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**Immigrants' integration and social change:
Greece as a multicultural society**

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Abstract

This paper develops from arguments framed in the context of my PhD research. My thesis seeks to understand the patterns, processes and practices that shape immigrants' lives in Greece: in other words, the dynamics of immigrants integration. The empirical focus is on the second largest Greek city, Thessaloniki, and on the two most numerous migrant groups, Albanians and Bulgarians. The starting point for the analysis is set within the debates on globalisation and migration; from a theoretical point of view, the thesis attempts to locate the Greek case in the global map of migration. The thesis is based on fieldwork research that involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary data come from structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with immigrants. Secondary material includes official statistics and documents, background and grey literature, press articles and systematic observation.

Early assumptions in the literature regarding, for instance, the temporary character of the phenomenon, or the marginal position of migrants in Greece, are rejected in the light of empirical findings. The integration of immigrants appears to be a complex, multifaceted and contradictory process, touching several aspects of contemporary Greek society: politics and policy, economy and the labour market, geography and space, education and culture. Despite the exclusionary mechanisms that are still in place, immigrants do make a living in the host country and gradually become organic elements, turning Greece into a multicultural society. The paper builds on selected empirical evidence from my PhD to sketch the main factors explaining this process. On the basis of the analysis, the paper argues that migration and the process of immigrants' integration should be seen as major factor of societal change in contemporary Greece.

Introduction

At the end of the past century, Greece emerged in the European landscape as a new migrant-receiving country. With the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the developments after 1989, immigration flows intensify, especially from Eastern European and neighbouring Balkan states, with Albania being by far the major sending-country. Political ambivalence, xenophobia, economic exploitation and social polarisation are the thresholds marking Greece's path to multiculturalism. At present, 15 years later, it appears that many of the initial problems gradually fade out, while new ones arise. Successive regularisation programmes have resulted in an increasing number of immigrants acquiring legal status. By 2004, there were 672,584 residence permit holders in Greece, but the actual figure might approach one million people if we take into account the significant numbers of migrants who are undocumented or are subject to a different status, such as refugees, asylum seekers and ethnic Greeks (mainly from the former Soviet Union and Albania) - making up a share of about 9-10 percent of the country's population. Migrants have become "visible" and the public debates raise concerns regarding the issue of integration. They are "here", to prove that Greece has de facto become a multiethnic, plural society. They live, work and consume

in Greece; their children go to Greek schools; most importantly, they increasingly interact with the local population, producing not only new social tensions, but also new kinds of relationships, new patterns of mobility, new types of cultural expression and exchange.

This paper develops from arguments framed in the context of my PhD research. My doctoral thesis is a study of immigration and the integration of migrants in Greece. The research is set within the debates on globalisation and migration: from a theoretical point of view, the thesis attempts to locate the Greek case in the global map of migration (see Hatziprokopiou, 2004). The focus is on the two largest migrant groups, Albanians and Bulgarians, both from neighbouring Balkan countries of different, though comparable, migration experiences; and on the second largest Greek city, Thessaloniki, geographically close to the migrants' homes and with a longstanding history of multiethnic coexistence and transnational ties. The principal aim was to examine the parallel but opposing processes of social exclusion and integration of immigrants in the city. I was concerned with identifying, describing and analysing the patterns, processes and practices that condition the ways migrants organise their lives in the specific locality where they live and work. To do so, I looked at both objective and perceptual factors relating to the characteristics of the migrants themselves and at aspects of their lives in different social spheres, of their own understandings of their experiences and of the various ways they interact with the local population. These were analysed in relation to the contexts within which different processes of integration/exclusion take place. Economy, policy, culture or space can be seen as such contexts shaping immigrants' lives and determining the dynamics of integration: for instance, the policy framework that conditions their entry, work and legal presence in the country; racist hostility (or, on the contrary, friendly reception), which affects people's everyday relationships; the local labour market where immigrants are looking for work; the place of residence, which becomes the terrain where migrants build their lives and develop their sense of belonging. However, all these different though interconnected "spheres" of social existence are not a-historic, nor unchangeable. They are historically developed and subject to transformation, and they are interacting with the dynamics of migration, whether invisible social structures, faceless institutions, hidden cultural attributes or common daily practices. The study of migrants' integration may reveal elements regarding the relationship between the dynamics of migration and the processes of social change.

The space here does not allow for a detailed presentation and analysis of the results. The paper proceeds with a review of the literature on immigration to Greece. Next, I give an account of the patterns and dynamics of migration in the light of empirical findings. In the fourth section, four different "spheres" of immigrants' integration are examined: the policy framework, the socio-political environment, the labour market context and the socio-spatial conditions. Research findings are discussed from a broad perspective, aiming at exploring the links between migration trends and the dynamics of socio-economic transformation. The paper concludes that migration and the processes of immigrants' integration should be seen as major factor of societal change in contemporary Greece.

The integration of immigrants in Greece: the limits of existing literature

During the past decade, interest in migration to Greece and in a wide range of related issues has been growing, resulting in a large amount of relevant research and publications.

Listing and reviewing this literature is beyond the scope of this paper (for details see Petronoti and Triandafyllidou, 2003¹). The aim here is to briefly overview the main topics addressed and to identify the limits and gaps in the existing literature, especially in relation to issues related to the integration of immigrants.

