SPATIAL PROXIMITY AND SOCIAL DISTANCE: ALBANIAN MIGRANTS’ INVISIBLE EXCLUSIONS

EVIDENCE FROM GREECE

DR. IFIGENEIA KOKKALI
Robert Schumann Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Italy
ifigeneia.kokkali@eui.eu and kokifi@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The spatial distance/proximity between two (or more) populations does not provide any measure for their social distance/proximity. More importantly this proximity might dissimulate various forms of exclusion and marginalisation, and let for discussions on a migratory group’s successful integration into the host country. This seems to be the case of Albanians in Greece, who are recently thought to be a successful paradigm of immigrant inclusion. We will maintain that if Albanians do mingle spatially with Greeks, this cannot be taken as an a priori social aggregation to Greeks neither as evidence for the Albanians’ social inclusion into the dominant society. Moreover, we will seek to explore the preconditions of this supposed integration, that is to say which are those facts, attitudes, phenomena, etc. that justify why Albanians are thought to be integrated into the Greek society. We will argue that this ‘integration’ is more fictive than real.

Key words: Albanians, Greece, integration/inclusion, spatial/social (de)segregation.
Introduction

Albanian immigrants are far more numerous than other foreigner groups in Greece, since they make up almost 58 percent of the total foreign population of the country (438,036 individuals), (ESYE, 2001). Despite the size of this population, the Albanians offer an interesting ‘invisibility’ in spatial and socio-cultural terms, as it will be outlined below. Drawing upon the body of work done on this issue, the paper examines briefly the links between the spatial proximity of Albanians and Greeks and the social distance/proximity of the two groups, and suggests that the former does not provide any measure for the latter. In the first place, we will briefly discuss the contested views on the association between spatial and social proximity, with a special focus on the current situation in Southern-European cities in which the study of phenomena of urban segregation is intertwined with the arrival of immigrant populations.

Then, we will argue that, similarly to what has been shown for other immigrant populations in Southern Europe’s urban settlements, the study of Albanians in Greece shows the spatial proximity dissimulates various forms of exclusion and marginalisation, and lets for discussions to go freely on their successful integration into the dominant society. We will try to demonstrate that if Albanians do mingle spatially with Greeks, this cannot be taken as an a priori social aggregation to Greeks neither as evidence for the Albanians’ social inclusion. Last but not least, we will seek to discern the elements and facts that feed the discourse on Albanians’ successful integration into the Greek society, showing thus that this latter is more fictive than real.

The research material being referred to in this paper is drawn from the research programme ‘Supporting the Design of Migration Policies: an Analysis of Migration Flows between Albania and Greece’ commissioned by the World Bank and conducted between the period of December 2005 to June 2006. For the purposes of this assignment, 128 semi-structured interviews with the Albanian immigrants in Greece were conducted. The sample was based on the information gathered during the
Segregation, Integration and Immigration

In the last two decades, a growing literature has seen the day on 'globalization' and its impact on cities and especially on big cities. A new type of urban system in the global and transnational regional level has been emerging, in which some major cities coordinate the world’s economies or – better – organise the unified world economy (Sassen, 1994). Inevitably, globalization and the economic restructuring trigger changes in the global city labour markets. According to Saskia Sassen (1991), those changes induce social polarisation and the increase of segregation.

Although such processes are undoubtedly present in most leading world cities, Sassen’s approach imposes an explanatory pattern on a situation that is much more varied, and this by transforming powerful tendencies into supposedly ecumenical outcomes (Maloutas, 2004: 4).

If we consider segregation as the horizontal pattern of socially diversified neighbourhood communities with fairly distinct socio-racial boundaries between them, the varied forms and processes of segregation in European cities are often difficult to identify. Let us remind that the above perception is closely related to the context in which the concept of urban segregation was generated: the fast-growing industrial metropolises of the American mid-West, with their low-rise suburban sprawl, strong waves of immigration and the heritage of racism from slavery and civil war. In that context, segregation meant spatial isolation, where spatial distance was more or less equated to social distance (Maloutas, 2007: 736).

