



AUSTRIAN ALBANIANS BETWEEN CULTURAL INTEGRATION AND CULTURAL DEFENSE

Ali Pajaziti

Full professor, Faculty of Contemporary Social Sciences, South East
European University, Tetovo, North Macedonia

a.pajaziti@seeu.edu.mk

Mevlan Memeti

M.A. in Diplomacy, [Secretariat for European Affairs](#), The Government of the
Republic of North Macedonia.

mevlan.memeti@sep.gov.mk

DOI: 10.2478/seeur-2019-0002

ABSTRACT

This study deals with the issue of cultural integration of a migrant community, i.e. Albanian community or Diaspora in the Austrian society. First, it elaborates culture as an element that distinguishes human beings from other living beings, stating that man is not born with culture but it is rather acquired, developed, cultivated, and enriched during one's lifetime. It also emphasizes the weight that culture has in society, noting that three forces have the greatest impact on society: the state, religion and culture. The second issue treated is cultural assimilation, as a process

of social and cultural fusion of groups with different identities, cultural defense, cultural isolation and ghettoization. The second is Albanian Diaspora in Austria, the history, structure and cultural apology trends. Final and most important element of this research is empirical part, namely the survey applied in the field, i.e. in Austria, with 296 respondents, selected randomly. Among the conclusions are that Austrian Albanians tend cultural self-defense, apology of their code by creating cultural islands, meeting points, being concentrated culturally, that the first generation is more hesitant in accepting the Austrian cultural values compared with the second generation that is more cosmopolitan.

Key Words: *migrant community, diaspora, culture, Albanians, Austria, integration, cultural apology, ghettoization.*

Culture, integration and acculturation

The notion of ‘culture’ derives from the Latin word ‘colere’, referring to land plowing, planting, harvesting, working, etc. The word ‘cultura’ is used as a synonym for “planting”. It was used at the time of Bismarck, when the foundations of the unification of Germany were laid, to express the national spiritual values. Culture is a reflection of a nation’s philosophy and aspirations. In everyday communication, a cultured person is someone who speaks several languages, has knowledge in history, literature, philosophy or fine arts. There is no a commonly accepted definition of culture among various different scholars.

Two American anthropologists, Kroeber and Klukholn (1952) could record 164 definitions on culture. The most classical definition was given

by E. B. Taylor who says that culture is a complex integrity that includes knowledge of arts, moral, customs, traditions, as well as all other skills and abilities that a human being can possess. (Tomash, 1989: 203) Some other notions related to culture include acculturation, assimilation, cultural integration, multiculturalism, negative identity, parallel culture, cultural ghettoization, etc.

The problem of the integration into humane sciences has to do with the coordination of the part as a whole, in both the whole society or in small social systems. With Parsons, after 1951, there was a difference between social and cultural systems, whereas the analyses have dealt with social and cultural integrations since then. Cultural integration refers to the adaptation of behaviors and shaped preferences based on socialization and self-conviction as well as the acceptance of norms and behaviors identified in another culture. (Kuran & Sandholm, 2007: 1-6)

The integration of the migrant and refugee population represents one of the most important issues, which the EU countries have been facing with, including those known as transit countries for these kinds of immigrants and refugees. The compilation of adequate policies as well as economic, political and cultural integration is crucial to the social cohesion and economic progress of the host or accepting countries. (Vuletić, 2016: 14)

According to Kuran and Sandholm, cultural integration is often connected to assimilationist campaigns that are part of the nation building of European countries. Assimilation is a process of cultural and social fusion of groups with different identities. In recent years, feelings like xenophobia and Islamophobia have spread across many western countries, incited especially by right-winged political parties as well as

by conservative and ultra-radical ones, which have openly stated that they are against admitting immigrants in their countries. The referendum in Switzerland against minarets, graffiti on the immigrant's houses and their religious temples, employment dilemmas, assaults against women in hijabs, etc. are just some of the indicators of an anti-immigrant atmosphere that prevails in Europe nowadays.