Given the lack of available data, early publications tended to rely on observations, assumptions and estimations; most of them were mainly descriptive and particularly concerned with the demographic and/or economic characteristics of immigrants², or with their rights and legal status³. Many studies of the first generation failed to understand the transformation of Greece into a receiving country, by assuming that the phenomenon was temporary, thus neglecting the implications for integration. Studies multiplied during the second half of the 1990s, especially after the 1998 regularisation programme and the publication of the first official statistics (Cavounidis and Hatzaki, 1999). One can observe a loose disciplinary division between economic studies⁴, on the one hand, and a series of other works that can be labelled as sociological ones⁵, combining however a variety of social science traditions ranging from historical accounts⁶ to political economy⁷ or human geography⁸, and from criminology⁹ to education¹⁰. The interest in the legal framework and the policy implications remains strong¹¹. Much research focuses on specific migrant groups¹², including publications dealing with ethnic Greek migrants and refugees.

Research output has grown further since 2000, spreading across the whole spectrum of the social sciences and involving both qualitative and quantitative studies and interdisciplinary works. The migrants' voice is increasingly "being heard" as a number of empirical studies are addressed directly to immigrants. Apart from individual or co-authored publications, a number of edited volumes offer combined and comparative accounts on several migration-related topics including elements previously neglected and factors underestimated, such as gender, agency, or migrant networks¹³. Exclusion and integration are now central themes in research agendas and public debates. Integration is discussed in relation to the labour market¹⁴, language and identity¹⁵, or recent policy

¹ This includes over 130 titles published between 1970-2001, about one third of them in Greek.

² Petrinioti (1993); Linardos-Rylmon (1993).

³ E.g. Theodoropoulos and Sykiotou (1994).

⁴ Lianos *et al.* (1996); Markova and Sarris (1997); Sarris and Zographakis (1999).

⁵ E.g. Psimmenos (1995); Fakiolas and Maratou-Alipranti (2000).

⁶ Fakiolas and King (1996).

⁷ Droukas (1998); Fakiolas (1999); Baldwin-Edwards and Safilios-Rothschild (1999).

⁸ Iosifides and King (1998).

⁹ Karydis (1996).

¹⁰ Damanakis (1997); Tsiakalos (2000).

¹¹ Triandafyllidou (1996); Baldwin-Edwards and Fakiolas (1999); Lazaridis and Poyago-Theotoki (1999); Baldwin-Edwards (2001).

¹² E.g. Psimmenos (1995) on undocumented Albanians; Romaniszyn (1996) on Poles; Markova and Sarris (1997) on Bulgarians; Lazaridis and Romaniszyn (1998) on Albanians and Poles; Iosifides and King (1998) on Albanians, Filipinos and Egyptians; Droukas (1998) on Albanians; Cañete (2001) on Filipinos; Labrianidis and Lyberaki (2001) on Albanians.

¹³ E.g. King *et al.* (2000); Marvakis *et al.* (2001); Naxakis and Hletsos (2001); Amitsis and Lazaridis (2001); Tastsoglou and Maratou-Alipranti (2003).

¹⁴ E.g. Fakiolas (1999); Maratou-Alipranti (2002).

¹⁵ Koiliari (1997).

steps¹⁶. Exclusion attracts much of the scholarly interest and focuses on the legal framework that led to migrants' stigmatisation¹⁷, on the public discourse and the exclusionary construction of Greek national identity¹⁸, or on broad socio-economic and socio-spatial mechanisms¹⁹.

However, as Petronoti and Triandafyllidou (2003) note, the patterns of interaction between migrants and locals remain largely under-researched, while the literature generally lacks thorough interpretations and linkages between empirical research on migration to Greece and broad theoretical discussions on globalisation, capitalism, multiculturalism and modernity. This is because the existing literature approaches the phenomenon mainly from two perspectives, in many cases simultaneously apparent or even fused:

- (a) *From the perspective of the host society*. The interest here is either in the effects of immigration on the host economy, society and culture, or in the Greek reactions/responses to immigration (policy, xenophobia, etc.).
- (b) *From the perspective of the migrants themselves*. This includes studies focusing on the characteristics and living conditions of the migrants, on issues of identity, etc. In a sense, many works can be seen as attempts to “know” the newcomers, to “defend” them against xenophobic arguments and to “respond” to exaggerations and “inform” the (Greek) public.

No conscious efforts have been made to synthesise dialectically the two perspectives in order to understand the dynamism of the phenomenon, its contradictions and the patterns of interaction. Both the “host society” and the “immigrants” are largely treated as unitary and homogeneous entities, limiting our capacity to locate and explain change in either case. Despite their qualities, many studies fail to address the dynamism of migration-related developments and give rather static pictures capturing the “moment”, which are then reproduced in the literature with a “distorted” version of reality as a result²⁰. In addition, despite the criticisms against the policy framework, racism or exploitation, references to Greece as a “multicultural” society are scarce and only recently have the implications of this started to be discussed. Moreover, the “immigrant” is frequently portrayed as a “victim” - of the legal framework, employers or the police, of xenophobic attitudes and abstract social structures - and agency and action (through informal strategies, social networks, or associational action and unionisation) are rather underestimated and often ignored. This one-sided “victimisation” reproduces, to an extent, binaries between “us” and “them” and - despite obvious “good will” in favour of the migrants - contributes to the consolidation of new stereotypes (e.g. the migrants as excluded, or destined to perform the jobs Greeks reject)²¹. Furthermore, several elements remain under-researched or totally

¹⁶ Fakiolas (2003).

¹⁷ Karydis (1996).

¹⁸ Veikou (1998); Triandafyllidou (2000).

¹⁹ Psimmenos (1995); Iosifides and King (1998); Lazaridis and Psimmenos (2000); Halkos and Salamouris, (2003).

²⁰ E.g. the research of Psimmenos (1995) on social exclusion of Albanians in Athens provided a thorough analysis of the mechanisms of migrants' marginalisation, underestimating though the early phase of migration at the time (early 1990s). The book by Labrianidis and Lyneraki (2001) on Albanians in Thessaloniki was the first major work to “see” the migrants' pathways to integration.

