

*The New Albanian Migration*

Edited by Russell King, Nicola Mai and Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers  
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reviewed by Theodore P. Lianos\*

This book consists of nine papers that were presented at an International Conference on Albanian Migration held at the University of Sussex in September 2002.

The titles of the papers contained in this volume show the wide range of issues presented and analysed. In order of appearance the titles are as follows:

1. Introducing and Theorising Albanian Migration, by K. Marjaba and R. King.
2. Lifestyles and Integration of Albanian Women in Bologna: Two steps forward, one step back?, by Ellen Kelly.
3. Examining Policy Responses to Immigration in the Light of Interstate Relations and Foreign Policy Objectives: Greece and Albania, by Gerasimos Konidaris.
4. The Albanian Migration Cycle: Migrants tend to Return to their country of origin after all, by L. Labrianidis and P. Hatziprokopiou.
5. Albanian Migrants' Remittances: A development opportunity? By Flavia Piperno.
6. Albanian High-Skilled Migrant Women in the US: The Ignored Experience, by Aida Orgocka
7. "Greece belongs to Greeks!" The Case of the Greek Flag in the hands of an Albanian student, by G. Kapllani and N. Mai.
8. Better than Muslims, not as Good as Greeks: Emigration as experienced and imagined by the Albanian Christians of Lunxheri, by G. de Rapper.
9. The uses of origin: Migration, Power-Struggle and Memory in Southern Albania, by G. Kretsi.

As is obvious from the titles just presented, a considerable variety of issues are examined in the papers contained in this volume. What seems to be missing is the economic side of migration. The two papers by Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou, and by Piperno are close to, but not at the heart of economic analysis of migration. Actually, the paper by Piperno is more about the Albanian and Italian banking system than about Albanian migration.

\*Department of Economics, Athens University of Economics and Business, Athens, Greece

To the reader who is trained in economics, there are several aspects of the analyses presented that raise questions. One question is the research methodology followed by some authors. For example, the paper by Ellen Kelly on "Lifestyle and Integration of Albanian women in Bologna" is based on interviews with seventeen (17) Albanian women living in Bologna, and the paper by Aida Orgocka on "Albanian High-Skilled migrant women in the USA" is based on twenty (20) interviewees. Both of these papers have merits but the question is to what extent can serious consideration be given to conclusions derived from seventeen or twenty observations. There are, of course, areas of research where even one single observation may be sufficient to destroy or support a theory, as for example in archaeological research. However, migration analysis in all its aspects requires very large samples.

Another question has to do with the easiness with which opinions and untested theories are used to develop unfounded arguments that are also expressions of opinion. I am referring to the paper by Kapllani and Mai which has very limited claims to be regarded as scientific research because it contains mainly opinions and value judgments. The following paragraph is a good example:

"Behind the violence with which Albanian migrants have been criminalised and stigmatised by Greek media one can trace the resurgence of discourses and categories of exclusion, marginalisation and racialisation which were partially internalised as a residue of Greeks' own past experience of migration, exploitation and hardship. In other words, because of their physiognomic and cultural proximity, Albanians reminded Greeks of their own near-past of poverty, social unrest, authoritarianism and emigration. In this respect, 'Albanophobia' can be seen as the by-product of the anxiety generated by the fear of having to regress culturally, socially and economically, according to a racialised, or rather, Balkanised, hierarchy of civilisation."

The best paper is, by far, the introductory essay by K. Barjaba and R. King. The authors' attempt to theorise Albanian migration is given below in their own words.

"To some extent these social changes reflected a wider ontological conflict between two competing cultural formations which framed the multiple relationships between political ideologies, models of lifestyle and behavior, and migratory dynamics across the post-communist transformation. These complex interrelationships between politics, culture and society provide another layer of understanding in our attempt to explain the particular nature of Albanian migration.

This line of theoretical analysis starts with Artan Fuga's (1998: 28) identification of two cognitive worlds which have consistently confronted each other during this period of extraordinary change in Albania:

- a *homogenous* world, producing an ontologically secure social and moral order based on denial of difference and legitimization of authoritarian power; and
- a *heterogeneous* world, which constructs a mixed social environment by accepting difference and acknowledging it as a constitutive and non-threatening part of everyday life, expressed in democracy and freedom of thought and action.

Before the demise of the communist state, the former was represented by the authoritarian rule of Enver Hoxha and, after his death, by the legacy of his regime; whereas before 1990 the latter was either excluded or infiltrated clandestinely via foreign influences, above all Italian television...

These conflicting and contradictory cognitive and moral systems create confusion and unrest throughout Albanian society, including amongst migrants and potential migrants, and give rise to a complex differentiation of migration types. In the first years of post-communist emigration, those seduced by the capitalist Utopia portrayed by glitzy Italian television wanted to emigrate not just to escape poverty and taste the hitherto forbidden fruits of the tantalisingly 'near-West', but as a gesture of political protest against the old regime which had denied them so much in terms of material goods, freedom of movement and political rights. They were, in a sense, both political and economic refugees. But different cultural formations also divide the present-day population of Albania. On the one hand the educated elites from the main urban centres, with their skills in languages and their cosmopolitan outlook, have been able to adapt to the needs and opportunities offered by the neo-liberal economy; and when migrating they have generally been able to construct a more successful and efficient migratory project."

Since the collapse of the communist regimes and the huge flows of migration from the ex-communist countries, the migration literature related to these countries' experience has been growing rapidly. The present volume is a very welcome addition to this literature and provides extensive and substantial information and insights into the nature of recent Albanian migration.