Hence, for long we have been thinking – particularly in Europe – that increasing ethnic and social mix in the city neighbourhoods would be the key to the inclusion of migrants in the host societies. In a way, the spatial proximity and the social mix in the urban space were thought to be the

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2 Parallel qualitative information was drawn from the interviews conducted in the Northern Greece. 29 interviews out of which 19 were conducted in the district of Thessaloniki and 10 in the neighbouring districts of Imathia, Katerini and Chalkidiki.
vector of social cohesion and the key to the incorporation of newcomers. Yet, since the 1970s, the article of Chamboredon & Lemaire (1970) ‘Spatial proximity and social distance: the grands ensembles and their populating’ has challenged this belief, by demonstrating that spatial proximity does not necessarily involve social proximity.

The study of the vertical social differentiation in Athens seems to reinforce the two French authors’ thesis. Indeed, in the Greek ‘polykatoikia’ (apartment building), different socio-economic categories live in close vicinity to each other, the storey being the main spatial differentiator (Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001). Many well-off households, usually owners, reside in the top floor flats of six or seven floor apartment buildings of the city centre. Middle floors have gradually been taken up by lower income families, students and private offices, while migrants (arrived in the mid 80s) rented lower floor and basement flats of the same apartment buildings. In many cases, this kind of flats had ceased to be used as residences due to pollution and noise conditions. Some went through transformation into manufacturing workshops in the 1970s and the 1980s and others had been completely unused and let to run down for quite a while (Vaiou, 2002: 381), until immigrants came to inhabit them.

It is easily understood that this process results apparently in the decrease of segregation in the city-centre, what then led some authors (cf. Leontidou, 1990) to interpret this transformation as a sign of social ‘democratization’ of the city-centre and as part of a desegregation that would be characteristic of the southern European city. This desegregation would be embodied in a social coexistence (in the same buildings) under a form of vertical social differentiation, supposedly produced by the deliberate choice of different social categories to reside in the socially mixed city-core. This choice would supposedly provide evidence for their urban culture and would simultaneously produce the slackening of the neighbourhoods’ segregation (Maloutas, 2006 commenting on Leontidou, 1990). However, Maloutas and Karadimitriou (2001) have shown that the vertical segregation is not characteristic to Southern Europe as a whole. Rather it is a Greek particularity, relative to the city-centres’ densification, the consequent degradation of the living conditions there (together with the rapid aging of the buildings that have been the physical back-up for
this densification), and also relative to the accelerated depreciation of apartments, especially those located in the lower floors.

Despite those (and many other) contextual differences in the factors that influence – induce or deduce – segregation in southern-European cities, it is certain that those latter are not adequately understood through the explanatory schemes used for the world’s leading centres (Leontidou 1990: 8-12, 128-136; Leontidou, 1995; Leontidou et al., 2002; Maloutas, 1992, 2004 and 2007). The dominant perspectives centred firstly on North-American cities, then, in North and Western-European ones, rather distort the characteristics of Euro-Mediterranean urban development and have therefore been characterised as inappropriate for the study of southern-European cities.

Those latter, as aforesaid, seem to offer a more mingled social composition and relatively diffused residential patterns compared to western and northern European cities. Besides, the function of some structures and mechanisms that favoured social coherence and residential stability (as for instance the family networks of solidarity) seem to have spared the European South the development and expression of phenomena of ‘new poverty’ that were, thus, restrained (Maloutas, 1999: 199-200, 221-222, and 2000a: 94-95; Arbaci, 2005; Leontidou 1996: 258; Mingione, 1994).

However, more recent research comes to challenge the supposedly limited segregation of the southern European city, which undoubtedly remains under-researched as far as segregational patterns are concerned. Let us remind that, in the European South, research into those issues has been enhanced to include socio-ethnic processes since the mid nineties, when the Southern European cities begun to register as international migrants’ destinations (Cf. Arapoglou and Sayas, 2008; Maloutas and Karadimitriou, 2001; Malheiro 2002; Minzione, 2009; Leal 2004). For this reason, research on urban segregation goes hand-in-hand with immigrants’ settlement and their social and spatial incorporation in the Southern European city.