²¹ See previous footnote. Of relevance here is also the economic logic of some studies, despite their analytical thoroughness (e.g. Linardos-Rylmon, 1993; Lianos *et al.*, 1996; or even Labrianidis and Lyberaki,

neglected: despite recent efforts, research on migration in Greece lacks coherent theoretical frameworks of analysis and reference, for instance to understand the role of both market and non-market forces, agency and structure, identity and institutions, space and place. There is a need for interdisciplinary approaches, prismatic views and dialectical understandings, in order to capture the patterns of interaction between migrants and locals and to locate the interplay between migration, integration and social change.

Structure, patterns and dynamics of migration

Research findings show that the figure of the “young single male Albanian” no more represents the “typical” immigrant in Greece. By contrast, the sample is characterised by a great heterogeneity: gender, age and family status play a role, as well as ethnicity, geographic and religious origin, education level and professional background. Despite common characteristics, there are differences between the two migrant groups, between males and females, between ethnic Greeks and “others”, urban and rural residents, highly educated and the low-skilled, etc. Beyond the dominant picture of the male-dominated Albanian migration, the sample uncovered other features of mobility that are equally important in order to understand integration. For instance, a more independent female migration pathway is apparent in the Bulgarian case, contrasting the relatively dependent Albanian female migration routes. In addition, a significant number of educated professionals from both countries challenges the dominant perception of the “poor, rural, illiterate Balkan migrant”. In addition, specific categories of people that keep coming and going to satisfy immediate needs and thus they might not be “here to stay”.

The findings reflect some of the chief differences in the situation in the two sending countries, suggesting how one should understand the dynamics of migration in either case. For Albanians, who witnessed a massive devaluation of their professional attributes after the collapse of the system, emigration arose as an “option” out of immediate necessity: initially at least, they had to go abroad simply because they could not do otherwise, and the scale of the phenomenon was so massive that it touched all sections of the population. For Bulgarians the situation was rather different: some may have lost their previous jobs, usually jobs in factories and especially in northern Bulgaria (see Markova, 2001); most would have made a living in Bulgaria, but they decided to emigrate in order to improve their financial conditions. Moreover, there are some additional elements uncovering “hidden” aspects of the dynamics of migration within this three-country system: network factors and historical links, family strategies and lifestyle preferences. For example, migration can be an “option of necessity” for divorced women, while factors such as love and marriage play a role in what is usually seen as movement due to “economic” reasons. In addition, places of destination are not always a casual choice or an estimation of benefits and losses, but depend on historical or relational factors. For instance, for Albanian immigrants from the city of Korçë, Thessaloniki has been a choice based on the historical bonds between the two cities, dating back to the pre-war era. Proximity thus, geographical but also cultural, appears to be a distinct feature of the migration system between Albania,

2001). Pointing out, for instance, that the jobs migrants do are mostly in the informal sector and “would not be done” without foreign labour is certainly true and useful, but assumes either that migration is temporary, or that migrants (and their children) will *always* perform this kind of jobs.

Bulgaria and Greece that inevitably determines mobility patterns, suggesting that the dynamics of migration and integration involve elements of transnationalism.

The heterogeneity characterising the sample, as well as the variety of reasons, modes and routes of migration, suggests a multiplicity of individual migratory journeys, strategies and plans that explain the diversity of integration pathways and experiences. In addition, proximity between Greece and the countries of origin of the groups studied here not only has conditioned the reasons for migration (e.g. Greece being an “easy” destination), and the structure of the migrant population as a whole, but it continues to play a role (and will do so in the future), with back and forth migratory flows inducing other forms of mobility, including the development of transnational networks and practices that are part and parcel of the integration pathways of these migrants in Thessaloniki. Finally, there is the question of time, since the sample allowed comparisons between migrants who arrived in Greece at different stages. It seems that, as the years pass by and migrants settle in the city, many of their background characteristics lose the significance they may have had at an initial stage, since experiences now refer to “here”, or are lived “in-between” places of origin and destination. Practices are changing, adapting or reacting, new relationships are formed and old ones break, identities are constantly renegotiated, while the host society, its structures and institutions, but also its population, values and ideologies are transforming as well. Migration, after all, is a process of transition: for the countries of origin, for Greek society, and for the migrants themselves.

Main findings: dynamics and contexts of integration

The policy framework: from illegality to regularisation

The influx of large numbers of immigrants at the dawn of the 1990s, found the Greek government totally unprepared. The New Democracy (conservative) government introduced the new immigration policy with Law 1975/1991, which determined all matters of entry, work and residence of immigrants in Greece almost throughout the whole decade. This was characterised by a strict, “police” logic and by a failure to address realistically the new situation (see Karydis, 1996; Kourtovic, 2001). In that sense, the most outstanding feature of Greece’s exclusionary policy framework in its initial phase was the issue of prolonged illegality. The vast majority of immigrants had either crossed the border illegally, or they had overstayed their visas, and had not had any opportunity to apply for regularisation until 1997. The only exceptions, apart from the ethnic Greeks, who were also subject to a fragmented framework applying different measures to migrants from different countries, was a small minority of “elite” migrants, professionals employed in highly skilled positions or people who came as spouses of Greek nationals.

Life under clandestine status entailed much more than working informally: irregular migrants experience a constant insecurity: they are afraid of being arrested by the police, they hide and limit their public presence to what is necessary. The in-depth interviews confirmed that stops by the police for document checks were daily routine; inspections often took place at the workplace, or even at migrants’ homes. Deportations were frequent, and some of the respondents had the experience of being arrested in one of the so-called “skoopa” operations, or they had such a story to tell about a relative or friend. When a period of detention before deportation was involved, conditions were far from appropriate,

as certified by inspections of the Greek Ombudsman (e.g. Cert. N. 1956, 10.12.01) and other organisations. Migrants' treatment depended largely on the attitude of individual policemen, and was often offensive, involving verbal or even physical violence.