Marginal immigrant groups in a western country try to endure these processes through the organization of activities with national flavors, such as education in schools in their mother tongue, folkloric activities, religious rituals, national holidays, meetings in immigrant's clubs, watching of TV channels of countries they come from, etc. (Hughes, 1999: 222-224). Therefore, in order to avoid assimilation, immigrants living and working in foreign countries tend to create social and cultural isles, surnamed 'ghettos', referring to a section of a city, especially a thickly populated slum area, being the poorest urban neighborhoods inhabited predominantly by members of an ethnic or other minority group, often as a result of social or economic restrictions, pressures or hardships. (Whitehead, 2000) Ghettos are usually a result of stereotypes and prejudices against the other, which can be noticed in many European cities, where the Muslim population in the first place, is concentrated in separate squares where they think will be able to find stronger cultural and social security. Such examples include the Turkish Kreuzberg in Berlin, the Arab Sevran in Paris, the Indian Croydon in London, etc.

Reasons of the non-integration of immigrants in western countries include ethnic and religious distance against immigrants/refugees; dilemmas and phobias created by themselves, current negative

experiences, the perception of the problem of immigrants (their perception as jihadists, potential terrorists, etc.), the media and politicians with their exclusivist narratives and declarations.

The diaspora: a general overview

The term Diaspora describes people settled far from their ancestral homelands, “dispersal of a people from its original homeland.” (Butler, 2001: 189) The term is most closely associated with the dispersion of the Jews living outside Palestine or modern Israel or members of the Armen, Greek or African *Diaspora*. Seeds are integral to the etymology of the word Diaspora (the Greek *speirein* meant to sow or scatter). Indeed the ‘spr’, sometimes with intermediate letters, is found in a number of cognate words – think of spore, disperse sperm, sprout, sprawl, sprinkle, spread or spray. (Sigona, 2015:2-3)

Therefore, the Diaspora refers to the placement of a community or a social group in other/foreign areas, far from their homeland. In the past, people did not have the tendency to move that frequently from one place to another due to poorer economic and technological opportunities. However, nowadays, with the advancements in all areas of social life, the movement processes have become easier and more frequent as such. The geopolitical redistribution, the restructuring of global economy, as well as wars that make people flee, have transformed the whole world, and as a result less and less people live in the lands of their ancestors. (Butler, 190)

Willaim Safran offers a list of characteristics of Diasporas:

1. Dispersal to two or more locations
2. Collective mythology of their homeland
3. Alienation from the host land
4. Idealization of returning to their homeland
5. Ongoing relation with their homeland

Robin Cohen places greater emphasis on the ethno-national consciousness. According to the majority of scholars dealing with this issue, the Diaspora has three key peculiarities: profusion (the opposite of concentrating in a certain location), relations with an imagined homeland, and the consciousness about the group identity. Another very important dimension is time: the existence of at least two generations. If a group has the possibility to return within a generation, than we are talking about asylum and not Diaspora. (Butler, 192)

“With the exception of the Jews, Albanians represent, proportionally the world’s largest Diaspora. Roughly 40% of Albanians lives outside the borders of the current Albanian state - the result of the arbitrary drawing of borders and mismatch between their national state and nation”. (See: Lloshi, 1999: 277-299)

The albanian diaspora in Austria

Austria is one of the most developed countries in the EU, covering an area of 83,885 square kilometers with a population of 8,507,786 inhabitants (2014). Out of this number, 7,093,162 are Austrians, whereas the rest, i.e. 1,414,624 (or 16.6%) are non-Austrians. Austria comprises

of nine regions: Vienna, Lower Austria, Steiermarkt, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Tirol, Burgenland, Karnten and Vorarlberg.

Apart from the USA, the Albanian Diaspora is also very powerful in Europe. Germany, Switzerland, Austria, as well as Belgium, Denmark and Sweden are some of the countries where a considerable number of Albanians reside. The Albanian Diaspora has existed for ages; however, the reflux of the greater immigration of Albanians began in the 1970s, mainly from the former Yugoslav areas. Albanians from Albania migrated to Austria at the beginning of the 1990s when great social and political changes began to occur.

The majority of Albanians living in Austria come from former Yugoslav regions, such as Kosovo, Macedonia and the Preshevo Valley (Serbia), and a very small portion come from Albania. According to the official data of 2014, the largest migrant community comprises of Germans (210,735), followed by the Turks (159,958), the Serbs (132,553 including the Albanians from the Preshevo Valley), whereas the Albanians are represented with 64,733.

