

Constructing Identity and Heritage at the Cross-roads: Albanian Families' Cross-Border Connections and Homemaking Projects in Athens

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Drawing from the author's ethnographic/participatory work with Albanian families in Athens, this paper tells the story of two families constructing identity and heritage in Greece and Albania. The processes involved in the families' literal and metaphorical connections with the 'old country',¹ manifested in cross-border links, everyday routines and material cultures, are integral to their homebuilding projects in their new locale. Given families' multiple-place-allegiance and disenfranchised status in a Greek context, theories on transnationalism and history and heritage *from below* are utilised in order to consider identity and heritage formation in the course of everyday routines. It is argued that the experience of building lives in more than two worlds results in the emergence of plurilocal identities, challenging spatially bounded notions of heritage.

Introduction

Embarking from history and heritage from below theorizations, this paper narrates the story of two Albanian families' identity formation and making meaning of heritage, unfolded in cross-border connections with the parental homeland and everyday routines suggesting their homebuilding projects in Athens (Samuel, 1994; Jones and Birdsall-Jones, 2008). Growing out of disenchantment with the nationalist-driven top-down approach to the past, history making *from below* and *from within* movements place oppressed groups' heritage narratives at the centre of their democratic endeavour (Kean 2008). Within the mono-cultural landscape produced by the Greek state and its apparatuses, the meanings and interpretations of the 'nameless' (Hamilton and Shopes, 2008), in this case Albanian families, have remained hidden from heritage phenomena. In the aftermath of iron curtain dismantling, instigating the development of the Albanian community in Greece, notions of otherness have epitomized Albanianness in Greek public and media discourses resulting to its 'exclusion from the pale of civilization' (Tzanelli, 2006: 43). In opposition to these stigmatizing constructs and the nationalizing mythologies exalting the superiority of Greekness, this account seeks to promote alternative engagements with heritage, focusing on the personal, emotional and subjective experience of the Albanian family. It will be shown that by sharing their lives between Athens and their native Albanian towns and villages, these emergent transnational family units build their identities, and consequently re-create heritage, in the fluidity of here and there, the intersecting points of old and new homes.

This work is part of an ongoing longitudinal ethno-

graphic project looking at Albanian families' making meaning of heritage in light of their ethnic and socio-cultural identities. The preliminary findings discussed below derive from the author's three-month fieldwork with two Albanian families in the private and public realms of contemporary Athens. Their consideration contributes in our understanding of engaging with heritage and the past in the context of family life (Galanidou and Dommasnes, 2007), particularly under conditions of migration, where routine practices, settings, and material cultures provide fertile ground for memory-work and belonging in the transnational realm (Attan, 2006; Wilton, 2009).

The paper builds around theories of transnational family living to conceptualise families' identity formation and practices of constructing belonging in their new surroundings. It then outlines the development of Albanian community in Greece along with the Greek socio-political and cultural context against which families' practices are formulated. Discourses on history and heritage from below movements attending to the families' socio-cultural experiences come next, followed by methodological considerations, discussion on data collected and concluding thoughts.

Transnational families: constructing belonging in cross-border links and homing projects in new habitats

The globalization of labour, capital and culture along with the expansion of new technologies and the restructuring of world politics has led to the 'new age' of migration phenomena, especially for work and refuge (Castles and Miller, 2003). The growing number of people leading 'dual lives' (Portes *et. al.* 1999: 218): speaking more than one language, having homes in two countries and making a living through continuous cross-border contacts, called

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into question normative, assimilationist conceptions of migrants caught in the 'two cultures dilemma' (Watson, 1977). In anthropology, Basch *et al.* (1994: 7) labeled such phenomena under the concept of transnationalism describing 'processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded and social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement'. Despite its highly contested nature, transnationalism has proved by many a valuable conceptual tool providing a new lens to the range and depth of migrants' lived experiences solidified in social, cultural, political and economic multinational fields (Espiritu and Tran, 2002). Although not an entirely new phenomenon transnational (or transmigrant) family forms are multiplying within the informational society of global capitalism and labour (Parreñas, 2001). Wiltshire (1992: 182) described the transmigrant family as a 'large amorphous structure made up of conjugal and nuclear units, as well as con-sanguineous segments that spread across national boundaries'. Its geographically dispersed family members hold together, according to Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 3), by creating a 'feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely "familyhood"'.

It has been suggested that transnationalism, the experience of building lives between more than two worlds, poses questions of identity, membership and belonging (Gardner and Grillo, 2002). In Probyn's (1996: 19) words belonging refers to the 'desire of some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places or modes of being'. Family forms spanning national borders produce and transform belonging in solidarity ties and transnational networks connecting members across states and continents (Reynolds, 2006). Regular contacts in the form of visits, letters, videos, cassettes, emails and telephone calls; financial remittances; practices of building houses in the homeland; and involvement in community associations fostering social ties and cultural practices with the home country, suggest common forms of cross-border links in migration literature connecting geographically scattered family units (Glick-Schiller *et al.*, 1992; Levitt, 2001; Al-Ali 2002a; 2002b; Madianou and Miller, 2012). Family rituals, reunions and ceremonies become focal *loci* of producing members' diasporic identities manifesting claims of ongoing membership to the community of origin, reworking meanings of continuity and change within the transnational realm (Al-Ali, 2002c). 'Home' figures prominently in these transnational gatherings: rituals are meant to happen 'over there', in *loci* of emotional investment (Gardner and Grillo, 2002). However, their conduct in the migration destination has also been recorded, elaborating notions of 'double belonging' (Salih, 2002: 52; 2003) or 'bi-focality' (Vertovec, 2004: 974) embedded in transmigrants' social fields linking 'here' and 'there', the country of origin with this of settlement.

The transnational family's simultaneity of place alignments embodies complex and multi-dimensional meanings of home. Home signifies territorial attachment to a specific place, but its symbolic conceptualization also evokes adherence to transportable cultural ideas, values and traditions (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002). Inherent to the

creation of home space is the construction of 'affective qualities of home': home-making crystallizes in memory-work of reclaiming and reprocessing habits, objects, names and histories uprooted in itineraries of migration and displacement (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003: 9; Hage 2010). Family story and narrative play an instrumental role in the homebuilding project: parents become mediators in communicating their offsprings meanings and values attached to material objects and routinized activities contributing in the construction of home in new settings (Chamberlain and Leydesdorff, 2004). In Louie's (2006) account these practices took the form of nursery songs, religious images, everyday poems, books in the ethnic language, ethnic food and repeated trips to the parental homeland initiating children to their parents' home culture. The transmission of ethnic language in particular is deemed critical in understanding individual's behaviour of 'becoming transnational' in the course of homing process (Al-Ali, 2002b: 116). Family and 'ethnic enclaves' are broadly understood to initiate children to transnational practices including that of bilingual fluency usually located within the child-rearing responsibilities of the mothering role in the new homeland (Deutsch 1966; Al-Ali, 2002c).

Transnational networks in the form of cross-border communications, regular contacts and strong kinship ties, marked processes of the development of Albanian community in Greece in the beginning of the 1990s.

Contextualising the Albanian community in Greece

Burrin e njeh kurbeti/gruan e njeh djepi: 'A man becomes a man out in the world (*kurbet*), a woman becomes a woman over a cradle' the famous Albanian proverb has it (Papailias 2003, 64). In Albanian folklore and memory, the ideology of the Turkish derived *kurbet* ('travel-for-work') brings to mind stories of hardships and sufferings of migration both for the migrant and the family left behind (Papailias, 2003: 1064; Mai and Schwandner-Sievers, 2003). To become a *kurbetli* (emigrant) is not merely a matter of economics; over the centuries the act of being 'absent' to support the ones back home acquired moral values and connotations of pride and fearlessness for it involved taking risks and making sacrifices (Barjaba and King 2005). Practices of *kurbet* are widespread throughout Albanian history excluding the 'artificial interlude' of Hohxa's hard-line, isolationist regime (King, 2005: 135). In the aftermath of iron curtain dismantling, marking the restoration of 'traditional' gendered divisions of labour within Albanian society (Papailias, 2003: 1064), massive numbers of Albanians, predominately males, migrated to the neighbouring countries of Italy and Greece (King *et al.*, 1998) (Fig. 1).

