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# A Matter of Power? (Ethnic) Identification and Integration of Albanian-Origin Immigrants in Thessaloniki

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## Abstract

The literature on the second generation has generally considered ethnicity as 'the issue' marking the identity formation of the children of migrants. This paper looks at Albanian-origin teenagers in Thessaloniki and explores their experiences and narrative of identification processes, focusing on the role of ethnicity. Results show that other identity traits are very important to the teenagers, whereas references to ethnicity are determined by contextual characteristics and factors, rather than parent or the ethnic community's 'legacy'. Ethnicity itself, at least in primordial terms, is perceived as a symbolic and external entity to which Albanian-origin teenagers have to relate in their everyday lives. The findings contrast with previous studies based on analysis of other second-generation groups and countries, which have established ethnicity as the core of the factors influencing the identity and integration strategies of the second generation. This paper shows that the type and frequency of references and choices in relation to ethnicity can be rational even among members of 'new second generations', with differences between self-identification and ethnic labelling conditioned by personal experience and by the centrality of ethnicity in the host society's political and social spheres.

## Introduction

'Greek you are born, you cannot become ...  
your blood will be shed, you pig Albanians'.  
This is one of the rhymed chants of the  
troops of the Greek army marching in the

of the children of migrants. As a result, ethnicity has been at the core of theoretical models explaining the second generation's identification and integration processes. This is at the same time when literature on ethnic identification is increasingly focusing on the concept of boundaries and is emphasising the need to look at the intersections of multiple identities.

Interest in the study of the second generation in Greece has been increasing in recent years. Most of the studies have looked at the second generation in Athens, and mainly children in elementary schools (e.g., Gogonas 2007; Michail 2008); to date there is no research conducted with Albanian-origin teenagers in Thessaloniki. This paper seeks therefore to fill this gap by exploring the perceptions on ethnicity of Albanian-origin teenagers. It aims to explore the role of ethnicity in the identification process of the second generation, by analysing the references made to ethnicity, the situational engagement with ethnicity and its role in the perception of identity. Findings show that other identity traits are very important to the teenagers, whereas references to ethnicity appear as determined by contextual characteristics and factors, rather than by parents' or the ethnic community's 'legacy'. Ethnicity itself, at least in primordial terms, is perceived as a symbolic and external entity to which Albanian-origin teenagers have to relate in their everyday lives.

## **Ethnicity and Identification Processes of the Second Generation**

### ***Ethnicity and identity***

Ethnicity has had its own distinct evolution as a term. Broadly put, ethnicity is associated with discourses on subjectivity and identity construction, acknowledging that such discourses are placed, positioned and situated in a particular historical, social and cultural context (Hall 1990, 1996). However, Wimmer (2008a, 2008b) notes that academic discourse on the conceptualisation of ethnicity has evolved

around two dichotomous terms: 'primordialism', based on the assumption that ethnic membership was acquired through birth and thus represented a 'given' characteristic of the social world; and 'instrumentalism', which posited that individuals choose between various identities according to self-interest. Nowadays, this dichotomy has been blurred and increasingly the two terms are not seen as mutually exclusive. By seeing the dichotomy through a cognitive lens, Brubaker *et al.* (2004) argue that the real difference between the primordial and the situational stance is that the former emphasises the tendency of participants to naturalise real or imputed human differences and the way groups are conceived, while the situational approach can explain how ethnicity takes relevance in particular contexts and everyday interactions. Jenkins (1997) maintains that ethnicity is a ubiquitous social phenomenon rather than a 'natural' group characteristic – a claim that has been wrongly confused with the primordial stance on ethnicity.

The developments on ethnicity from the primordial stance to the cognitive approach have been long and fragmented. It is important to note here the original definition of ethnic groups by Max Weber (Roth and Wittich 1976: 389), who maintained that 'we shall call "ethnic groups" those human beings that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; thus belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely it doesn't matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists' (*italics mine*). A crucial moment was the introduction into this debate of the concept of boundaries by Barth (1969), who considered ethnicity a product of a social process, attributing thus a more active role to individuals' and groups' engagement in redefining their ethnicity, by seeing ethnic identity as defined by the combination of the view one has for oneself and the views of others about one's ethnic identity. Others have

followed a similar line. For instance, Alba (2005: 22) maintains that ethnicity '... is a distinction that individuals make in their everyday lives that shapes their actions and mental orientations towards others; and it is typically embedded in a variety of social and cultural differences between groups that give an ethnic boundary concrete significance (so that members of one group think, "They are not like us because . . .")'. Jenkins (1997: 165) delineates the post-Barthian anthropological model of ethnicity based on several propositions:

'ethnicity is about cultural differentiation (bearing in mind that identity is always a dialectic between similarity and difference);

ethnicity is concerned with culture – shared meaning – but it is also rooted in and the outcome of social interaction;

ethnicity is no more fixed than the culture of which it is a component or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced;

ethnicity is both collective and individual, externalised in social interaction and internalised in personal self-identification'.

Jenkins (2004) furthermore points to the contrast between individual and collective identities by maintaining that the former emphasises difference whereas the latter similarity. By considering identity 'a practical accomplishment, a process', Jenkins (2004: 23) maintains that both individual and collective identities use a unified model of the dialectical interplay of processes of internal and external definition, with time and space being central to both these processes. Another classification is that of Karner (2007), who sees ethnicity as a triad of constructs: in terms of structures that affect social action, as a cognitive process affecting perceptions of the world, and as an emotional way of experiencing life situations. Anthias (2009), furthermore, calls for a distinction to be drawn between notions of ethnic identity and of ethnicity, as the latter refers to a practical term

expressing the mobilisation on the basis of ethnic ideas.

