
Changing Cities: Migrations and New Urbanities in Contemporary Europe

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In this article, I draw on ethnographic material collected in Albania and France to address the diversified nature of contemporary migrants and new forms of mobility and discuss the way in which they influence changes in the urban environment, social relations and lifestyle. Such diversity also includes new forms of mobility that involve middle-class urban residents who have moved to rural or semi-rural areas, exporting their urban lifestyle and, in some cases, triggering a form of gentrification that has changed the local housing market and has engendered the flourishing of new services and businesses. The ethnographic analysis of these changes has also stimulated further reflection on the meaning of ‘urbanity’. I discuss the distinction between ‘immigrants’ and ‘foreign residents’, and the cultural meaning attached to the socioeconomic status of ‘economic migrant’ and ‘expatriate’. The Albanian and the Franco-British cases bring out how the local context and cultural factors interact with the newcomers’ specific circumstances in determining their position in the local society.

Key words: Migrants diversity, Albania, British expatriates, urban policies, change.

Introductory Notes

The advent of the so-called ‘new urban millennium’ has sparked a renewed political interest in urban-related research. The year 2008 has been singled out as the critical historical moment when, for the first time, the global urban population outnumbered the rural population. Given their cross-cutting nature, urban issues are recognised to have a significant impact on several Goals of the UN ‘2030 Sustainable Development Agenda’. Urban regeneration — and the attendant upscaling of central city areas — has been presented as the strategic pathway to the solution of such problems as environmental issues, social inequalities and decent, affordable housing; in practice, however, this has been none other than a tactical means to making a city more attractive to new tourist markets and global capital investment. Urban policies are also failing to address the diversified nature of contemporary demographic movements and the different impact that they have on the urban environment and city life. Such diversity also includes new forms of mobility that involve middle-class urban residents who have moved to rural or semi-rural areas, exporting their urban lifestyle and, in some cases, triggering a form of gentrification that has changed the local housing market and the flourishing of new services and businesses.

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Migrants Diversity¹

When I began reflecting on the new forms of demographic mobility, two descriptions of human migration flashed through my mind. One is ethnographic, the other poetic. Let me start with the ethnography. While I was doing research in Brindisi in the late 1980s, a successful local entrepreneur told me that he had rejected the suggestion to move his business to the North of Italy. Experience, he said, had taught him that, because of his southern origins, he would be treated as an immigrant, a ‘rich’ immigrant perhaps, but a ‘migrant’ nonetheless (Prato 1993). This entrepreneur’s observations brought to mind a poem dedicated to the transhumant shepherds of Abruzzo, in central Italy, which stimulated comparative reflections. The poem, written by Gabriele D’Annunzio (1903) at a time of heavy Italian migration abroad, is infused with the kind of nostalgia often associated with migrants; a melancholy that, according to D’Annunzio, never leaves the hearts of those in ‘exile’.² However, although he seemed to share the melancholy and nostalgia of these seasonal migrants, he did not consider himself, nor would he be generally regarded as, a migrant. The son of a rich landowner from the city of Pescara in Abruzzo, he had an urban upbringing, later moving to Tuscany and, then, to Rome, France, Dalmatia and back again to Italy. In short, he could be described as a flamboyant cosmopolitan who moved confidently among the aristocracy and the most fashionable literary circles of early twentieth-century Italy.

Both the example of the Brindisi entrepreneur and the nostalgic mood of D’Annunzio’s poem raise interesting questions about migration; first among them, how to identify who is ‘categorized’ as a migrant. Does this ‘status’ depend on geographic provenance (as in the stereotypical portraits of southern Italians), ethnic origin, or economic status? If this is mainly a socioeconomic category, how do we understand it in a way that makes sense of the distinction between, for example, ‘immigrants’ and ‘foreign residents’? Is this category still analytically relevant to our understanding of the rapid transformation of the scale and scope of the contemporary global transboundary demographic mobility?

According to the United Nations, in 2013 the number of people living outside their home country amounted to 232 million (Thornhill 2013). These international migrants include a varied range of people: from those traditionally categorized as ‘economic migrants’ to international students living abroad, to so-called ‘lifestyle migrants’ and professionals working abroad, traditionally defined as ‘expatriates’. The ‘professionals’ have been further subdivided into ‘foreign executives in local organizations’ (FELOs) and ‘self-initiated expatriates’ (SIEs).³

¹ This section and the following two on postcommunist migrations in Albania and on British expatriates are abridged versions of G. B. Prato, ‘Views of Migrants and Foreign Residents: A Comparative European Perspective’, originally published in A. Vailati and C. Rial (eds), *Migration of Rich Immigrants*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016: 179-198.

² Such melancholy is vividly illustrated in the last lyrics of the poem: ‘Alas, why am I not with my shepherds?’ (from ‘The Shepherds’, in G. D’Annunzio, *Halcyon: Dreams of Distant Lands*, first published in 1903 by the Publisher Treves of Milan).