For the older generation carrying family responsibilities back in homeland, the financial motivation was the main drive behind their exodus to the West, whereas adolescents saw the latter as a chance for personal and cultural fulfillment by escaping from a conservative and patriarchal society (Mai, 2001; 2005). Under severe working and settlement conditions, these first male arrivals adopted

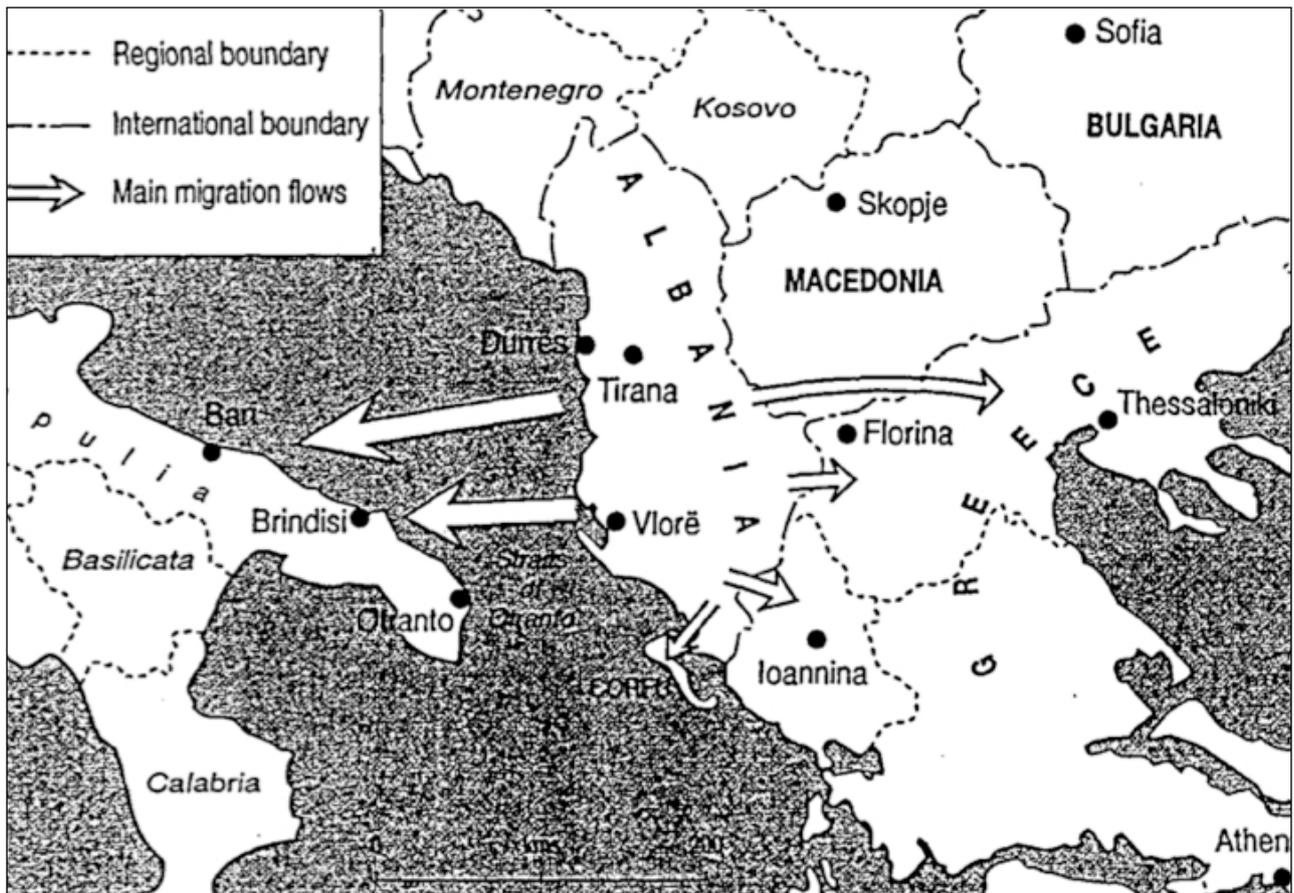


Fig. 1: Albania and its neighbours: main migration routes (King, 2003).

'chain migration' patterns (Vullnetari, 2007), by establishing networks of information exchange for women, children, relatives and friends to arrive later.

The element of shuttle migration coupled with the massive deportations of Albanian immigrants and the subsequent re-entry of some of these back to Greece makes the community's estimated presence in Greece difficult (Fakiolas, 2003). According to the 2001 Census data, Albanians constitute the largest ethnic group of the country's immigrant population (56 per cent) numbering approximately 443,550 members. Almost half of this population (207,042) resides in the Athens conurbation (Iosifides *et al.*, 2007). There is no gender balance as such, however Albanian women's participation in migration, holding a share of forty per cent in 2001 Census data, is thought to have intensified in recent years mainly as a result of family reunification (King 2003).² Accordingly, calculations by Baldwin-Edwards (2008) on the 2001 Census data regarding the second generation bring the Albanian ethnic group on the first place (36.6 per cent) with 44,000 members.

Greece's initial, albeit short-lasting, reception of Albanians was warm, driven by curiosity of exploring cultural connections of Balkan brotherhood after forty years of isolation (Papailias, 2003). Soon the newly arrived neighbours became the embodiment of national threat, backwardness and criminal behaviour within the Greek media circulating terror stories on 'waves of infection crossing the Greek frontiers' (Seremetakis, 1996: 489; Kapllani and Mai, 2005). The widespread 'Albanophobia' (Karydis, 1996)

nurtured within such discourses legitimized state migration policies of tight control and massive deportations, favouring regularization programmes at the expense of the community's access to Greek citizenship acquisition (Triandafyllidou and Veikou, 2002; Fakiolas, 2003).

Albanians' severe stigmatization in combination with their clandestine status led to their informal employment correlated to highly exploitative working conditions (Iosifides, 2001). Men worked (and still do to a large extent) in agriculture, construction sites, the tertiary sector or small firms, as unskilled or semi-skilled workers (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005). Women are mainly employed in the domestic sector as cleaners, baby-sitters or elderly carers. By performing specific occupational roles within the social structure, the Albanian population turned into a '*class of servants*' deepening prejudices and unveiling '*class-based roots of racism*' of the host society (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1990 quoted in Hatziprokopiou, 2004: 330). Paradoxically, these "second-class" career pathways became a vehicle of retrieving dignity and self-confidence replacing Albanians' insecurity of the first years. Research undertaken in Greece's two main urban centres has indicated cases of upward socio-economic mobility and a grand shift in the community's working conditions including provision of social security, access to formal employment and jobs of higher status and salary (Hatziprokopiou, 2003; Lyberaki and Maroukis, 2005).

In contrast to other immigrant groups Albanians are rather scattered across the urban and the rural landscape

reducing chances of ghetto situations (Vaiou, 2007). For early arrivals, low rent cost and employment opportunities were the main criteria of choosing somewhere to settle. These areas gradually transformed into 'nests' for pioneers' direct family members, relatives and friends arriving at a later stage (Hatziprokopiou, 2004). Spatial proximity enabled Albanian kin and friends to exchange acts of mutual support and reciprocity facilitating processes of 'social reproduction' and incorporation within the Greek society and its labour market (Iosifides *et al.*, 2007).

The Albanian community's stigmatized status and low social standing has kept its members restricted in the margins of Greek heritage phenomena. Its long-held 'invisibility' within official cultural discourses has been in a sense accelerated within the Greek mono-cultural landscape favouring nationalist-driven top-down approaches to heritage.

Constructing heritage: modernist (or top-down) and bottom-up-nature approaches

In the long history of creating stories from material aspects of the past, Smith (2006) identifies a particular set of social and cultural practices dominating the heritage discourse in late modernity; alternatively what she calls the 'authorized heritage discourse' (AHD). Tracing its roots in nineteenth century liberal modernity and the heyday of nation building in Europe, the AHD sought to establish approaches of top-down character in interpreting the past for the construction of nationalising mythologies (Smith 2006, 17; Dietler, 1994; Atkinson *et al.*, 1996). From a historical perspective, Enlightenment rationality and French Revolution gave rise to the establishment of the first nation-states consolidated in notions of citizenship, territory, mass participation, universal education and civic ideology (Díaz-Andreu, 2001). Concepts of language, ethnicity and race were added in the map of nationhood in the aftermath of 1870s "unifications" of Italy and Germany based on the claim of common descent and shared culture (Smith 1991: 11; Díaz-Andreu, 2007). In the course of colonial expansions dialogues on race further naturalised connections of ethnic and cultural identity with concepts of biology and 'blood' perpetuating significations of states as 'homogenous racial-cum-national' units (Jones, 1997: 44; Trigger, 1989). Archaeology and museums played a crucial role among the new devices employed to 'ensure or express social cohesion and identity' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 263). Rediscovering, forgetting and misremembering the past went hand in hand with the "manipulation" and display of its material remains (Trigger, 1984). National myths and 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) 'objectified' their existence in the materiality of museum exhibits and non-portable antiquities, the depositories of cultural and national identities *par excellence* (Kaplan, 1994; Boswell and Evans, 1999).

