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New Brits? Migration and Settlement of Albanian-Origin Immigrants in London

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The logo of the University of Sussex, consisting of the letters 'US' in a large, bold, serif font.

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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 Britain has deeply affected migration trajectories of this group into the country. By this I mean not only the geographical routes and means of entry, but, much more, the personal trajectories of the migrants. Furthermore, an unsettled British asylum policy and deficiencies in its implementation have had an impact on migrants' health and their strategies of integration. In their search for a social and ethnic positionality in a multi-ethnic and socially stratified host society, the realisation of the migration project of Albanian migrants takes place alongside culture shock, a widened intergenerational 'gap', ambivalence towards citizenship and belongingness, and links to Albania.

Introduction

Patterns of immigration and the surrounding political debates and policies in Britain have recorded significant changes in the past two decades. Alongside a progressive system on the integration of minorities, these developments have been characterised by an emphasis on restrictive measures towards continuing immigration, with issues surrounding asylum seekers and refugees being at the heart of policy debates (Hampshire 2005). On the other hand, as the acknowledgement of new migration waves into the country gets institutionalised, migration management is increasingly focusing on wider aspects of the life of immigrants, such as access to jobs, welfare services, family reunification, integration and the acquisition of citizenship (Flynn 2005).

Nevertheless, both research and policy-making are falling behind as far as the 'new' migrants are concerned. In particular, it is only recently that the impact of immigration policies on the adaptation of migrants, and more particularly on their health, is considered among academics and policy-makers in Britain. This is in line with developments at an international level, especially after the swelling waves of asylum-seekers across the globe in the 1990s and the development of policies of deterrence and restrictive measures, such as confinement in detention centres,

enforced dispersal within the community, the implementation of more stringent refugee determination procedures and temporary forms of asylum (Silove *et al.* 2000; Summerfield 2001). On top of a repressive immigration regime, the development of managed migration systems and a return to assimilationist debates, Britain, like other immigration countries, is demanding belongingness and loyalty from its immigrants, leading to greater emphasis on obligations in the practice of citizenship (Kofman 2005).

Despite the politics of deterrence, illegal immigration into Britain continues through very unsafe roots.¹ This paper aims to bring evidence to bear on two main research areas. Firstly, research on border control and immigration policies considered in relation to the adaptation and integration of migrants in Britain is limited, especially when seen from the perspective of migrants. Secondly, amongst the growing

¹ New figures published in early September 2009 revealed that the number of migrants arrested after hiding in the backs of lorries and vans nearly doubled in the first half of this year – up to 13,715 compared to 7,760 in the same period last year. <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1203691/Migrant-hid-Border-Agency-bus-reach-UK-20-immigration-staff-failed-spot-hes-run-Britain.html>>. The Daily Mail also reports that the number of illegal immigrants in the country is 750,000, as for September 2009. <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1203691/Migrant-hid-Border-Agency-bus-reach-UK-20-immigration-staff-failed-spot-hes-run-Britain.html>>, [Accessed: 7 September 2009].

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 in London, which could well consist of one of the biggest non-EU East European groups in Britain. This is also a multi-generational paper that explores mainly the process of settlement of the first generation, pointing to the lack of legal migration opportunities and problems of implementation of policies in Britain, as well as, secondly, the strategies of integration of the first generation in relation to teenage children, the second generation (or, more precisely, the '1.5 generation', since most were born in Albania and brought to England as young children).

Research for this paper comes from an ongoing comparative study of Albanian migration and settlement in three different urban and national contexts: Thessaloniki, Greece; Florence, Italy; and London – these being, in that order, the three main countries of Albanian immigration over the last twenty years. My research has involved ethnographic study and quota-samples of interviewees in each of the three cities. This paper presents some results from London; parallel papers are being written on the other two urban contexts.

The paper is structured in the following way. First, I set the background context of immigration politics and ethnic relations in Britain. I then describe how 'new immigrants', particularly Albanians, fit into this picture, with specific reference to multicultural or 'super-diverse' London (cf. Vertovec 2007). Next comes a brief section on field methods. The main, empirical results, part of the paper is built around the notion of 'having got the *British*' – the question many interviewees asked when referring to citizenship and the right to stay as a legal migrant. Making extensive use of interview and focus-group narratives, I trace the evolution of their lives in London from arrival to settlement and (a sort of) integration, drawing particular attention to cross-generational relations and contrasts

where appropriate. Issues of psychological stress surround their 'limbo' phase of the long wait for 'papers' – and these issues persist to the extent of having affected their entire integration process. 'Integration' is also affected by their doubly ambivalent relationship to 'multicultural' London and towards their home country.

Immigration Politics and Ethnic Relations in Britain

Like many other European countries, Britain has faced sizeable levels of immigration in its contemporary history. However, the post-war migrants, including large immigrant cohorts who were non-white and non-Christian, arrived earlier in Britain than in most other places in Europe. Perhaps as a result, Britain led the way in managing this new 'challenge of immigrant multiculturalism' (Kymlicka 2000: 723). Britain has taken pride in its focus on tackling racism and discrimination earlier than these issues were recognised elsewhere in Europe. At the same time, Britain started earlier with its policies to reduce and later block spontaneous immigration, since early 1960s with the Commonwealth Immigration Acts (King et al. 2003; Westin 2000).

The 1960s and 1970s were a time of immigration pause for the country, at least as far as labour-migrant recruitment was concerned. This situation, as in the rest of the North-Western Europe, changed rapidly by the beginning of the 1990s. The decade of the 1990s recorded a net immigration of 100,000 as a result of the British government's programme for voluntary migrants and the waves of asylum-seekers (Hampshire 2005). Britain, however, has assumed a different positioning and adopted a different stance on immigration and integration compared to the rest of Europe. This is thought to be the outcome of very different geographical, historical and political conditions, framing the basis of a multicultural and multiracial society with little in common with the rest of Europe. Yet, nowadays British immigration politics are highly institutionalised, dominated by elites which tend towards increasingly

restrictionist measures, ruling out potential effects of a pro-migrant lobby (Statham and Geddes 2007). This was especially evident in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, a period which recorded six immigration acts in fifteen years – all aiming at a higher controlling function and further cuts in immigration figures (Vertovec 2007).

Favell (1998: 97-98), however, notes that there is a distinct dualism in British immigration and integration politics. The discourse seems to be divided between the issue of nationality and border control on the one hand, and on the other hand strong measures for ethnic minority integration. The legislation put in place shows that the successful integration of minorities is seen as a separate issue from, or perhaps even conditioned by, the control and management of new migration flows. The harsh nationality and border control measures contrast with the progressive race relations legislation and the broader and inclusive conception of Britain as a multiracial and multicultural society established through the practice of legal ruling and internal regulations.