According to Arbaci (2005), this latter is generally characterized by forms of socio-spatial exclusion and marginalisation which are hidden within patterns of ethnic residential dispersion and desegregation (as for instance the case of Albanians in Athens, of North Africans and Albanians in Italian cities, of Dominicans and Peruvians in Spanish ones) as much as within patterns of spatial concentration (e.g. Moroccans and Pakistanis in Barcelona or Genoa and Cape-Verdians in Lisbon).
This multifaceted relation between various forms of exclusion and the geography of immigrant settlement challenges generic conceptions on integration via territorial dispersion, usually associated with the binominal identification of social segregation with spatial segregation.

Our study of Albanian immigration in Greek cities, and Thessaloniki in particular, comes to reinforce this thesis. A variety of reasons and different processes (that certainly call for exploration, but will not be addressed herein) provide Greek cities with a relatively low urban segregation. As far as Albanians are concerned, we perceive a veritable ethnic residential mix: diffusion into the urban space and the absence of ethnic enclaves, neighbourhoods or even visible ethnic infrastructure, as we will briefly discuss further on. However, the resulted spatial proximity of Albanians to Greeks does not necessarily involve the social proximity of the two groups; nor the Albanians’ inclusion into the dominant society, as we will argue in this paper.

We could define the ‘social proximity’ as the similarity of households’ socio-economic conditions, as well as the cultural affinity binding people (Allain, 2000). However, we do not intend to illustrate the ‘social distance’ of Greeks and Albanians in a strict sense of class distance, based on differences of socio-professional stratification. We will rather opt for a vaguer definition of the ‘social distance’ as the opposite of the ‘social proximity’, by this latter meaning the relations established between individuals or groups on the basis of a social bond (Lecourt & Baudelle, 2004).

**Albanians in Thessaloniki: ‘Familial’, Spatially Diffused and ‘Invisible’**

The massive concentration of the Albanian migration over a short period of time – as Albania moved almost overnight from total closure to large-scale out-migration – has marked this particular flow as a significant and unique case (Vullnetari, 2007: 39). Referring to the current Albanian population movements, Carletto et al. (2006) talk of a ‘country on the move’, while King (2005: 133) considers Albania as a ‘laboratory for the study of migration’.

Indeed, in less than 20 years’ time, the Albanians’ out-migration presents – in the Greek case, at least – all the ‘classic’ stages of a migratory movement (Cf. Castles & Miller, 1998 : 26-28): labour migration of young males (pioneers), regularization of the migrant’s status, extension of the intended
stay, stabilization of the flux with the arrival of women and children (and in a lesser extend of grandparents), children’s schooling and questions of incorporation, 2nd generation issues such as the Greek-born Albanian children’s nationality...

The study of the age pyramids of the Albanian migrants settled in Greece reveals this shift from a very young male migration to a kind of family migration – what Abdelmalek Sayad (1999) would call a migration of populating (‘migration de peuplement’) or Castles & Miller (op.cit.) a long-term settlement. Figures talk for themselves: in 1995, 75 percent of the Albanian migrants were male, and 34 percent were under 30 years-old (Labrianidis & Lyberaki, 2001: 158). Six years later, in 2001, over 41 percent of all Albanian migrants are women and we register a non-negligible rate of dependent young persons (children aged 0-14 years account for over 21 percent of the Albanian population in Greece).

Remarkable for the intensity in which it took (and is still taking) place, the Albanian migration in Greece, while presenting this rather ‘classic’ order in the evolution of the phenomenon, it seems to deviate from some other ‘classic’ – or at least more usual – migration patterns regarding settlement in the host country. Unlike other migratory groups, which present high concentrations in specific regions of the country and in specific quarters and neighbourhoods within Greek cities, the Albanians seem to offer a more diffused territorial pattern.

According to the last Greek census, the Department (district) of Thessaloniki counts more than one million inhabitants of which nearly 9 percent are foreign nationals. The Albanians account for 47 percent of the city’s foreign population and approximately for 3 percent of its total population (ESYE, 2001). Far behind come the Georgians (about 16 percent of the city’s foreign population), the Russians (approximately 7 percent) and the Bulgarians (4.38 percent).