Greece was no exception to the rule of "abusing" material culture to bolster national pride and morale (Kotsakis, 1998; Hamilakis, 2002). The glorification of the classical past within Western Hellenism ideologies marked the foundations of the Modern Greek state crystallising its national, ethnic, and cultural unity in the masterpieces of

its lost and rediscovered golden age (Morris, 1994). The manufacturing of 'common myths' (Appadurai, 1981) made its first steps in purification programmes cleansing classical remains from barbaric Turkish and Frankish relics "contaminating" the *loci* of the nation's imagined community (Anderson, 1991; Yalouri, 2001). During the second half of the nineteenth century the incorporation of Byzantium in the national historical narrative established notions of cultural and spiritual continuity permeating the Hellenic identity throughout the millennia (Hamilakis, 2007). Since then, this linear trajectory has deeply shaped interpretations and meanings attached to the Greek past. From Greek history textbooks (Frangoudaki and Dragona, 1997; Avdela 2000) and museum exhibitions (Gazi, 1994; 2008; Mouliou, 1996; 2008) to archaeological projects producing monumental landscapes and new "Disneylands" (McNeal, 1991), the connection with the past in modern Greece has predominately taken the form of nationalizing narratives ratified on the integrity of scholarly knowledge (Alexandri 2002).

Within the nationalist narrative propagated by the AHD, the historical, cultural and social experiences of the disenfranchised have been largely ignored. Sub-national, local and personal identities have been obscured at the expense of national, and values, meanings and thoughts featuring prominently in the heritage experience of sub-altern groups, in general, have been compromised in the name of 'materiality' (Smith, 2006). It is these emotional and personal subjectivities interwoven in subversive conceptualizations of heritage that the modernist approach has largely ignored, and this of a more bottom-up nature aims to address.

Heritage may reproduce the dominant ideological discourse, but that also ensures according to Graham *et al.* (2000: 58) that 'it can become the focus of alternative meaning for those who dissent'. These 'small' (Harvey, 2008) or dissonant heritages (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1995) endorsing the local, the personal, the everyday and the banal owe much of their naissance to cross-disciplinary trends capturing engagements *from below*. What has been termed in literature 'as history' and 'heritage from below' is the outcome of theoretical thinking springing from an array of fields, including history and oral history, memory, heritage studies and archaeology, all driven from the principle of soliciting the voices of those obscured in the national drama (Frisch, 1990; Perks and Thomson, 2006).

The intensified interest on subjective encounters with the past is often associated with the 1980s postmodern and poststructuralist turns of multivocality broadening understandings of history and heritage (Gathercole and Lowenthal, 1994; Habu *et al.*, 2008). Under the globalizing narratives of the 1990s, these developments gained further prominence: the nation-state was no longer seen 'as the foremost container of identity' forwarding, thus, the recognition of ethnic, local and personal experiences within the heritage realm (Harvey 2008, 31). Deeper roots of these bottom-up-character traditions can be traced in the refashioning of social history trends in the 1960s and

1970s Britain (Rowbotham, 1973). Parallel to the growth of activist movements appealing for the recognition of rights of socially marginalized groups, Thompson's (1980 [1963]: 12) *Making of the English Working Class* sought to rescue the everyday life activities of working classes from the 'enormous condescension of posterity' and the elitist-driven concerns of the top-down history. Along these lines, the 1970s *History Workshop* focused its attention on day-to-day connections with the past arguing that 'what is seen and experienced in our everyday lives is as likely to be as significant in our understanding and creation of history as the readings of books and archives' (Kean *et al.*, 2000: 15). Condemning academic history work based on the unspoken assumption that 'knowledge filters downwards', Raphael Samuel (1994: 4), the leading figure of this people's history movement, called for a hybrid form of history rested on 'a social form of knowledge'. This 'different kind of enquiry' resided among others in personal collections; family albums; local lore; television; 'hidden curriculums'; autobiographies; and stories, legends and songs which a child might learn at a grandparent's knee (Samuel, 1994: 8-11).

Echoing the term 'history from below', Robertson (2008: 143-147) described 'heritage from below' as an egalitarian, resistant form of heritage memorializing *from within* the 'oppositional' practices, thoughts and meanings of those 'otherwise hidden from history'. Like history from below, heritage from below attends to the local, the urban, the ordinary and the mundane (Moran, 2004). Feminine, domestic and private settings transform into prominent *loci* of 'meeting' with the past within this crossover form of heritage movement treating social memory production as a fluid process, swirling around practices, performances and places of the everyday (Atkinson, 2008). In migrant homebuilding these intellectual theorizations manifest in routine material cultures carried through the journey. Invested with high sentimental value, these 'transitional objects' (Mehta and Belk, 1991) take the role of cultural-memory portmanteaux (Tolia-Kelly, 2004a; 2004b) in the new land prompting family histories, treasured moments, people and landscapes of past lives.

Expressing analogous democratic motives for a more inclusive sense of history and heritage, family history is considered a grassroots practice focusing on the private, domestic details of daily life (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2003: 4). Stories and sayings about the past shared between grandparents and grandchildren provide a sense of continuity and rootedness within the family explaining how the past has led to the present (Finnegan, 2006). The transmitters and guardians of such family tales do more than personal reminiscing; they actively reconfigure the families' identity, tradition and ethos in that elder family members pass on about the past what they think is important for their descendants to know about (Byng-Hall, 1990). For Halbwachs (1992 [1952]: 83) this 'common familial past' created and re-created in acts of storytelling constitutes the family's traditional armor drawn from society, becoming, nevertheless, distinct in that is 'pervaded by the family's peculiar experiences... to ensure

its cohesion and guarantee its continuity'. The site of the family itself can act as a focal point of reference for exploring, learning about, and engaging with the past (Ashton and Hamilton, 2003). In Rosenzweig and Thelen's (1998: 41-43) national survey of popular uses of the past within contemporary American living, family rituals and reunions suggested fertile grounds for members to relive and reinterpret the intimate past by recounting 'old times', bringing loved ones back, making connections with the present and being reminded of their origins.

The study: methodological and analytical framework

The data presented and discussed below come from preliminary fieldwork with two Albanian families in Athens over the course of three months. The study's methodological framework drew from the philosophical principles of critical ethnography acknowledging that social life is constructed in contexts of power and seeking to disturb the *status quo* by engaging with emancipatory practices for an egalitarian society (Thomas, 1993; Noblit *et al.*, 2004). Data derived from a collage of ethnographic and participatory methods. The application of archetypical forms of ethnographic research, such as participant observation and conversational interviews, were useful in grasping families' social and cultural meanings of identity and heritage occurring in everyday settings (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Participatory approaches sought to limit the dichotomy of 'objective' researcher/'subjective' researched for a dialogical relationship to develop between my theoretical knowledge and families' experiential knowledge (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 1998; van de Riet, 2008). Photo albums, children's drawings and material belongings in families' domestic settings prompted stories from life in-between Greece and Albania enabling members to become 'analysts, interpreters and social critics of themselves' (Freidenberg, 1998: 174; Young and Barrett, 2001; Gabb, 2008). To improve my understanding of children's worlds in specific I listened to their stories, played, and conducted 'walking interviews' with them offering rich perspective of the places they and their families inhabited (Clark and Moss, 2001: 28; Reynolds, 1989; James, 2001).

In total I had twenty-two meetings with the first family and fourteen with the second. I mobilized personal networks to gain access to both families, which was deemed appropriate given the fact that I was a member of the Greek ethnic group that has severely stigmatized participants' community for the last twenty years or more. In both cases it was my relationship with mothers and children that shaped the frequency of my visits lasting from four to eight hours each depending on individuals' agendas, work and school commitments. Mothers invited me over to take part in family rituals they considered relevant for my research and children often asked when '*I am coming next*' or '*sleeping over*'. Relationships of trust and rapport built up visit after visit with parents gradually introducing me to their social networks as 'a family friend' (Vetere and Gale, 1987).