³ Inkson et al. 1997, Peltokorpi and Froese 2009, Bozionelos 2009.

This complexity, together with the continuously changing geopolitical situations and the attendant global interests, demands a new approach to the study of contemporary migration that acknowledges the importance of a cross-disciplinary dialogue. Furthermore, when looking at new trends in labour force mobility, such a new approach should also take into account the role played by the interaction among social, economic, legal, political and cultural factors in the quality of migratory policies and in the status of foreigners in the host society. Legal and political factors may include bilateral agreements between countries; laws on the free movement of people, as in the case of the European Union (EU); agreements between governments and private sectors; and issues specific to the immigration policy of each country (Da Silva 2018, Giordano 2012, Ruspini and Eades eds 2014). Social and cultural factors may be linked, among other things, to the role of transnational families and diaspora communities, and lifestyle migrants (Rubel and Rossman 2009, Benson and O'Reilly eds 2009). Of course, as anthropologists, we cannot ignore that, with variations in degree and intensity, all these factors influence native people's attitudes toward migrants and the latter's position in the host society (Fernandes and Morte 2011; Pardo 2009, 2012). Although most studies have traditionally focused on 'poor' migrants, new research is increasingly carried out on the aforementioned FELOs, often focusing on cross-cultural interactions in the workplace (Arp et al. 2013), and on skilled migrants' social capital and networks (Ahmed 2012, Casado Diaz 2009). The attention paid to these international migrants would stimulate a redefinition of traditional analytical categories, such as 'expatriates' and 'economic migrants'.

In the sections that follow, I discuss the distinction between 'immigrants' and 'foreign residents', and the cultural meaning attached to the socioeconomic status of 'economic migrant' and 'expatriate' (usually identified as 'rich immigrant') in relation to two European regions — specifically, in Albania and France — that have experienced a large influx of foreign residents and expatriates in the past two decades.

The first part of the discussion addresses the extent to which internal migration and the increasing presence of foreign residents have influenced urban policies in major Albanian cities, like Tirana, the country's capital. The second part of the article looks at British expatriates in the North of France. The Albanian and the Franco-British cases highlight how the presence of rich foreign residents (and in the case of Albania of broader geopolitical and economic interests), on the one hand, and 'economic migration' on the other, may affect urban policies and the local housing and land market. At the same time, these two ethnographic cases bring out how the local context and cultural factors interact with the newcomers' specific circumstances in determining their position in the local society.

Postcommunist Migration, Foreign Residents and 'Urban Renaissance' in Albania

Albania is historically considered a country of emigration (Prato 2009). However, since the collapse of the communist regime in 1990, Albania's major cities have become the recipients of a large number of new residents. This new demographic mobility has occurred on two levels. On the one hand, there has been a significant internal migration. The rural North was

particularly affected by the postcommunist economic crisis and the consequent deterioration of the infrastructure. The combination of these negative events triggered the exodus of the working-age population from the mountain areas. Those who could not emigrate abroad moved to the country's urbanized areas, leading to a high demographic concentration in the central coastal region, mainly in the Tirana-Durrës area. On the other hand, major cities like Tirana have experienced a large influx of foreigners who reside there; they are, diplomatic personnel, NGO activists, executives in local organizations, consultants to the Albanian government and to other key public institutions, and private investors. Furthermore, alongside transnational entrepreneurial ventures, migrants' remittances and new businesses established by returning migrants have injected a considerable amount of capital without necessarily producing widespread welfare. These new demographic and economic phenomena have engendered significant changes that, while generally affecting people's lifestyle, have truly benefitted only a minority of the population. An example of selective beneficial changes is illustrated by the scheme called *Rilindja e Qytetit* (Urban Renaissance) promoted by the mayor of Tirana in 2000. The scheme stimulated the design of several urban plans targeted to make life comfortable for the foreign residents and the new Albanian élite and, the dominant rhetoric stated, to make Tirana a dynamic 'world-class' city attractive to further investment. In contrast, the areas inhabited by a significant number of internal migrants, who moved to Tirana in search of jobs and better living conditions, have been mostly neglected and generally bypassed by this 'renaissance'. Most of the internal migrants live in the urban peripheries that lack basic services and infrastructures. This internal migration and the presence of foreign residents have contributed, in different ways and degrees, to the rapid transformation of the urban landscape, generating what many observers describe as a 'dual city'. In order to understand why and how this dual reality has developed, it is important to examine the processes that spurred the unplanned, unauthorized urbanization of Tirana's periphery.

Informal Urbanization Beyond the 'Yellow Line'

The rapid development of new urban areas at the periphery of Tirana is the outcome of the postcommunist reforms; in particular, the newly acquired freedom of movement and the rights to private property and to private business. As a consequence, the population of the metropolitan area of Tirana has exploded from about 250,000 to well over 800,000 registered inhabitants.⁴ In the process, an uneven development has taken place, leading to the aforementioned 'dual city'; that is, a trendy and fast modernizing inner city and an urban periphery mostly characterized by illegal buildings and a lack of basic infrastructure (Požani 2010). Considering some historical factors will help to understand these processes.

