

University of Sussex
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New Brits?

Migration and Settlement of Albanian-Origin Immigrants in London

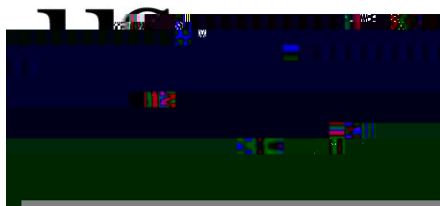
Working Paper No 57

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March 2010



Abstract

Studies on migration and the integration of ethnic minorities have noted the lack of research on 'new' immigrants to Britain. The 'pragmatism' in UK immigration politics and the inadequate response to the presence of these new migration waves have also been documented, although there is only limited evidence to date. This paper focuses on one particularly ignored immigrant group – Albanian migrants and their children – and provides evidence regarding their migration and process of settlement in Britain. Findings show that the lack of legal migration routes to

number of studies on the 'new' East-West migrants to the UK, the experience of the non-A8 (i.e. non-accession) East Europeans has been neglected. The paper aims thus to add to the evidence on the 'new' migrants, by focusing on Albanian-origin immigrants

communities with distinct cultures → all this to serve to institutional purposes. At the expense of internal differences and cross-cutting social cleavages, the dominant discourse tends to equate ethnic categories with social groups through the reification of minorities' cultures and ignoring the multiple criteria that would normally characterise a plural society. Other issues have been related to the functioning of multiculturalism. The creation of parallel societies is considered nowadays as the unintended outcome of multiculturalism, constituting an important part of the discussions on the need for policies to promote social cohesion. Johnson (2007) maintains that it has been the focus of the policies on the 'multi' rather than on the common culture and the emphasis on the dividing lines rather than the commonalities, that have created the social and ethnic fragmentations now present in Britain.

This emphasis on the development of multiculturalism is also associated with a persisting focus on race and an emphasis on the integration of post-colonial migrants, thereby overlooking the new migrants. This is highlighted by Favell who quotes research that has shown that race and ethnicity in Britain nowadays bear less importance than class and other social factors in marking minorities' (lack of) integration. As he puts it, confronted by the ethnic differentiation of British population

- increased migration from Eastern Europe

these new migrants, especially on their identities, views and opinions, life experiences, settlement patterns, interaction with 'old' minorities, and the local initiatives that can affect their integration (Robinson and Reeves 2006).

Immigration in London

Immigration in London is not a recent phenomenon. Indeed, historians go back 250 years when looking for the origins of London as the 'city of nations' (Akroyd 2000: 701). The same is true for the multicultural tensions, but also openness and acceptance. The story played out today of diversity and difference has characterised London over the centuries, with many groups defining themselves against a susceptible native population, although the once-dominating fear of illness and contagion may have been progressively transformed into a more politically-loaded social and moral one. As such, London has a particular position in Britain's immigration history and its variety and heterogeneity have impacted the notion and re-definition of Englishness itself. Holmes (1997) furthermore points to London as a principal destination and location for many immigrant groups whose immigration and residence experience in Britain is bounded within the capital.

The dynamic relationship of London with immigration is very much related to its character as a global city with an imperial past (Eade 2000). London as a global city holds certain features, such as being in the centre of the world economy and finance and being both an important site of production and a market for innovative products and services. Like other global cities, London is characterised by an increase in informalisation and casual labour markets – an aspect closely related to immigration as the source of low-wage labour to economically marginal sectors of production, including the service industry (Sassen 1991). However, compared to other global cities such as New York and Los Angeles, up to the early 1990s the growth of low-paid employment in London was impeded by a relatively generous

welfare system and a limited supply of 'fresh' migrant labour. But then, with the increase in immigration over the past twenty years, it is notable that a 'migrant division of labour' has emerged, which in London is characterised by a disproportionate growth of managerial jobs and a lower, but still significant, growth in low-

with the lowest level of education (Markova and Black 2007). Furthermore, Albanian migrants were concentrated in specific job sectors, such as construction, garages, car valeting, catering and pubs. Women, on the other hand, were mostly taking care of the households; in the labour market they underwent a similar concentration in cleaning or catering jobs (King . 2003).

King . (2003, 2006) further found that the migration experience did not affect the patriarchal ideas and the reproduction of gender roles in the host country. Rather, the same patterns of male-dominated decision-making and subordination of women were found to characterise the Albanian family in London, which was reflected also in the sending and management of remittances back in Albania. Kostovicova (2003) and Kostovicova and Pestreshi (2003) described the lack of community organisation among Albanians and their more relaxed attitude towards religion when compared to Kosovans. These authors went on to describe the divisions between Albanians and Kosovans within the Albanian ethnic community in London. Discrimination and racism is encountered in the UK in the form of bullying at school, incidents at work or the stereotypes portrayed in the media. Intentions to return are widely reported to be weak (King . 2003, 2006).

Methods

This paper is based on a total of 42 interviews: 22 with teenagers ò 12 girls and 10 boys; 10 with Albanian parents of teenagers ò 8 mothers and 2 fathers; and 6 with teachers in secondary schools in London. In addition, I interviewed 4 key informants ò community activists working in different sectors such as health, education, advocacy, etc. Interviews were conducted between December 2007 and March 2008.

could oppose our mothers! Here the child says everything in your face how he feels about something. I mean, we got married and we didn't know what that involved! (Majlinda, mother, 34).

ë I don't know what we will do this year [about going to Albania]. Unless my brother gets married, I don't think we are going (Marjana, mother, 40).