As signalled above, ethnicity is built on two major constructs: identity and culture (Nagel 1994). It is worth noting that the literature on identity is characterised by various strands that are based on different epistemological and disciplinary approaches working in different domains and levels. Indeed, one could not agree more with Gilroy (1996: 224–225), who stylishly points to the 'the passage into vogue' of identity and the academic mess that surrounds the concept (see also Handler 1994). One of the most confusing and analytically problematic approaches has been the 'soft' constructivist version which posits that identity is multiple, fluid and always changing, which raises questions on its operationability and usefulness as a research construct (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 19; Todd 2005). Brubaker and Cooper (2000), in their explicit 'attack', acknowledge the importance of the developmental approach in establishing the term and at the same time 'blame' it on Erikson (1968) as the start of a saga of confusing terms and models that have made identity an ambiguous analytical concept. They instead propose the use of three clusters of terms: identification and categorisation; self-understanding and social location; and commonality, connectedness and groupness. In these clusters, the classic triangle of aspects of identity – the question of self, that of sameness and of solidarity (Gilroy 1996) – are reviewed and challenged. This reorganisation of the identity literature highlights the growing emphasis on the processes and agents that do the identifying, the cognitive awareness and the multiple forms and degrees of commonality and connectedness discussed under various types of collective identities

Ethnic identification, however, is not a 'flat' and uniform process across contexts and groups. Jenkins (1997) maintains that culture is taken for granted until the moment when identity is problematised along the interaction across the boundaries, a process that leads to an explicit acknowledgment by the members of an ethnic group of the distinct common features, both to themselves and to the non-members. Barth (1969: 14) furthermore recognised that the features that are proclaimed as distinct are not always objectively selected, but consist of those that the main actors regard as significant. The salience of ethnic categories can vary in different socio-cultural systems; they may be 'inactive' or may pervade social life – in general or selectively in limited sectors of activity.

This view is furthermore elaborated by authors who relate ethnic identity and its performance to structure. While acknowledging these theoretical assumptions and the role of agency in identification processes, Nagel (1994: 155) maintains that 'the chosen ethnic identity is determined by the individual's perception of its meaning to different audiences, its salience in different social contexts, and its utility in different settings'. She further notes that ethnicity is both the product of actions undertaken by ethnic groups as they shape and reshape their self-definition and culture, and the 'outcome' of external social, economic and political processes and actors that shape and reshape ethnic categories and definitions (Nagel 1994: 152). This view partly reflects the 'situational' stance on ethnic identity which holds that ethnic identity is unstable over time and life-span, with different settings 'activating' different aspects of one's possible range of group identities, while self-identification is increasingly given the status of the most appropriate means of measurement of ethnic identity (Banton 2008; Stephan and Stephan 2000).

But what are the factors and actors that influence identity formation and how do they combine in affecting the way that

individuals and groups identify? Until recently, academic work on racial and ethnic identities has emphasised Barth's relational perspective and has considered these identities as the result on the one hand of a process of self-definition and on the other of the construction of symbolic boundaries and assignment of collective identities by others (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Jenkins (1997) supports this view and maintains that ethnicity is transactional; these transactions are processes of internal and external definition, which constrain and shape ethnic identification. However, most of the post-Barthian literature has overlooked the importance of external definition and social categorisation and has mostly analysed ethnicity based on internal definition and group identification. Neither Barth, nor the members of the Manchester School who developed the situational approach, have paid sufficient attention to the external constraints that condition ethnic identification. The main working concepts extensively used in the study of ethnic identity, such as 'boundaries' and 'choices', have proved to be useful to analyse the already established ethnic categories, but they do not explain how some of ethnic categories are developed and engaged in social action (Levine 1999). This has been ordinarily associated with a conceptualisation of social relationships as egalitarian and conflict-free, based on equitable negotiations (Jenkins 1997). External categorisation is, however, seen as framing and conditioning the internal malleable construction of identity at an individual level, and as a means used by political entrepreneurs to affect collective identification and modify collective action (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Barth (1994) proposed a multiple-level approach, which entails a combination of the interpersonal interactions at micro level, the processes

a joint work shared between members of both contrasting groups, 'though they are probably differently empowered in their ability to impose and transform the relevant idioms'. This empowerment is related to the salience of ethnicity in local settings as a result of differentiation, which results in ethnicity becoming an integral part of an individual's point of view of selfhood starting in early primary socialisation. External categorisation, however, features as a very important factor in shaping ethnicity and the element through which power differentiations are expressed and materialised (Jenkins 1997). Sokéfeld (2001) goes as far as to maintain that certain individual and collective identities are chosen and claimed not on the basis of psychological or sociological categories; they are informed and conditioned by issues of power and resistance, which are intrinsically connected with identity. These power differentiations are expressed in various settings and apply to '...immediate everyday life, which categorizes the individual, marks him §/c. etc.] by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power, which makes individuals subjects' (Foucault 1982: 781).

This view is taken up by Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002), who furthermore emphasise that the anthropology of ethnic groups within modernising or industrialised nation-states tended to describe these as culturally different from the 'majority' population because of their varying historical origin, including their history of



'host' country, the more likely it would be



for the second generation, handled by them and marking their identities in different ways. In the meantime, the main developments in research on the second generation in Europe have been concentrated on recognising the role of the



Greek authorities responded to the fast-increasing stock of illegal migrants during the 1990s with two presidential decrees in 1997, based on which immigrants could apply for a short-term White Card and then a longer-term (one to five years) Green Card, which did not however give any right of renewal. Another regularisation took place in 2001 with a new immigration law introduced, followed by others in 2005 and 2007 (Baldwin-Edwards and Apostolatos 2008). However, very minimal measures are predicted for immigrants' integration and, when this is done, the focus is on assimilation, ignoring the increasing diversity in the Greek society, while migrants' legal uncertainty has significantly

immigrant groups (Lazaridis and Koumandraki 2001).