The contemporary suburban settlements are located outside the so-called Yellow Line, which, under communism, defined the limits of the 'allowed' expansion of a city. Yellow Lines were imposed on every city by the communist regime as borders beyond which a city could not

⁴ These figures do not take into account people who live in Tirana but are not registered as residents.

expand.⁵ They were an important element of the communist urban planning strategy implemented after 1960. This was, de facto, an antiurbanization strategy with a threefold aim: to foster the development of rural areas and of the suburban industrial districts; to control urban growth; to control demographic mobility. Once a city's expansion reached the Yellow Line, the excess population was forced to move to other, less populated cities or to newly created towns (Aliaj 2003). As Pllumbi (2013) points out, this urban control was justified as a form of planning strategy aimed at achieving an 'optimum city size', a concept based in part on the nineteenth-century idea of 'garden city'.⁶ Emulating the Soviet project of self-sustaining urban settlements, the communist garden city was meant to be part of a larger 'urban administrative area' (Prato 2017), which included state-owned farms and publicly managed cooperatives — located outside the Yellow Line — whose priority was to supply the urban population.

Following the fall of the communist regime and the economic collapse of the state cooperatives and industries in the early 1990s, the farmland and business buildings were leased to private individuals. Initially, the privatization process benefitted mainly the former communist nomenklatura, who took advantage of their position and contacts to acquire state properties. At the same time, parcels of state-owned land and ex-cooperative farmland were allocated as private property to worker families and to residents of the state farms on condition that they would work the land and become independent farmers. However, the new legislation on the redistribution of formerly confiscated land led to thousands of land claims. It soon became obvious that the postcommunist state bureaucracy was not equipped to administer this new situation. Many Albanian informants — private citizens as well as public officials — have pointed out to me that land allocations and redistribution were made quickly, and on many occasions arbitrarily, and that it was often difficult to draw clear boundaries for the allocated plots of land (Prato 2011). Moreover, state land recipients were told that the document testifying to their parcel assignment had to be intended as a long-term lease and did not specify future rights (Bloch 1998). The difficulty in determining the final status of these state lands, together with demographic pressure from internal migration, led to the creation of an 'informal' land market, whereby land recipients began to sell 'informally' their assigned parcels to rural immigrants and building speculators. Other rural migrants and low-income families who could not afford regular housing in the city centre contributed to accelerating the 'informal land market' phenomenon as they occupied illegally plots of private or public-owned land on the suburban fringes, where they built houses without permission — in most cases, ownership was

⁵ Exceptions were made for major cities like Tirana, Durrës and Shkodër.

⁶ The concept of 'garden city' was developed in the late nineteenth century by Ebenezer Howard (1898). Many early twentieth-century architects who embraced this concept proposed the creation of 'garden city communities' in metropolitan areas; that is, residential neighbourhoods surrounded by parkland and pasture. In Tirana, the 'garden city' model had been applied by Italian urban planners first in the 1920s and in a more significant way later through the 'Bosio Plan' of 1940, which created the shape of Tirana as a pedestrian-friendly city with radial roads converging to the centre — to be reached within 30 minutes from any direction—and circular roads at the outskirts (Prato 2017).

claimed following the pre-communist customary law (Bardhoshi 2011). As soon as the land was claimed and built upon, even if illegally, it became available for sale on the informal market.

The social and cultural dynamics, and the economic and political implications of this kind of informal market have been studied from different disciplinary perspectives (Bardhoshi 2011, Felstenhausen 1999, Pllumbi 2013). For the purpose of this discussion, it is relevant to point out that these ‘informal’ areas amount to 40 percent of the urban expansion of Tirana and that they are located outside the old Yellow Line boundary. In particular, the initial squatter settlements grew in four specific peri-urban areas: Kamza to the northwest, Babruja to the north, Sauk to the south and Yzberish to the southwest. These areas were well located — they were near transport routes and could be easily connected to electricity and water supply lines. Most significantly, the strongest expansion occurred toward the northwest, along the planned EU transportation Corridor VIII (one of the major European Ten-T Corridors). The pressure to acquire land for development produced widespread speculation, rampant unauthorized building and, unsurprisingly, an increase in the (informal) market value of the land. A study carried out on the Kavaja and Durrës corridor routes in 1995 (Felstehausen 1999) identified more than 1,000 shops and businesses per square kilometre in the suburban areas. This study also documented the rapid development in the commercial use of highway space for approximately 50 meters on each side of the road.