This particular stance on ethnic relations and integration is associated with a certain conceptualisation of multiculturalism, citizenship and Britishness. Today's 'old minorities' in Britain – the original Commonwealth immigrants – went through a process of settlement over a period of twenty to thirty years, in which immigration to Britain had almost stopped. They were also given the name and status of permanent ethnic minorities and were distinguished at all times from the newly-arrived immigrants. This was realised through a *laissez-faire* attitude, or a lack of intervention of the state in everyday life in managing ethnic relations. As a result, multiculturalism has been on the one hand a fabricated official concept by elites, and on the other, was actualised at local levels by ethnic groups lobbying to monopolise local institutions for the realisation of their interests (Favell 1998; Joppke 1999).

It is important to note that the settlement of permanent minorities was strongly

impacted by notions and discourses on Britishness, the citizenship regime and politics of multicultural education. Along with its tough zero immigration regime, Britain was one of the first EU countries to adopt liberal naturalisation for its post-colonial migrants. However, the redefinition of Britishness to include minorities was also associated with maintaining the participation of ethnic groups in British political decision-making at the local level and away from the mainstream circles of politics (Favell 2001). Education with its pluralist structure is considered as the most obvious example of this pragmatism operating at local level. This sector, according to Favell (1998: 228), illustrates this, making it 'an area which has played very much into Asian hands and left behind the now unfashionable concerns with Black underachievement and the effects of poverty, deprivation and so forth'.

On the other hand, while 'Britishness' is thought to be at the core of the development of this country's concept of multiculturalism (Kymlicka 2000), the direction of change in the citizenship regime has been towards exclusion and a narrowing in the definition of those people who belong to the national body. Hampshire (2005) maintains that the substance of Britishness and its uncertain notions remain a recurring theme in the national identity discourse. At the same time, the lack of a citizenship regime in the formal sense counts for the absence of a distinct notion of belonging and creates the space for a more inclusive multiculturalism by enabling multiple modes of belonging. Favell (1998: 53) maintains that through a concept of citizenship based on the idea of *subjecthood* – an attribute of a population for their loyalty to the queen – in Britain the cultural, national and civic components of classic citizenship consist in effect of separate forms of citizenship attributed to different resident groups.

The discourse on ethnic minorities is criticised for yet another assumption. According to Baumann (1996: 30) this discourse is based on the essentialistic conceptualisation of minority groups as

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 and many internal differences within minority groups themselves, 'the hegemony of British "black" cultural studies has to end' (2000: 361).

Other literature, however, suggests that the belief that race and ethnicity have lost their importance could be rather premature. Research here shows mixed results. Some studies sustain the importance of race and ethnicity, but point to significant differences between and within groups and according to the 'sector' of study. For example, Cheng and Heath (1993) show the importance of race and ethnicity, and also gender, when access and mobility in the labour market is concerned. More recently, Platt (2005) has examined the social mobility of the second

generation, finding that although education and class of the parents mattered, particular ethnicities and religions were important predictors. Platt in this way further emphasised the differentiation in British society according to ethnicity, after having found the latter to be strongly associated with chances of poverty (2002). On the other hand, Cross (2000: 364) draws our attention to a different set of findings. He notes that the integration of those populations more similar to the majority has been more difficult than for those with a distinctively divergent cultural origin. He explains this within the framework of *pluralism* and *separatism* applied towards minorities in Britain. The integration of post-colonial migrants, according to Cross, has succeeded via the outcome of offering them 'the benefits of non-integration' and concessions in the form of ethnic entrepreneurship and community resources.

This strengthens the rationale behind claims that the old framework focused on race relations seems to be inadequate for analysing the conditions of sizeable new migrant groups in Britain. The overlooking of this group is particularly clear in the response of Parekh *et al.* (2000). In their defense of their work on ethnic minorities in Britain (Modood *et al.* 1997), they maintain that, since the newcomers are not in big numbers, bilingualism and naturalisation are no longer problems in Britain (of course, the date of their intervention is important – before the large influx of 'A8' migrants in the 2000s). They particularly downplay the importance of citizenship and are concerned with the development of formal citizenship ceremonies to emphasise symbolic and political importance. As this paper will show, this seems not to be the case of new migrants.

The New Migrants

Three main characteristics are thought to characterise the new immigration to Britain:

- the reduction of immigration from Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and South Asia;

- increased migration from Eastern Europe and East Asia; and,
- the opposition towards asylum-seekers, as scepticism regarding their legitimacy has increased (Berkely *et al.* 2006: 1).

The issue of the new migrants is especially related to the laws and practices on asylum, as the 1990s recorded, as mentioned above, a substantial rise in the number of asylum applications. Hampshire (2005) argues that the recent tendency to acknowledge the positive impacts of migration is associated with an increase in emphasis on welfare parasitism, stigmatisation and penalisation of asylum-seekers and an increasing antagonism towards sponsored immigration. Similarly, Favell (1998) maintains that the record of Britain has been especially poor in its response to the asylum claims even when compared to its pre-war indicators, as the contemporary stance on the issue does not make reference to human rights and humanitarian norms in general. This is shown in the legal measures enshrined in the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act in 1992, which introduced carrier liability and restricted the possibilities for appeal, leaving fewer avenues for the claimants. New Labour policies have further eroded the rights of asylum-seekers, considering them as a threat to the management of migration waves (Flynn 2005).

King *et al.* (2003: 24) note that the case of Britain is not special as the issue of asylum-seekers is problematic across EU migration policy, with measures converging on two main elements: the tendency to reduce the ability of asylum-seekers to access the EU via external restrictions (visa requirements, carrier sanctions, in-country processing, and lists of 'safe countries of origin'), and secondly, by using internal measures, such as dispersal systems, accommodation centres, denial of employment, and the issuing of vouchers instead of cash-based welfare payments. However, as Vertovec (2007) observes, throughout the 1990s there has been both an increase in net immigration and more diversity in the countries of origin and in other

characteristics of migrants. And yet, the presence of the new migrants is almost ignored. Although the number of migrants that entered Britain in the 1990s was smaller compared to most other European countries (this changed in 2000s, especially after 2004), the new migrants have been made unwelcome. They are 'blamed' for the further increase of immigration into the country and for 'ruining' the balance of privileges and rights already in place for the old minorities (Favell 2001).