Nevertheless, Greek national identity has been under significant pressures in the past twenty years and it has shown signs of transformation based on changing international and internal conditions, with some of its features being more emphasised accordingly (Kapllani and Mai 2005). Immigration as a new phenomenon in the 1990s has been one of the important causes of such transformations, but also of the revitalisation of the racist discourse (Triandafyllidou 2000). Lalioti (2005) goes even further, arguing convincingly that immigrants are a new pole against which the Greek identity is negotiated and defined. This is particularly evident in the policy-making process on migration, which in turn shows the redefinition of the boundaries of national identity and of in-group and out-group members, based now also on needs and current pragmatic considerations. While the lack of a coherent migration policy is blamed on the particular (Albanian) ethnic identity, the latter shows signs of some adaptability to internal and external pressures, trying at the same time to retain the strength of attachment of its members (Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002:197). Thus, the initial 'fetishisation' of Greekness during the 1990s against the threats put forward by new internal conditions and international political affairs was followed by a more flexible notion based on civic and territorial elements (Gropas and Triandafyllidou 2007: 7). However, the development of this new identity is slow to emerge and to have an impact on the policies and their outcomes for immigrant- and minority-origin residents in Greece (Baldwin-Edwards 2009). The problematic situation of the welfare system in Greece adds to the problems that an immigrant family has to face (Hatziprokopiou 2004) with many immigrant-origin children dropping out in high school to enter the labour market (Papandreou 2005). The recent economic crisis in Greece only compounds the problems of survival for immigrants there.

It is important to see developments in Greece within a larger context of global development. As a result, changes are taking place in the national identity and the respective immigration policies are impacted by the external pressures because of EU integration (Meintanis 2005) and the large immigrant population in the country (Hatziprokopiou 2004). Nevertheless, the emergence of a kind of de facto multiculturalism has found partial recognition in the public debate. Although the cultural and religious difference is slowly being recognised, the debate on the definition of the nation leaves out the 'sensitive' differences presented by minorities. While the immigrant population is becoming ever more diverse (Rovolis and Tragaki 2006), the presence of immigrants has rather made evident the different traits of Greek identity by leading to the construction of a hierarchy of Greekness, with different immigrant groups at different levels around the ethno-national main core (Triandafyllidou and Veikou 2002: 189; Tzanelli 2006). The





the interviewees were changed, but an attempt was made to keep the same 'category' of name – for example, if a child held a Greek name, I gave him or her a Greek pseudonym, and where he or she had an Albanian name, I changed it for another one of the same type. This is for the very important role that names are found to have in the way identities of immigrants in general are perceived (see for example Silbermarøt *al.* 2007).

Lamont and Molnar (2002) and Wimmer (2008b) group this avoidance of ethnic categorisation as a boundary-blurring strategy of ethnic minorities to counter racist stigmatisation, while 'universalising' general human values as a basis to distinguish between groups of people or referring to local urban lifestyle to counter the perceptions of sharp ethnic divisions. However, a distinction should be drawn between the primordial and the more situational forms of ethnicity (see also Kibria 2002). Both avoidance and self-identification in ethnic terms are referred to the externally and primordially articulated ethnic identities, which are in general not questioned or challenged. This is not to say that consciousness of the politics of such distinctions is missing, as Anna tells us below. However, self-identification and the related strategies here are very rational, expected to change over time and conditioned by the attitude of the host society, the economic conditions of the country of origin and the opportunities available in the future.

ZV: Which ethnic group do you identify yourself with?

Anna (girl 16): I believe that essentially there aren't any of these divisions that you are in some groups; it is all in people's mind. It is the people that make these divisions, maybe so that they feel they belong somewhere. But I don't believe that in reality there are these groups, so basically this is all in the minds of people and they do this because it is convenient to them, so that they feel something, not because in reality there are (ethnic groups).

On the other hand, although downplayed and not clearly and openly acknowledged, hybrid identities are under construction (Bhabha 1994). 'Ethnic narratives' of these teenagers referred to age-related experiences like the way of dressing, favourite music and friendship circles as characteristics that marked their daily 'ethnic' experience. This also resonates with Barth (1994: 14), who defined the cultural content of ethnicity as analytically

organised around two orders: *the overt signals or signs* – the external features through which identity is often shown, such as dress, language, house-form, or general style of life; and *the basic value orientations*, which consist of more substantial and idiosyncratic standards, such as those on morality and excellence by which performance is evaluated. Although, at both levels of Barth's typology, a distinction should be drawn between explicit self-identification and the underlying identity processes where both overt signs and signals are constructed and redefined. The primordial ethnicity – both Albanian and Greek – is referred to when a stance is taken and external categorisations are discussed or resisted. Pan-ethnic identities, European in this case, are also engaged as part of self-identification and avoidance, showing a relation to the contextual issues, since European identity is salient in contemporary Greek public discourse. The quotes below from Joana, Anna and Vilma further elaborate on these points.

ZV: From all these qualities that we mentioned, which one characterises you?

Joana (girl 16): That of a teenager!

ZV: Would you say that in another time you would choose another category as the most relevant?

Joana: Yes, I would. I would choose Albanian in future [...] because the more time passes, the more Albanians are liked better here in Greece, because now we still have a little bit of racism...

ZV: Would you choose another category in another time?

Anna (girl 16): (identified herself as Greek) In future I would choose European, because we will be more united and Greeks will not be so important, so being European would be better...