The informal land market and the construction of new houses and businesses in these areas have occurred in the absence of public planning, street layout and infrastructure. Sanitation and sewage were inexistent. Water and electricity supply were achieved by illegally tapping into the public grid. As these areas have become more urbanized, these services have fallen under the control of illegal ward bosses who charge each household a hook-up fee.

From the ‘Right to the City’ to Planned Urban Renaissance

Inner-city Tirana, too, initially experienced an ‘informal’ development in part similar to that described above. In a perverse interpretation of the ‘right to the city’ that followed the collapse of communism, ordinary people not only began to enjoy access to previously forbidden areas, such as the so-called *Blloku* (blocked area)⁷ but they also occupied public spaces. Inside the Yellow Line, both old residents and a few newcomers began squatting in public spaces between houses, and the city’s parks, claiming these spaces for commercial activities, including small shops, kiosks, and above all restaurants and bars that catered to the increasing number of foreign residents and to the new Albanian economic élite. Parallel to the establishment of these commercial activities that allowed people to earn a living, the need for new housing led to real estate speculation in the centre. New high-rise buildings mushroomed unplanned, totally out of control (Pllumbi 2013). In some cases, old houses were illegally ‘extended’ into public space,

⁷ The *Blloku* was the residential district where the communist leadership lived. The dictator Enver Hoxha had his villa there. Armed guards constantly patrolled the boundaries of this area, which was off limits to ordinary Albanians.

as their inhabitants built additional rooms, bathrooms (or simply toilets), kitchens, storerooms, and so on. In other cases, the public space outside residential buildings was divided into private courtyards. In the absence of urban planning, these unauthorized constructions generated what could be appropriately called a ‘collage’ city. By the mid-1990s, Tirana had become a construction site dotted with countless new or renovated buildings that emerged next to rundown neighbourhoods.

Thus, postcommunist Tirana has probably become the fastest-changing capital in Europe. Under the aforementioned ‘*Urban Renaissance*’, the city’s mayor, Edi Rama, ordered the demolition of all the illegal kiosks, restaurants and bars built in the city-centre’s public areas after 1991. Most of the illegal constructions in the centrally located Rinia Park were also destroyed. As part of this renewal process, previously grey apartment blocks were painted in bright colours, though the usually gloomy interiors were often left unchanged. As I have mentioned earlier, this ‘Urban Renaissance’ project, which sought to turn Tirana into an attractive, booming and modern European capital, mainly targeted the city centre. Examples abound. The *Blloku* became an upmarket neighbourhood with shopping areas, trendy bars, restaurants, nightclubs and casinos. This once secluded residential area, now the ‘playground’ of the young Albanian élite, is very attractive to foreigners, who enjoy the local facilities. The centrally located Rinia Park has been transformed into a green commercial area with renovated buildings, including some illegal constructions that have survived the cleansing order by the mayor. The complex known as the Taiwan Center has become the most popular gathering place in Rinia Park, with its expensive restaurants, outdoor terraces facing a fountain, bars, a bowling alley, club and casino.

Since 1994, half a dozen urban plans for Tirana have been drafted with the help of foreign consultants and local NGOs, whose influence depended on their relationship with the political party in power. Because of the continuously changing political situation, many of these plans did not undergo the established approval procedure; thus, their legal status remained unclear, often amounting to an ‘informal’ agreement between the consulting firm and their political interlocutor (Prato 2017).⁸

Over time, the urban development projects have gradually radiated outward, first toward areas within the official boundary of the city (the Yellow Line), then, toward the informal areas. Many of these projects are about the construction of modern, multifunctional centres along the highway connecting Tirana to the port city of Durrës and on the highway to the airport, or in the direction of developing residential areas.⁹ These multifunctional centres are supposed to be

⁸ The most recent Central Axis Masterplan focuses on Skanderberg Square and its surrounding boulevards. The Plan includes the construction of ten 85-meter-tall towers around Skanderberg Square, two of which — the TID business centre and the 4-Ever Green Tower — now dominate the urban landscape with their multifunctional 25 floors that include residential apartments, shopping facilities, office space, and luxurious hotels with panoramic views.

⁹ Typical examples are the Mall of Albania and the City Park to the northwest — they include shops, cinemas, casinos spa centres, luxurious hotels with high-tech conference facilities — and the Tirana