Despite the size of their population, Albanians do not seem to practice the residential clustering, which is, however, the case particularly of some ex-Soviet nationals, as for instance the Georgians and the Russians. In addition to their over-representation in some areas of the city, those groups mark ‘ethnically’ the neighbourhoods in which they settle. Indeed, in Thessaloniki, we can find several companies of money transfer and cafés exclusively Georgian, but also many Russian restaurants and mini-markets, as well as a number of churches and doctors ‘coloured’ Russian or ex-
Soviet. Besides, Filipinos have their own places of worship, a primary school and a day nursery. From this ethnic mosaic that begins to emerge in the city of Thessaloniki, Albanians seem to be surprisingly absent. Unlike other groups, they hardly present any pockets of concentration in specific parts of the city nor do they dispose of any of the pre-mentioned ethnic infrastructure (Kokkali, 2010).

Although spatially ‘invisible’, the Albanians are omnipresent in the city of Thessaloniki. As shown elsewhere (Kokkali, 2006), if we compare the Albanians’ spatial distribution to that of other migrant groups (e.g. the Bulgarians), we can observe that the former is much more diffused than the latter. The Albanians’ spatial pattern does not offer any great concentrations into the urban territory, whereas, for instance, the Bulgarians are over-represented in a very small section of the urban agglomeration of Thessaloniki while being almost completely absent from the rest. The Albanians, on the other hand, offer a balanced presence in the city; they are very present into the entire city-centre apart from the quarters that go along the sea, where rents are extremely high (Kokkali, op.cit).

Their quasi omnipresence in the city of Thessaloniki suggests that the Albanians more or less live in the same places with the Greeks. However, according to what has been said above, the observation that the Albanians mingle spatially with the Greeks cannot be taken as an index for their social aggregation to Greeks or for their social inclusion into the dominant society; nor does it give any sign for the spatial equality of the two groups, leaving alone the equality in the housing conditions, as we will try to argue in the following section.

**Inclusions³-Exclusions: Albanians in Greece Viewed Through Empirical Evidence**

By offering cheap, unqualified labor thus filling the gaps of the Greek economy, and in particular the grey economy, the Albanian immigrants were firstly employed in any possible job. They have been working mainly in construction, agriculture, small industries and a number of other sectors (commerce, transport, hotels and restaurants), while the women have been mainly ‘confined’ in the

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³ We will generally prefer the term inclusion to that of integration. For more see Sayad (1999: 311-313) and Kokkali (2008: 47-49).
domestic services. Gradually, some Albanians, essentially men, have started their own little business of cleansing or slight-repairing of apartments, in which they have been employing other Albanians, mostly relatives.

Research material drawn from the project ‘Supporting the Design of Migration Policies: an Analysis of Migration Flows between Albania and Greece’ reveals some very interesting facts about Albanian immigrants’ working patterns despite its small sample.

When they first entered Greece, 70 percent of our respondents had been daily-paid employees. Yet, this situation has improved with time: at the time of the survey, while 67 percent remained daily-paid, more than 70 percent were full-time workers, a fact implying their gradual integration into the labour market and a certain amelioration of their situation. Besides, generally speaking, a clear shift has been observed from the agricultural sector to constructions (where the percentage doubled) and secondarily to services (that also doubled).

In addition, more than 70 percent of the sample stated that their job at the time was officially registered and that they were insured. However, if we look closely at the insurance stamps collected, we can observe that one third of the insured respondents got the law’s minimum number of social security stamps requested annually at the time in order to obtain a residence permit. This means that even if our interviewees were insured, employers paid the minimum insurance for them. Still, 20 percent of the sample was not insured, while 18 percent had fewer stamps than the minimum demanded (at the time) for the renewal of the residence permit.

From those who have been unemployed at least once (80 percent), less than one out of ten received unemployment benefits. This is mainly due to the inability to raise any claim on this kind of benefits due to inadequate social security.

Besides, regarding payments compared to the average payments (for the same labour done by a Greek worker), less than ⅕ of the respondents declared to have been equally paid, while 6 over 10 persons believed that they were unequally paid.