Within this context, the news regarding the first amnesty programme (1997) was welcomed, even if it was marked by several problems that excluded many migrants from that initial regularisation process. The most common of these problems were: the breakdown of the process in two separate stages; the financial costs of regularisation; the requirement of documents that had to be issued by the authorities in the sending countries; the bureaucratic procedures and significant delays in the issuing of stay permits; and the burden of unregistered employment that did not allow to the majority of immigrants to collect the number of social security stamps necessary for applying. Nevertheless, despite problems and constraints, it appears that during this first regularisation programme, and the one that followed (2001) gave the opportunity to the majority of the respondents to obtain legal status. At the time of the fieldwork, only 4 persons were undocumented; the majority were holders of the so-called "Green Card", about 30 percent had ethnic Greek status and 8 persons had been granted Greek citizenship.

Nevertheless, despite significant improvements brought by Law 2910/2001, the existing legal framework does not guarantee a stable and long-term feeling of security. The Law is being constantly revised; long-term residence is still denied to the majority; there is no established system for permit renewals running throughout the year; bureaucracy and delays generate problematic situations; prejudices and discriminatory attitudes by officials are rare but exist; immigrants' informal employment and lack of insurance make it difficult for them to remain regular - the list of existing and potential problems could be endless. What they highlight in sum is that the development of a coherent, realistic immigration policy in Greece, to solve more problems than it creates, is currently at the nursery stage. Meanwhile, things are evolving slowly, with the majority of the migrant population being in a state of uncertainty. Even so, however, the fact that regularisation procedures have been put into a kind of repetitive schedule is indicative of a more pragmatic spirit characterising the polity's approach to immigration, which helped the majority of immigrants to ensure a certain degree of dignity within Greek society and facilitated many practical aspects of their lives in Greece.

Socio-political responses to immigration: xenophobia versus solidarity

Despite the rather marginal, although growing, presence of the organised extreme right, xenophobic prejudices and attitudes are rather widely spread within contemporary Greek society. "Traditional" stereotypes about "the Turks", "the Blacks", or the country's "northern neighbours" have been reinforced, or gave place to new ones directly related to the presence of immigrants (Tsimouris, 2003). The initial, and to a certain degree expected, xenophobic reactions towards the massive influx of immigrants have led to open racist feelings. High unemployment rates and the rise in criminality during the 1990s have been the main arguments used in racist discourse, connected directly to the coming of immigrants. The experiences of my respondents, clearly confirm this situation. How are we to explain xenophobia and the growth of racism in the Greek context?

To an extent, it has appeared as a spasmodic reaction to the "immigration boom" and the massive arrival of Albanians in the early 1990s. The transition of the country into a host

society took place quite suddenly and the migrant population is often perceived as alarmingly large, especially compared to what is referred to as “the demographic problem” in Greece, i.e. declining fertility rates and ageing of the population. Research on xenophobia in Northern Greece has identified feelings of “excessive numbers of foreigners” among the local population (Kafetzis *et al.*, 1998). The legal framework itself has been another factor that contributed significantly to the rise and spread of xenophobic sentiments: the police-logic of governmental policy stigmatised migrants through the criminalisation of their clandestine status, building thus the stereotype of the “illegal immigrant = Albanian criminal” (Karydis, 1996). Such stereotypes have been widely used in the mass media, especially television, through “the common use of an overtly racist and offensive language” (Triandafyllidou, 2002: 157). The media in particular have cultivated sentiments of alarm, by exaggerating the numbers of “foreigners” in the country, by focusing on their harsh living conditions, by showing repeatedly images of mass arrests of clandestine migrants, and by emphasising the contribution of immigrants to rising criminality. The media discourse is largely responsible for the spread of the myth of immigrants as criminals. As Pavlou (2001) has noted, writing on Thessaloniki, local media have created this negative image in four ways: by being selective with the information they publish; by “inventing” daily affairs through references to past events as if they were current; by adopting a style of reportage much resembling police reports, focusing on the nationality of the offender; and by presenting high concentrations of immigrants in specific districts as worrying situations. TV series too passed from an initial neglecting of migrants’ presence to the reproduction of dominant perceptions and prejudices, cultivating the new exclusionary ideology of xenophobia by picturing immigrants in stereotypic ways (the domestic servant, the prostitute, the worker, or the criminal).

Above all, the public discourse on immigration reflects the exclusionary construction of the Greek national identity, which defines the concept of “Greekness” on the basis of religious, linguistic and genealogical criteria, rather than civic ones (Triandafyllidou, 2000). Greek political culture is based on the conception of Orthodox religion as an integral part of the national myth, which identifies itself in a line of historical continuity from ancient Hellas to the modern Greek nation state, directly passing from, and incorporating, the Orthodox Byzantine tradition (Lipovac, 1993). Research in northern Greece located widespread sentiments of mistrust towards distinct national and religious identities of the migrants, particularly “the Albanians” and “the Muslims” (Kafetzis *et al.*, 1998). This finding not only points to the fear of the “Other” in a society that for long and at large had perceived itself as a homogeneous one, but also highlights the particular weight of elements prominent in the Greek national imaginary (ethnicity, religion) which crucially determines stances towards immigrants. Such elements are reflected in the experiences of the interviewees regarding the reactions of Greek people towards them: Albanian migrants are treated with mistrust since they are considered to be Muslims, while Bulgarians have also faced negative attitudes, articulated in the context of the Balkan wars.