easily accessible — either by private car, through renovated or new main roads or by public transport. In particular, a strong emphasis is put on the new privatized transport system, which aims to put an end to the informal services that emerged in the late 1990s in response to the dilapidated public transport system inherited from the communist period. At the time, informal transport was provided by privately run minivans (*furgonë*) that ran more frequently and reliably than the public buses and also reached destinations not normally served by public transport. Many people, including wealthier residents, preferred to use these *furgonë* also because during their intercity journey they would pick up and drop off people on request along the route. Following the privatization of public transport that began in 2001, new legal requirements for running the service were introduced, including a special license. These changes caused a decline in the number of *furgonë* in operation (Požani 2010). In 2004, intracity *furgonë* were eventually banned. By 2006, nine out of ten urban lines had been privatized and were operated by four companies. However, not all suburban areas were served by these lines, and the companies charged a considerably higher fare for suburban destinations. In 2016, urban bus lines charged 30 Lek (approximately US\$0.30) per ride, regardless of the distance travelled within the city, and were legally bound to offer monthly passes and reduced fares for students. In contrast, not only were fares higher on suburban lines,¹⁰ but they also varied depending on the distance travelled, and monthly passes were not available. Still today, few residents in the informal areas own a car, so they are among the people who are most heavily dependent on public transport. Furthermore, the younger residents point out that this situation makes it more difficult for them to go to school and to attend university, and makes it impossible for them to enjoy the nightlife in the city centre. Thus, the image of a ‘dual city’ is reinforced.

We know that these informal areas are located outside the historic Yellow Line. While this Line seems to have lost its original meaning of delimiting the boundaries of urban growth, it has acquired a new meaning. It has become a symbolic line within society, indicating differences of status. It is now a dividing line between the formal and the informal city. It is a line of segregation, separating the ‘true’ urban residents — who include the original inhabitants of the city and foreigners — and the newcomers, who are still seen as outsiders who do not have the ‘right mentality’ and culture to live in the city. As Pllumbi has aptly noted, ‘The phenomenon of the expansion of the city resembles a patchwork puzzle, the patches here are separated and suffer in their vulnerability and lack of identity. The Yellow Line is transformed in a social wall that separates the components of the city’ (Pllumbi 2013: 79–80). Not only do most foreign residents usually not integrate into the local society — at most they seem willing to associate with the local élite — but also, most significantly, it would appear that the old urban residents, who claim their right to the city, do not wish to grant that same right to the rural migrants.

East Gate to the southeast, which is described as Albania’s largest covered retail and entertainment centre.

¹⁰ For example, a round-trip fare to reach the informal settlements west of the city was 100 Lek (US\$1.00); a considerable sum for low-income commuters and students (Požani 2010).

The Tirana case seems to mirror Krase's observation (2012) that the transformation of the urban landscape produced by migration introduces a new ordering of city life. Here, while rural migrants have changed the suburban landscape, the inner city has been changed by urban planners to satisfy what local administrators perceive to be the needs of the foreign residents and to transform Tirana into a 'world-class city' that would hopefully attract new investors and rich immigrants. Following Lofland (1985), it could be argued that here the built environment is symbolically communicating people's position and the ordering of the urban inhabitants in terms of spatial location, and that it does so in such a way that urban residents will know a great deal about each other simply by looking.

British Expatriates and Economic Migrants in the Nord-Pas-De-Calais

In contrast to Albania, the United Kingdom has historically been a destination for many foreign migrants, mainly from former British colonies. Beyond this historical pattern, there are two demographic phenomena that need attention: the increased presence in the UK of European nationals as a consequence of EU 'free movement' policies, and the growing number of Britons who move abroad. Here, I shall focus on the latter phenomenon.

An expatriate is by definition a person residing in a country other than his/her homeland. In common usage, however, this word is usually applied to professionals and skilled workers working abroad for a specific length of time or to so-called lifestyle migrants, often including pensioners who move abroad in search of a better climate or lower living costs. The category 'expatriate' does not, therefore, include all 'migrants'. In particular, it does not include manual labourers, or the so-called economic migrants; that is, people who are poor and move abroad to earn money and improve their living standard. In this light, we should ask to what extent the increasing number of British people living in northern France is to be considered an expatriate community. As we shall see, Britons residing permanently in northern France are by no means a homogenous socioeconomic group, and some of them would certainly fit the category of economic migrants.

In addition to lifestyle migrants, it must be pointed out that during the second half of the twentieth century, a combination of many factors created a global market for professional expatriates. Contrary to 'traditional' professional expatriates, some chose to move abroad on a short-term basis, while others did so permanently. Many commuted between their new residence abroad and their workplace in the home country. To many Britons from southeast England, northern France was ideal for such 'commuting' expatriation, which is described in the literature as self-initiated expatriation (SIE). Initially, the SIE category referred to the significant number of young people who every year moved abroad 'for a prolonged period of travel, work, and tourism' (Inkson et al. 1997: 358). The concept was later broadened to include other groups of 'expatriates' (Bozionelos 2009, Selmer and Lauring 2011), generating a considerable number of subgroups that are so different from each other as to make one wonder whether a single category is a useful analytical tool. To complicate matters further, perhaps unnecessarily, Suutari and Brewster (2000) have suggested that when the geographic and

cultural distance is limited, as in the case of people moving to neighbouring countries, it would perhaps be more appropriate to use the expression ‘self-initiated foreign experience’ (SFE).

So, are the British expatriates in the Nord-pas-de-Calais an example of SFE? The ethnographic cases that I have studied would simply suggest that they could be broadly described as relatively rich immigrants. Although they are not particularly well-off, they are generally wealthier than the native inhabitants.

