

Sidste Nyt fra Albanien, Kosóva og Makedonien

Serbien og Montenegro

The Latest News from Albania, Kosóva and Macedonia

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The old Peloponnes' Railway Station in Athens. A common meeting place for Albanians. Photo: Andreas Roepke, 2005

Albanian immigrants in Athens

Power relations and health

A review of Anna Mousouli's book

The relations between Albania and Greece, Albanians and Greeks are complex

The relations between Albania and Greece, Albanians and Greeks are complex, maybe complicated and dubious; some relations are good, some really bad - some are between people who respect each other, but generally the relations are unequal, the Greek consider the Albanians as »underdogs«. {1}

An anthropologist on a friendly visit

Recently Anna Mousouli, a young Greek anthropologist, has made an interesting study about Albanian immigrants in Athens, - more precisely about how they are treated by physicians and other medical staff.

The author presents valuable information - not only about the specific subject in itself, but about the *set-up*. She is quite frankly about her own position as a friendly anthropologist - from the »patron-culture« - visiting the Albanian subculture.

To make her field study Anna Mousouli had to be introduced to the Albanians by one of them, nevertheless the Albanians were more or less reluctant towards her. They all took her for a stranger and maybe for a strange person. *What could her intentions be?*, they thought - and some of them put the question to herself.

Some of the Albanians suspected her being related to the police or other Greek authorities, some of them took her visit to the Albanians as a single event: She was doing something *trendy* and would disappear quickly afterwards never to return, they imagined. Generally, the Albanians were polite to her, but not all of them wanted to be interviewed.

By the way, Anna Mousouli had no need for an interpreter or a companion (as I have understood it), since all the Albanians spoke Greek, many of them excellently.

There are disadvantages with the *set-up*, since there is an obvious gap between the researched and the researcher. Maybe a team of a male and a female Albanian sociologist could have reached far deeper in the interviewing? Probably, they could have collected more interviews, they could have made *observations*, they could have understood the »hidden« and the silent language much better etc. Last not least they would not have been taken as Greek spies. This is not - in any sense - meant to be a criticism of Anna Mousouli. First of all, she has to be commended for her initiative and diligent work. Secondly, she has a major advantage, since she is familiar with the »patron culture«.

The public and the private language

One of the observations is very important, even not exactly a new one. The researched master at least two languages, a public one and a private - and may be hidden - one {2}; when Anna Mousouli made her interviews, the Albanians all spoke the public - and Greek - language; one of them understressed the language-problem by saying that he did not care whether she was a police informant or something else.

Even when the researched are speaking public language, it can be useful to interview them, but often it is more preferable to combine participant observation with interviewing, I imagine.

The findings

Since the field study only lasted for about six weeks and the number of interviewed persons is limited (actually only 20 were interviewed), we have to take the findings with some care. Nevertheless, they seem to be unambiguous:

- The Albanians belong to a lower caste or class than the Greek. Both objectively and according to common Greek.
- Medical staff disliked Albanians and considered them causing problems. »*[The Albanians] are characterized as overdemanding, ungrateful and suspicious towards the medical personnel. Sometimes they are compared to animals*«, Mousouli writes.
- The Albanians are often considered criminals. To Anna Mousouli some Albanians may be criminals, but not more than the Greek themselves; to her opinion the criminal activity has been over-exaggerated by the media (and the authorities?).
- The Albanians considered themselves to be in an exposed position. Therefore they decided to lie low and not to act in a provocative way against policemen, civil servants etc. Some Albanians even idealized and palliated troublesome experiences with the Greek health care system.

To stand silent

Many of the Albanians - being asked about experiences with the health system - answered that they did not have any experience themselves, since they and their family were healthy. It is not to know whether they answered in this way because they would not like to be interviewed, whether they would not risk to be exposed - or whether they actually did not have any experience. Most likely, many of them considered it would be the most clever thing to do to stand silent.

When the Albanians objectively were in need for medical care, some of them postponed or gave up to visit a physician, either of economic reasons or because they had bad experiences with the health system.

Additional money

In Greece medical care is commonly paid for by an insurance company, and most of the Albanians (being interviewed) had taken out a proper insurance {3}, nevertheless the Albanians generally paid the physicians some more money in addition. They imagined - probably correctly - that the treatment would be better then. To the author the payment of additional money also

tilted the scales between the medical staff-person and the Albanian in the favour of the latter - the staff and the Albanian became more equal {4}.