Uh, the trip to Albania, more expensive than a trip to New York! Yes, too much hassle going there (Arjana, mother, 32).

These quotes are taken from a meeting of a group of Albanian mothers who get together in a school in East London where an Albanian organisation has Albanian classes for the children. They did not want to be interviewed, but they allowed me to be a passive observer in their meeting and 'get what I needed'. In previous work conducted in the early 2000s the Albanian community in London was largely depicted as a community composed of single men, concentrated in specific job sectors, unwilling to be interviewed and with no desire to return to Albania (King 2003, 2006). As the quotes above hint, the Albanian community is now a 'settled' community, with 'family amnesty' of 2003 and the subsequent naturalisation of Albanian migrants in the mid-2000s being important events that marked this process.²

Although in relatively small numbers when compared to other minorities who have arrived in the country both before and since, Albanians arrived in Britain in the late 1990s when the political discourse was already characterised by stigmatisation and penalisation of asylum-seekers and with concerns expressed over the impact of new arrivals on health and welfare system (Hampshire 2005). Moreover, different from other immigrants who often settle in areas where a previously established immigrant community of the same origin resides (Vertovec 2007), there was no settled community for the Albanians who came at the end of the 1990s. The routes

that the Albanian migrants followed to enter Britain were limited to claiming asylum as Albanians after the pyramid crisis in 1997; claiming asylum as Kosovans after the refugee crisis in 1999; entering illegally through smuggling which has continued, although in very small numbers, in more recent years; and latterly though family reunification (King 2006, Schwandner-Sievers, 2004).³ Their migration to Britain involved also a 'meeting with the state'; apart from being inexperienced migrants, Albanians were leaving Albania in anarchy. Some had had migratory experiences in Southern Europe (Greece and Italy) where the situation with migration management and legislation was chaotic throughout the 1990s.

There is a feeling of a pending life crisis and psychological persecution experienced during the numerous interviews as part of the process of applying for refugee status. This was reflected in some migrants' refusals to be interviewed and recorded yet another time after 'having filled sacks with papers and interviews' in the past several

² The Family Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) Amnesty was introduced by the Home Office on 24 October 2003.

highly-skilled to low-skilled. Furthermore, as King . (2003, 2006) report for the early years, jobs in construction and catering remain typical for the low-skilled. There is now, however, a growing category in the

depression during the application and the questioning at the Home Office, and some of these health problems were not resolved once the refugee status was acquired.

ZV: Did the process of legalisation have any effect on you?

Fatmir: It was severe stress; thank god it didn't transform into depression. During the past 4 years I didn't work for a whole year, I just didn't feel like working or doing anything – I got very fat; I went to the Chinese (specialist) and did acupuncture – (and) I returned a (normal) human being again! Because one needs – like the doctor says, a little bit of stress helps people to go forward, but too much stress kills people (father, 41).

Drita: Any effects? Well, the tension that we had to sit and wait. Maybe that was it that created so much stress. We got very stressed, you can imagine. When I was thinking that they were – that they would return me, that they would – that was for me a catastrophe! That was the worst stress; these last 3-4 years I have been feeling calmer – very calm. Very calm; now I just think about my children, nothing troubles me anymore; I just wish at least we will have good health, as we say (in Albania). Now the only thing that matters above everything: to raise these children, to enable them to do well in life and be there for them. That's all what matters now; I have got no other complaints or problems (mother, 45).

Marta: Health was one of the main areas affected, so I think there was a big damage in that respect. Because they didn't know what was going to happen, lots of people chose to stay at home, waiting until they get status, which stopped the integration in that respect, because if you don't know what is going to happen you don't want to do anything. I would say physical symptoms we saw a lot during that time, because some of these problems were somatised, they came up as

physical problems and a lot of health issues were presented at GPs. Waiting wasn't something easy – observing people, they kind of got stuck at the time, it was really difficult, waiting, you know, everyday checking for the post. I know people who have been dispersed outside London or were sent to centres to be returned home. The way they were treated. – in detention – but even places where they were sent to be returned home and just a minute before they were flying back, they were kind of returned to the UK and allowed to stay (migrant and community activist).

The Post-Status 'Era': A New Albanian Community?

After years of apprehension, hope and struggle, the post-status era found the Albanian community bewildered, tired and hugely transformed. The chaos of around ten years included people and families being returned and disappearing from the lives of those remaining, the birth of many children, improvement in economic conditions and the emergence of some common lines of interaction within the community. Community organisations were created, some initiated by the Kosovan migrants and most including both Albanian and Kosovan migrants, at least two Albanian newspapers circulate now in London and businesses – mainly restaurants and smaller food shops, sometimes appearing with Italian names – have started to mark the presence of a community now 'here to stay'.

The choice to come as asylum

education and language schemes. Moreover, since there was no pre-established ethnic community, there was hardly any chain migration, and so this first

backgrounds so when people ask where I am from, I say Albanian and I am proud to say it. But in primary school it was different (Albanian girl, 14).

Is the Albanian community being created as a new bit in London's 'multicultural mosaic'? Community activists maintain that only a small percentage of Albanian migrants take part in organisations, while the Kosovan migrants show a stronger commitment to getting organised and sponsoring community events. Unlike the other 'old' minorities, there is no special Albanian ethnic business or religion or

sometimes also resentment among the children towards parents who cannot perform their parental role, especially in school in front of their peers. More importantly, the inability to communicate and be self-sufficient from the side of the parents has damaged the boundaries

special code if you can tell me what it is about. "Well, something to do with our passport, we have to go to the town hall." "Wow, are you getting the

know everything. Here (we belong)
mostly. [...] But I w

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