Nevertheless, there is a certain degree of ignorance connected to the novelty of the phenomenon that should be taken into account in order to understand the particularities of xenophobia in Greece. Almost 50 years of separate histories and closed borders imposed by the Iron Curtain, resulted in a certain degree of ignorance regarding Greece’s northern neighbours. This formed the terrain on which prejudices and stereotypes have been built during the 1990s, under the influence of governmental policy, due to exposure to negative

media images, and on the basis of the factors outlined above. However, as contact between immigrants and locals is enhanced and interpersonal relationships are developed over time on the basis of mutual trust, collaboration, friendship, etc., xenophobic sentiments gradually fade and racist attitudes become characteristic of only a small minority among the local population. The “curative” effect of time appears to be a gradual smoothing of “host-stranger” relations, and this can be observed in both the public discourse and the experiences of the migrants themselves. The media, for instance, now take more seriously into account the relevant anti-discriminatory regulations, and positive portraits of migrants are more frequently pictured, while some state TV and radio channels have included special multilingual programmes for immigrants. This overall positive development in their “level of acceptance” is highlighted in the narratives of many interviewees.

The maturation of the host society’s stances towards immigration over time however, should not be considered as a “natural” process. Apart from multiple social developments at the informal level, the role of organised pro-migrant voices should not be underestimated. Some of the policy gaps regarding the welfare of immigrants have been covered to an extent by non-state initiatives: community associations, NGOs, left-wing parties, antiracist groups, Trade Unions, the Church, etc.; in short, what can be labelled as “civil society organisations”, grassroots initiatives and the community and voluntary sectors. Since the early 1990s, there have been growing positive responses from such initiatives, whether state-funded institutions or grassroots collectives, aiming to support immigrants and to defend their rights. The outcomes of such attempts might be rather limited in scope, in geographical scale and in the numbers of people they affect; but the moral, political but also practical support from these sections of society encouraged and/or assisted migrant groups to get organised in associations and hence to acquire their own institutional “voice”. In the recent past such activities were rather marginal, often trapped in the political isolationism of traditional radical-left activism, or in the limited influential power and elitism of small think-tanks. Through networking and coordination of activities, however, but most importantly through the mobilisation of immigrants themselves, there are traces of an anti-racist, pro-migrant social movement, characterised by organisational, political and ideological diversity (see Glarnetatzis, 2001).

Immigrants’ employment and the labour market: exploitation and integration

With respect to immigrants’ labour market integration, the overwhelming majority works at jobs for which indigenous labour supply is insufficient and/or which would not be done in the absence of foreign labour. A first key-observation concerns the concentration of migrant labour in two basic types of jobs: either manual positions in construction and manufacture (including small workshops), or posts at the lowest ladders of the service sector (retail trade, cafes and restaurants, domestic service and care). A second observation relates to the nature of work migrants do, which is usually physically demanding, often of a servile character, and, for most of them, in low-skilled positions. A third observation has to do with the types of employers that tend to rely on immigrant labour: these are usually small or medium sized enterprises, in many cases family owned, on the one hand, and individuals or households, on the other. A fourth observation points to the different employment niches male and female migrants cover in the local labour market. Men usually work in construction or industry, or as assistants in workshops and small retail shops, while some are involved in casual manual work. Women comprise more than one

third who are domestic servants and carers, while many are manufacture workers and waitresses or assistants in cafes, bars and restaurants and retail shops. A significant number are entrepreneurs, white-collar employees and highly skilled professionals - these last two categories including high shares of women. The respondents' working conditions reflect to an extent the cheap and flexible labour offered by migrants. The working day is often much longer than the usual 8-hours one, while about half of the respondents earns between 20-29 Euros a day. Unregistered work is still the case for many - only 61.5 percent had social security during the fieldwork, and the figure drops to 30.3 percent for women working in personal services. Union participation is extremely low: only 4 percent were members of a trade union, the majority men with 9 or more years in the country, more than half working in manufacturing. Finally, temporariness in working arrangements is common: for 43.4 percent their current occupation dated no more than a year before the time of the fieldwork.

A single migrant is likely to have changed many occupations while in Greece, performing various different tasks, in many cases unrelated one to another. Only 26.9 percent of the respondents were practicing the same profession since they arrived, but even in such cases it is exceptional to have been doing this for the same employer. This means that, being in urgent need, immigrants had to accept any job that was offered to them, despite their qualifications and experience back home. Thus, apart from constituting a "pool" of cheap, hard-working labour, unregistered for the most part, they are also extremely flexible regarding the types of jobs they do. Many of the barriers imposed by the market, or by the limited knowledge migrants have about its geographies and its conditions, as well as language barriers, are overcome in practice by the flexibility itself and the low cost of their labour, but also because they possess a particular "advantage" in terms of social capital. This refers to the strength and density of social networks, which function as an important source of information about job opportunities in particular places, or are of direct assistance in finding employment. At least half of the respondents acknowledged that their main way of finding work in Greece has been through the help of relatives, friends or acquaintances. Especially for those who have been in Greece for longer periods and have also contacts with locals, social networks provide a guarantee for securing access to employment. On these grounds, long-term and/or structural unemployment has not been so far the case. Obviously, during their period in Greece and in-between different occupations, many migrants have experienced shorter or longer periods of unemployment. Generally, however, immigrants in Greece have not faced serious difficulties of access to the labour market. But while this might be true for migrants who go for unskilled or low skilled positions, it does not seem to be the case for those who look for more qualified posts in sectors where competition is sharper, even among Greeks. This contrasts with the educational and professional background of the migrants, a significant number of whom are specialised or qualified: the shares of those with university and technical/professional education reach 27.9 and 29.3 percent respectively; among those working in their home country, about two thirds were occupied in skilled positions.