It is to be noted that Britain was one of only three countries in the EU (the others were Ireland and Sweden) to allow the new member-states' citizens to work in the country after the 2004 enlargement (Drinkwater *et al.* 2006). This policy was based on two main arguments: firstly on the expectation that this migration would be temporary, and secondly on the recognition of shortages in the UK labour market, especially for unskilled labour. Markova and Black (2007), however, make a similar observation to Favell (2001) on the issue of new migrants, this time referring to the policy framework in place. They note that East European immigrants do not feature prominently in the government's agenda on community cohesion, which still focuses on race equality and issues of cultural 'distance'.

It is only very recently that the diversification of the migrant population has been fully acknowledged, at least in academic terms. In 2007 Vertovec put forward his now well-known idea on *super-diversity*, thought to characterise London in particular, but also other urban areas in Britain, both in migrants' characteristics and the emerging social patterns and conditions. Vertovec (2007: 1049) notes that super-diversity is the outcome of different factors that mutually condition and combine with each other. Among these, legal status is considered as an important feature. It is also an element of difference within the same ethnic group, leading to different social capital and socio-economic and ethnic ties to different members. Nevertheless, more research is needed on

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-paid jobs, the latter being mostly taken by new migrants. The emergence of such a divide necessitates a closer look at the place and lived experiences of migrant workers in London, as such polarisation is related to major political challenges which negatively impact the situation of new migrants, who are mostly constrained to taking such low-grade jobs (May *et al.* 2007).

Most of the research on global cities, and on London in particular, has focused on the economic dimension of the local, urban impacts of globalisation, and relatively few studies have focused on the everyday lived experiences of ordinary people (Dürschmidt 1997). Eade (1997) points to the lack of research on the meanings that such structural developments hold for individuals and how they relate to collective categories such as 'classes' and 'minorities'. It is found that the racialised boundaries between insiders and outsiders are still evident in the transition of London from an imperial to a global city, and while the attention of researchers and commentators has been on the inner-city areas, it is often in the outer suburbs of London where a more general process of racialisation takes place. Eade (1997, 2000) illustrates these processes by taking the case of Bangladeshi community and the second generation in particular. He points to the new ideas about place that lead some of the highly skilled away from the inner-city enclave and the ethnic niche, previously seen as the bases for any potential social mobility. In more general terms, Eade (2000) maintains that assimilation can be questioned on several grounds: racial beliefs of the native population enhance the exclusion from the majority of African- and Asian-origin populations; many of these minorities

prefer to keep their own culture and pass it to future generations; the second and third generations of these minorities are creating new cultural identities, which in turn challenge assumptions about a coherent and lasting national culture within which all newcomers should assimilate.

The integration of new migrants represents worrying features, too. Together with the polarisation of the labour market and the lack of secure low-waged jobs, the reception of new migrants throughout the country, and in London in particular, is found to be affected by local labour markets, local housing pressures, local and regional demographics, and political leadership on migration. The integration of new migrants is especially hampered by the diversity and pace of new migrations, which in turn affect the information available to the local authorities. Besides, there is a widely-held view among public authorities that 'race relations' refers to the established white communities and 'visible' ethnic minorities, but not to the new European immigrants, while the required emphasis on the local-level integration is still misconceived (Pillai *et al.* 2007).

The situation with new migrants is even more problematic when the large number of 'illegal' immigrants is considered and the fact that no large-scale regularisation campaign has ever taken place in the UK (Vollmer 2008). Recently this issue seems to have come to a high level of discussion, at least within London, with the mayor of the capital advocating the regularisation of illegal immigrants through an 'earned amnesty' scheme, estimating the number to be 400,000 in London alone (cited in Vollmer 2008). The initiative seems to be supported by a general public consensus in London, set against a background of negative media coverage and policies of immigration that insist on policy of law and order against irregularity (Vollmer 2008). London, however, is not a homogeneous entity and this should be taken into account in any analysis of processes associated with it, such as the 'new' migration of Albanians.

Albanian Migration to Britain

Albanian (and ethnic-Albanian Kosovan) migration to Britain has been little studied. The limited work on Albanians to date has provided some evidence on the process of migration to Britain, the composition of the community and its characteristics in the first years of residence in the country (King *et al.* 2003). Britain became a destination for Albanian migrants at the end of the 1990s. The size of the community is hard to estimate and different figures are reported both from official sources and key informants. The IPPR report on new migrant communities settling in Britain in the 1990s estimated the Albanian community to be just under 2300 by 2001, compared to 150 recorded in 1991 (Kyambi 2005). The Government of Albania, on the other hand, reports that the Albanian community in Britain is the third largest in Europe after Greece (600,000) and Italy (250,000), estimating it to be around 50,000 (Government of Albania 2005). Most of the Albanians in Britain are thought to originate from Northern Albania, although a number of them were previously migrants in Greece and Italy and decided to move to Britain for better employment opportunities and to escape discrimination in the two former countries. Therefore, the majority of Albanian migrants in Britain initially were young males in their 20s and 30s; women followed later. The reasons to migrate to Britain were reported to be related to poverty and lack of employment in Albania, the collapse of a failed pyramid investment scheme and the following unrest in the country, insecurity because of blood feuds, the refugee crisis in Kosovo, and only more recently family reunification (King *et al.* 2003).

Lack of legal status was found to be one of the main obstacles to integration, leading to precarious working conditions and exploitation in the labour market. A study based on non-representative sampling found that, compared to the other East European migrants in London (Harrow and Hackney) and Brighton and Hove, Albanians were the least proficient in English, with 70 percent knowing little or no English, and

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 *et al.* 2003).

King *et al.* (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 *et al.* 2003, 2006).

Methods

This paper is based on a total of 42 interviews: 22 with teenagers – 12 girls and 10 boys; 10 with Albanian parents of teenagers – 8 mothers and 2 fathers; and 6 with teachers in secondary schools in London. In addition, I interviewed 4 key informants – community activists working in different sectors such as health, education, advocacy, etc. Interviews were conducted between December 2007 and March 2008. I also organised a focus group with teenagers in a secondary school in North-East London, which included 7 participants – 5 boys and 2 girls, among whom 4 were of Kosovan and 3 of Albanian origin. Further information was collected by visiting homes and having conversations with other

members of the families, including grandparents and siblings in a few occasions, through conversations with other people in community events and making observations in mainstream secondary schools and Albanian Sunday classes organised by community organisations.