Considering the above, the Albanians’ incorporation into the labour market presents a rather complex image of inclusion – exclusion. While we cannot speak of exclusion from the labour market – or even from the formal labour market, since the majority of jobs are officially registered and
Albanians themselves are socially insured –, we can neither maintain a sufficient inclusion. This is because of their inadequate social security, which, in turn, does not allow them to access unemployment benefits as the rest of workers in Greece. Yet, this exclusion, in the long term, could turn into a more permanent exclusion from the labour market overall, leading thus to various possible forms of marginalisation. This is even truer at the moment, when the economic crisis in Greece hits harshly Albanian workers too (Cf. Onisenko, 2010).

Our research has also revealed some telling facts about Albanian immigrants’ housing patterns. Overall, only few are those who lived under very poor conditions (e.g. in temporary structures or hotels), while the majority lived in a house or apartment. With time, important improving in their housing conditions was registered. Yet, those findings could be misleading, given that, nonetheless, there were at the time still some dwellings that did not dispose toilet facilities inside the house. Moreover, approximately one person out of eight benefited from hot water in the dwelling, while only one person out of two had heating in the entire house. Regarding household assets, however, the situation was more satisfactory: everybody had a television, one out of two had a Hi-Fi stereo, two-thirds of the sample had DVD or VCR, half owed a car, though only one out of five possessed a P.C.

As expected, the great majority lived in rented residence, but it was not rare to find cases where the housing was provided by the employer. In those cases, the residence consisted basically of precarious structures and warehouses within the employer's property or even in the employer’s own house. Yet, generally speaking, this type of accommodation mainly concerns male immigrants living in Greece without wife and/or children. On the contrary, Albanian families enjoy better housing conditions.

Overall, the respondents considered the rents to be high compared to the living standards in Greece, but also compared to the quality of the residences, which were mostly old and dilapidated, located on ground floors or basements of the apartment-buildings. It is to mention, however, that Albanians have managed to improve their living conditions by applying in their own dwellings the know-how acquired in the job market (e.g. construction, apartment slight-repairing, plumbers, etc.).
Therefore, with their personal work, many have greatly improved their apartments, thus decreasing the gap between Greeks’ and Albanians’ housing conditions.

It is to note that many landlords refused to rent a house to the interviewees in question because they were Albanians. This was so for almost one person out of two, while for approximately one person out of five renting a house was a problem because of a foreign origin in general (not specifically Albanian). In other words, about six out of ten persons interviewed had difficulties in purchasing or renting a house because they weren’t Greeks.

These findings come to reinforce our argument on the ambiguous and partial inclusion of Albanians. And this goes even further, if we look closely at the social bonds between Albanians and Greeks, even more than the percentages of intermarriage. In their free time, the majority of our interviewees (57 percent) said to mainly associate with other co-nationals, even if an overwhelming percentage (79 percent) has declared having Greek friends. We should consider, however, that the denomination ‘friends’ seems to include also colleagues and employers. Given that one out of four respondents had been working with the same employer for 2-5 years and one out of five for more than 5 years the familiarity with their bosses (and their bosses’ families) and thus their ‘friendly’ relations with them seem to be explained. Yet, this familiarity may not substantiate any socialisation with Greeks outside the work context and in particular outside the relation employer-employee.

None of our interviewees had a Greek partner or wife/husband. Generally speaking, the percentage of intermarriage with Greeks seems to be very low, but, unfortunately, there is no sufficient research done so far on this issue. In recent years, some mixed marriages between Greek men and Albanian women seem to occur, whereas the opposite is very rare. Yet, according to Mrs Demetra Malliou, consultant for immigrants at the Research Centre for Gender Equality, “few marriages resist [...] Usually they are devastated by the depreciation of the couple’s friends and family for the Albanian bride; hardly ever does a Greek woman marry an Albanian…” (Kroustali, 2004). It goes without saying that this ‘depreciation’ cannot be taken as a sign of inclusion of Albanians into the dominant society.