Vilma (girl 16): European and Greek. Because it's here I grew up, I have the same way of behaving like the Greeks, way of dressing, style of here; I have lived here most of my life. In Albania I was a little child, I don't know anything (from there); it's here I have learnt most of the things. And also European, because now Greece has joined Europe; we behave a bit more differently from before, the foreign languages that have been integrated to communicate with people... I believe these two groups represent me the most. [...] I think it might change in future, because Albania has slowly, slowly started to... what to say? To progress has started to make the first steps in terms of economy, culture, and I believe that one day Albania will be at the same level as Greece. And then we can say freely that we belong to the Albanian ethnic group, because then they will be equal.

Similar patterns are evident in expressions of belongingness, attitudes towards the ethnic group and the maintenance of language. Like the references to ethnicity, expressions of belongingness seem based on the everyday and local manners, age-related experiences, and knowledge of the place where they live. It is interesting to note a straightforward relation that teenagers establish between their belongingness and space rather than groups, which may reflect the conflation of ethnic and national identities in Greece. As is common in adolescence, there is a shift and ambivalence characterising the articulation of identity and belongingness, with these teenagers often not identifying ethnically or identifying themselves as Greek or belonging to Albania, or vice-versa. As the quotes below show, the lack of social integration and the continuing existence of discrimination in Greece, the extended family and positive experiences during holidays in Albania constitute the main factors that influence their feelings of belongingness to Albania, whereas the weak economic situation in Albania and better opportunities in Greece seem to

inspire belongingness to Greece. Sometimes the memory of migration at an early age and the expected difficulties of resettlement upon return strengthen a feeling of belongingness and settlement in the host country – 'here' as opposed to 'there' (Albania). Three contrasting quotes:

Olta (girl 16): I mostly feel I belong here in Greece, because I can't even think of going back and starting again from the very beginning with everything; friendships, life... everything I have been doing here. So I can't think of going back and start from zero and in those conditions.

Attitudes towards the Albanian community seem to be defined by referring to the local migrant community and to migration as a livelihood strategy to secure a better life and future for their children, referring to Albanians as 'they' and assessing objectively their performance as migrants and individuals more generally. The classic collective terms based on a common culture, common ancestry, history and traditions, 'us' versus the others, based on Weber's concept of ethnicity, do not seem of relevance (Roth and Wittich 1976). Similarly, language maintenance for the second-generation teenagers has also been mostly instrumental. Parents learned the Greek language over the years, some of them still being unable to read and write competently, so using Albanian at home has been dictated by the first generation's lack of fluency. They are also more interested for the children to learn Albanian if they want to return and to facilitate the 'transnational experience' – for visits and keeping in touch with 'home'. The two following instances come, first, from my field notes on observing Sunday classes on the Albanian language for second-generation children, and, second, from a quote from one of the participants in these classes.

Albanian activist (man 65) said that the number of children (learning Albanian) in the Albanian weekend classes was far higher when they started in 2000. In the early 2000s there was a hope in the parents that Albania was developing and that they would return soon, so they wanted their children to learn Albanian. But this hope has faded and many families have started to distance themselves from the school. Especially those from Korça; they have

distanced themselves more. Because they have been registered as Vorio-Epiriote<sup>4</sup> [...]

Flavio (boy 14): I come to learn my language so that if I return tomorrow, I would like to know my language, but even if I don't return, it is not that bad to know your language. If you want to write a letter or something and you don't know your language. Just like my mum and dad here in Greece, if they want to write a letter in Greek, they don't know to write it. And I don't want to be like that, not to be able to write something in my language.

Indeed, understanding the 'content' of ethnicity for the Albanian-origin children in Greece starts at school. The process of 'discovering' ethnicity is coupled with becoming conscious about the negative external articulation of Albanianess in Greek public discourse, experienced in the micro- and meso-levels of institutional settings. These instances are experienced as confrontations in early years of schooling and exclusion on the basis of ethnicity, these being harsher in the case of children who arrive at or after the school age. The stigmatisation has wider connotations that include 'Albanian' as the 'other', the 'different', the 'immigrant', the 'Muslim', referring to a politicisation of Albanian ethnicity in a broader sense and a general level. The national media and its role in 'launching' and further elaborating these connotations feature prominently. Although 'racism' is part of the teenagers' narratives as part of the lay jargon, in substance their narratives support Anthias's (1992) argument that racism is not necessarily built on racial categorisations, but rather by using the ethnic category as a building-block and then materialised in exclusionary practices towards groups defined on the basis of racial and ethnic categories. The quotes below of Blerim, Orjana and Vilma speak for themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> A term used in Greece to identify Greek minorities of Albania, while Vorio Epirus refers to the territories in Southern Albania claimed by the Greek state as Greek territory.

Blerim (boy 13): Because I was from Albania, they used to insult me 'You are Albanian!'; they used to beat me up. Everyone was against me. But after that, from the third year onwards, because I have changed three schools after that, some people left, some came, people changed and now they stopped. Now I am the same with the others.

Orjana (girl 15): I have heard them calling '*Albanós*', <sup>5</sup> '*Albanós*' and everything, without knowing anything (about the person); so just hearing 'Albanian' and they withdraw and distance themselves... Last year a new pupil came from Albania and everyone was saying 'Oh, the Albanian won't make it!'. She didn't know a word in Greek, but knew French, English and stuff ... and now she gets 18 and has shown to everyone where they stand! [...] So they say 'Oh, he is Albanian' and they see him with a different eye, until they give him an opportunity to know him. They will say '*Albanós*' and will put him in that category; they won't see what kind of person he is, or what kind of pupil he is.

Vilma (girl 15): When we (Albanian-origin students) speak, they laugh at us, like 'You are like this, like that...'. For example 'You Albanians shouldn't come to Greece!', 'Greece is full of Albanians!', 'Here there is only Albanians!', 'You have fights; you kill each other'. When an Albanian student is very good at school, they are very jealous 'Oh, Albanians came and they are taking over the school as well!'. There are many cases when the Greeks feel this way.