Although I had planned to use the snowballing technique, this did not prove effective as most of the participants were not willing to share any information about their relatives or other co-ethnics. Most of the interviewees were contacted through community organisations – ethnic and youth organisations – and a smaller number through secondary schools. Ages of parents ranged from 34 to 46 and those of teenagers from 13 to 19 years old. The interviews with children were conducted in English whereas those with parents generally in Albanian. Participants were living in different areas of London, but a number of them were living in Eastern and North-Eastern London, where it appears there is a relative concentration of Albanians in areas such as Ilford, Barking and Dagenham. Interviews lasted around an hour and apart from 3 interviews with parents, all interviews were recorded. All names are pseudonyms and information on places was removed or generalised to ensure anonymity.

'Have You Got the British?' Citizenship and Settlement

...We enjoyed our childhood [in Albania], we used to play outdoors all the time, but our own children stay closed in at home all the time (Majlinda, mother, 34).

Well, our children don't lack anything. This is making them lazy and they are falling behind with the lessons. Here [in England] they have all the opportunities possible. I got engaged by my father at the age of 16 and then I had to quit school. It was really finished at that point! (Arjana, mother, 32).

It is difficult to bring up children here; they have a lot of freedom. When we were children we didn't even think we

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).

... 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 *et al.* 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 *et al.* 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 years. On the other hand, many expressed a feeling of achievement for having got the *British* – as the Albanian migrants refer to the recently acquired citizenship – and become settled for good in Britain. This was contrasted on occasions with the situation of Albanians in other countries, where they still have uncertain residence rights.

The cost that Albanian migrants paid for the *British* was, however, very high. They remained for years cut from their families – a traumatic experience especially for those migrants who had never migrated before. Many of them faced a dilemma – whether to stay and continue the nightmare of waiting for the refugee status or 'crack under pressure' and return. The grief of the memories of those years is especially emphasised in cases when migrants lost very close family members and had to choose whether to go and see them for the last time or attend their funerals, thereby performing important family obligations

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

³ See also Naim Hasani, writing in the *Albanian Mail*, 115, 10 October 2009, pp. 1, 14.

according to the Albanian culture, or stay and realise their goal of settling in Britain. Here are two typical testimonies relating to the early years. The second one, from Majlinda, is in English as she wanted to speak in English, hence the 'mistakes'.

In the beginning it was very difficult; the interviews were very intensive. The first month I came I had three interviews... very frequent! After that they were every two months, three months... Many interviews and very intensive! For me it was stressful, I had two children... They asked many questions, you couldn't just be superficial, it was absolutely necessary to answer... Because we came here with this goal [of settlement], so we had to submit ourselves to that procedure (Marjeta, mother, 38).

We came here... I don't want to think about it. No... I don't want to think about it. For me it has been terrible. It has been the worst time for me. Really the worst! Because it is like... the people ... I would say that... How can we describe the people that can't speak? I was a mute people. I was like that, because I didn't know, I knew just a tiny bit of English. It was very frustrating for me to be honest, having nothing, living in houses; we started the life from A here! We didn't know where we were going to... we didn't know nothing. We didn't know nothing! We just thought back there, what would happen to our life? We had nothing, no house, we left a lot of money to the [pyramid] schemes, and I thought what am I going to do? I was thinking at those times, if this country doesn't give me a permission to stay you know, I was thinking to go somewhere else those times, anywhere. Just to bring a good future to my oldest son. Nothing else, this has been the worst time for me, the worst time in my life. Very stressful... (Majlinda, Albanian mother, 41).

Other consequences relate to labour market experience. Because of their lack of status, Albanian migrants worked 'in the

black' and got very badly exploited, although this is not voiced as discrimination and the possibility to work was taken as a valued opportunity. They explained how in the beginning, when they arrived, it was much easier to get a job in the black. In a few years towards the mid-2000 this became much harder as the employers were more cautious. Similarly with what Black *et al.* (2005) found, many of them had working as a prime goal, hence they exploited every opportunity to work for whatever period they could stay in Britain. However, lack of legal status and uncertainty about a future in Britain constrained some parents to send all their savings to Albania to invest in housing and other things there.

ZV: Do you have any discussions at home about this country's attitude towards foreigners, fair treatment, unfair treatment? How was it for your parents, how is it for you?

Eliana: All the time. My parents... it was very hard for them. 'Cause they had to work at very low, low, low wages, beneath the low wages, 'cause they didn't know anything. And they had to work extra hard; some were paid £100 a day and they were paid £25, 'cause he didn't know any better. They still don't know the laws, what's right and what's wrong; they know the basic like not stealing and all that, not that they would break the law, but I am saying... They didn't know at the time; they didn't know about human rights. So they were unfairly treated. It was much harder about my parents, than it was for me. I can imagine, because of the stories they tell me. They tell me how they work hard for £25 a day. [...] So they had to work extra hard. And they had Home Office, passports to get (Albanian girl, 15).

The situation with working conditions improved significantly after the approval of refugee status and the subsequent citizenship. As Kostovicova (2003) has shown, the Albanian community in Britain is very polarised in terms of education and labour market integration, varying from very

highly-skilled to low-skilled. Furthermore, as King *et al.* (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 'middle' of those who are self-employed in their own enterprises, such as those owning restaurants, shops, travel companies, etc. There is also some mobility in the labour market, especially of those who were better educated in Albania and/or come from urban areas, although the main jobs are related to fields that cover migrant issues, such as in the health, legal or the education sectors. Some of the migrants experienced de-skilling and expressed contempt for not being able to enter further or higher education or for the length of courses to back up qualifications taken in Albania with other qualifications in Britain in order to get an office-based job.

However, the long process of waiting to get legalised proved to be a very serious barrier to parents' strategies of integration. Alba and Nee (1997: 835) maintain that 'occupational mobility and economic assimilation, as the key dimensions of socio-economic assimilation, are of paramount importance because the parity of life chances with natives is a critical indicator of the decline of ethnic boundaries and for the reason that entry into occupational and economic mainstream has undoubtedly provided many ethnics with a motive for social assimilation. Furthermore, socio-economic mobility creates the social conditions conducive to other forms of assimilation since it likely results in equal status contact across ethnic lines in workplaces and neighbourhoods'. As in the case of other migrant groups, the main strategies of the Albanian migrants with the best outcomes relate to occupational status and progress. Social integration seems to be negatively impacted by a lack of networks and a lack of efforts to create them. Upon arrival, as is the case of asylum-seekers in general in Britain, Albanian migrants were also dispersed by the social services, which inevitably impacted the establishment of relationships with locals, although this was

in cases followed by subsequent internal migration towards London. Albanian migrants report that they do not have friends or acquaintances apart from a few other Albanian families. They are in general suspicious towards other Albanians. Because of the absence of chain migration, the number of relatives or kin they have in Britain is small. Although most of the interviewees, both parents and children, had now received British citizenship, there are cases of migrants who reside on leave to remain of a duration of 1 or 3 years and have to reapply, and a minority who are still waiting for the outcome of their refugee status application. These 'uncertain diasporans', as Kostovicova (2003: 64) calls them, are the most vulnerable group as they feel isolated and also left behind from the rest of the community – those who got the *British*.