Let us remind, besides, that, in the early 1990s, with the advent of increasing migration flows in Greece – and especially the massive arrival of undocumented immigrants – the media have
gradually started to incriminate foreigners and especially the Albanians. Phenomena of resentment and albanophobia were given rise, since an entire nation – the Albanians – has been convened under the stigma of the ‘criminal’. Going back to our empirical findings, approximately 6 over 10 respondents experienced a discrimination of any kind due to their Albanian descent.

The considerable stigmatisation of the Albanian immigrant in Greece seems to have generated phenomena of ‘identity dissimulation’; mainly name-changing, but in some cases also christening of Muslim Albanians (cf. Kokkali, 2008 & 2010). As for our respondents, more than one out of four concealed his/her Albanian nationality, while more than one over three used a Greek name instead of his/her own. Among those latter, more than three individuals out of five did so when they went to look for a job for the first time. This indicates that those interviewees considered that they would have better chances to get a job if they presented themselves as individuals of Greek origin (‘Vorioepiroti’), that is to say members of the Greek minority in southern Albania (cf. Kokkali, op.cit.).

Problems of inclusion occur also at school. One quarter of those of our respondents that had children at schooling age considered that their offspring(s) faced problems in the school environment. Isolation from their fellow pupils appeared to be the main problem encountered, concerning more than half of the children in question. Here again, if isolation and teasing at school occur because of the ethno-national origin, the Albanians’ inclusion into the Greek society is highly contested.

The issues addressed above do not pretend to examine exhaustively the patterns of inclusion-exclusion of Albanian immigrants in Greece. But, by acting as indicators, they allow us to get a slight idea of the asymmetries that exist. It is very difficult to talk of inclusion when considering Albanians, because even if they managed more or less successfully their economic integration, from many other different aspects their social inclusion to the environing society remains a question (Kokkali, 2008).

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4 For the campaign of criminalization and stigmatization to which have been submitted the Albanian immigrants in Greece, since 1991, see Tsoukala (1999), Pavlou (2001: 135-137), and Kourtovik (2001).
Albanians in Greece: a Successful Paradigm of Immigrant Inclusion?

Let us remind that, generally speaking, the Greek society has gradually viewed immigrants and Albanians in particular firstly with suspicion and resentment, harshly stigmatising them, then with a paternalistic and utilitarian spirit. The post-2000 campaign in politics and the media viewed immigrants as beneficial to the Greek economy, while Albanians in particular were presented as to have largely contributed in the construction works needed for the organization of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens (Pavlou, 2009). As such, for the collective Greek imaginary, from the dangerous ‘criminals’ they were in the 90s and the early 2000s, the Albanians have gradually become the ‘good’ and ‘integrated’ migrants, a paradigm to cite. Yet, as above shown, the Albanians are far from being fully included into the Greek society. Their ‘integration’ is more fictive than real.

There are three basic preconditions for this supposed integration. The first one is the actual predominant familial character of the Albanian migration. As aforementioned, this latter shifted from a young men’s migration to a long-term settlement of the Albanian family. Still, different patterns of migration and various ideal-types of the immigrant can be distinguished among Albanians, basically those who have brought their families in Greece and those who did not. Generally speaking, the former enjoyed much more acceptance from the local communities than the latter, who – in many cases – remained isolated and enclosed themselves in exclusively male Albanian-speaking milieus with poor linguistic abilities in Greek (Kokkali, 2010).

In any case, the arrival of women contributed to a considerable shift in the way Albanian immigration was looked upon by the dominant society. Let us remind that the Albanian men were seen with suspicion and were stigmatized as dangerous, uncivilized, and so on; the family reunions, which in Greece were mainly requested by Albanians rather than other immigrant groups, succeeded – together with other reasons – in changing this image5 (Kokkali, op.cit.).

This is not new in the study of migration. The actual familial character of the Albanian migration should be associated to what Abdelmalek Sayad (1999: 112-113) very tellingly wrote about

5 For a similar evolution in Italy, see Kelly (2005: 35).
the ‘good immigrants’, i.e. those who can be trusted because they behave like us; those who ‘have given themselves the same social and family structures as 'us' as well as the same familial ethos, because those immigrants cannot stand being separated for long from their wives and their children, and they are constantly being joined by their families’. Conversely, those who behave differently from us, who would give themselves social and family structures and a domestic moral in which we do not recognize ourselves – a moral which is shocking for the societal sensitivity (‘as if there was no culture than our culture’, Sayad, op.cit.) –, are not good migrants, because they certainly form a bothersome factor to assimilation.