More importantly, this articulation has been internalised and further exercised among the second-generation teenagers themselves. The images taken from the media and the stereotypes suffered at school have also caused a negative

perception of the teenagers towards the Albanian migrants in Greece and towards Albania in general. This is seen in the attitude of the teenagers towards co-ethnic classmates, especially when they are newly arrived from Albania and have not yet acquired sufficient language skills. Inter-group exclusion is also practised towards the relatives or other first-generation migrants that take the role of kin since they provide the main or only source of support during the process of settlement (see also Foner 1997). As most of the Albanian migrants have very humble jobs, including the highly skilled who have experienced de-skilling, children associate Albanian identity with a poor and not-so-interesting life and with uneducated and uncivilised behaviour. Moreover, as the quotes cited above and the ones that follow show, in the presence of negative external categorisation in the form of strong discrimination, it seems like these teenagers are 'expropriated' from the boundary-making attribute and ability; it is rather the host society that establishes who they are.

Orjana (girl 15): It's the origin. So the origin is a fundamental criterion based on which someone judges/considers you immediately, and the appearance... maybe the appearance comes first. These two are the main that someone sees firstly, before one approaches you. [...] I have seen racist behaviours, but not towards me. I have seen it with my other classmates, but I haven't said anything, so when something doesn't have to do with me, I don't get involved. Towards me, no. So I don't get engaged with those things; I look after myself, I look after my friends. I won't sit and deal with those things.

Anna (girl 16): Because to know that you are like a Greek, it means that you don't feel separated from Greeks, so you feel better and this is more important, because... you don't feel distanced from the others and you are not afraid that they will call you 'Albanian' or anything else... they won't insult you. Because I look like a Greek;

<sup>5</sup> The Greek pronunciation for Albanian.

<sup>6</sup> The highest grade in secondary schools in Greece is 20, so 18 is very good.

when I tell them that I am Albanian, they don't believe me and that makes me feel better and more relieved...

ZV: OK. Is this what you feel, is this what you want to feel, or is this something that you want others to see in you?

Anna: Others to see in me.

As Anna's quote above especially shows, these everyday life accounts show a strong agency at an individual level. Although all the interviews reveal discrepancies and multiple subjectivities, they show the teenagers as active agents, and the identification choices as a way of life to survive, by enabling social identities and socialisation processes, all so important in adolescence. The discrepancies between the ethnic labels chosen and the experiences revealed refer not only to the ambivalence of identification processes in adolescence, but also the awareness of the need to assimilate, a high understanding of the state of affairs and political connotations that their identification is expected to have, while a process of hybridisation takes place unclaimed and unrecognised by the 'host' society.

As a result, one of the main patterns of the ethnic identification strategies of Albanian-origin teenagers in Thessaloniki consists of distancing themselves from their own ethnicity, striving to cross the boundary, but facing insurmountable difficulties, living thus at the edge of the boundary. Helplessness and an 'identification limbo' characterise the identification narratives of Albanian-origin teenagers who speak Greek as a main or their only language, have adopted the Orthodox religion and are prone towards assimilation, but are forbidden a Greek identity. While changing the positioning of boundaries is hampered by a weak ethnic agency as a group, the change of the boundaries' meaning is made impossible by the resistance of the Greek society and an ethnocentric Greek identity, holding on to ancient civilisations, culture and religion. This resonates with what Jenkins (1997: 57) writes about ethnicity,

social categorisation and power: 'internal and external identification do not exist in isolation. Identification is never a unilateral process: at the very least there is always an audience'. Moreover, according to Tzanelli (2006: 41) 'contemporary Greek political discourse has also hermeneutically adapted the nineteenth-century formula of Albanian exclusion. This discourse, which is structured around confluences of physical boundaries with symbolic borders [...] promotes a fictional preservation of racial purity against "alien contamination", feeding the urgency for the Greeks to claim direct racial and cultural continuity from antiquity'. As the quotes of Anna and Maria show below, racialisation in this case is experienced as dehumanising, alienating, and disempowering.

ZV: You chose Greek as the category you experience the most. How do you experience being Greek?

Anna (girl 16): How is it? It is like you feel like a human being. Because you are a human being first of all. Furthermore feeling Greek you feel that they don't separate you from others, and you won't have any problems. If you say that you are ... let's say Albanian ... or in general, if you say that you are from another country lower than Greece, they will see you as inferior, and you will encounter a different reaction. OK, until now we and I see you differently!(Anna's words)

ZV: Do you see yourself like being part of an ethnic group?

Maria (girl 12, born in Greece): I don't think so. Basically I wouldn't like to be part of an ethnic group. But often this can't even happen. Let's say, I can't say 'my country'... that Greece is my country, that this is the history of my country, and that this is the religion of my country... I can't say this. This would have been good, but this is not possible. [...] Let's say, the teacher says 'Now we will do history'. I can't say 'Oh, the history of my country'. Because the other children will hear and they will say 'She went mad! This is not the history of her country. This is the history of my country' [...] Yes. Greece is not my country. But neither Albania can become... It is not possible for Albania to be my country, because I know neither the language, nor the traditions, nor the history, nor anything from religion. I really know nothing from the history and traditions ... nor from religion do I know anything... So I constantly feel like I am somewhere at the border: I can go neither that way, nor this way!

## Religious Identities

The case of Greece shows an example of the institutionalisation of 'bright' boundaries or sharp symbolic categorising distinctions based on religion, citizenship and language (Alba 2005; Lamont and Molnar 2002). According to Baldwin-Edwards and Apostolatos (2008), for the greater part of the twentieth century, both the Greek state and society can be characterised as exh

'inherited religion' as their primary source of identity, as part of their strategies towards greater social integration (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007).