People waited for a decision for 5-7 years and 8 years; there are people here for 10 years who haven't got a decision yet. And that brings uncertainty about what is going to happen tomorrow. They can't study, they can't plan their future, they live in a limbo and probably don't want to do anything, basically... Because you don't want to learn a language if you are not going to be here tomorrow... So yes, it has had a great negative impact not having a status very quick. For those that don't have a status I don't know how they cope because it is very stressful waiting for that brown envelope every day looking for the post and looking what is... you know, what's next. Two years you get support and after two years you don't get any support and then you have to go through the dispersal system and that is painful... (Lola, mother, 39).

This process had a serious impact on migrants' health. Like Lola above, migrants and community activists recollecting those years tell how the time of waiting for years for the outcome of the application for the refugee status, and the impossibility to talk about this, was a traumatic experience. Many suffered severe stress and

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-seekers, despite the negative consequences reported above, enhanced these migrants' integration in other respects. Being asylum-seekers involved Albanian migrants at a *meso* level. Differently from the situation in Italy, and even more so in Greece, in Britain Albanian migrants were very much in contact with state structures throughout the process of settlement and had to submit to and interact with several programmes, projects and support. This included better access to information and opportunities for

education and language schemes. Moreover, since there was no pre-established ethnic community, there was hardly any chain migration, and so this first wave of migrants came in direct contact with different parts of the host society's structure. This helped them in learning some of the social and political rhetoric of the country.

There was, however, a difference in how this process was experienced from men and women. As improvement of economic conditions through accessing the labour market in the UK was an important goal, men took up employment soon after arrival. In general, men had more than one job, which left them little time to explore opportunities for socialisation and education. This worked differently for women as they stayed with their children and worked part-time, while attending courses in colleges and taking classes in English. These differences had consequences which started to appear more clearly once the vital issue of status was resolved. Differently from what King *et al.* (2006) found in their study of the 'pre-status' years, the migration experience has in some cases impacted the perception of gender roles in women, which has in turn led to crisis in the families and subsequent divorces. Another negative phenomenon reported by the migrants themselves is the high incidence of gambling among Albanian migrant men.

These are some of the phenomena that appeared as part of this process of adjustment, which in general was characterised by a kind of culture shock. Once the goal of settlement was achieved, Albanian migrants found themselves in a multicultural environment characterised by a mix of people of different races and ethnicities and, on the other hand, by individuality and social phenomena like single parent families, drugs, gambling, teenagers' gangs and murder, all of which were unusual in Albania. This makes parents concentrate on the family and education of the children, rather than on attempts to establish relationships in the areas where they live. There is, however, a

noticeable difference between the reaction of parents and children growing up in London. Also, those who came from urban areas in Albania show a greater willingness to make links with the local population – both natives and minorities – than those who originate from rural Albania. The next batch of quotes from my interview material gives some examples of these social and family issues.

England has helped Albanians, but it has also damaged them. The Albanian family has been damaged. I know 30-40 cases of people with children divorcing and divorce is becoming a normal phenomenon. The wife says to the husband: 'Fuck off; you've got no chance to touch (beat) me!' or the husband, father of five, goes to the night club! (Mirash, father, 39).

(I socialise) with all kinds of races, whoever calls and says let's go out. But I don't go out much because I have got a family. Besides it's expensive; we can't leave all what we earn in the pubs and clubs! But there are also other people that work all week and then go and leave all the money in gambling. Gambling, bets; that's what the Albanians have got their mind on! (Fatmir, father, 41).

... but we don't have any relations with them (English people). Where we were living before, we used to socialise a bit with the old people, our neighbours. Because here we are also afraid; it is not like in Albania where we grew up with everyone around. However, we try to go to London with the children; we go to the parks, shopping. The oldest son used to go out to the park and it was hard to bring him back home. He yes, he does go out with English boys every Friday. I am actually a bit annoyed because of this; you know, English people here are *bërrnut* (rubbish); poor, with divorced parents... Worse than us (migrants)!! (Flutura, mother, 43).

On the other hand, migrants do appreciate the multicultural environment of London and the presence of people from all over

the world, which makes it less hostile towards the foreigners. However, it is not so much that these immigrants have a great curiosity for the various ethnic cultures of 'super-diverse' London; rather, there is a feeling of anonymity and comfort in terms of ethnicity that characterises these migrants' experience in these neighbourhoods, perceived as being left to their own business, which is further enhanced by the lack of emphasised social stratification.

Discrimination, however, exists and seems to have been directed towards Albanian migrants mainly as 'foreigners' and asylum-seekers or people on benefits. As Robinson and Reeves (2006) found regarding the settlement of new migrants, Albanian migrants feel better in areas that are particularly mixed with a high concentration of minorities and migrants. However, what Vertovec (2007: 1025-26) cites as the minorities' 'multilayered experience' within unequal power structures and social locations is also what characterises these migrants' relations with other minorities. Albanian migrants' narratives point to hierarchies within minorities, reporting being discriminated against both by the natives and the old minorities. Harassment is also experienced by the children at school and by adults during their interaction with state institutions and immigration services, while coming out of benefits seems to 'relieve' these interactions and enhances a feeling of better integration among migrants. Some extracts from my interview data:

In fact, living in London it's not bad; they are used to a lot of people. But some people may be... they are jealous, because we go to school, we learn, we are able to find jobs. You know, in a way, they don't like us. But it's not bad living in London; if you go outside London they are racist (Mimoza, mother, 39).

ZV: Have you ever felt treated unequally?

Fatmir: In the beginning they welcomed me, because there were few refugees

ten years ago. But now it's full and they (English people) are fed up! Even the ordinary people, not only those in the offices, but also around they have this hate; they don't welcome foreigners anymore, because they are taking many things from the state that they don't have. 'We' – they say – 'are not given a house by anyone. You just come and get a house; it's years now and we haven't been given a room, not to mention a house!' (father, 41).