Data gathering was conducted in the Greek language and was multi-sited (Fig. 2): beyond visiting families to



Fig. 2: Map of Attica Prefecture. Circles in orange indicate the families' locales and circle in yellow stands for the researcher's locale, while in fieldwork (www.web-greece.gr).

their domestic settings, I joined them in outdoor daily and leisure activities including kickboxing and dancing lessons; grocery, flea-market and gadget-shopping; theatre and museum visits; school festivities; walks in the neighbourhood; and visits to relatives' and friends' houses.

During each visit, I let the members of the family guide me through their daily routines and I willingly did what parents and children told me. I had lengthy conversations with the parents; I played and watched TV with children; I read books to them and helped them with schoolwork; I assisted at the preparation of meals and had dinner and lunch with both families. Visits took place in different days and times of the week enabling me to follow in their fullest extent families' trajectories in the private and public realms of Athens.

After each visit, I took field notes recording observations, thoughts and reflections on families' social lives. I transcribed audio-recorded interviews, whereas in my informal interviews with family members I kept notes. Notes of personal observations and interview transcripts were translated from Greek to English for analysis purposes. Taking photos of families' activities acted as a visual

log for putting together the bits and pieces of family visits at the end of the day.

I analysed data reflexively by contextualizing my positionality (Madison, 2005). This was accomplished by acknowledging how my personal biases and political position affected my role as an observer, and by considering how my membership within the dominant ethnic group and my presence as a researcher within families' intimate environments influenced families' narratives. In processing with analysis I employed grounded theory methods allowing 'an open-ended', dialogical 'back and fourth' interplay between data and ideas (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 159; Charmaz, 2005; 2006). Theory building emerged from coding; a dynamic process of breaking down raw blocks of data to delineate concepts; elaborate relationships among identified concepts; and integrate and subsume the latter into a coherent theoretical framework (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Codes of naming phenomena, or else 'in vivo codes' mainly emerged from the field (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lofland *et al.*, 2006). Throughout the coding process I kept memos recording thoughts, reflections and understandings of concepts extracted.

Family stories from the margins

In the following three sections I first introduce the two families and then tell their stories focusing on processes of identity formation and conceptualising heritage through connecting with Albania. For ethical issues, I replaced family members' real names with pseudonyms. I named families after their areas of residence in Athens.

Family 1- the Galatsi family story

The initial contact with the Galatsi family came quite unexpectedly while I was still in London preparing for fieldwork. The Albanian translator whom I hired from the Internet to have the project's ethic forms translated to Albanian gave me the head of the household's mobile number, who later turned to be his brother-in-law.

On my first visit to the family's house, the parents offered me vanilla ice cream. *'Eat your ice-cream before it gets cold!'* said Kostas, the father, recalling an Albanian joke. Back in 1992 Kostas was about to finish a sports college, when he left Albania *'to try [his] chances'* in Greece. A couple of years later, he returned to his home country to find a wife and fell in love with Adelina. They made the journey to Greece together with Kostas' sister and brother-in-law, one year before Adelina was due to complete high school. Kostas and Adelina, in their mid-and-late-thirties respectively, have two children, Zamira, eleven, and Skerdilaid, six. The family rents a one-bedroom flat in the district of Galatsi near the centre of Athens. Kostas does double shifts distributing flyers in the mornings and delivering pizzas in the evenings. Adelina is a poet, who used to work as a journalist for an Albanian newspaper circulated in Athens until a year ago, and currently works occasionally as an elderly carer. She spends most of the day at home taking care of the housework, helping children with schoolwork and making plans for the weekend, when they *'all do something together as a family'*: from attending children's book presentations, puppet shows and theatre performances to visiting museums or having picnics in Parnitha Mountain.

Family 2- the Neos Kosmos family story

'Mirela loves collecting flowers; each time we go out for a walk she picks up flowers' said Drita, the mother, in our first and usual walk together with her daughter to the local playground. I first met Drita with an Albanian friend of hers at my contact's house in the centre of Athens. The mother, currently in her early thirties, joined her almost fifty-year-old husband, Artan, to Athens after finishing high school. Back in Albania the father used to work as a digger. He came to Greece on foot with his brother-in-law in the early 1990s. The couple has two children: Plato, twelve, and Mirela, six. They live at a recently bought three-bedroom apartment in an old building at the Neos Kosmos district close to the centre of Athens. Artan works in constructions and has *'no day off'* as he often said in our discussions. In what is left of his spare time he meets up with friends in the local café, where Drita and Mirela usually join him later to have ice cream or a drink. Plato occasionally joins the family at the local café. He prefers playing football, videogames or going online to

chat with his friends. Drita works as a full-time housekeeper during weekdays and Saturday mornings. When at home, she catches up with housekeeping, where Mirela is happy to assist. In her spare time, Drita takes Mirela to the local playground or they pay visits at relatives' houses. This is more usual during the weekend, where the whole family exchanges house visits with friends and relatives in Athens.

Constructing identity and heritage here and there: families' practices of connecting with Albania

Both families, including their friends and relatives, employed various mechanisms of enacting symbolic and literal connections with the old homeland. These were multi-faceted occurring in cross-border links with Albania, activities and performances happening 'over there', at grandparents' villages and towns, but also in a range of material culture and daily rituals suggesting families' homemaking projects in Athens. In more detail, these connections took the form of: (a) ways of communication; (b) socialising with other Albanians; (c) contacts with Albania; (d) customs, traditions and value systems; (e) involvement in ethnic community associations; (f) demonstrations of ethnic identity; and (f) family histories.

Ways of communication: promotion and practice of the Albanian language

Perhaps one of the most established methods of connecting with the old homeland, in what seemed to be at first impression predominately Greek-speaking households, involves methods and ways of communication in Albanian. In migration literature ethnic language is considered among the key cultural tools employed in displacement to remember 'home' away from home (Isajiw, 1990; Kershen, 2006). In the context of families' daily communication patterns, the term 'practice' refers to locating participants' use of Albanian at home and public domains. I employed the term 'promotion' to describe sets of techniques and methods introduced by adults to improve children's ability in ethnic language.

Families' language choices, amalgamating Greek and Albanian in daily communication, promoted phenomena of 'double consciousness' in the diasporic realm (Gilroy 1993). Corroborating with results by Gogonas (2009; 2010), Chatzidaki (2005) and Maligkoudi (2009) children in both families showed a clear preference for speaking Greek with their siblings and Greek-born Albanian age-mates, while parents mainly spoke Albanian to each other. This is not to suggest that the second generation excluded Albanian from its communication with adults. Mirela occasionally mixed up Greek with Albanian in the same sentence. She also made use of Albanian terminology to refer to her grandparents in Albania (*'nena'* and *'gjysh'* for grandmother and grandfather respectively); her aunt from her mother's and father's side (*'tezja'* and *'halla'*); and her mother's Albanian female friends in Athens (*'teta'* for Mrs). The intentional use of such terminology presumably signified people with whom the six-year-old communicated in the ethnic language. The use of Albanian in parent-child talk appeared significantly less often than

Greek. Children communicated with their parents in both languages with the usage of Greek playing a substantial role in interfamilial conversations, almost turning into '*a family habit*' according to the mother of Neos Kosmos family. Similarly to Albanian parents' in Gogonas' study (2010), Drita regretted talking to her children more often in Greek than Albanian, but rationalized such choices on the fact that Greek consisted the dominant medium of communication in the family's school and work environments respectively.

Patterns of language usage in public domains unveiled notions of ethnic language stigmatization within a Greek context (Gogonas, 2009; 2010). Similarly to the private realm, adults mainly spoke Albanian to each other; children spoke exclusively Greek with their Greek-born Albanian age-mates; and parent-child communication balanced between both languages. However, Adelina admitted that until acquiring a regular status many Albanians avoided employing their mother tongue in public '*out of fear of being caught and deported by the police*'. Such feelings of self-consciousness seemed to have followed the families' friends and relatives' languages choices throughout their trajectories in Athens. For Adelina's friend it felt intimidating to address her toddler in Albanian in public, while Kostas' younger brother refused to be spoken in Albanian when enrolled at a Greek state school.