The attitude towards religion of Albanian-origin teenagers, however, speaks of a different religious story. As the vast majority of Albanian parents included in my study said, whether they were Christians by origin or decided to get baptised or remain spiritual in Greece, 'they just believe in God' and 'they are not used to religion as, in their time, there was no religion in Albania<sup>8</sup>. However, a number of my 27 teenage interviewees answered positively to the question of them being religious. Most of them have been baptised, all as Christian Orthodox, often reporting that parents are 'spiritual' or only sceptically 'religious'. They have been active with Sunday church school, they visit church occasionally, 'though not fanatic' about religion, while their name days feature as one of the main celebrations in their families. This is how Monda and Daniela describe religiosity in their families:

Monda (mother 50): I am baptised. I go and light (candles)... because there has remained the tradition that you need to believe in something [...] but I am not a fanatic of faith. Here we became Christians; so just like in every other religion it means don't steal, don't kill [...] I don't insist on my faith [...] my faith is for myself, not to give to other people [...] For example, my son bought a motorbike and said he wanted a *panagia*<sup>9</sup> to have with him, because of the environment where he lives. 'Here it is', I gave him one. My daughter goes to the children's groups (in the church) that get together to sing, but I don't oblige her to follow that line. [...] Although we are here due to certain conditions [...] I believe in God; it probably doesn't exist, but my father left this to me: that God does exist, and

he told me that God is for everyone, for the Muslim, for the Roma, for the Christian. I don't have racism for anyone in the world and I don't lobby for religion or anything else; whoever wants to be religious can learn from books and go ahead.

ZV: Is your family religious?

Daniela (girl 17): They (parents) are and they aren't at the same time.

ZV: And you?

Daniela: I am.

ZV: Why do you say you are?

Daniela: I am baptised; we are baptised, the three of us (sisters). And we go to the church for example, with our godmothers, always...

The references to religion include religiosity as a condition and therefore a means to be accepted by their native peers, but in some of the cases religion seems to be associated with faith and consists of a common life practice. The baptism appears as the outcome of pressure from the side of those few Greek acquaintances and the society in a broader sense, as it seems to be the only means for the families to have friendly relations with the locals. At the same time, their narratives hint at the role of the godparents, who are often natives related to the family as employers or neighbours, as a source of support and as important for the families and their limited social integration. This is how two parents describe the religiosity of their children.

ZV: Are you religious in the family?

Abaz (father 44): We don't believe a lot, but now we are mixed with religion because the children are baptised. We feel ourselves Muslim, but we don't follow any rites...

Entela (mother 42): My children are baptised; I got them baptised when we came. Not that I wanted, but a Greek insisted 'I want to baptise them...!' Eh...! And the children believe in God, but it's not that they go to churches and take a special

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<sup>8</sup> The constitution of 1976, Article 37, prohibited religion in Albania until 1990, when the communist regime collapsed (Dingo 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Saint Mary's icon.

interest (in religion)... like asking which (saint's) day is today or which celebration... no. But they do believe. I see them for example praying 'My God, will you help me? Mum, please pray to God that he helps me to get a good grade'.

However, while baptism has helped in the social integration at a micro- and meso-level and bearing a Greek name has counteracted the visibility as 'other' and as non-Orthodox, Albanian parents had to later recognise that, as Tzanelli (2006: 39) points out, 'even religious conversion would not truly "open" participation in the Greek "nation" to outsiders'. As pointed out in Monda's quote above, religiosity has been instrumental for the first generation, although this is sometimes more a reinterpretation at a later stage of their immigration process. As awareness of the opportunity structure and identity politics of the host country developed over the years, this is also referred to as an 'identity sacrifice' that often generated limited positive outcomes in terms of integration.

Matilda (mother 33): Racism is this: we came here to Greece, we changed our names, surnames, those of our parents; all names! And we all became *kaurrë* (Albanian: non-Muslim)! Why? Because of the fear that if they would know that our name was *Selim* or anything else, they will point the finger towards us 'She is a Muslim!'. Wherever you go they ask you 'Are you a Muslim or an Orthodox? Are you baptised or not?' so we all changed our names. Why? We shouldn't change our names! [...] I have two sons. The oldest one is called Kosta. The other one I called him Fabio.<sup>10</sup> He (Kosta) says to the younger son: 'I celebrate (the Orthodox name day). You don't! You are a Muslim; I am an Orthodox!'

ZV: Why didn't you give also to the younger one a Greek-Orthodox name?

Matilda: I didn't want to!

Although on previous historical occasions the religious conversion of Albanians has had a function in resisting assimilation while Albanians have preserved their distinct identity (Doja 2000), this 'encounter' with religion has significantly changed the cultural practices of Albanian

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<sup>10</sup> Fabio is an Italian name that has taken the status of an Albanian name due to the extensive use of Italian in Albania and familiarity of Albanians with the Italian language and culture (see Mai 2003).

the parents. Most of the teenagers interviewed had younger siblings, which may be related to the timing and selective ages of emigration from Albania. The older children who were born in the early 1990s, and who came with or joined their parents in the first years of migration, tend to have a very developed agency as sometimes they had to share some of the parenting duties with their parents. Their expressions of the 'immigrant identity' (Waters 1994) – as being self-sufficient, studying harder than the others, being more goal-oriented and prone to succeed and realising, as the main goal of their parents' migration plan, 'a better future', coupled sometimes with more empathy towards the parents – seem to weaken in the younger siblings. This difference is clearly pointed out by Vilma and Joana below.

ZV: Do you see any differences between you and your younger sister?