Place of birth	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total	8.142.573	8.201.359	8.254.298	8.282.984	8.307.989	8.335.003	8.351.643	8.375.164	8.408.121	8.451.860	8.507.786
Austrian	7.001.361	7.001.361	7.059.142	7.067.289	7.072.311	7.074.726	7.076.156	7.080.458	7.085.038	7.087.089	7.093.162
Non-Austrian	1.141.212	1.154.776	1.195.156	1.215.695	1.235.678	1.260.277	1.275.487	1.294.706	1.323.083	1.364.771	1.414.624
EU countries, EWR, Switzerland											
	483.514	503.203	519.002	529.793	545.726	561.524	571.175	585.276	604.075	628.256	658.292
German	148.100	155.473	162.970	169.830	178.739	186.171	191.207	196.885	201.366	205.868	210.735
Third countries (Europe and Turkey)											
Albania	2.132	2.284	2.436	2.499	2.591	2.656	2.706	2.734	2.820	2.961	3.141
Kosovo	19.045	20.711	22.844	24.037	25.380	26.254	26.939	27.135	27.578	28.150	29.162
Macedonia	17.325	18.392	19.315	19.675	19.953	20.463	20.697	21.134	21.308	21.746	22.430
Serbia	126.032	130.414	134.175	133.576	132.239	131.361	130.426	130.931	130.211	130.862	132.553
Turkey	142.653	147.911	152.499	154.088	155.057	156.621	157.847	158.535	158.683	159.185	159.958

Table I. Austrian population between 2004 and 2014 (detailed according to the birthplace)

(Source: Statistik Austria, 28.05.2014)

From 2004 to 2014, the population in Austria increased by 365,213 inhabitants, of whom 91,801 Austrians and 273,412 non-Austrians. This means that the increase of the non-Austrian population compared to the native one was three times bigger. The size of Albanian population from Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia increased approximately by 30% (16,231 persons) within a decade, i.e. from 38,502 to 54,733.

Albanians in Austria are organized in various different associations and clubs, which play an important role in maintaining their culture and identity as well as other national and religious values. They play a crucial role in introducing children born in Austria to their native culture and traditions by organizing different manifestations and annotating the most important national and religious events; they also assist Albanian migrants in regulating documentations for temporary stays in Austria, inform them about the right to asylum as well as other legal matters, and help Albanians in general to integrate better in the Austrian society.

The empirical study: analysis and interpretation of findings

The quantitative part of this paper consists of a field study carried out with the help of some trained friends and colleagues in Vienna, Krems, and Linz in the period between January and February 2014. Apart from direct interviews, we used a questionnaire with 23 questions dealing with daily cultural problems and issues which Albanians in Austria faced with. This research was limited in time and space, since it includes only the Albanian population from the mentioned cities and the period stated above.

The research sample consists of 296 respondents, chosen randomly. There were 166 male respondents and 118 female ones. In terms of their age, the situation was as follows: 26-45 (160 or 54.1%), 46-55 (57 or 18.9%), 15-18 (30 or 10.1%), 19-25 (24 or 8.1%), 55 - > (24 or 8.1%) and there were only two people that did not respond at all (0.7%).

Birthplace	Frequency	%
Albania	8	2.7
Kosovo	36	12.2
Macedonia	196	66.2
Austria	38	12.8
Other	18	6.1
Total	296	100.0

Table 2. The respondents' place of birth

We can see from Table 2 that the majority of respondents come from Macedonia (66.2%), followed by Albanians born in Austria (12.8%), Kosovo Albanians (12.2%) and the smallest number refers to Albanians coming from Albania (only 2.7%). With regard to material goods (i.e. salaries) of the respondents, the majority declared a salary range between 1,200 – 2,000 Euros (50%); the others varied from 750 to 1,200 Euros (25%) and over 2,000 Euros another 25%.

Apart from the initial questions related to identity issues, our questionnaire included the perceptions of the Albanian immigrants regarding issues related to their host country, their living places, accommodation, connections with their homeland, the media in Albanian language, the language of communication at home, the language in which a last book was read, factors influencing the maintenance of identity, etc.