Migrants are thus "forced" to do the jobs available in Greece, despite their educational qualifications and professional experience. In that sense, migration involves a significant devaluation of the individuals' employment profile and occupational status. It has a deep "de-skilling" effect, since what used to be a "marketable" educational capital in the countries of origin becomes almost useless and obsolete in the Greek labour market, where the high demand for foreign labour is for the bottom-end jobs in the employment

pyramid. The economic conditions in the home countries, which have been at the root of people's decision to emigrate, and the family or personal needs generated by the process of transition, push people to "throw away" what can be characterised as acceptable employment standards. Hence, they accept to perform any job in order to survive or to support their family back home, by sacrificing the present for gaining a future life in dignity. Moreover, linguistic or cultural obstacles, as well as institutional factors (e.g. concerning the highly bureaucratic procedures for the recognition of foreign degrees), put immigrants in a weak "bargaining" position that makes them keen to accept any job. And certainly, there are the problems arising from the uncertain legal status of immigrants in Greece. But it would be quite naïve to overestimate such parameters at the expense of the structural conditions that seem far more important for understanding the patterns of immigrants' insertion in the labour market. The demand for migrant labour in Greece is precisely for the low-skilled manual and servile posts where most of the respondents work. When migrants seek to get out of the space "reserved" for them in the labour market, they face difficulties of access, structural and institutional obstacles, discrimination or even exclusion. Under such conditions, the flexibility of migrant labour can be clearly translated into high degrees of exploitation. Employers have profited greatly from the migrants' desperate need to work. For the majority, exploitation has been expressed in long working days, lack of insurance and poor wages. It used to be particularly intense and far more common during their first years in Greece, also as an outcome of their weak "bargaining position" and their clandestine status. There are stories of semi-slavery conditions, with employers not paying migrant workers under the threat to inform the police.

However, there are significant shifts in the occupational structure of the sample. At the time of the fieldwork none was working in agriculture and fewer people were working in the leisure and catering industry, in personal services, or were employed as general manual workers. Now there are more industrial workers, shop assistants, skilled workers, technicians and white-collar employees, including some in highly skilled positions. Looking at the migrants' trajectories in the Greek labour market, we can observe important changes in the types of jobs and the remuneration of immigrants in the city. Many have experienced a gradual improvement of their position and their real wages have risen since their arrival. The rather humiliating initial conditions do not seem to be the case any more, while there is strong evidence of many successful employment trajectories. Many interviewees expressed satisfaction from their progress in the Greek labour market, which seems to compensate for - although never justifying - the years of hardship. Hard work in that sense has not been "for nothing": as the years pass by conditions get better, whether because of regularisation, social security, language fluency, more effective networks and relationships with Greeks, or a combination of all these factors. Sometimes, what has been previously described as a devaluation of the individuals' human capital, imposed by necessity and by conditions that force migrants to accept any low-skilled post, is succeeded, after a period, by a reverse process of re-skilling, although in a different field. Immigrants who stay in the same trade tend to specialise and become skilled workers; in some cases, such an experience may lead towards self-employment or entrepreneurship, for instance in small businesses, or small construction projects and house-repair work. Similarly, qualified migrants gradually make their way towards more responsibilities and duties that correspond more closely to their academic and professional experience.

Nevertheless, it is not meant here that migrants always overcome the obstacles put by the legal framework and the labour market, or that they do not face exclusion, discrimination and exploitation in several forms and at various levels. Neither do such examples of upward employment trajectories imply any idealising stereotype of “the successful immigrant”. But assuming that immigrants in Greece are eternally destined to perform the same types of jobs in the same exploitative conditions is equally misleading by victimising the migrants’ experience. The phenomenon of socio-economic mobility rather reflects the fact that immigrants form a dynamic section of the labour force and also recognises an important temporal factor in their labour market integration.

Immigrants in the city: living conditions, housing and the urban space

The migrants’ conditions in the labour market are to an extent reflected on their housing and residential experiences. The vast majority of the participants in my survey live with their families in rented flats, usually on the lower floors of relatively old buildings. Cheap accommodation is preferred by many, and low rents, expectedly, usually mean bad-quality housing (e.g. in the areas within and around the inner city), properties lacking basic facilities (e.g. central heating), or small inadequate apartments (often in ground floors or in basements). The spatial distribution of immigrants mirrors the social geography of the city. There are high concentrations in overpopulated inner city neighbourhoods or areas at the supposedly more deprived north-western part of Thessaloniki, where rents are relatively cheaper. However, segregation patterns are not that sharp and ghetto-like situations do not seem to be the case so far in Thessaloniki. The Albanian community in particular, expectedly perhaps given its size, is spatially dispersed across the city. Apart from the price of the rent, other factors that condition the choice of a particular property by individual migrants are: knowledge of a neighbourhood, convenient distance from the workplace, or the location of the children’s school, as well as the quality and size of a particular property, to suit family needs, and kinship ties that allow mutual help and support.

In a speculative housing market, where urban expansion goes on with rents following an upward route, immigrants, who are often looking for temporary accommodation and are particularly vulnerable due to their legal status, experience high degrees of exploitation in the housing market. In many cases, landlords avoid signing a tenancy agreement, or even sign false ones, to escape taxation for renting the property. Another practice is renting properties that were not built to be used for accommodation, such as storerooms in the basements of inner-city buildings, de facto exempt from the relevant (higher) taxation. The splitting of properties in order to host a higher number of tenants, often without providing basic facilities in the separated spaces (kitchens, bathrooms), serves again landlords in multiple ways, through the exploitation of a situation of high demand and the vulnerability of this special category of tenants. The immigrants’ undocumented status is sometimes used as a means to convince them to accept the terms of tenancy, or even to vacate the property without notice in some cases, under the threat (or simply the fear) to inform the authorities. And while access to housing is not a problem as such, the interviewees’ residential experiences suggest that there exist also non-market obstacles, which create difficulties in the migrants’ pathways of access to housing. By this I refer to the common prejudices about immigrants in Greece, and to xenophobic attitudes that are apparent in their daily interaction with (some) locals. So, one of the most important features of immigrants’ experiences is the discrimination they face in the housing market. Some landlords refuse to

rent their property to a foreigner, particularly to Albanians (and especially to young unaccompanied males). However, this is not an absolutely exclusionary phenomenon; the housing market, as any other market, operates in terms of exchange, of supply and demand: if a landlord refuses to rent his/her property to a migrant family, someone else will accept. And in most cases, any initial hesitation will disappear over time, when the relationships between migrants and landlords or neighbours reach a more personal level.