Vilma (girl 16): Yes, there are differences between me and my sister because she has become just like the Greeks. She always has to ask my mum about her lessons, like 'Mum, can you have a look on this?' Greeks don't do the lessons themselves; they have to be dependent on their parents. I tell her 'Try to do your lessons yourself; you will make a mistake, but you will learn for the next time'. She is the type who needs to ask mum. She is still very young, but it seems she is a bit insecure about what she does.

Joana (girl 16): Yes. We are very different... I read much more and feel more anxious (about achievement), whereas my sister is quicker and catches things more easily; she is also more outgoing... [...] I want to be the best, none to be better than me, and want to know everything, because I want to go higher ...

ZV: How about your attitude towards Albania, visits...?

Sister (13): Yes!

Mother: The younger one wants more to go (to Albania).

Many of these teenagers have developed a very strong feeling of distancing from their ethnicity, hiding their identity and devaluing everything that has to do with Albania and Albanians. The absence of an ethnic agency or Albanian organisational structure blocks the development of strategies for countering stigmatisation; on the other hand, the same absence seems to prevent the creation of a reactive or adverse identity in its classic definition. The reaction, mostly observed in the case of the boys, is usually expressed as employing the role of 'the reckless', asserting a kind of existence by breaking the rules, again by not referring to any collective ethnic frames. The recognition of discrimination in the case of the girls shows at times the converse trend: a clear distancing from discriminative attitudes towards Greeks or any other people on the basis of ethnicity.

The differences between siblings may have various explanations, firstly relating to the particular age of the group under study, as the identification patterns and an



There are also differences in the perception of discrimination: older siblings personalise it and have internalised it more, whereas the younger ones find it more 'external' and exaggerated. This points to what has already been emphasised in the literature, namely that the mode of incorporation of the first generation has a strong impact on the second generation, providing differing amounts of cultural and social capital and exerting differential pulls on their allegiances (Levitt and Waters 2002: 15). But it also suggests that the stage of incorporation can be very important. Younger children seem more relaxed towards language use, visits to the homeland, and show more interest towards Albanian language and TV, although sometimes developing a stronger hyphenated identity. Although the attitude towards Albania and Albanian ethnic identity is not always positive among the younger siblings, they show a better capacity in taking a stance towards their ethnicity and their identity more in general. In the following extracts from a discussion meeting in Thessaloniki,<sup>11</sup> parents and grandparents recall the negative instances of discrimination and their impact on their children's attitude towards their ethnic identity.

Albanian mother: We have been here for so long and nothing changed! Do you know that my son who is now 20 years old doesn't want me to go with him anywhere so that people don't recognise him as an Albanian?! 'Mama', he says to me, 'You don't speak Greek well, so I don't take you with me!'

Grandmother: As I see things, Fabiola was very affected by the experience of nursery. The teacher was very negative. We came in August and Fabiola went to nursery in September. She with her attitude... She [the teacher] was a very bad person; she was trying to impose

the (negative) feeling to the child

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<sup>11</sup> Fieldnotes from a meeting in Greece on 16 May 2008 organised by migrant and anti-racist organisations in Thessaloniki, with the participation of migrants and with a human-rights lawyer on the legal framework for migrants and the rights and citizenship issue of the children of migrants.

Greek, with some of the younger children only discovering by incidents at school or elsewhere that they were of Albanian origin. As Valmira recounts below, many parents, and in this particular case especially those highly skilled who are experiencing de-skilling, have been following a long 'identity trip'.

Valmira (mother 38): Of course these are not as the early years. I would be lying if I would say that it's the same as the early years, because many progressive steps have been made... although slow steps. I remember when I came for the first time in Greece, I saw how small (metaphorically) the Albanian was. Basically how small it felt if you would say that you were Albanian. When I was hanging around in the beginning, since I was speaking in English they were asking 'where are you from?' 'I am from Albania' and they would be looking at each other and I was asking myself 'What's going on?... I don't... What is he saying with that look?'. And this way I lost all my respect that I had for myself and for Albania, for my parents, my relatives, my friends and for everything I had experienced and had learnt in Albania. I lost it completely, I 'deleted' it and it took a long time to understand that people are individuals who have their qualities and those out of Albania (foreigners) are not Gods! Everyone has his own merits and faults. It took a long time, it took a long time... Of course my experience in the tailoring workshops, in these jobs where not everyone is cultivated, in my opinion it helped me because it was there that I realised that I had my own values; why not show them? Why not fight for them, and this way I started to work on myself and ask for other things so that I could have a better life than what I had, or have a better prospect than I had.

The Albanian community in Thessaloniki is now a 'mature' community and has a good idea about the opportunities that will be given to them in Greece. The families have

now completed the 'golden' 5–10 years of migration and put their return 'on hold', partly to secure a better education and potentially better life prospects for their children and partly because return is resisted by the children themselves. However, although the children were born

opportunities to do

The quote below shows a simplistic interpretation of these dynamics by a group of unskilled male Albanian migrants.

Ismail: We have been here for 10–15 years, but we are still considered the same as someone that comes here to Greece for the first time. We prepare the same documents... It is the same document for us that have been living here for 18, 16 or 12 years and for someone that comes today to Greece as a 'refugee'<sup>14</sup>

[...] They have started to see the Albanian with a different eye, not like they used to see him in the beginning. And this is due to the Albanians themselves.

Neritan: They have changed it (the attitude) because we (Albanians) work a lot!

Auron (to Ismail): ... This has happened because Albanians now have started to take loans and buy houses. From the Greek banks there has been no confiscation until today. I have never heard for an Albanian that they had been confiscated anything, whereas from the Greeks and Russians they have confiscated a lot of things. And because of this they have started to see us with another eye...