ZV: What's the neighbourhood you are living in like?

Flutura: The one we are living now is OK. In Dagenham where we used to live before people were very racist. There everyone was English. With the adults it was OK, but the children that had the same age as my children used to behave very badly. They used to swear at us and throw things at us in the street. [...] When we were in Dagenham, the Indian-British doctor would not even have a look at our son, although it was an emergency. Because that's what they were in Dagenham, mainly Indian-British. Those that are on benefits are treated worse than us at the council and other places. [...] We pay everything ourselves now. I feel better now that we pay. When we had the 'negative' [i.e. a denied asylum claim] we had a very bad time. Those days when my husband would go to work, the neighbours would look at us with anger. Didn't they take it with Blair because he approved the Amnesty? (mother, 43).

Erinda: OK, basically... When I was in primary school there was no other country... there was no other background other than English. So when people asked me what was I, I was a bit like 'Al-banian' [*with a scared voice*] and everyone was like 'Where is that?!' They were not really keen to know where I come from and they didn't like it 'cause most of the people in that school were racist. But now I have come to this secondary school where there is a lot of different

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 different 'race' that would distinguish this community from the others. Meanwhile, the discourse on multiculturalism seems to be adopted by Albanian community leaders and activists in their efforts to establish a more tangible community life. This lobbying is perhaps still somewhat naïve when compared to the discourse and tactics of the old minorities and their lobbying for public resources on the bases of a reified community culture (cf. Baumann 1999). The Albanian diaspora in London imitates the other minorities' action and, in the words of Brubaker (2005), seems rather as a 'stance' or 'claim' of the new Albanian lobby-in-the-making to be counted as one of the many communities composing London's multicultural population. A similar attitude is noticed among parents and children who acknowledge the commitment of other minorities, which inspires their integration strategies. Here is a small vignette from my field notes:

In one of the venues of a community organisation a group of men discuss the Albanian community in London. Sadik, an Albanian father, comments: Have you seen the Indians? Even after 100 years they have kept their traditions. They speak their language, eat their food, have their own shops... So the Albanians should do! Manjola, what (nationality) are you? – he asked an 11 years old girl passing by. 'Albanian!' she replied conveniently in English. 'Thank you very much!' he

answered, pleased, before he let her go.

ZV: Why do you come to the Albanian classes?

Darina: I just like the idea that something, Albanian school, is done. Because Indians and Africans, they have their own thing, so I said to myself 'I should go, too and see ...' I am also keen to learn; I know, but I would like to learn better (Albanian girl, 13).

The Settlement Process and the Children

Where are the children positioned in the process of settlement? As the Albanian migration to Britain is recent, most of the teenage children I interviewed were born in Albania and migrated with their parents at an early age. Some of them had to follow their parents in their attempts to settle in different countries, which caused major disruptions and difficulties with their education. Many of these children travelled in boats and trucks and experienced the horrors of very unsafe trips into Britain. Some children recall the tense situation in the families during those years, and although they were not aware of the situation, they felt the apprehension and the parents' frustration at the impossibility to settle and the grief of not being able to visit their families back home, especially at moments of crisis such as a death in the family. Furthermore, these children were plucked from their environment at a very early age and were not able to return to Albania for years while waiting for the outcome of the asylum claims, which deprived them of emotional support from their extended family back in Albania.

ZV: You spoke about your parents. I would like to know your opinion, how do you think it was for them to come to this country?

Ilda: I think it was hard. They sacrificed a lot to bring us here. We had to come here by boat, and you know, you hear people... they die when they come through, they die... I realise how lucky I

am to be here with them. I remember the day I was on the boat, I can remember it, my dad had to... I don't know, I can remember it like it was yesterday. They had to go through a lot and everything (Albanian girl, 15).

ZV: Did it take long for you, because some parents said they waited for 7 years for their passports?

Eliana: Ours took 5 years. Long enough to get really upset... and miss Albania. The first time I went to Albania, I remembered everything to be so different and I went there and was kind of shocked. Because everything changes, everything changes... I remembered my room, my parents' room, they had an old house, I remembered the roads and they looked different. And people looked different... [...] It made me feel like I was gonna stay here forever! I felt like I was gonna... 5 years made me feel like they were 50 years! Because they were so long! And summers as well, all the summers I would stay here and everyday go to the park, same thing everyday really. Whilst everyone was on holidays or something, I would be here with my brother, just going out and them telling us about their holidays, seeing their family and ... It can get a bit hard, because it reminds you what you are missing out there (Albanian girl, 15).

Rei: ...when I (first) went there I saw everyone and I felt like I don't know how I felt... I was normal like in my own house... because when I went there I saw my house, I had there everything; I had my grandmother, my grandfather, my cousin and aunt and ... my uncle... because when I went there ... I couldn't recognise anyone, but I got used (to it) and now I know many people... (Albanian boy, 14).

While parents were keeping their eye on the labour market and financial gains, worrying about the outcome of their status application and coping with psychological problems, children had to adapt to the

parents' absence and feelings of insecurity, and later to their incapability to function in the country where they strived so hard to settle. Some children had to cope with the effects of divorces which impacted the functioning of the family and the emotional and practical support available from the parents. In many cases, this failure of parents to integrate, that became a burden to the teenagers, developed remarkably their agency.

In particular, parents' lack of proficiency in English was voiced by both children and parents themselves as one of the main issues that the families faced. This more or less forced the children to take up many of the parents' responsibilities in term of managing family life, such as dealing with institutions, doing the paperwork, and in general connecting the parents with the outside world. There is a significant difference in the agency and aspirations of those children who arrived in Britain around early school age, which helped them to learn the language fast, compared to those who were older at arrival. The former had to share and also take over some parenting responsibilities. The older children and siblings sometimes left education early and in the case of boys they usually took up employment in order to help the family. Not being sent to school straight away, the older siblings learnt the language later and were not very involved in family affairs.

There are problems between children and parents, but the role of parents should be great; all the vices of the children are parents' deficiencies. My oldest son, now 16, slams the doors around the house; but that's not him, that's me leaving work at 10pm and getting back the next day to work at 5am for years and years when he was younger. Why? Because we were with a 'negative'; my friend was taken from his house with wife and children at 5am and was deported [*sighs*]... If they had returned (deported) me sometimes I think they would have done me a favour (Qerim, father, 46).

The lack of language skills creates divisions between parents and children and

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 within the family and parent-child relations, as parents could not function and the children missed a role model or an authority figure.