A more dynamic analysis of the residential experiences of immigrants in the city would lead us to take into account their housing conditions before the fieldwork took place. Many of the interviewees talked about negative experiences in the past; they spoke about harsh conditions initially and problems they had encountered in the course of their residential pathways in the country and in Thessaloniki. Whatever their housing quality was at the time of the fieldwork, things had been worse in the beginning for the majority, especially for unaccompanied males during the first ambiguous years of their migratory journey. Initial conditions, clandestine status, uncertainty and fear had pushed people to sleep at the workplace, or even out in the open air. However, as in the previous section on employment, the residential trajectories of individual migrants do change over time. Following these trajectories we see that not only do immigrants experience a high degree of residential mobility, much higher than that of the locals, but also that the quality of housing conditions gradually improves.

Inevitably the presence of immigrants reshapes the face of the city: certain areas (parks, squares, etc.) become places where immigrants gather, in order to meet each other or to look for work. Examples are the Aristotle University campus, the Courts Square (Plateia Dikastirion), the Railway Station, all at the heart of the city, as well as other strategic points (e.g. motorway junctions, green spaces). This development is also evident at a neighbourhood level, in areas with high concentrations of immigrants, where, for instance, the surrounding kiosks sell Albanian, Russian, Bulgarian and other newspapers. The demand for specific types of services on the part of the migrants (e.g. translations, newspapers, special products, food) and the entrepreneurial action of both themselves and of locals, transform the urban landscape in certain streets and neighbourhoods, giving it multicultural characteristics. For example, in the Vardaris area (western part of the centre), in the streets below the main (Egnatia) street, there is a growing Chinese market that has emerged during the past few years (mainly clothing stores)²². In the Courts Square, which functions as a meeting place for migrants from the former Soviet Union, we can observe the development of several small ethnic businesses, ranging from street traders to specialised food stores and ethnic restaurants with self-descriptive, place-specific names (e.g. “the Caucasus tavern”). I should note that the groups studied here do not exhibit similar tendencies of *visibility* within the city, at least not in such a particular and distinct way; this points to certain aspects of cultural proximity (in terms of food, for instance), as mentioned by many interviewees, but also a degree of *adaptability* to the local environment, especially in the case of Albanians. In general, however, immigrants add new “colours” and character in the changing urban morphology and they develop new social uses of space, which

²² During the fieldwork, I personally witnessed the expansion of a small “Chinatown” in Thessaloniki, counting 4 shops (shoes and clothing mainly) located on the main street in 2000, 21 in 2002, while many more had mushroomed in the surrounding streets in my last visit in 2003.

acquires a particular meaning for them and becomes their “place”. In the narratives of many interviewees, the city is “imagined” as a new home.

Conclusion: immigration and social change: identifying the trends

The transformation of Greece into a host society coincided with a series of parallel developments that have signalled processes of increasing exposure to global trends. In fact, migration can be seen as one of the factors indicating Greece’s particular experience of globalisation; other factors may include:

- The redefinition of the regional position and role of Greece in the Balkans, in the advent of post-1989 developments in Eastern Europe and the former USSR.
- The ongoing process of European integration and the transfer of certain powers to European bodies, especially in respect to Greece’s membership in the Common Market, the Euro-zone and the Schengen Area.
- The general trends of restructuring and internationalisation of the national economy, as expressed by: the privatisation of key state companies and the process of de-industrialisation; the liberalisation of exchange rates; the growing amount of Greek capital invested abroad and the relocation of production; the further tertiarisation of the economy, particularly regarding banking, finance, business and IT services, etc.

Contemporary trends of migration and integration in Greece differ from any past experience in the history of the country; but they also differ from past European and other experiences. On the other hand, there is a range of processes, practices and phenomena resembling other contemporary cases, especially Southern European ones with which Greece shares many common characteristics (King, 2000). The integration of immigrants appears to be a complex, multifaceted and contradictory process, touching several aspects of contemporary Greek society: politics and policy, economy and the labour market, geography and space, education and culture. Despite the exclusionary mechanisms that are still in place, immigrants do make a living in the host country and gradually become organic elements, turning Greece into a multicultural society. Rather than searching for single factors and one-way paths leading to integration, the main conclusion is this depends on a combination of interdependent processes at the level of structures and institutions, on the one hand, and at the level of agency and relationships, on the other. It thus appears that neither “integration”, nor “exclusion” are definite and stable one-way processes. They are both subject to time, thus they may evolve in parallel directions and they may be reversed, whether for specific groups or for individual migrants. In addition, it is not only migrants that “adjust”, but the host society itself is adapting, in conflicting ways, to the new situations imposed by the fact that it is now a multicultural society - and develops as such. The integration of immigrants is characterised by a series of contradictions, expressed in the diversity of experiences and reflecting broader social mechanisms, processes of economic restructuring, political trends and institutional changes. What this reveals is the key-issue of social change: Greece, as a host society, is changing anyway, but now it does so because of, and with the immigrants. Migration becomes part of the dynamics of socio-economic transformation, therefore it should be understood as a “critical force in history” (Papastergiadis, 2000: 53). In a rapidly transforming reality, where Greece found itself to

have become within a decade or so a multicultural society, no certainties apply. The phenomenon is still unfolding, which suggests that things may change constantly and it is particularly difficult to make projections. At best, the findings presented here draw the picture of the emerging trends and set out a framework for future research and analysis.