Parents, relatives and friends actively encouraged children's contacts with the ethnic language confirming the role of the wider family and 'ethnic enclaves' in initiating the second generation to bilingualism (Kershen, 2000; Isajiw, 2010). This was accomplished through a series of techniques including the teaching of Albanian; enrolling children to Albanian cultural clubs; inventing games of '*exclusive Albanian-talk* for one day; buying and reading to children Albanian fairytales and poems; and sending them to their grandparents in Albania. Mothers in both families were regarded as primary transmitters of the ethnic language (see also Al-Ali, 2002b; 2002c; Kershen, 2006). Adelina taught Zamira to read and write in Albanian by the time she was four years of age. The mother did not follow the same approach with her younger child out of fear of '*multi-language confusion*', she did, nonetheless, utilize an Albanian textbook to teach Skerdilaid Mathematics. Likewise, Drita employed reading material to familiarize her younger child with Albanian poems. The mother had taught both her children how to verbally communicate in Albanian, however her son's intermediate literacy skills in the ethnic language were the outcome of being enrolled at an Albanian cultural association in the vicinity of the family's house. Drita could not follow the same approach with her daughter, as the family moved neighbourhoods on the meantime. She many times expressed her anxiety over her daughter's poor level in written Albanian that she felt she could not improve within her daily heavy working and housework commitments.

Both mothers projected ethnic, or mother-language-prominence-motives, behind their transmission projects supported by findings of Chatzidaki (2005) and Milesi (2006). The fact that there were grandparents within both

families, who spoke no Greek, suggested an additional drive behind these practices, especially in Drita's case, where she found it '*unimaginable*' for children not to be able to conduct a conversation with their grandparents. The mother's comment denoting parents' responsibility of making sure that their offsprings are able to communicate with their grandparents can be understood in the wider context of the core value of the family institution within Albanian society, where the existing bonding between grandparents and grandchildren is regarded to be exceptionally strong (Hall 1994). As an old Albanian proverb has it, older people love their grandchildren more than they do their children: 'the sugar of the sugar is even sweeter' (King and Vullnetari, 2006: 80).

Children ought not to be perceived as passive receivers forced to practice Albanian by their parents. Zamira kept in touch with the ethnic language by reading books in Albanian. Accordingly, mothers in both families noted how quickly their offsprings caught up with the ethnic language as soon as they found themselves in exclusively Albanian-speaking milieus, such as these of their grandparents' villages and towns. Literature has affirmed the salience of visits to parental homeland in language transmission (Zinn, 2005; Borland, 2006), especially for extended periods, as in cases of families' children.

Socialising with other Albanians

Families' participation in personal networks, such as family and friendship, fostered connections with the 'old country'. Parents' social life primarily built around Albanian relatives, friends and neighbours coinciding with findings by Hatziprokopiou (2003) and Pratsinakis (2005). Unlike parents, children's friends were a mixture of Greek and second generation Albanians concurring with Gogonas' results (2010).

Common ethnic origin did not necessarily imply socialising: Drita did not trust her Albanian friend's husband to take her daughter out for a walk until she got to know him better. However, the idea of '*sharing similar experiences of exclusion as an Albanian migrant in a Greek context*' enacted Adelina's feelings of empathy and compassion toward the younger members of her ethnic community. The mother forced her daughter to encourage a newly arrived, and rarely invited by other children to their parties, Albanian classmate of hers to come to her birthday gathering.

Families' Albanian relatives and friends lived in most cases nearby, sometimes within walking distances or the same neighbourhood. This spatial proximity encouraged acts of exchanging help among participants and their relatives and friends strengthening solidarity ties and helping them to cope with everyday hardships. Similarly to results by Iosifides *et al.* (2007), these daily interpersonal contacts translated into (i) exchanging no longer needed stuff with each other including children's clothes, toys or kitchen appliances, (ii) baby-sitting their relative's children, (iii) lending each other money and (iv) offering assistance in health issues. For instance, when Adelina was stuck in bed due to severe back pain, Kostas' aunt dropped by on a daily basis to do the cooking and the housework.

Socialising mostly took place in private spaces with public spaces offering more popular options during the summer time. Family members paid visits to each other's houses; invited their friends and relatives for coffee, lunch or dinner; and relatives and friends dropped in after work to catch up with families. Children invited over their Greek-born Albanian friends to play at home. Other forms of socialising in private settings involved relatives or children staying over at the families' houses and vice versa. During school breaks or national holiday members of both families undertook trips in the Greek countryside, where they stayed over at Albanian friends or relatives' houses.

Public settings of socialising included: playgrounds, squares, churchyards, and in case of Neos Kosmos family, a nearby café. Families met up with friends or relatives at *tavernas*, restaurants and fast-food restaurants rather occasionally. These venues were employed for special occasions, such as celebrations of a child's birth, naming ceremonies, birthday gatherings and Albanian weddings. Men's employment of public spaces considerably more than women in the course of socialising unveiled 'distinct gender roles' within families (Lyberaki and Maroukis, 2005: 36).

Contacts with Albania

In multi-sited or multi-locational family forms retaining 'intimacy at distance' (Baldassar and Baldock, 2000: 67) becomes a source of identity and a fundamental *raison d'être*. The 'relational nature' of the transmigrant family (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002: 7) reproduces and transforms in 'circuits of affection' (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997) establishing solidarity ties and networks of mutual support spanning national borders. Like Levitt's (2001) *transnational villagers* and Viruell-Fuentes' (2006) Mexican women based in the US, Albanian families constructed social and cultural belonging in the new locale by maintaining continuous cross-border contacts with beloved persons 'left behind'. These took the form of repeated visits, regular contacts, exchanging gifts and photos and occasionally receiving family visitors from Albania (see also Al-Ali 2002a; 2002b; 2002c; Parreñas, 2005).

Trips to Albania took place during school holiday with summer time being the most popular period. There were cases in both families, where children spent the whole summer with their grandparents in Albania. Families either drove altogether to Albania, or sent the children to their grandparents by bus joined by members of the extended family. An integral part of the trip's preparations involved stuffing large bags with clothes and toys, which children no longer made use of, to be taken to young relatives in Albania.

By mid-June children of families' friends had left for Albania, and both families were sorting out the details of their or their children's trips to grandparents' locales. Mirela often expressed her enthusiasm of visiting parental homeland by asking her mother '*when are we visiting Shqipëria [Albanian for Albania]?*' Drita confirmed that normally by late June the family takes their daughter to

grandparents' village, but this year they had to delay their visit until August due to Artan's work commitments.

Even though family members did not state concrete reasons for making trips to Albania meeting up with family, and particularly grandparents, suggested key motives behind these visits. Participants divided their stay between their parents and parents-in-law catching up with neighbours, friends and extended family members. Kostas' sister joked that she '*barely got any rest*' when in her home country constantly finding herself in the kitchen preparing coffees, nibbles and meals for guests visiting over '*to hear their news from Greece*'. A substantial part of families' social itineraries involved attending life-cycle events, such as engagement ceremonies, weddings, funerals or celebrations of a child's birth. These family reunions, common in migration literature among temporary returnees (Fog-Olwig, 2002; Salih, 2003), reaffirmed individuals' notions of continuity and ethnic membership in the diasporic realm by establishing the existence of 'a distinct kin-based collective identity' grounded in kin connections and creations of new ties (Sutton, 2004: 253).

Similarly to Louie's (2006: 383) second generation Dominicans in New York City, home returns were a 'way to get to the culture' for the families' children. In the course of back-and-forth movements to Albania the younger generation was introduced to the home culture in the form of ethnic customs and grandparents and parents' lifestyles and environments of growing up.

Spending time with grandparents formed an integral part of children's daily realities in parental homeland. The younger participants gave detailed descriptions of the former's town or village houses and neighbourhoods, their professions and routine rituals, the food dishes they prepared for them, or recalled places they visited with them and people they met there. Grandparents' areas of residence shaped the nature of families' activities when in the home country. The small village in central Albania, where Drita and Artan's parents were based, encouraged engagements with rural-oriented activities including spending the day outdoors riding the bike and playing football, hide-and-seek and dodge ball with cousins; feeding grandparents' domestic animals; milking cows and assisting with the growing of fruits and vegetables (Fig. 3).

On the contrary, the urban landscape, prevailing grandparents' areas of residence within Galatsi family, instigated activities of taking strolls in the town centre during the evenings; visiting flea markets, historic buildings, sites and museums; or taking short trips to the countryside and staying over at relatives' village houses (Fig. 4).

Parents also sent children to Albania to introduce them to their ways of living and environments of growing up. Particularly in Neos Kosmos family these were utterly different to these of their children triggering parents' discontent. Artan often expressed his disapproval over his son's urban lifestyle in Athens, where most of the day is spent indoors in front of a PC. Accordingly, Drita added that her children '*do not climb up on the trees when in the home village*' as she and her husband used to do throughout their childhood there. The couple's strong emotional ties with



Fig. 3: Mirela's drawing depicting her parental home village in central Albania.