Neritan: Albanians are the most correct and hard-working people here in Greece. Although they tried very hard and with all means *'të na bëjnë rezil'* (idiom: to give us a bad a reputation), we showed ourselves who we are!

Auron: ...And also because of the children. Our children are still young, but some are very clever, they are the top students. And when there are celebrations at school, they don't allow our children to hold the flags. The flag is always held by the best of the school, but they still don't allow them to do this, so they are nothing! The school that they do is useless. The child gains

nothing through it; their children can become doctors, lawyers... They (Albanians) are zero!

As the parents above say, children feature both as 'victims' of a harsh impact of the first generation's settlement within a 'homogeneous' host society, and as the strongest agents of a boundary blurring process. The presence of the children in schools is, on the one hand, an everyday reminder of a 'growing differentiation/heterogeneity' in the Greek society, while their educational success has caused at times significant 'ethnic identity incidents' by initiating discourses of national, ethnic and racial identities, with the rejected flag bearer having become the symbol of their discrimination in Greece (see Kapllani and Mai 2005; Tzanelli 2006). From a bottom-up perspective, children's presence ensures a significant contact and exchange between the natives and non-natives as a result of their social integration in schools, as friendship and love transcend boundaries.

Entela (mother 41): His friend used to tell him (her son): 'My dad says I shouldn't make friends with Albanians. But you are Albanian and you are so good. What's wrong with you Albanians that my dad says don't make friendship?'. So basically at an early age, the little children do not understand... they hear the words 'Not with Albanians!' and they react and say why, when we socialise with them we notice no problems. The mother of my son's friend told me: 'My son used to tell me "But mum, Kostas is more intelligent than me, better student than me, he dresses so nicely and is so clean and neat". And then we got to know him ourselves...'. I notice that Greek children like the Albanian children both at school and in the neighbourhood. They do make friendship and then say that they are told things (by their parents)...

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<sup>14</sup> 'Refugee' is the word usually used by immigrants to refer to 'immigrant'.

Albanian parents are very open towards the

ethnic identification and belongingness seem to be instrumental, rationally selected, and to change over time depending on the opportunities and host-society attitudes. The teenagers' narratives show that the patterns of identification are context-bound and are shaped by factors operating at different levels, related to the structural features of the hoststate/society and the immigrant group. More specifically, they point to these main factors: the institutionalisation of sharp symbolic boundaries by the dominant group and the politicisation of the 'other'; the positioning

maintain, the effect of structural factors can have the reverse effect on ethnic identification. Instead of strengthening ethnic identity and the vitality of the ethnic group (Waters 1990), structural forces such as discrimination in face of the absence of an ethnic agency can have the opposite effect.

The lack of resistance towards discrimination and the forced assimilation experienced at the beginning of their settlement in Greece, and the change in attitude over the years, could well be explained within the framework of power and capital. Barth (1969: 28) did not elaborate extensively on this element, but sensed an 'anomalous' general feature of ethnic identity as a status: while *ascription* rests mainly on origin and commitment and does not depend on any specific assets, the *performance* of the roles required to realise identity is conditioned on certain assets. He noted, however, that a change in cultural differences between groups is not associated in any simple way with a change in the same direction and of the same scale in the organisational relevance of ethnic identities or in boundary maintenance processes. However, Bourdieu (2004: 15) is very clear on the role of capital in the structure and functioning of the social world. He defines capital as 'accumulated labour (in its materialised form or its "incorporated", embodied form) which when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive basis by agents or groups of agents enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living world'. In particular, agency and culture, and all the interrelations they are part of, are marked by the notion of power. As Ratner (2000: 430) maintains, the individual notion of agency as based on personal meanings ignores the barriers agents encounter in their struggles for a sense of equality, democracy and fulfilment. A common view in the literature that recognises power as a factor that shapes the social world is that people are situated in different social locations, which are influenced by power hierarchies, including those attached to gender (Pessar and Mahler 2003). Power

hierarchies are also taken as the mechanisms that make individuals subjects through the imposition of categories, the impact of their individuality and identity, and the control they have on the law of truth, which individuals must recognise and others should also recognise in them (Foucault 1982: 781). On the other hand, power and capital are inter-related with the possession of capital resting on the basis of power (Bourdieu 1989).

Nevertheless, the 'cultural repositioning' as a group in a host society and the above-mentioned strategies of Albanian-origin immigrants can also be related to the 'structure' of Albanian ethnic identity. Scholars have pointed to the feeling of historical priority and cultural homogeneity and indifference towards religion as 'myths' of Albanian identity, employed symbolically by the Albanian diaspora in the historical struggles to build a national ideology (Malcolm 2002). Others have observed Albanian ethnic identity as based on the respect for the family and kinship and on respect for the given word, considering the lack of a single common religion as a historical obstacle to a strong ethnic identity (Dingo 2007), referring thus to a more 'micro-level' ethnicity. As a result, it is rather the 'migrant identity' that characterises the Albanian first generation and, from their narratives, it seems that the 'ethnicity' of their incorporation strategies is the realisation of their migration project: a better life for them and a brighter future for their children, which results in the individual boundary-crossing strategies of their descendants. However, the migration experience associated with accumulation of resources and capital enabling the gaining of power, has caused a significant change in agency, and has developed a knowledge of identity politics and class and a capacity to recognise boundaries and the mechanisms that determine them. Compared to the lack of civic engagement and responsibility in Albania<sup>15</sup> – this

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<sup>15</sup> See Totozani (2010) 'Une, shqiptari' in *Shekulli* newspaper 18/12/2010 for an excellent reaction of a member of the Albanian elite and civil society to the issue

process of external identity contestation followed by a self-questioning and hybridisation at a later stage may well consist of the genesis of a 'reproduction' of ethnicity in the Albanian diaspora.

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