Since the *raison-d'être* of most Albanians in Greece is to work for an employer they have to be productive every day. Every loss-in-work could turn out to be highly critical, especially for those being employed in the big informal economy {5}.

Patrons and clients

Some Albanians have found a *patron*, in Greek an *affentiko*, who at some time had assisted them to be formally assimilated in the Greek community; often a Mediterranean *patron-client-relationship* has been the foundation of such an assimilation. Many of the patrons were Greek, but some of them - I imagine - might have been Greek with Albanian ancestors. Even when an Albanian family was not 'patronized', it often assimilated their children voluntarily - for example by letting them being baptized in the Greek Orthodox Church. The reason is obvious, the family has had no intention of returning to Albania and wanted to secure itself as much as possible.

The Greek policy is harsh and ambiguous

The Greek policy against the Albanian immigrants has been tough since the breakdown of the Hoxha-regime in Albania, but there have been ups and downs. On the one hand the Governments have been well aware of the micro- and macro-economic advantage of the big influx of underpaid workers, on the other the immigration have raised a lot of social and political problems. Economically spoken, the existence of a big - and maybe even growing - informal sector has made it difficult for the »white« companies to compete on the free market.

Since 1991 the Greek governments have acted ambiguously, mostly they have oppressed the Albanians.

- Authorities have often persecuted illegal immigrants and expelled them to Albania (and may be Macedonia?).
- Many incidents of Police brutality have been reported.
- From time to time Police has mounted harsh *skoupa's* - sweep operations. (Possibly, the *skoupa's* were run more frequently when Anna Mousouli did her field work since it was in the Olympics season).

Eventually, the Governments have accepted a big quantity of legal workers - and have occasionally made it easier to become legalized immigrants.

More studies and sincere discussions are needed

The study is to be welcomed. Hopefully, it can inspire to more and deeper studies and to sincere discussions between the Greek and Albanian Governments. All parts would gain, I am sure - except black and grey agents.

Bjoern Andersen

Notes

1) Some Greek cities were established in Albania in antiquity, Durrës (then Epidamnus - founded by Greek colonists from Corinth and Corcyra (Corfu), Lezha (then Lissus - founded by Dionysius I) and Apollonia (not far from Fier - founded by Greek colonists from Corinth and Corcyra (Corfu)).

For centuries Albanians have settled in Greece, the *Arvanites*, and Greeks in Albania.

For many years the Greek Governments have not wanted to recognize the Albanians as an ethnic minority. Many (or most) »old« Albanian families in Greece have - voluntarily and non-voluntarily - been hellenized and assimilated. Some have changed their names to Greek ones, some of them have been baptized - and they all speak Greek.

Some years after World War I many Muslim Albanians in Greece were forced to emigrate to Turkey. At the same time a large number of Greek emigrated from Asia Minor to Greece.

After World War II Greece expelled many Muslim Albanians from Ipeiros, the Greek part of Çameria. Çameria is the Albanian name for the borderregion in the South of Albania and the North of Greece. The Ambassador's Conference in London 1913 had assigned the biggest part of Çameria to Greece, the smallest to Albania. Greek attempts in 1919 to »move« the Southern part of the region to Greece did not meet international approval. Ioannina is the main city in the region - and the city of Ali Pasha of Tepelena too.

Since the first part of the 1990's hundreds of thousands of Albanians have emigrated to Greece for ever, for some years or for a shorter period, many of them illegally. Reliable figures are not to be found for the illegal emigration, but it is estimated that almost 550.000 Albanians are living in Greece.

The big emigration is caused by repulsion and attraction. Repulsion because the living conditions in Albania still are very poor, attraction because the labour markets in Greece and Italy more or less have been in the need of legal and illegal immigrants. Also Germany houses a large contingent of Albanians (some of them from Albania, many from Kosóva and Macedonia).

Official figures: »According to the Internal Ministry, specifically the Department of Social Integration of Greece in October 2004 from the general number of stance permissions of all kinds, 672.584, the number of Albanians requesting such service stand somewhere at 452.321 people from which the Albanian males number is 325.784 and Albanian females is 99.403«. Source: The Albanian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs: »*Albanian Emigration as a Developing component since its surviving stage*«. Paper, May 2005.