Fig. 4: Zamira's drawing depicting her aunt's village house in Albania.

their place of origin unfolded in practices of renovating their parents' village houses sustaining the myth of return (Salih, 2002; Buciek *et al.*, 2006). Artan is currently building up an extra floor in his parents' house to make room for his nephews and nieces to stay over when visiting from Athens.

Within Galatsi family friends pinpointed the cultural aspects of the children's trips to parental homeland; *'it is through these visits'* as they said, that their little ones *'will*



Fig. 5: One of the numerous hand-knitted cardigans sent for Mirela by her grandmother from Albania.

get to know the Albanian customs and traditions'. Indeed, there were cases within both families where children familiarized themselves with facets of the ethnic culture by practicing wedding customs, such as that of young males placing money in the bride's shoe to bear sons. Likewise, Mirela recounted moments of being a bridesmaid in her uncle's Albanian wedding followed by a grand feast of Albanian folk music.

Apart from travelling to Albania, families affirmed affiliations to their places of origin mainly through telephone calls and online communications as well as by receiving visits from grandparents and extended family members in their new locales. The latter primarily took place during national holiday or the summer, where work and school commitments were relatively loose. Lastly, family members enforced *'their personal relationship'* with the old homeland (Iosifides *et al.* 2007, 1351) through the exchange of gifts: parents posted children's photos to grandparents in Albania, and grandmothers sent gifts, such as hand-knitted cardigans and slippers, to their grandchildren in the migration destination (Fig. 5).

Customs, traditions and value systems

In the diasporical realm, where territory is *'decentred'* into multiple settings (Gilroy 1994, 204), imagining, creating, remembering and re-constructing *'home'* suggests adherence to transportable cultural ideas, traditions, customs and values of *'another time and another space'* marking a sense of collective heritage among émigrés (Hage, 1997: 106; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002; Ahmed *et al.*, 2003; Burell, 2004). In families' lived experiences these imaginative returns to the country of origin took the form of handing down to children the *'World Cup tradition'*; school and naming ceremony customs; and values, which parents were brought up with.

Parents passed down to children the passion for the World Cup associated with the sport's broad appeal within Albanian society; *'where there was a child, there was always a football (ball) around'* told Adelina. Indeed, Kostas confirmed that the Mundial *'was a big thing in Albania'* dominating peoples' discussions. Both families, including their younger members, religiously followed the World Cup

season, a habit tracing its origins in parents' childhood. *'I have been watching the Mundial for as long as I can remember myself'* claimed Adelina, while Drita linked her preference to the national team of Holland to early memories of following the team together with her father back in the village.

The observance of ethnic customs within Galatsi family unveiled in the conduct of naming ceremonies and acts of children taking flowers to their schoolteachers. The formalistic, ritualistic quality of these practices ensured a sense of simultaneity to be felt with fellow members of the imagined community (Anderson 1981; Burrell, 2006). By the time Zamira and Skerdilaid reached one year of age, Kostas' brother and Adelina's best friend took the role of "godparents", or what is known in Albanian as 'hair kumbara' (*kumbarë flokësh*), naming children and giving them their first symbolic haircuts (Elsie, 2001: 106). The family celebrated children's naming ceremonies by having a feast with relatives and friends at a local *taverna* followed by the exchange of gifts between children and godparents. At times this physical performance of customs popular in Albanian folk culture, yet uncommon in a Greek society context, created feelings of uneasiness and self-consciousness among children. When Zamira felt stigmatized for not being christened, and therefore not being able to receive communion at the local Orthodox Church as part of a school visit, Adelina explained to her that being named this way *'is part of our life; that's the way our life is'*. None of the parents have been christened either.

The Albanian custom of bringing flowers to teachers on the first day of school year consisted, according to Adelina, a form of paying respect and tribute to these highly educated, sophisticated persons within Albanian society. Across the family's photo albums, there were photos of Skerdilaid and Zamira holding bouquets or flowerpots to be offered to their teachers in Athens. *'It was a big thing to become a teacher in Albania'* Adelina highlighted explaining that the Teacher's Day was a national holiday back in the old homeland commemorating the opening of the first secular school teaching Albanian in 1887. Practices of expressing reverence to schoolteachers can be understood in the wider context of education gaining higher prominence within Enver Hoxha's communist regime, viewing the former as a tool for modernization, national unity and the construction of the new socialist Albania (Pano, 1992; Vickers, 1999; Fischer, 2007).

Parents inculcated to their children values acquired during their upbringings in Albania, such as these of females trained to be *'good housewives'* as Mirela spelled out while playing dolls with me. Adelina confirmed that girls in Albania became familiar with the household routine, including cooking, from a young age. Both mothers made sure that their daughters contributed in housekeeping tidying up their rooms, setting up the table, or assisting with the preparation of meals. In Galatsi family these tasks were not confined to the daughter's task-domain, but expanded to this of their son, suggesting patterns of ethnic identity rupture in dislocation. Mothers' practices of preparing their female offsprings to become *'good housewives'*

reflected patriarchal norms and values tracing their roots in Kanun³ culture, where a woman's purpose in the world is to marry, bear children and work in the house (Hall, 1994; Post, 1998; Young, 2000).

Other ethnic values pertaining families' lives in the new locale, suggested this of sons taking care of their parents. As Drita explained *'in Albania it is the son, especially the youngest, taking care of his parents when they grow old'*. Being the only son in his family, Artan was fully responsible for covering the cost and sorting out the details of his father leg operation back in homeland. Throughout my field visits, the grandfather's leg operation regularly returned in my dinner discussions with Artan unveiling his angst and worry of dealing with such matters from distance. The father's undertaking of transnational care-work (Parreñas, 2001; Aranda 2003), can be associated with the patriarchally controlled family remaining a fundamental social institution across Albania despite its long transformation from pre-to-post-communism and dismemberment occurring within large-scale migration (King and Vullnetari, 2006). King and Vullnetari (2006) assert that the act of caring for one's parents remains highly honourable in Albanian society sustaining practices of middle-aged and elderly parents living with one of their sons, who is referred to as 'the son of old age' (*djali i pleqërisë*) and whose role is to look after their parents in their later years.

Lastly, within Galatsi family parents instilled to their children values of *'wives following their husbands to their place of residence'*. Both mothers followed that path by leaving their natal houses to join their husbands in the migration destination. Both males had returned to homeland to select a wife, a common practice among Albanian men in Greece based on Drita's claims. Zamira showed her open/direct approval of such values by empathizing with her grandmother's discontent of her only son following his wife to Italy. Responding to her aunt's comment that these are *'old fashioned values'*, the child underlined that *'it is women who follow their husbands and not the other way round!'* bringing her mother as an example. Perceptions of *'wives belonging to their husbands' households'* as Adelina referred to the phenomenon of females joining males in their areas of residence can be interpreted in the context of patriarchy and patrilocality codified in the rules of Kanun and remaining prevalent within contemporary Albanian society, especially in the northern parts (Young, 2000; Saltmarshe, 2001). Patriarchy ensures that society is male dominated and patrilocality that upon their marriage women leave their parents' houses to move into these of their husbands' families.

Involvement in ethnic community associations

Participation in ethnic associations such as clubs, societies or youth organisations, as well as functions by ethnic organizations such as concerts, public lectures and dances is considered among the most common transnational activities émigrés engage with to retain elements of ethnic identity outside their countries of origin (Isajiw, 1990; Al-Ali 2002c). Both families reproduced ethnic belonging in the new country by coming in contact with



Fig. 6: Scanderbeg's souvenir bust on display in the living room of Galatsi family.



Fig. 7: Scanderbeg's souvenir bust on display in the flat of the grandmother of the Galatsi family.

cultural aspects of the Albanian community in Athens. Drita enrolled Plato to an ethnic association at the vicinity of the family's house, where apart from improving his literacy skills in the ethnic language, the eleven-year-old became acquainted with Albania's national history, folk songs and dances. Adelina's work experience in the Albanian newspaper and membership to an Albanian writers' club established in Athens introduced the family into a series of ethnic community events including poetry nights, literature competitions, theatrical performances, film festivals and group exhibitions. Being a poet herself, Adelina was personally involved in the setting up of many of these initiatives. Following her mother's steps, Zamira edited the children's column in the Albanian newspaper her mother worked for, and had also won the first prize in a children's competition of reciting Albanian poems. Families' activities contradict literature findings according to which Albanians' interactions with ethnic associations remains limited partly due to prevalent beliefs within the community that these institutions are ineffective in representing their needs (Iosifides *et al.*, 2007) and partly due to Albanians' perceptions of furthering one's distance from the Greek community, and consequently, delaying one's process of integration (Michail, 2009), when participating in ethnic manifestations.⁴

Demonstrations of ethnic identity

For an 'ethno-national' identity to endure and survive the displacements of migration 'a strong sense of personal identification with the nation has to be present' in the new destination, 'where any flagging' of the homeland is likely to be non-existent or confined to migrant circles that are not always easily accessible' (Burell, 2006: 66). In the context of Albanian families' here and there trajectories, the old homeland was memorialized and re-enacted in demonstrating ethnic identity through displaying material culture and practices of (i) naming children after heroes of Albanian mythology; (ii) claiming Albanian origins in performances and discourses of the everyday; and (iii) commemorating Albanian national anniversaries in Athens.