Drawing on ethnographic material collected in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, in the discussion that follows I look at a community of Britons (mainly from southern England) who over the last 15 to 20 years have moved to northern France in search of a better lifestyle. Many are pensioners, while others are professionals or small-scale entrepreneurs. Rather than moving to big cities, they choose to reside in mid-sized towns that offer cheap housing and living costs and are easily reachable from the UK — most are a 30- to 50-minute drive from the ports of Calais, Dunkirk or Boulogne. This choice fits nicely with the French government’s interest in populating the country’s economically declining semi-rural and post-industrial areas. For the expatriate community, better living conditions mostly mean being able to afford a British-style social life that they could no longer sustain in their home country.¹¹ Furthermore, expatriates often qualify for many financial benefits, including tax benefits either in the country of origin or in the host country. For example, UK pensioners can benefit from the ‘Qualifying Recognized Overseas Pension Scheme’ (QROPS). This scheme has become popular among British expatriates due to the tax advantages it offers. Pension funds left in the United Kingdom are heavily taxed, in some cases up to 50 percent; however, if the UK pension fund is transferred to a QROPS, the pensioner can avoid UK taxation.¹²

Most of the British expatriates whom I have met in northern France appear to rely on a network of acquaintances and friends. Some say that they have been helped by their ‘old boy’ network, or by their membership of gentlemen’s clubs back in the UK. In a significant number of cases, it would indeed appear that people could have not afforded to expatriate without the help of their networks. In recent years, the number of Britons moving to this part of France has increased so significantly that a real estate agent has aptly chosen the name ‘L’Abri-Tanique’ for its business, playing on the French words *abri* (shelter) and *britannique* (British). This firm advertises its services as a bilingual real estate agency for those who want to buy or rent a townhouse, a farmhouse or any other property near the Channel ports.

The phenomenon of British expatriates living in European countries is, of course, not new. In 2009, more than three million British people lived abroad, half of whom were in EU

¹¹ In the cases of professionals who lost their jobs or entrepreneurs who went bankrupt, they say that they could not face the shame of living in disgrace and relative poverty in England.

¹² The QROPS was launched in 2006 by Her Majesty Revenue and Customs (HMRC). It can be used by UK residents who have accrued a pension fund but have left the UK either to retire or to work permanently abroad — in a country recognized under the scheme.

member states.¹³ Notoriously, many have moved to Italy, Spain and the South of France. In Italy, most initially settled in Tuscany slowly growing in such a number that this Italian region became known as ‘Chiantishire’. Their presence rapidly changed the housing market, and when prices became too high, newcomers started settling in nearby Umbria and, then, Marche. British expatriates in Spain are also a well-known phenomenon (O’Reilly 2000, Benson and O’Reilly 2009, King et al. 2000, Gustafson 2009). In her study of British expatriate women in the Costa Blanca, Ahmed (2012) describes how they establish social barriers not only between the network of expatriates and the native population but also within the expatriate community, determining who is accepted in their circles. Most of these women make a clear distinction between ‘acquaintances’ and people with whom there is a ‘shared sense of community’. However, in many cases it is a ‘superficial’ feeling of belonging that satisfies their need for security and safety. As Ahmed points out, such a feeling can be switched on and off for pragmatic purposes. Above all, belonging to the expatriate network seems to be a matter of being able to continue their British lifestyle. As these expatriates do not seem interested in learning the local language and culture and integrating into the wider society, Ahmed notes (2012), their establishment and maintenance of these social networks is a strategy for thriving in a foreign environment.

Contrary to this Spanish situation, the British expatriates in northern France do not live in ‘segregated’ residential areas or away from the native population. Although belonging to the network of local British expatriates gives a sense of continuity to their lives, most of my informants seem to make an effort to integrate with their French neighbours.¹⁴ Some have taken French citizenship. Although British nationals did not need to have a French passport to reside permanently in France,¹⁵ they chose to become French nationals for two main reasons. One was pre-emptive and stimulated by the debate that preceded the 2016 ‘Brexit’ referendum; many said that, at their age, it was unlikely that they would move again and, thus, wanted to make sure that they had the legal right to remain in their ‘new home’ whatever the outcome of the referendum. The other reason was more immediately practical and had to do with social integration. This second reason was given mainly by those who had established a local business, such as a bed and breakfast or other tourist-related activities. They said that by taking up French citizenship, they were showing the local community their determination to become fully integrated into local society. They hoped that their business would benefit from this choice, gaining local people’s support and help. In both cases, however, my informants were keen to point out that they have not lost their British citizenship. They saw their dual citizenship as an advantage.

¹³ Britons represented the highest of expatriates among OECD countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). For the past ten years, British emigration has stood at about 400,000 people per year.