Naturally, a first area where one can capture change is the structure and composition of the country's population. A population that was for long perceived as a homogenous entity is now characterised by pluralism and diversity. Greece is now a multicultural society, and this development crucially alters political traditions, cultural beliefs and perceptions of identity. Faced directly with "the Other", national identity is transforming and responds to difference in multiple ways. To an extent these are reactionary, as the spread of racist and xenophobic feelings and the growing influence of extreme right parties show. However, current debates on citizenship and senses of belonging suggest that certain things that were unchallenged in the past are now at least discussed. The rhetoric of the public discourse has shifted and immigration issues are now part of the political agendas of the main parties. Not only has the far right been growing, but also the range of the pro-migrant voice is expanding to the whole spectrum of the Left. Civil society organisations are "learning" how to deal with migrants, how to interact creatively with their associations and, given the limitations, to inspire participation and collective action. Despite the persistence of xenophobic attitudes, reciprocity between immigrants and locals is growing at an informal level and there are signs that (some) locals start to esteem the value of diversity. As interaction increases and the "second generation" comes into play, hybrid and transnational identities and practices are beginning to emerge.

Another area is that of the economy and the social structure. A particular space has been created for immigrants at the boundaries between the formal and the informal labour market, which keeps them at the bottom of the social hierarchy through processes and relations that turn them into "servants". Such a development implies also changes in the class structure within the Greek social formation, which is now characterised by ethnic and cultural difference. This space has a structural function in the way forces of restructuring and internationalisation are affecting specific localities within Greece. However it is fluid and dynamic and its boundaries are blurred: individual migrants may find ways out through the acquisition of legal status and the move to the formal labour market. What this reveals in respect to social change is that even under harsh and exploitative conditions the position of migrants within the host country is not given and may be reversed. The economic impact of immigration²³ has been rather positive so far, regarding the complementarity of foreign labour, the survival (or even expansion) of certain sectors, growth in consumption, the strengthening of insurance systems and the public budget (through contributions and taxation). In respect to negative outcomes, economic studies tend to emphasise labour market issues, such as the distorted and short-sighted development path based on labour-intensive activities, the expansion of the informal economy, the replacement of locals by migrants in some sectors, and the impact on indigenous wages. Empirical studies do confirm a low degree of substitution of indigenous labour by foreign workers, in sectors

²³ The issues touched here are those addressed by studies looking specifically at the Greek case: e.g. Lianos *et al.* (1996), Fakiolas (1999), Labrianidis and Lyberaki (2001), Lyberaki and Pelagidis (2000), Sarris and Zografakis (1999), Lianos (2003).

such as agriculture and construction²⁴. However, part of the replaced labour force is moving towards better posts or supervising positions, while the presence of migrants seems to be creating more jobs than those it actually “takes away”²⁵. As for the rest, these are not exclusively direct effects of immigration as such, but rather a result of the exclusionary policy, the failure of successive governments to regulate the labour market and processes of economic restructuring that induce flexibility and keep wages down. However, the overall socio-economic effects cannot be limited solely to such “standard” economic indicators. Background material from my own research and findings of other studies (e.g. Romaniszyn, 1996) suggest that there is a whole range of economic activity addressed especially to immigrants. Specific economic niches have emerged, in some cases with direct involvement of migrants as entrepreneurs: from taverns or bars serving the migrants, to retail shops selling goods from the sending countries (food and drinks, books and newspapers, DVDs and music, etc.); and from translation offices or travel agencies specialising in the countries where immigrants come from to specialised lawyers dealing with cases of regularisation, expulsion, or human rights.

Then comes the issue of urban transformation. In cities, where restructuring processes are more explicitly manifested, difference and diversity, but also poverty, are now more apparent at the local spatial level. The emergence and consolidation of new ethnic communities celebrates a *de facto* multiculturalism, particularly visible in specific locales. The urban space itself is redefined on the basis of new social uses and new geographies. Empty public spaces are revitalised and areas with high immigrant concentrations and/or ethnic businesses acquire a multicultural character. However, the structural position of immigrants has a concrete spatial face, translated into old, bad-quality properties and into sharpening segregation patterns which may confine migrants in specific areas and create ghetto-like situations. Even if my findings do not suggest high levels of socio-spatial exclusion of immigrants in Thessaloniki, this might be an issue for concern in the future, as polarisation in the labour market grows and urban inequalities become more intense.

Most of the above elements are policy-relevant; but recent developments suggest that policy approaches change as well. The positive effects of the “rationalisation” of immigration policy have been pointed out, while new developments include the design of specific measures aiming at integration and non-discrimination legislation according to EU standards. Practical problems persist, but reflect wider malfunctions in the public sector, coupled by widespread xenophobic attitudes. Together with issues applying specifically to migrants (naturalisation procedures, access to health care and benefits, etc.), these problems underline the necessity for a redefinition of policy but also of the culture of service delivery. The successive legalisation programmes gave the opportunity to migrants to acquire documents, and thus be entitled to basic rights. However, their ambiguous status in Greece regarding a variety of issues - from long-term residence to pensions and civil rights - constitutes a major problem with respect to welfare. To what extent Greece will manage to “integrate” migrants at a time of restructuring and social change is both a concern and a challenge for the future.

²⁴ E.g. Lianos *et al.* (1996); Labrianidis and Lyberaki (2001).

²⁵ See Sarris and Zografakis (1999); also Labrianidis and Lyberaki (2001).

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