal with the specific conditions of the receiving society and its specificities:

a) The existence of a Greek minority in South Albania, which results in a large number of Albanian citizens seeking out “Greekness”. In fact, even if they are not issued from the Greek minority, many Albanians try to “pass” for “Voreio-Epirotes”¹⁵, as the Albanian citizens of Greek origin, issued from the Greek minority in Albania, are called unofficially. The reason for such a choice is rooted in the consideration of the latter as “Homogenous” (“Omogeneis” – “Ομογενείς”), i.e. of the same descent as Greeks, who are theoretically more accepted by the Greek society and apparently treated in a better way, compared to ethnic Albanians.

However, it seems to us that this is not the principal reason, particularly because Greeks’ attitudes towards Albanians of Greek descent cannot be homogenised in such a manner. For the Greek authorities, on the other hand, Albanians of Greek origin are indeed seen in a more positive way, since they have

¹⁵ It is worth noticing that, although, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its estimations the most “integrationist” of the Greek minority in Albania counts 150.000 persons, there were 300.000 –350.000 applications on the part of Albanian migrants in order to become Greek (with the argument of the Greek descent).

been given Greek passports, state loans for housing, working licenses, etc., soon after their arrival in Greece. This is absolutely not the case of migrants who did not have any Greek descent; they were – and in some cases still are – less privileged.

It is worth noting, however, that the policy of facilitating Albanians issued from the Greek minority in Albania to come to Greece has been gradually abated, since it did not endorse Greece's geopolitical objectives. In contrast, this policy resulted in the decline of the Greek minority and the “evacuation” of those territories in South Albania where Greeks or Albanians of Greek descent historically resided.

b) The absence of a rigid inherited system of social hierarchy; such an obstacle to social ascension does not exist. On the contrary, it is the Greek educational system (university degrees in particular) that has always been the main means of social mobility. As a result, the place of education, good knowledge of foreign languages and university degrees has always been primary. Therefore, Greeks put considerable emphasis on their children's successful schooling. In a very similar way, Albanian parents insist on their children's Greek education and good knowledge of the Greek language, even if this could lead to the loss of the native language of their children;

c) the rapidly changed status of Greece from an emigration to an immigration country which resulted in rather “hostile” migratory policies undertaken by Greek authorities, but also hostile and xenophobic behaviours on the part of the Greek society, particularly in the early 1990s. However, it should be mentioned that the 1998 regularisation program of undocumented migrants is considered as the one with the largest number of applicants (371.641 individuals have submitted) carried out in Europe up to date (Cavounidis, 2002: 47). In addition, contrary to various xenophobic discourses taking place currently in Greece, the number of racist events is still very

low compared to other EU countries. It seems that in Greece a sort of “everyday life tolerance” flourishes¹⁶.

2. Albanian migration in Greece

We propose herein an overview of Albanian migration in Greece: a brief flashback to the socio-economic and political situation in Albania over the course of the last 15 years (such as extreme poverty, socio-political instability, etc.¹⁷) that could partly explain the motivation of Albanian migrants to stay in Greece rather than return to their homeland.

3. Albanian migrants in Thessaloniki

In this part, we will present some general traits of the Albanian migration in Thessaloniki.

- a) The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the Albanian migrant population in Thessaloniki, in order to illustrate

¹⁶ In order to explain this “everyday life tolerance”, we recall that generally in the Greek perceptions, Albanians are identified as thieves, barbarians, those who take Greeks’ jobs and are thus to blame for unemployment, and so on. However, interviews with Greeks have shown that “every Greek has his/ her Albanian”, of whom he/ she thinks in a very positive way. But the Albanians in question have, in general, a personal relation with the Greek “employer”, for whom they have painted the house, fixed the roof, looked after the children or elderly relatives, etc. In that way, the general discourse regarding Albanians in Greece differs considerably from what Greeks say when talking about “their” Albanian.

¹⁷ See Arosio (2004), Kallço (2005), Nasi (2004), in <http://www.balkans.eu.org>.

as precisely as possible the dynamics of the Albanian community in Thessaloniki.

- b) The diffusion of their households throughout the urban territory, which will appear in a localisation map, and the non-formation of an Albanian “centrality” within the city.

What is expected, herein, is to illustrate the socio-spatial pattern of the Albanian migration in Thessaloniki, and, thus, to corroborate or not the hypothesis of a “diffusion” model. In practice, we will try to compare the Albanian “pattern” with those of other migratory groups in Greece, such as the Poles, the Chinese, etc., who seem to hold up more “concentrated” models, on an ethnic-national basis.

However, it is to be noticed that a space concentrating Albanians’ habitat cannot necessarily and automatically be considered as “ethnically” marked. A space is “ethnically” marked when an ethnic community manifests its presence: “ethnic” commerce and shops, kiosks selling journals written in the native language, either coming from the homeland or published in the receiving country, and above all a symbolic place considered as such by the migrant community, as for instance a standard meeting point (a café, a square or a park, a street, etc.).