¹⁴ On British expatriates to southwest France, see Benson (2009). O’Reilly (2000) discusses aspects of integration in the host society with reference to British expatriates in Spain.

¹⁵ This rule may change following the UK exit from the EU in January 2020.

Let us now look in more detail at the socioeconomic composition of the British living in the Nord-Pas-de-Calais. As I mentioned earlier, some are retired. However, a significant number, especially failed entrepreneurs in the UK, have established new businesses locally, in most cases a bed and breakfast. Others, less adventurous, look after the houses and gardens of fellow Britons who have not yet moved permanently into the area and who use their properties seasonally or rent them out. They may be people whose pension is too low even for the cost of living in this part of France and who, therefore, complement it with this kind of activity, or they may be people who have not yet accrued enough pension contributions and commute periodically to work in the UK on part-time contracts.

Some more adventurous expatriates, who do not have skills employable in the current labour market but are still of working age, have started a business that they call ‘alternative tourist experience’. They advertise among their British networks, offering hospitality in their French chalet (or, in some cases a chateau; that is, a house bigger than usual set on several acres of land) to paying guests and a ‘full immersion’ in the local way of life. Usually, such ‘alternative tourist experiences’ consist in food and drink tours with visits to local *caves* (winemakers) and specialist wine merchants, tours of local *brocantes* (secondhand, or vintage shops), visits to flea markets and open-air activities such as cycling or horseback riding in the countryside. Sometimes these activities are combined with painting lessons or French book-reading sessions. Also in this case, the acceptance of the local French inhabitants appears to be fundamental to the success of the business, especially considering that many customers are people passing through the area.¹⁶ As these people stop at local cafés and restaurants, they are informed of this ‘alternative’ tourist opportunity by the locals who run these businesses. In this symbiotic relationship between the locals and the expatriates, the latter direct their friends and, if in business, their paying guests to patronize the local cafés and restaurants.

The relationship between the locals and the expatriates is, however, not always so idyllic. Some opposition to the presence of ‘too many British’ arose when some expatriates began to speculate on the housing market. These self-declared ‘housing entrepreneurs’ began to buy derelict properties at very low prices — in some cases paying little more than the value of the land — which they proceeded to restore at low cost using inferior materials and, then, sell to newcomers at prices far above the local market value. This practice has inflated the housing market and has made it more difficult for local people to become homeowners.

Significantly, while the United Kingdom is the OECD country that ‘exports’ the most expatriates, all the major British political parties have engaged in an increasingly heated debate on revising the country’s immigration policies. As we know, the (legal) principle of free movement of people from other EU member states became the focus of attention in this debate. EU visitors have been collectively labelled as ‘migrants’, including those young people who would rather fit the description of SIEs. Meanwhile, there has been pressure from various lobbies to encourage the presence of so-called ‘rich migrants’, such as rich Chinese or Russian entrepreneurs, Arab ‘expatriates’, and so on. Equally interesting, while the Britons who move

¹⁶ These are usually British tourists travelling to other French destinations.

abroad continue to be described as expatriates, regardless of their socioeconomic status, foreigners who decide to settle in the UK but come from certain countries — including some EU countries — continue to be labelled as ‘migrants’, even when they are financially wealthier than most native Britons.

Migrants and New Urbanities: A Comparative Ethnography

In the last two decades of the 20th century, cities have experienced new forms of demographic movement, including an outward migration of urban residents who have moved to the suburbs to live or work — we could, thus, say that the ‘urban’ has been delocalised. At the same time, there has been an increase in foreign immigration in cities that until relatively recently had not experienced this phenomenon. New financial and political agreements, changes in the labour market and cheaper travel have made it easier for people to move to other countries. New analytical constructs, such as FELOs and SIEs, have been devised to describe the status of the various kinds of new ‘migrants’. Given this scenario, here I have addressed the heterogeneous nature of demographic mobility and the impact that new forms of migration — whether temporal or long-term, and how they are affecting urban life socially, economically, culturally and politically. Let me sum up what a comparative analysis reveals.

Migrant: An Arbitrary Categorization

The Albanian and Franco-British cases analysed here highlight the arbitrariness of migrant categorizations. We have seen that, when discussing socioeconomic categories, people’s wealth does not refer merely to monetary or, more generally, material wealth but also to social and cultural capital. In the Albanian case, some of the rural migrants who settled at the urban periphery managed to accumulate substantial economic capital through their involvement in the informal land market and building speculation; and yet, they have persistently been considered ‘outsiders’. These newcomers are not considered to be full urban citizens because they are the bearers of a cultural tradition that conflicts with the new dominant political project to transform Tirana into a ‘world-class city’. As I have observed, the informal zones in which they have settled are ‘self-regulating systems’ where ‘legitimizing moralities (Pardo 2000) allow people to operate and to make a living’ (Prato 2018: 64). This has created a ‘dual city’ phenomenon whereby residents in the informal areas have been treated as second-class citizens (Pardo 2009). In contrast, Britons who move abroad see themselves and are portrayed in their country of origin as ‘expatriates’ and, regardless of their wealth, they are usually seen as ‘rich migrants’ in the host society.