Souvenir replicas of Scanderbeg's⁵ bust in miniature or bigger sizes, and with some versions with the Albanian flag attached on the back, marked processes of Albanian-home-making in the migration destination transforming families' intimate settings into forums of national space. 'From here on [referring to the entrance of her flat] it's Albania! See?' declared a female friend of the Galatsi family, while pointing her finger toward Scanderbeg's miniature bust on display in her living room. Likewise, the medieval hero's replica-bust in the flat of Galatsi family prompted family talk exalting Albania's resistance against the Ottoman Empire, acting as a source of national pride among displaced family members and fostering a sense of collective identity and consciousness (Turan, 2010) (Fig. 6).

Adelina's mother, who had the hero's souvenir bust placed on prominent position in her living room like her daughter, almost sneveled when recalling and sharing with me verses of a national poem written for Scanderbeg (Fig. 7).

Both the grandmother and her daughter's family talked about visiting the hero's memorial in the city of Lezhë in northwest Albania. Other items reflecting ethnic and cultural ties with the old homeland involved an Albanian map, a small Albanian flag hanging on the wall in the children's room, and the father's *qeleshe*, a traditional Albanian woolen cream skullcap representing 'his fatherland' as he said.

At the Neos Kosmos family's flat a decorative cross-stitched fabric in glass and wooden frame featuring 'welcome' in Albanian fostered the family's ethnic belonging in the new environment (Fig. 8).

Placed on the sideboard opposite to the flat's main entrance, the object served as a medium of communication between family members and their co-ethnic visitors. According to Drita, the item formed part of gifts given out to students, including her son, taking classes in the Albanian cultural association close to the family's previous flat.

Giving children '*ancient Albanian names, instead of imported ones*' revealed intentions of reconnecting with Albanian origins in the Galatsi family. Naming children after heroes of Albanian mythology or ancient history, as was the case with the family's younger child, suggested a long-held '*patriotic*' tradition within Adelina's family. Indeed, Albanian mythology acted as a pivotal source of inspiration for the mother, who talked about reading books and writing poems on this subject, as well as narrating ancient Albanian myths to her daughter when she was a toddler.

For the families' younger generations, the re-discovery, remembrance and commemoration of ethnic origins (Gilroy, 1994; Fortier, 2000) took shape in discourses of the everyday and performances of belonging in public spaces. After sharing with Skerdilaid that I originally come from Greece, but London has been my temporary residence for the last three years, the six-year old claimed that he comes '*from two countries: Greece and Albania respectively*'. In a different incident, where his mother supported that his grandmother spoke better Albanian than he did, because she came from Albania, Skerdilaid replied to her with anger: '*Why? Where do you think I come from? I am from Albania!*' Similarly, Mirela confessed during one of our walks in the neighbourhood that her brother's best friend originated from Albania, as '*we [Mirela and her family] do*'. Performances of Albanian belonging disclosed in practices of Zamira joining her Greek classmates to the commemoration of the 25th of March Greek national anniversary⁶ dressed in an Albanian folk costume sent by her grandfather from Albania. '*You have Albanian origins. It's like going to a party; you would not go to a party wearing the same dress with the hostess, you'd wear your own dress*' Adelina told Zamira to convince her to show up at the school festivity wearing the Albanian costume. While narrating the incident, Adelina explained that Greece and Albania share common histories in their resistance against the Ottoman Empire and therefore her daughter's Albanian costume would not appear as an offending symbol to Greece's national holiday.



Fig. 8: Decorative cross-stitched fabric featuring 'welcome' in Albanian in the flat of Neos Kosmos family.

To commemorate the Albanian national anniversaries of the 28th and 29th of November, celebrating the establishment of the Albanian state and the withdrawal of German and Italian troops from Albania in the end of WWII respectively, Adelina had taken a photo of Zamira as a toddler sitting next to the map of Albania and holding the Albanian flag. Channeling the family's ethnic imagination outside the old country, the photo formed part of a handcrafted calendar prepared by Adelina and sent to her father and parents-in-law in Albania, affirming the 'worshipping' of the old nation in the transnational realm (Gellner, 1983; Burell, 2006).

Family histories

In the process of uprooting and re-rooting, family histories play a critical role in the creation of intimate spaces (Chamberlain and Leydesdorff 2004, 233). Identity, history and heritage are inscribed in family stories and narratives of past lives that parents share with their children in new home settings shaping the former's acceptances of 'parental homeland imaginaries' (Louie, 2006: 379). In Albanian families' intimate realms, the recollection of these personal biographies evoking 'a sense of continuity and familiarity inherent in the notion of home' (Walsh, 2006: 130) was tied up with 'home possessions' (Miller, 2001) carried through the journey and embodied practices of the everyday.

Photos of beloved persons or ancestors, heirlooms and personal belongings acted as touchstones of personal and family histories re-connecting individuals with kin 'left behind' and unveiling cultural identity themes prevalent within families. The old photo of Kostas' grandmother placed '*out of respect*' on prominent display in the family's living room created nostalgic responses from upbringing in Albania. The grandmother represented '*the strongest emotional bond*' that Kostas '*ever had with a human being in [his] life*' as he admitted. Kostas told of not being able to meet his grandmother as often as he wished, of her distinctive smell he could still bring back to his memory, and the generous pocket money she gave him from her low pension each time they met. Likewise, the yellowish black

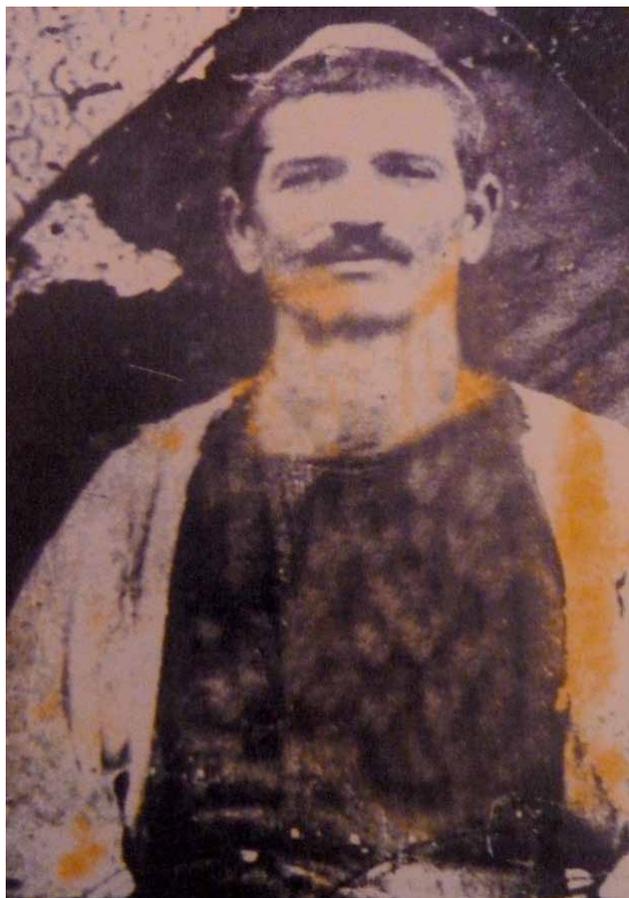


Fig. 9: Photo of Drita's great-great grandfather.



Fig. 10: Adelina's hand-knitted tablecloth from her mother in Albania.

and white photo of Drita's great-great grandfather on display in the family's flat manifested the mother's tangible claims for roots. Emitting accounts of 'tribes and families' from the place of origin handed down from parents to children, the treasured photo provided a sense of rootedness within the family sustaining its cultural memory (Turan, 2010: 44) (Fig. 9).

Drita took pride of her great-great grandfather's achievements while sharing with her daughter and me stories told by her father. She told of her ancestor, whom she never met, that he was famous for his archery skills, and

that each time he and his fellow farmers took their sheep out in the fields to have them fed, '*he could catch birds on the sky with his arch*'.

