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**Tracing trajectories of vulnerability in the biographical narratives  
of Albanian onward migrants from Greece in the UK**

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## **Trajectories of vulnerability: situating Albanian onward migration in the UK**

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We analyse how Albanian onward migrants from Greece living in the UK construct and negotiate forms of vulnerability they experienced along their migration trajectories. Focus group participants weaved life narratives in which vulnerabilities were constantly but variably imbricated. The risks to personal safety that they experienced in Albania set participants' migratory trajectories in motion. The hostile institutional policies participants were subjected to in Greece drove them to onward migrate. The UK was constructed as a migratory destination where racism was more subtly present compared to Greece. We, therefore, conceptualise participants' migratory experiences as constituting trajectories of vulnerability.

**Keywords:** migratory trajectories, vulnerability, onward migration, Albania, Greece, UK

### **Introduction**

It is well-established that the 2009/2010 government-debt crisis in Greece triggered many people to emigrate from the country, seeking better life opportunities in wealthier parts of the world (Pratsinakis et al., 2021). What is less well-known and remains under-researched is that a substantial proportion of this 'new' migration comprised people who had previously migrated to Greece from other Balkan countries, primarily Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania and who, in some instances, had spent considerable parts of their biographies living, working, and studying in the country. This article contributes to the emerging body of literature on the onward migration of Albanians from Greece and Italy to other European countries (Dimitriadis, 2022; Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021; Karamoschou, 2018). By using 'onward migration', we align with recent advances in migration studies, which employ the term to describe the spatial trajectory of people who, after spending time in one migratory destination, remigrate to a new one (Nekby, 2006; Jeffery & Murison, 2011; Toma & Castagnone, 2015; Montagna et al., 2021; Ahrens & King, 2023a). Although onward migration is not a novel migration trajectory, interest in it has been growing in academic and non-academic contexts in recent years. Scholars and policymakers, including national governments, have begun to pay attention to onward migrants (henceforth OMs) and the implications of their trajectories and experiences for a range of social and political issues and the theoretical study thereof. This interest is reflected in collections of research such as those in Montagna et al. (2021) and Ahrens and King (2023a), as well as in the annual reports published by Fondazione Migrantes on Italians abroad, which include the concept of *nuovi italiani*, or 'new Italians'.

Here, we propose that the migratory experiences of Albanian OMs can be conceptualised as constituting trajectories of vulnerability, wherein each instance of migration represents a movement between two sociohistorical contexts, both of which contain conditions and power relation dynamics that increase the likelihood of OMs facing various types and degrees of inequality and oppression. We challenge approaches that erase or downplay the vulnerabilities of certain migrants, such as so-called ‘economic migrants’, while foregrounding or exclusively focusing on the experiences of other displaced people, like refugees or asylum seekers. At the same time, we problematise the positions of power and amounts of privilege that migrants can be found to occupy and possess at different points alongside their migratory trajectories compared to other members of society. We have structured the article as follows: we first theoretically introduce onward migration and how it relates to forms of vulnerability. Next, we provide an overview of the migratory trajectories of Albanian OMs, which is the focus of this article. We then present our methods and the profiles of the participants in our study before analysing the different forms of vulnerability participants experienced in their migratory origin and destinations. Finally, we offer concluding remarks on how researchers can critically and ethically address participants’ experiences of vulnerability.

Before we present our theoretical framework, we offer a few remarks on our positionalities, which serve as the lenses through which we approached and analysed the data we present herein. Petros Karatsareas is a Greek man who has spent most of his adult life living, studying, and working in the UK. He acquired Greek citizenship at birth through his parents and, in addition to fulfilling the legal requirements for naturalisation, had the financial means to apply for and gain British citizenship. In Greece, he belongs to the dominant ethnic-linguistic-cultural group (Greek). He has no Albanian background and, when drafting this manuscript, had a basic knowledge of Albanian. He has not faced racism nor felt disadvantaged because of his ethnic background. Rexhina Ndoci is an Albanian woman born in Albania to Albanian parents and was raised and educated in Greece from a young age. She holds Albanian citizenship from birth and acquired Greek citizenship in her early twenties after meeting the legal requirements and passing the Greek naturalisation exam. The second author is herself an Albanian OM having subsequently migrated to the US to pursue doctoral studies. She is a native speaker of Albanian and Greek and shares many of the experiences of vulnerability in the context of onward migration as described by the participants of this study.

## **Theorising vulnerability in onward migration**

### **Onward migration**

Onward migration has been the object of systematic study primarily for the past two decades, leading to new understandings of migration as an inherently dynamic, complex, fluid, and even reversible process characterised by high degrees of fragmentedness and temporariness. This represents a paradigmatic shift away from conceptualisations of migration as a bipolar event with one point of departure and one destination, an event that occurs only once in a

person's life; is reduced to a binary and clearly defined chronotopic opposition 'from a there and then – to a here and now'; and, is permanent (van Liempt, 2011; King & della Puppa, 2020; King & Karamoschou, 2019; Paul & Yeoh, 2021).