Very little. I understand a lot, but can't speak. I wish I had learnt. ... I also feel sorry for my daughter. I have to wait for her to come back from school for every bill, every application. She comes in and without leaving her bag, before eating, she runs to help me... I really feel like dying [from shame] that I couldn't learn a little bit of English! Why should I wait for my daughter for everything? (Drita, mother, 45).

The feeling of alienation of the parents who suddenly find out that they have to 'know' the place they live is expressed especially in their inability to understand youth culture in Britain, which further increases the divide between them and their children. Their lack of social integration makes them over-protective and cuts the children from the social life of their peers. In particular, materialism and the consumerist culture, nightlife and sexuality, and inter-racial relationships and marriages of the children are particularly 'difficult' topics for Albanian parents, especially in relation to their daughters.

I always accompany my daughter, we go to many activities and when I have the opportunity to go with her I feel much safer. I don't send her on trips abroad because I don't feel safe... I don't feel safe, so I don't send her although there are many things that are normal for a young person here, I still think she is very young, I am still very over-protective. And many times we have discussions with my daughter and she says 'Mum, you are really over-protective!' Do you understand? It's something that doesn't change, because we grew up like that and

maybe we are following the way we grew up ourselves, maybe we appreciate that and we do the same with our children. [...] If I lived in Albania I would feel calmer and could have let my daughter to go to other countries; but because I am living here, I feel more unsafe about myself and what can happen to me and what I can do. I don't have people here around me with whom I can... I have people, friends and some relatives, but they seem to me powerless to correct what could happen (Lira, mother, 39).

The parents don't understand sometimes what year they live in. Sometimes my son asks me: 'What year were you born in?!' I say '1959!' [smiles]. He doesn't know about us and the way we used to live; we had one pair of trousers, one pair of shoes... But we have to adapt to the children nowadays! (Qerim, father, 46).

Here in London many Albanian mothers have arranged marriages for their daughters from the age of 14, because they fear they will marry foreigners, but especially they fear they would mix with black people. I have 3 children and I haven't told them that I will arrange them marriages. They can date whom they want, as long as they are happy. Well, my brother married a foreigner. I told him 'No', but I didn't insist (Donika, mother, 45).

Especially because of the sacrifice they submitted themselves and their children to in reaching Britain, parents are insistent that their migratory plans, which are very concentrated on the children and their education, have to work. In particular this is expressed in parents' pressure for their children to succeed in education. There is an emphasis on empowering girls, especially in mothers' narratives, which is expressed through their perception of gender divisions of labour and their choices for their children.

ZV: Where do you see your future?

Drita: In England of course, I will stay alongside my children. What would I be

doing in Albania when my children are here? Don't you agree? My parents have passed away, my sisters and brothers... So for me the children are everything; it's for them I sacrificed... My soul knows what I have suffered! So I have dedicated to them everything! (mother, 45).

Flutura: We try hard to please him (the 16 year-old son) so that he doesn't make bad friends and end up in trouble. Because we don't like it that he goes out with English friends; it is maybe hard for me to understand because I haven't seen my brothers going out on Friday night so I can't get used to this. My husband has even promised to give him £500 if he does well at school this year [...] We are trying hard because we know that he doesn't understand the value of education at this age. My husband asks me to speak to my son: 'Please tell him about my hard job so that he studies and one day goes to work with a laptop and not like me, waking up in the night and working in construction!' I just wish they get a profession. So that they don't rely on my pension to eat chicken and chips [*laughs*] (mother, 43).

This lack of experience of parents with the host environment and lack of language skills make the children feel let down, as they have to find their way completely on their own. There are differences in this among siblings, as the younger siblings have the advantage to learn from older siblings' experience and now live in a more settled family. Accepting their parents' incapacibilities, children express feelings of empathy and suggest that the dependency of their parents on them in their elderly life will be a recognition for their hard work and lack of social life and entertainment.

Attitudes towards Citizenship and Belongingness

After the acquisition of the refugee status, Albanian migrants in Britain became naturalised. However, the period of waiting, the challenges and the struggles that they

and their families went through, have weakened the feeling of belongingness among the parents. Citizenship is rather perceived as an achievement, the end of the asylum-seeking nightmare and the finally-realised goal of the migratory project to Britain. It furthermore serves as an assurance for the parents that they had made a good decision, that the sacrifices they submitted their families to were worth it, as the citizenship will open opportunities to the children to reside and get educated in Britain. In the following two extracts we hear first from a mother, and second from a (non-Albanian) secondary-school teacher; both express a rather 'underwhelmed' reaction to getting the British citizenship.

ZV: What does it mean to you having British citizenship?

Majlinda: ... It means a lot, of course, because you are proud to say that I am a citizen like the other citizens and you have all the rights like the other British people and I have got the right to work, I have got right to... I mean for NHS... everything, every right ... by constitution, I am entitled as well, but the time when I had the one (oath), everything is like, you know... I didn't feel anything to be honest. I didn't feel ... because it was long time, it was 4-5 years and nothing... um... I would say that... I mean, as I said, you know, if you speak to someone you are really proud and say OK, don't talk to me, don't discriminate me, because I have all the rights that you have. I mean, being a citizen of course it is a great opportunity. But after I passed very bad periods, it seemed like you had nothing! (mother, 41).

Teacher: You see, for me I would think it was a big thing (Albanian students getting citizenship). But um... it was almost incidental I think, you know... I would be proud if that's what they had wanted, perhaps they didn't want it, perhaps they are just going with the flow, family expectations. But, you know, the first student who said 'Ms, I won't be here tomorrow, but it is a special reason'. And I said 'I will put the

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 citizenship?' 'Yes. That's right'. 'Oh, I said, that's fantastic!' And he said 'Oh, yes... you know...' (female, 58).

Citizenship is also perceived as an important instrument that secures more allowances and access to many resources and free movement. Importantly, it is a source of rights, which, more than allowing one to function as a citizen, heralds an end to the discrimination and stigma that are associated with the words 'asylum-seeker', 'refugee' and 'immigrant'.

ZV: What does it mean to you having British citizenship?

Mimoza: To me as a person? Nothing. But I am relieved, because at least after a loong time, I have got something... (mother, 39).

ZV: Why do you want to get British citizenship?

Saimir: I wouldn't like to get it; if Albania would be part of EU, I wouldn't have a problem about it. I would want the citizenship only for one reason: I have the chance to make a decision to go somewhere or not. If my friends want to go tonight to France, I haven't got the option to go there or not; it's 'No' in my case and that's it (Albanian boy, 19).