Keepsakes and material belongings in the domestic sphere of Galatsi family, carried through the journey or created in Athens employing skills acquired in Albania, helped displaced individuals to shelter and nurture 'facilitating environments' (Turan 2010) easing identity transition from one place to another by providing a sense of security and comfort (Parkin, 1999; Turan, 2004). Triggering the telling and re-telling of personal and family narratives, these vernacular artefacts captured members' identities operating as symbols of these identities (Pahl, 2004). Zamira associated '*her love of old books*' to her grandfather's old stamp book brought from Albania. The actual '*dusty old book*' displaying around '*500 stamps on each page*' no longer existed according to the child, yet the family has preserved the habit of collecting stamps. The grandfather's treasured collection dating back in the 1940s has been enriched with more recent additions.

Hand-knitted tablecloths passed down from parents to children as part of their dowry revived family histories uncovering the Galatsi family's connection with fabric techniques (Fig. 10).

Adelina commented about her mother's tablecloth that '*back then there were no such things available in Albanian stores and people had to make these on their own*'. Fabric producing techniques, such as these of knitting, weaving or sewing, was a dominant cultural identity theme within the family originating both from the mother's and the father's side. Adelina's mother learned how to weave from her mother back in Albania. Noticing a big loom exhibited in the Benaki Museum of Athens during one of my visits with the family, the grandmother of Galtasi family told me that '*this is [referring to the loom] where we used to weave carpets with my grandmother*'. Adelina regretted not being able to knit that well as her mother and grandmother; the latter did it so naturally that she made it look very easy. Zamira learned how to sew from her grandmother (from her father's side) in Albania. Her grandfather worked as a tailor in Albania and her grandmother used one of his sewing machines to teach her how to sew. By the time I started visiting the family's house, Zamira was finishing her first cross-stitch for her grandmother in Athens. She admitted '*it was not easy to make*' (Fig. 11).

The physical participation in routine activities and practices such as this of making pastry, enacted autobiographical remembering within Galatsi family, bringing to life childhood moments of the everyday and the more special (Anderson, 2004; Blunt, 2003). Making pastry had a long tradition within the family passed down from grandmothers to granddaughters. Adelina's mother recounted old times spent in her grandmother's village, where she learned to make dough, and collect herbs from the mountains to make pies for the family's males to take them in the fields. Following her mother's example, Adelina continued such traditions in the migration destination preparing herb and spinach pies for her family (Fig. 12).

For the mother of Galatsi family, dough making elicited memories of women from the same neighbourhood gathering at each other's houses before the New Year's Day to prepare baklava desert. Adelina recalled her mother keeping her and her brother out of the house throughout the desert's preparation, which required covering the house with bed sheets to put on the filo pastry to dry up, and become crunchy when baked. On New Year's Day relatives, friends, and neighbours exchanged visits to each other houses, offering delicacies to each other, among which the baklava desert. The success (or failure) of the latter was a common theme in housewives' gossiping circles '*competing*' for the crunchiest and thinnest pastry layers of baklava desert.

Concluding thoughts

This paper captured Albanian families' identity building and heritage encounters at the meeting points of new and old homelands, Greece and Albania respectively. I treated such processes from the perspective of symbolically/metaphorically and literally connecting with Albania manifested in cross-border ties with family 'left-behind' and a range of routine material culture and everyday rituals consolidating families' homing projects in Athens.

Following Ahmed *et al.* (2009: 3), Hage (2010) and Al-Ali and Koser (2002), my interpretations supported that Albanian families' creation of home space in the new habitat crystallised in reprocessing and reclaiming its 'affective qualities': treasured customs, values, traditions, histories and rituals uprooted in migration. Family heirlooms, keepsakes, personal belongings of material and visual nature carried from Albania, in combination with day-to-day rituals and practices of introducing children to ethnic traditions, facilitated families' homing processes in what was perceived as a '*hostile*' environment in the new habitat. These tangible and intangible 'reminders of home' (Burrell 2008) transformed families' ordinary and mundane private settings into active sites of memory work and focal *loci* of connecting with the intimate past. Drita's photo of her great-great grandfather, Adelina's hand-knitted tablecloth, and Zamira's collection of stamps handed to her by her grandfather along with performances of the everyday, such as these of opening dough, cross-stitching, or watching the World Cup embodied aspects of families' biographies reasserting the 'dualistic qualities' of home, formulated in the present and through family history (Tolia-Kelly, 2004a: 324). At the heart of this transitional journey, acts of sharing ethnic values between older and younger generations, such as these of *women following their husbands to their places of residence* and '*being attentive and good housewives*' reproduced in families' storytelling, re-constructing its traditional armor (Halbwachs, 1992 [1952]) and solidifying its ethos in new lands (Finnegan 2006).

In constructing identity and heritage, parents and grandparents became mediators to children's acquaintances with facets of the ethnic culture. Older family members in Greece and Albania communicated the Greek-born offsprings meanings and values attached to objects, habits



Fig. 11: Zamira's first cross-stitch on display in her grandmother's living room in Athens.



Fig. 12: Adelina's herb pie with hand-made pastry pie dough.

and rituals, bound up to the creation of home space in Athens (Espiritu and Tran, 2002). Parents initiated children to aspects of Albanian culture by passing on the ethnic language; enrolling them in community centres or encouraging their participation in community events (Al-Ali, 2002c); and sending them to their grandparents' places in Albania. Concurring with Louie (2006), the trip to parental homeland was regarded as one of the most efficient ways of improving children's skills in the ethnic language (see also Zinn, 2005; Gogonas, 2010), and bringing them in contact with Albanian customs, traditions, environments and ways of growing up. In the more private realms of domestic settings, Albanian maps, flags, replica busts of national heroes, and folk costumes 'flagging' (Bilgic 1995) the '*fatherland*' introduced children to the old homeland's nation-making symbols, exposing grandparents and parents' desires for ethnic belonging.

Families' identity and heritage trajectories spanned national borders embracing the realm of transnational. Cross-border ties with Albania in the form of regular contacts, repeated visits, exchange of gifts (Levitt, 2001) and

care-work practices, as well as parents' acts of renovating houses in the native region, suggested projects of 'becoming transnational' (Al-Ali 2002a: 116). Active participation in ceremonies conducted in the emotional invested places of hometowns-and-villages, or these of the new locale, made statements of families' on-going membership to the community of origin establishing notions of 'bi-focality' (Vertovec 2004) and 'double belongings' (Salih 2002: 52). These cherished social gatherings and reunions enacting feelings of individual and collective pride among dispersed family members (Barrow, 1996; Reynolds, 2006) were captured in visual traces of the private space. The photo of Mirela as a bridesmaid in her uncle's village wedding in Albania was on prominent display in the family's living room 'kindling the pleasures and the pains of intimacy' at distance (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998: 41).

In describing Serbian diaspora's perceptions of heritage in Denmark, Buciek and Juul (2008: 115) called for its *polyspatial* form embracing the 'monuments of distance': not simply the material objects embodying the migration journey, but the actual cross-travelling between the migration destination and the home country. Drawing from this approach and taking it a step further, in this paper I argued for a broadened democratized perception of heritage emerging *from below* both here and there, at the crossroads of new and old home locales, where plurilocal identities emerge.

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Notes

- 1 I have borrowed the concept of the 'old country' signifying the second-generation's parental homeland from Louie (2006). Throughout the paper, terms such as 'old' and parental country, home and homeland are employed to denote Albania, while these of 'new' home, homeland, locale and surroundings refer to Greece.
- 2 For an alternative view deconstructing Albanian migrant females' dependency on their families in terms of basic needs (such as accommodation) and access to social rights in a Greek context see Vaiou and Stratigaki (2008).
- 3 The Kanun concerns a set of ancient customary laws, unwritten until 1933, having governed for centuries all aspects of social, political and economic life in mountain Albania (Young, 2000).
- 4 For a more extensive analysis on Albanian migrants' scarce interest in developing a broader-scale social capital 'bonding' in the form of generalized ethnic solidarity see Mai (2005) and King and Mai (2009).
- 5 George Castriot Scanderbeg (1405-1468) is an Albanian national hero born to the noble Kastrioti family

in Northern Albania and captured as a hostage at the court of Sultan Murad II. In 1443 Scanderbeg left the Ottoman army to defend Albania against the Ottoman Empire as a local ruler of Krujë district.

- 6 Greece's 25th of March national anniversary commemorates the outbreak of the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman rule.

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