In this respect, the Albanians, who are actually living in Greece mainly in family, do not challenge the moral values of the dominant society. This was not the case in the early 90s when the pattern of the newcomers – essentially men – was completely different: four to five persons (sometimes even more) used to stay in small, ramshackle apartments altogether. Actually, this is the case of more recent migrants in Greece, such as the Pakistani, Bangladeshis and other Asians, as well as Africans. It is those groups of migrants that are actually considered dangerous and became the new scapegoats, replacing thus the Albanians.

The latter, as aforesaid, do not challenge the values of the Greek society. This is even more so if we consider the phenomena of identity dissimulation or at least identity negotiation that took massively place in Greece, that is to say name-changing and in some cases christening, especially of the Albanian children belonging to families of Muslim affiliation. Those practices offer an exemplary indication of how the Albanians’ otherness has been silenced or at least dissimulated so as to fit in the Greek society. They have changed their names in order to pass for co-ethnics from the Greek minority in Albania (‘Vorioepiroti’) and for the same reason they have also christened their children or even themselves, erasing thus every cultural – ethno-national and especially religious – difference that could hinder inclusion. This ‘invisible’ difference is the key to the Albanian immigrants’ supposed integration. It forms also the second precondition which explains why the Albanians are considered to be the most integrated migratory population in Greece.

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6 Those strategies constitute, however, a more complicated issue, since they are also related to Albanians’ cultural characteristics and history (Cf. Kokkali 2009 & 2010).
The last precondition is of spatial order. As above discussed, the absence of any marked ethnic infrastructure within the city space and the Albanians’ spatial proximity to Greeks – meaning that they live in the same places as Greeks even if other spatial inequalities occur (quality of the residence, floor, etc.) – render the Albanians spatially invisible as a group. Hence, once again, the Albanians – via their ‘invisibility’ – do not challenge the existing orders, values, practices, etc. of the dominant society and thus let for discussions to go freely on the subject of their integration.

But ‘a tolerance of diversity, provided that this diversity remains invisible, is not tolerance any longer’ (Kokkali 2008: 470). In that sense, we cannot maintain a societal inclusion of Albanians into the Greek society nor pretend that they form an ‘integrated’ migratory group as they are currently thought to be.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we have tried to illustrate that the quasi omnipresence of Albanian households’ in the Greek city of Thessaloniki, and the consequent geographic vicinity of migrants to nationals, does not necessarily involve the social proximity of the two populations. It is to underline that by ‘social proximity’ we did not imply the belonging to similar social classes but rather the existence (or eventually the absence) of social relations between Albanians and Greeks, even more than patterns of the formers’ inclusion into the dominant society. We have thus shown that even if Albanians do mingle spatially with Greeks, this cannot be taken as an a priori social aggregation to Greeks neither as evidence for social inclusion into the Greek society.

Indeed, based on an empirical study, our conclusions concerning social inclusion and/or social proximity (as meant herein) are rather discouraging. Despite their spatial proximity, Albanians and Greeks do not really seem to associate to each other in a context other than the work context. There again, their association seems to be conditioned only by the relation employer – employee. When it comes to other social bonds, our respondents associate mainly with people with whom they share

common language and common origin (either national or local), that is to say with other compatriots. Besides, as for integration to the labour market and the quality of housing, the Albanians’ situation offers a complex image of asymmetric exclusions/inclusions.

As such, rather than integration and inclusion, Albanian immigrants in Greece seem to counter a short of ‘differential exclusion’, meaning that the migrants are accepted and incorporated in certain fields of the society (e.g. the labour market), but, on the other hand, the access to other fields (social security, citizenship, political participation, etc.) is refused to them (Castles & Miller, 1998: 244-249).

All in all, even if the Albanians are recently thought to be a successful paradigm of immigrant inclusion, there is sufficient evidence that, in reality, this is not exactly the case.

References