Where do parents belong? While they rationally estimate the pros and cons of their decisions, Albanian parents acknowledge the differences with the 'host' culture with what they valued back home. As a result, they feel culturally alienated. The costs of waiting, the real loss – actual loss of loved ones, lack of connections with back home, poor health – have weakened the feelings of belongingness and in some have not erased the feeling of irreparable loss. In other cases, ambivalence, individuality and opportunism characterise their narratives, with little or no signs of civic responsibility or belongingness. The new citizens also feel 'unimportant' when it

comes to voting, and political integration is almost non-existent.

Differently from what King *et al.* (2003) found in their study conducted in 2002, before the amnesty, some parents are now considering a possible return to Albania. Since they achieved their goal of settlement, as they grow older and the children settle in the UK, some parents prefer to go back to their 'old' environment where kin and other networks are denser and there is much more support, to better weather for their elderly life, and in the case of the skilled migrants, as a way to 'rehabilitate' themselves from a 'migrant' status (which implies a low-class worker) and re-establish themselves as professionals. The intention to return is expressed also by some children, who value the support of the family in Albania and see return as an escape from the lack of social integration. Here are some examples of these sentiments:

Different from my children, we parents can make friends both here and in Albania, wherever we decide to stay. But still it's not the same with the childhood friendship. So we really miss this; the friendship that we had there, the life we had there.... We had a busy life and I used to get tired, but I had so much satisfaction, whereas here I don't feel any satisfaction. I worked for 8 years... it's 10 years soon that I have been (working) here now and I feel like my life has been wasted! Personally ... stress, things ... my dad died, my mother died and I couldn't go... It has happened to others as well, understand? It's not only me. There is even worse. But everyone says 'poor me'. I say 'Why me?' Because I was also an only son, so... [sighs]. But this is life; we have to deal with these things, since we came here we should have taken this in consideration... (Fatmir, father, 41).

Um... [hesitates]. In Albania we don't even know where to buy a chocolate. We don't know about the Council, about applications... My youngest child is not even registered there. Here we

know everything. Here (we belong) mostly. [...] But I want to wait at least 10 years so that I make sure the children settle well... I am happy here for the children and for the living conditions. I am not happy that it is so far away from Albania and the climate and culture are so different. But I don't know... I have tried [thinking about] Albania for a long time now; maybe I will go and I will want to come back here in 6 months! So I am thinking that, even if I returned there, I will make sure I will keep the passport, even if I lived permanently there. I think you need to enter the country every 6 months in order for the passport to remain valid. I mean, even for coming here and buying some clothes from Primark or second-hand shops, it would be worth it! *[laughs]* (Flutura, mother, 43).

ZV: What do you think about the future; will these visits become more or less frequent?

Eliana: Definitely more frequent; they will have to become more frequent, 'cause eventually I am gonna live there, which is my ambition: I want to live there. I want to start a family in Albania, not in England. [...] Yeah. Because I am more happy in Albania. If Albania makes you a more of a happy person, why stay somewhere for the money? We came like ...Yes, it has got good economically developed status, London, England, probably one of the richest places in the world, but it's not that it makes anyone happy. And this is what I am looking for in my life: happiness. And to like be somewhere where I can spend my life and have a happy life. Not somewhere where I can be working for money all my life and not enjoying the money that I work for. Not enjoying the fact that I am working so hard for something and not enjoying it myself, or my family to enjoy what I am working for (Albanian girl, 15).

The lack of civic pride and civic institutions among minorities in the suburban areas of London has already been observed by Baumann (1999: 197). In the case of

Albanian parents there is a commitment to Britain, which is also transmitted to the children. This commitment, however, is appreciated and constructed on the basis of the resources gained and the opportunities offered to them and their children. Parents push children to be committed to Britain as a sign of recognition for the material help they received from the public funds and for the opening of opportunities for a better future for the children. This is sometimes reflected in children's pride of being British as something gained by the parents and an instrument to important life opportunities. Two final quotes, one from a mother, the second from a father.

The oldest son says that he would go to Albania if the politics there would change. He studies Politics at university and wants to defend a thesis, just like you. He says that he is in service to this country (England) and if he was delivered to another country in the world, that's no problem (Donika, mother, 45).

ZV: Are there discussions at home about issues of discrimination, this country's politics or media?

Qerim: Yes, I talk with the children and my wife regarding these issues – how we Albanians are treated. I am satisfied from the way this country handled our situation; they have treated me very well, even when I was with a 'negative'. [...] We came here for economic reasons and they gave us the opportunities to achieve something. Even though I remained here although I was sent the 'negative' they still gave me a house, no-one stopped me in the street, they gave us support for our children... I am grateful. I know the ones that were returned would speak differently... We came here with all the others like little children and they let us 'grow and stand on our feet'. For me England is a second mother; I can't deny it and what it has given to me! (father, 46).

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the process of settlement of Albanian migrants and their families in London and the impact of the long delays in processing their asylum claims on their strategies of integration. It has shown how the legal status and the lengthy asylum bureaucracies have had an impact on these migrants' physical and mental well-being, putting them in precarious conditions. In particular, the findings show how the uncertainty of stay in the country of residence can have direct consequences on migrants' health and can block the development and passing of social capital to the children. This is especially important in light of recent developments in UK asylum policy which predict further restrictions on the rights of asylum-seekers to health services, as the opposition to the 'bogus asylum-seekers' is followed by a new focus of the political discourse on 'health tourists' or claims on the exploitation of the health benefits by fake asylum-seekers.⁴

These findings add to the limited evidence on the 'new migrants' in Britain and point to the stigma associated with the migrant status and 'the stratification within minorities', which give rise to harassment and discrimination towards new immigrant groups. They furthermore point to the impact of the unhealthy regularisation procedures on feelings of belongingness, civic responsibility and citizenship, with these being in turn constructed on the basis of opportunities and outcomes of the migration process. Very stringent migration regimes and deterrence policies seem to have impacted this group's integration strategies, by causing a considerable 'delay' in their integration plans, by widening the intergenerational gap, and surely do not help in creating a sense of belongingness to be transmitted across

⁴ Dallal Stevens: Paper presented to the Migration Research Seminar Series, University of Sussex, 21 January 2009, 'Asylum and the right to health'.

generations. In turn, the realisation of migration goals seems to impact the migrants' social resilience as the Albanian community settles down and embeds itself as one more new fragment in the mosaic of 'super-diverse' London.

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