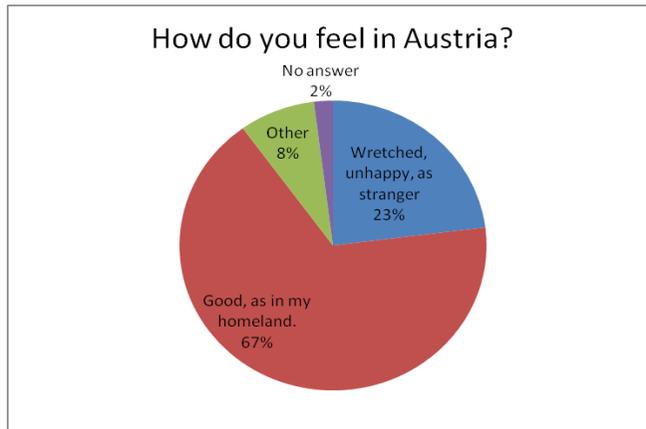


Chart 1. The Austrian Albanian between dreams and reality – the future

Based on the above chart, we can conclude that the members of the Diaspora have been well accommodated – adapted within the Austrian context, stating that they are even quite happy with their lives, just as in their homelands. This shows that they have overcome the stage of dilemmas and hesitations and have moved to another stage already – to the one of redefining themselves; in other words, they have overcome the feeling and the status of being *gastarbeiters* and they consider that place as their own home. This can also be verified by the fact that they have already begun to purchase real estate there and have settled well in this respect.

The results of the following question, however, reveal that only 1/5 (24.3%) have managed to make their dreams come true; the majority (66.9%) managed to realize their plans and ambitions only partially. This shows they have greater expectations from the society they live in. 69.6% of the respondents said that they can foresee a better future in Austria and 10.1% said that they did not identify their future with this country but perhaps with another one, including their homeland.

	F	%
On daily basis	180	60.8
Sometimes within the week	64	21.6
Rarely	40	13.5
Never	12	4.1
Total	296	100

Table 3. Do you follow media (TV, the internet, etc.) in Albanian?

Based on this table, we can conclude that most of the respondents are connected and familiar with the events happening in their homeland because they all have access to various different telecommunications means even in their mother tongue. About 1/5 of the respondents said they did not really like the media in Albanian.

58% of the respondents are aware that they have the responsibility of preparing the future generation and as a result, they send their children to various different activities, such as courses, trainings, events, concerts, matches, etc. with authentic Albanian character. Almost one third of the Austrian Albanians do to care about events with Albanian character that are organized in Austria.

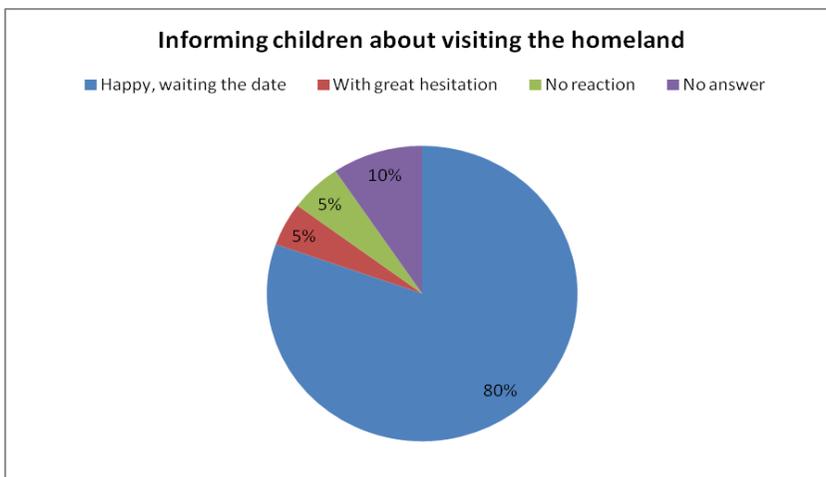


Chart 2. Generations 2 and 3 and the homeland: How do youngsters react when they are informed about their visit in their homeland?