4. “Invisibilisation strategies” of Albanian migrants in Thessaloniki

We will recapitulate, herein, the reasons explaining and justifying Albanian migrants’ “strategies”. In addition, we will reach some conclusions particularly regarding the confirmation or erosion of our research hypotheses.

We will also explore the impact on the city of the “invisibilisation strategies” that Albanians uphold, as well as the effects on the way that the Albanian community in Greece is organised. We will then be capable to respond to our last problem, i.e. if

these strategies – if they really exist – result in/ favour the emergence of an informal network of acquaintances or a kind of centrality, or both, or even none of them.

Methodological approach

Limitations of the research and an overview of the methods to be used

It is to be noted, once again, that within the present research we are not capable of producing primary data on Albanian immigration in Thessaloniki because we do not dispose the means to carry out a survey based on a representative sample of the Albanian population in this metropolis. For the same reasons, we cannot carry out a survey with the intention of collecting original data on the “classical” fields of demography regarding migrants: age, sex, education, profession in the homeland, profession in the host country, socio-economical status, etc.

On the contrary, we will be treating secondary data of this type. Hence, our principal source is essentially the Statistic Agency of Greece, and more precisely information coming from the two last decades’ census, i.e. the 1991 and 2001 (ESYE, 1991, 2001). This does however, imply that we are effectively only going to work with the migrants that appear in statistics, even if we recognise that the rest are also significant, particularly if we intend to illustrate the pattern – spatial or other – of Albanian migration in Thessaloniki.

In addition, we will carry out fieldwork of our own. Given the nature of the present research, qualitative methods seem to be most appropriate. Therefore, observational and interview techniques are to be used, particularly relying on information obtained from a number of semi-structured interviews with Albanian migrants who actually reside in Thessaloniki.

We will also include in our interviewees, if necessary, some key-informants of the local Authorities (mayors, consultants in Municipalities working on migration, etc.), but also of the Albanian community (or communities) of Thessaloniki (journalists, leaders of Albanian associations, syndicates, etc.). However, we believe that those informants are very unlikely to be reliable; we consider that they are prone to “filter” the information given, according to their objectives, and their personal and political standpoints. Therefore, we need to carry out a localisation work, in order to detect those persons, apart from our interviewees (Albanian migrants), who will be able to provide us with reliable and relatively objective data.

Last but not least, certain university laboratories and institutes such as the Laboratory of Social Demographic Analyses (University of Thessaly), will also provide us with data on immigration in Greece and Thessaloniki, and information about Albanian immigration in particular.

Our methodological approach consists, generally, in:

- a) literature review regarding migration phenomena, as well as ethnic-national identities and their reformulation during the migratory process,
- b) literature review about the methods of observation and analysis of such problems,
- c) critical review of the existing sources of administrative and survey data regarding immigrants in order to reveal gaps and limitations,
- d) literature review regarding Albanian immigration in particular, in Greece (and to a lesser degree in Italy, so as to be able to compare the two),
- e) a limited analysis of legal frameworks related to migration, highlighting changes over the past decade,

- f) semi-structured interviews and focus groups with Albanian migrants in Thessaloniki (qualitative and non-representative sample),
- g) semi-structured interviews of key informants in Greece. Key informants include national and local government officials, representatives of NGOs and civil organisations that work with migration and representatives of migrant organizations,
- h) direct observation in the districts with a high concentration of Albanian immigrants in Thessaloniki (in search of a potential Albanian “centrality”).

In addition, we have distinguished three principal problems of our work that correspond to our theoretical assumptions; for each of these problems the methods and data to be used, in order to confirm or erode the departure hypotheses, are the following:

1. Migrants’ “invisibility”: qualitative interviews and analysis of information required;
2. Migrants’ “diffusion” within the urban territory: cartography. In a map of Thessaloniki we will localise the Albanian households, so as to show their dispersion (or concentration). As data for other foreign communities is available, we will proceed with some comparisons between migratory groups of different origin;
3. Network(s) of acquaintances: interviews and life histories, so as to explore the type of link that relates Albanians to each other. To this end, the “Sunday practices”¹⁸ (what we do on Sunday, whom do we visit, with whom do we go out, etc.), will be a major indicator.

¹⁸ See Weber (2004).

Preparation of the fieldwork

Our field of study and reference is Thessaloniki, which has been chosen for the reasons mentioned above. We are conscious, however, that a study comparing Athens and Thessaloniki, so as to show the dissimilarities and particularities in these two cities, as well as to produce some general conclusions concerning these two Greek metropolises, would be more complete.