The different attitudes that have emerged in this discussion make one wonder whether the status of new migrants is determined by a new hierarchical ‘reputation-based’ categorization, whereby the status of the migrant is assessed on the basis of the international reputation of the migrant’s country of origin. It is noteworthy that this reputation is essentially linked to the international recognition of the political and economic weight that a country is allowed to have in the continuously changing geopolitical framework. Of course, in this scenario, it is irrelevant

whether this reputation reflects reality. What matters is that the ‘virtual’ status of the country meets the criteria established by a well-understood but unspoken ranking. It is not surprising, therefore, that people who decide to move abroad from countries like Albania will continue to be categorized as (poor) migrants, whereas people who do so from countries like Britain will continue to be regarded as (rich) expatriates. However, the case of British expatriates in France and the literature on expatriate communities more generally show that, although expatriates do not consider themselves ‘migrants’, their eagerness to belong to a network of compatriots is not, after all, so different from the nostalgia of the cosmopolitan D’Annunzio. Perhaps they, too, dream of being with ‘their shepherds’.

Another aspect of migration that I have considered is the way in which it affects the urban environment and city life. In particular, in this scenario, we should ask what does it mean to be ‘urban’.

Changing Urbanity

The changes brought by migratory fluxes seem to compound with new geopolitical interests. Albania is a case in point. Pressured by the international community, the Albanian government has sought solutions to infrastructural problems linked to the informal areas. So, in 2006, it established the ‘Agency for the Legalization, Urbanization and Integration of Informal Areas/Constructions’ (ALUIZNI) — a special body of the Ministry of Urban Development. ALUIZNI is meant to cooperate with international investors, NGOs and private stakeholders in the implementation of various projects that targeted informal areas across the country. Given the strategic, economic and demographic relevance of the Tirana-Durrës metropolitan region, special attention has been paid to address the problem swiftly there. This region is the fastest growing in Europe; it covers two counties (*qarku*) and includes the country’s capital city, its main port, more than a quarter of its population and almost two-fifths of its economy (Prato 2017). Significantly, this region is situated along the route of Corridor VIII, which has attracted substantial government and international financial investment (Prato 2018).

Positive changes have also occurred in many inner-city areas. In line with EU programmes on smart, green, sustainable cities, pedestrian routes and bike lanes are new aspects of Tirana’s landscape. Pedestrian areas are most welcome in Tirana for, regardless of age, residents enjoy socializing outdoors; it is not unusual to see the older generation playing cards or simply chatting in the city’s parks, whereas younger people love to engage in long promenades, locally known as the *xhiro*, through car-free boulevards and pedestrian paths. The promenade, a typical aspect of outdoors socialization in many north Mediterranean countries, is another aspect of life that could not be enjoyed under communism and has been eagerly been rediscovered or, in the case of the younger generation, discovered anew. The newly discovered ecological awareness is also reflected in the controversy surrounding the rehabilitation of the ‘Gran Park of Tirana’ that includes an artificial lake built in 1955, the royal palace — now the residence of the President of Albania — the botanical garden, swimming pools and an amphitheatre. In spite of the establishment of an ‘Agency of Parks and Recreation’, the

controversy continues on the plans to reduce green areas, including the botanical garden, in order to make space for offices, housing, hotels, public buildings and a new motorway (the Tirana Outer Ring Road).

The changes described above seem to be part of a broader project of urban gentrification which should bring a ‘Europeanizing transformation’ of Albanian cities. Albania’s urban gentrification seems to reflect global trends on inner-city transformations (Atkinson and Bridge eds 2005, Kruse and DeSena 2015). However, as the Franco-British ethnography shows, gentrification is not generated only by the ‘city marketing’ approach, nor is it confined to large cities; in small towns and peri-urban areas it is also triggered by new forms of migration — specifically, the outward urban mobility. As in the Franco-British case, urban newcomers transform the landscape of the areas in which they move. In some cases, their schemes of housing renovation de facto ‘evict’ the local population; in other cases, their practices, domestic arrangements and business activities remodel social relations and lifestyle.

Elsewhere I have argued (Prato 2018) that the ‘urban’ has extended beyond the administrative boundaries of the city not simply in terms of built-up area but also, in terms of life-styles, behaviours, social interactions, economic activities and so on. Therefore, ethnographic analysis, and urban policies, cannot focus merely on the physical space. According to the UN Development Agenda, the future of our world depends on environmental sustainability and urban resilience. However, we should recognize that these goals cannot be achieved through the application of abstract, homogenising models. The strength of ethnographic research lies precisely in its contribution to our understanding of how abstract models are negotiated at the local level, and how new historical conditions influence the emergence of new forms of urbanity.

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