The second and third generation do not possess the same feelings as their parents with regard to their homeland. The majority (80%) of children of immigrants cheerfully receive the news about travelling to their homeland. There is of course another portion of those that do not have any strong feelings about this issue (10.1%), and even they are about to visit their homeland, they do not feel anything special about it.

Question number 14 (Do you think that you should be different in terms of the spatial and social aspect, i.e. create your own ghettos and neighborhoods in order to stay close to one-another?) was aimed at measuring the pulse of the Albanians in Austria in terms of their positioning against the majority culture. 44% of them claimed that spatial separation or *ghettoization* is a must if they want to remain Albanians in the future. Even though 66.9% said that they felt Austria as their own country and are happy there, they still do not feel very comfortable vis-à-vis the local culture and its effects; therefore, their positioning next to each other is perceived as a solution to remain who they are; otherwise, they would finally be entirely alienated.

	Frequency	%
Albanian citizens themselves	64	43.2
Different Diaspora NGO's	28	18.2
Religious institutions/organizations	17	11.5
Embassies: ALB, KOS, MKD	29	19.6
All of them	8	4.7
No one	1	0.7
Total	148	100.0

Table 4. Entities that affect mostly in maintaining the national Albanian identity in Austria

The findings show that Albanian employees or immigrants in Austria mostly perform individually in terms of maintaining their cultural and national identity; this means that they are aware of the circumstances

their families are brought up in and are therefore quite active in preserving their own national and cultural values by undertaking various different activities. Only 11.5% of respondents said that religious organization helps more in terms of preserving the national identity of the Albanians in Austria.

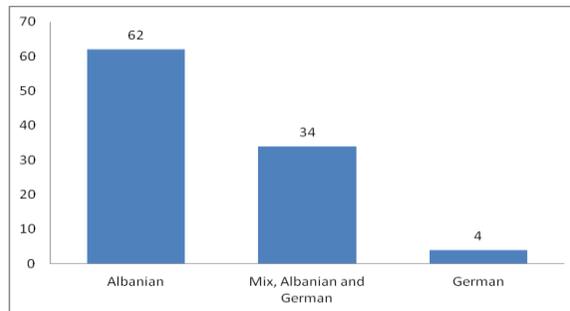


Chart3. Language of communication in Albanian families in Austria

As regards the language of communication in families, we can conclude that Albanian immigrants in Austria utilize their own mother tongue as the main means of communication (62%); 34% communicate in both languages and only 4% communicate exclusively in German.

These data show that despite the foreign environment, a large portion of the Albanian community is doing well with regard to nurturing their own natural discourse. However, we can see that 1/3 of the respondents have slowly begun to feel the impact of the environment they live in; this means that even if they want to speak in Albanian, the other party seems to feel more comfortable when communicating in German and this is how this language diversity happens.

Among some relevant findings of this study are those that have to do with the language of reading, i.e. if they use Albanian or German in their

everyday reading. The responses show that the percentage is almost equal between those who read in Albanian and in German (they are both represented with 41%). This illustrates the fact that a dual community is being created – one more Albano-centric and the other more like Germano-centric community. The same data reveal that the Austrian Albanians have achieved the level to intellectually consult German literature and not remain at the level of orally expressing their basic needs there.

	As a natural thing or phenomena	Like a big punch for me, like a heavy blow	Indolent, do not care	With all means will help to continue the normal life	Will try using all means to cause divorce	No answer	Total
Albania	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Kosova	27.8%	38.9%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%	100.0%
Macedonia	13.3%	53.1%	2.0%	3.1%	26.5%	2.0%	100.0%
Austria	21.1%	42.1%	0.0%	5.3%	15.8%	15.8%	100.0%
Other	44.4%	44.4%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%	0.0%	100.0%
Frequency	28	71	2	4	34	9	148
% Homeland	18.9%	48.0%	1.4%	2.7%	23.0%	6.1%	100.0%

Table 5. The attitudes of Austrian Albanians towards mixed marriages (Austrian-Albanian)

By doing a cross-analysis of questions 3 (homeland) and 18 (the issue of marriage with an Austrian), we can come to the conclusion that among the immigrants from the three main Albanian areas (Albania, Macedonia and Kosovo), those from Macedonia have more sensitive and conservatory views on this issue. Only 13.3% see the marriage of their children with a native as a normal behavior and another 53.1% see it as a huge shock to them. The Kosovo Albanians seem to be far more liberal in this respect (27.8% think that mixed marriages are a normal thing). The same happens with Albanians born in Austria (21.1%). With regard to the latter, it is interesting to note that they have the highest percentage of those that would help their children continue their lives with a member of the native community by any means.