Nevertheless, we do not dispose the means for such an extensive and comparative survey. We will, thus, go no further than studying Albanian migrants in Thessaloniki; which enables our research to be considered as a case study. However, it should be clarified that for us the decision to carry out a case study is not a methodological choice; as Stake (1998) suggests, it is a selection of object.

a) The sample

We intend to work with approximately 30 households, either made up of families (extended or nuclear) or single persons or even cotenants in an apartment. Regarding families, in particular, one person at least from all of the living generations is to be interviewed. This will enable us to explore the cohesion or division of mentalities, practices, relations, points of view, problems, etc. in the receiving society among the different generations. In general, we will try to interview an average of 4 persons per family. The male and/ or female heads of each family will also be interviewed in the interest of looking at different standpoints related to gender roles, profession, age, etc. Nevertheless, the definite number of families and interviewees within each household will be defined when a saturation point is reached (Bauer 2000:34).

b) The sampling techniques

Bauer's (2000) method of a corpus construction seems to be appropriate to our research. According to this method, the interviewees' final number will be defined when a saturation point is reached; in other words, when the interviewees' answers start to reappear. The "corpus construction" is a cyclical method in which a primary selection is made either following external strata, functions and categories (e.g. occupation, gender, age) or following an already known number of representations (e.g. beliefs, attitudes, discourses, practices)¹⁹. This first selection is to be analysed and through the acquired knowledge of the field, other categories will be identified and incorporated into the corpus (sample). However, we intend to use this method, in a second stage, only to define the "volume" of our corpus.

On the contrary, we will construct our sample by using the "snowball" method, as it appears to be the preferred method of researchers carrying out studies on migratory populations. Indeed, this method is appropriate for studying populations that have some particular characteristics in comparison (as for instance migratory groups) to the majority population of a society.

There are two conditions necessary for the success of this method: the interviewees' acquaintance and their will to introduce the researcher to another person they know. This latter will introduce the researcher to another person, and so on, till the acquaintance "chain" is exhausted. In other words, interviewee "chains" are created by persons that know each other. In addition, in order to achieve a more

¹⁹ The problem here is to overcome what Bauer describes as the "corpus paradox", i.e. the dimension of representations (beliefs, attitudes, discourses, practices), which is the main interest of qualitative research, is unknown and is intrinsic to the phenomenon studied. It is, thus, impossible to determine the sample (corpus) *a priori*.

representative sample, it is often suggested to create several such “chains” (Tzortzopoulou, 2002: 124, Psimmenos, 2001: 89).

It seems to us that the use of the “snowball” method will enable us to reveal the Albanian migrants’ informal network in Thessaloniki.

c) Data collection throughout the fieldwork

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the main methods of data collection to be used during our fieldwork are observational and interview techniques. The latter will enable us to gather of data on practices, attitudes and discourses regarding the migratory experience of Albanians in Thessaloniki. The survey will mainly discuss the attitudes of Albanian migrants towards their return to their homeland and will explore issues of settlement or resettlement (in Greece or elsewhere). It will permit a limited analysis of the characteristics of individuals who are more likely to return or stay, taking into consideration differences in patterns and migration experience that are subjected to various elements: the departure society and area (urban or rural, Tirana itself or another smaller city, areas bordering Greece or not), the type of migration (temporary, permanent, circular), etc. In addition, we will explore the size and regularity of remittances or investments in the source country, together with the means of sending these remittances and their use (build a house in Tirana or in the area of origin, send goods or simply money from Greece, etc.). In this way we hope to better understand their migratory projects.

The interviews will be semi-structured; they will be made up of both open-ended and focused questions. These will be complemented with a number of narrative questions in order to trace the history and the experiences these migrants have had in Thessaloniki (life histories, residence and professional trajectories, etc.).

The use of visual methods is also considered, as they are particularly useful for recording and retrieving perceptions, uses and attitudes towards spatialities and practices (Ortega-Alcázar, 2004: 11).

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APPENDIX

Table 1 (NATIONAL LEVEL):

Usual resident population by country of citizenship²⁰

<i>Total population</i>	<i>10.934.097</i>		
Country of citizenship	Residents	Country of citizenship	Residents
EUROPE		ASIA	
Albania	438.036	Kazakhstan	2.256
Bulgaria	35.104	Iraq	6.936
Poland	12.831	Syrian Arabic Republic	5.552
Romania	21.994	Armenia	7.742
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia	3.832	Bangladesh	4.854
Republic of Moldova	5.716	Georgia	22.875
Russian Federation	17.535	India	7.216
Ukraine	13.616	Pakistan	11.130
Cyprus	17.426	Philippines	6.478
Turkey	7.881	AFRICA	
		Egypt	7.448

Source: ESYE 2001.

²⁰ Here are presented the countries that count more than 3000 residents in Greece.

Table 2 (REGIONAL LEVEL NUTS 3): Usual resident population in Athens and Thessaloniki

	<i>Thessaloniki</i>		<i>Athens</i>	
	<i>Population</i>	<i>% of the population</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>% of the population %</i>
<i>Total population</i>	1.084.001	100,00	2.805.262	100,00
Population living outside				
Greece one year prior to the census	8.130	0,75	18.676	0,67

Source: ESYE 2001.

Table 3: Estimation of the total population of non-EU immigrants, 1998 (000s)

	<i>Total population</i>	<i>Total migratory population (estimation)</i>	<i>Immigrants/total population</i>
Greece	10.300	800-1.000	9-10%
Italy	57.000	1.500	2,6%
Spain	39.100	900 ²¹	2,3%
Portugal	10.000	279	2,8%

Source: Baldwin – Edwards, 2002, our rectification.

²¹ Of which almost 400.000 are EU nationals, retired, in particular.

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