2) The author is speaking about »a public transcript« and »a hidden transcript«. Scott has said, she writes, that a *hidden transcript is a discourse that takes place 'offstage', beyond direct observation by powerholders, while the public transcript is the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate.* (Mousouli, p. 27).

3) Many Albanians have taken out health insurances, but probably less than 50%.

4) »*Informal payments are a practice well rooted in the Greek health care system*« (Mousouli, p. 37). It can be added that this kind of corruption has increased in Albania since 1991. The level is unknown.

5) According to Anna Mousouli most Albanian males are occupied in the agricultural sector or in the construction sector, the half in the formal, the other half in the informal sector. Most females are occupied in private homes as domestics - and some are prostitutes.

Possibly many construction workers occupied in Albania have been occupied in Greece. In both countries informal work in the construction sector is considered very big.

Literature, links etc. - a sample

Anna Mousouli: »*Albanian immigrants in Athens: Power relations and health*«, Albanian Institute for International Studies, Tirana, 2005.

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The Global Commission on International Migration: Supporting Evidence: http://www.gcim.org/en/ir_experts.html

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Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs: »*Albanian Emigration as a Developing component since its surviving stage*«, 2005 [PDF]: <http://www.osce.org/item/14594.html>

Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies (JEMS) Volume 29, Number 6, November 2003: »*Special issue: Albanian migration and new transnationalism*«. Guest editors: Nicola Mai and Stephanie Schwander-Sievers. Abstracts: [http://www.cemes.org/JEMS/contents/29\(6\).htm](http://www.cemes.org/JEMS/contents/29(6).htm)

Martin Baldwin-Edwards: »*Albanian emigration and the Greek labour market: Economic symbiosis and social ambiguity*«, 2004 [PDF]: http://www.boeckler.de/pdf/South_East_Europe_Review_2004_01_baldwin2.pdf. Cf.: »*The Changing Mosaic of Mediterranean Migrations*« <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=230> and: »*Regional Study on the Middle East and Mediterranean*«: <http://www.gcim.org/attachements/RS5.pdf>

Athina Tatsioni, Antonia Charchanti, Evangelia Kitsiou, and John PA Ioannidis: »*Appendicectomies in Albanians in Greece: outcomes in a highly mobile immigrant patient population*« 2001, [HTML]: <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=35286>

Maria Vidali: »*Living in a Policy Vacuum. The plight of Albanian immigrants in Greece*« [PDF]: <http://www.mmo.gr/pdf/library/Greece/CentralEuropeReview1-21.pdf>

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Francisco J. Durán Ruiz (Granada): »*The Relationship between Legal Status, Rights and the Social Integration of the Immigrants*« [PDF]: <http://www.ccis-ucsd.org/PUBLICATIONS/wrkg84.pdf>

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Albanians: Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albanians>. In the English edition also articles about the ancient Greek cities in Albania: [Durrës](#), [Apollonia](#) and [Lezha](#).

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The Çam-problem: <http://www.frosina.org/about/infobits.asp?id=161>

Brain drain: Andrea Koxhaj and Fatmir Mema »*Albanian Brain Drain. Emigration of the intellectual elite*«: <http://bjoerna.net/sidste-nyt/275.htm>

Bjoern Andersen holds a MA in Sociology and Danish philology. He has visited Albania some times through the years, the first time in 1976. In 2003 and 2004 he was a participant in the conferences about 'the clash of civilizations' and 'religious tolerance', both in Tirana.

He is the author of books in Danish about Albanian history, eg a collection of articles in »*Albanske Studier*« 1-2 (Soeborg, Cph. 2002), cf.: <http://bjoerna.dk/albansk-historie/studier-2002.htm>. Among the articles some about Edward Lear, Edith Durham, Sami Frashëri and Ismail Kadaré. Also an article about feuds in Corsica.

BA has published the play of Sami Bey Frashëri: »*Besa*« on the internet in a Danish translation of Johannes Oestrup [Johannes Østrup]: »*Aeresordet*«, Cph. 1912.: <http://scanderbeg.dk/frasheri/aeresordet.htm>.

Recently he has published the 'Danish Law of 1683' in a digital edition - and by now he is working on a book about the Danish-Norwegian author Ludvig Holberg - who, in 1739, issued an appreciating article about Scanderbeg. Cf.: »*A viewpoint from Copenhagen*« <http://bjoerna.dk/Holberg/Scanderbeg.htm>.

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