Conclusions

The issue of immigration, especially with regard to western European countries, has been quite a hot topic recently, at times when the world has become ‘a global village’ (McLuhan) and when social mobility has become unstoppable. Albanians as a Balkan-European entity, pushed by external factors and other hardships, have managed to find the possibility of being settled in Austria and continue their lives there. The first Albanians that settled in Austria were those that went to work there as part of inter-state agreements. They were all males that left their families at home; however, the second stage of this flow, included Albanians who left their homeland due to political and security issues, especially with the emergence of ethnic wars in former Yugoslavia and political system crisis in Albania (1990 and after).

Based on the research, we came to these specific conclusions:

- Austrian Albanians have shown self-defensive tendencies of their cultural code by creating the so called ‘meeting isles’ among themselves, thus focusing culturally on them;
- The first generation seems to be more rigid in accepting Austrian cultural values, compared to the second and third generations, which are more cosmopolitan in their views;
- We should note that a part of Albanians in Austria would rather be named as ‘temporary residents’ (known in Albanian as ‘kurbetqarë’) than immigrants, because they are still hoping to return to their homeland one day;
- The majority of Austrian Albanians have found a positive environment in Austria; they have adapted well with the setting

and are doing well; only a quarter of them still feel as foreigners, desperate and dissatisfied;

- Albanian immigrants in Austria still keep their bonds with their homeland, mainly through the use of media and social networks, which helps them a lot in the psychological viewpoint, because it makes them feel as if they are (virtually) there;
- Austrian Albanians are doing their best in nurturing their own natural authentic values. They do this through their associations, clubs, organizations, educational activities in their tongue, meetings, celebrations, etc.
- Despite the claim that they have been accommodated in the host country, almost half of them still have fears for their future and the future of their successors and they justify the spatial organization of theirs in the form of *ghettoization*;
- Even though it may seem at first that religion is quite an influential factor in maintaining one's identity, the respondents said that they do more individually to preserve their national identity;
- Bilingualism is dominant in the first and second generation, whereas German prevails in the third generation of immigrants in this country.
- Findings show that the Albanian community is organically bound to their homeland; they visit it quite often, except a small group (6.1%) who are totally cut off from their or their parents' homeland.
- One of the elements of living in a non-Albanian society is the issue of mixed marriages. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the respondents (71%) do not approve of this kind of marriage relationship.

References

- Bullakaj, A. (2015). “Integrimi duhet të promovohet dhe të inkurajohet”, *Bota sot*, May 4, 2015.
- Butler, D. K. (2001). “Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse”, *Diaspora*, 10:2, pp. 189-219.
- Kuran, T. & Sandholm, W.H. (2007). “Cultural integration and Its Discontents”, in
- <https://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~whs/research/ci.pdf>, December 18, 2017.
- Lloshi, Xh. (1999). “Albanian”, *Handbuch Der Sudosteuropa-Linguistik*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, pp. 277-299.
- Meyer, M. (2014). *Indetiteti i Europës: Shpirti i përbashkët i Unionit European*. Skopje: ISPN.
- Monaghan, J. & Just, P. (2007). *Antropologjia social-kulturore, një hyrje e shkurtër*. Tirana: Ideart.
- Pajaziti, A. (2009). *Fjalor i sociologjisë*. Skopje: Logos-A & SEEU.
- Sigona, N., Gamlen, A., Liberatore, G., & Kringelbach, H. N. (2015). *Diasporas Reimagined Spaces, Practices and Belonging*. University of Oxford.
- Tomash, G. M., Feher, F. & Heler, A., (1989). *Filozofia dhe tranzicioni*. Tirana: Arbri & Soros.
- Vuletić, V. et. al. (2016). *Studija o izbjeglicama*. Beograd: Fondacija Fridrih Ebert.
- <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/pravilo-kovcega-i-integracija-muslimana>
- retrieved on December 17, 2017.