Ahrens and King (2023b) identify several key motivations underlying people's decisions to onward migrate: the acquisition of citizenship and enhanced mobility rights, unemployment due to economic crises, experiences of discrimination and racism, and the expectation of better opportunities in another country. The 2007–2008 financial crisis drove many people who had previously migrated from non-EU countries to EU countries that were severely affected by the crisis – most notably, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal – to onward migrate to less affected countries such as Germany and the UK (Dias & Junior, 2018; Dimitriadis, 2022; Mapril, 2021; Mas Giralt, 2017; Ramos, 2018; Román- Velázquez & Retis, 2021; Turcatti, 2022; Turcatti & Vargas-Silva 2022). Having previously been naturalised as EU citizens based on residence, ancestral descent, historical colonial links, or ethnic identification, many people exercised EU freedom of movement rights to onward migrate. Others onward-migrated as third-country nationals, while some circumvented legal and geographic borders and may currently be of irregular migration status in their most recent destinations. Equipped with a wide range of skill sets, many intra-European OMs managed to improve their life prospects and those of their families, escaping various forms of vulnerability they faced in their first migration destinations, such as employment insecurity, changes in social welfare rights, other ramifications of austerity, lack of stable legal status. However, for others, onward migration entailed processes of deskilling and (further) precarisation, coupled with intersectional discrimination based on their gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic background, educational level, legal status and other social characteristics (Bermudez, 2020; Bermudez & Oso, 2020; McIlwaine, 2020; McIlwaine & Bunge, 2019).

Structural conditions such as residential segregation and unemployment, physical and verbal attacks, and “the very indirect ways in which they had come to believe that they were not “100% Swedish”” (Kelly, 2013, p. 274) underpinned the decisions of Iranian OMs to onward migrate from Sweden to other European countries, with some participants explicitly stating that they never wished to return. Similarly, being treated “a step below citizens” (Das Gupta, 2021, p. 41) in the Gulf countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates), institutionalised under the kafala system, drove Indian and Pakistani OMs to onward migrate to Canada. In the Gulf countries, the inferior treatment of these migrants compared to Gulf country citizens was evident in a broad range of vulnerabilities embedded in everyday living and working conditions. These included racialisation in hiring practices and salaries, lack of citizenship and civil and political rights (including the right to speak freely), increased possibilities for being banned or deported easily, social and cultural segregation, exacerbated by lack of fluency in Arabic, and residential segregation due to affordability issues, similar to those described in Kelly (2013). In Canada, OMs encountered new forms of racial prejudice, such as the devaluation of their educational credentials and employers assuming that, as migrants ‘of colour’ with ‘non-standard’ names, they lacked

in English competence and Canadian work experience. Their marking as deficient, undesirable, and non-preferred employees led many to underemployment and precarious employment, which Das Gupta (2021) considers forms of systemic racism. This involves a discourse of anti-racism which is, “an avoidance of racial terminology that focuses on removing the evidence of rather than the conditions of racism as the “proper response” to racism” (Ku et al., 2019, p. 293).

### **Migrant vulnerability**

In popular discourses, vulnerability is often associated with powerlessness, weakness, dependency, passivity, lack of agency, and insecurity – essentially, a diminished capacity to cope with emerging circumstances when exposed to forms of risk, resulting in a heightened possibility of suffering (physical or psychological) harm. There is also a tendency to refer to specific groups, such as refugees or victims of abuse, as vulnerable in a way that suggests that vulnerability is a natural, inherent, and fixed characteristic of those people. Conversely, the vulnerabilities of other groups are often discursively erased based on the perceived reasons for their displacement. Holmes and Castañeda (2016) discuss how people who were involuntarily displaced by war, conflict, or natural disasters are framed as deserving of social, economic, and political aid by the international community. In contrast, economic migrants are deemed undeserving because they are portrayed as having left their home communities of their own volition after having made free and autonomous choices to cross borders. Recent work in the social sciences (Brown, 2011; Mendola & Pera, 2022; Mesarič & Vacchelli, 2021) highlights that such broad generalisations entrench inequalities, impede social inclusion, and exacerbate stigmatisation and alienation. As Götsche specifically relates to migrants, “the construction of migrants as vulnerable victims at best, and as cultural and security threats at worst not only assists in their dehumanisation, but it also legitimises actions taken against them. Moreover, these existing constructions, which hierarchise ‘worthiness’, are limited in their reflection of the complex realities of migrants” (2021, p. 24).

The point regarding the “complex realities of migrants” echoes current social constructivist approaches that draw on Crenshaw’s (1997) notion of intersectionality, as well as Butler’s (2004; 2009) work linking vulnerability with precarity, to propose a view of vulnerability as contextually and socially produced within frameworks of intersectional oppression. In this theorisation, all human bodies are equally frail, and all persons have the potential to face vulnerabilities in their life courses. Not all persons, however, do – or, at least, not all people face the same vulnerabilities or to the same extent. Who does face vulnerabilities is determined by the position people occupy within society (Gilson, 2016). The causes of this type of disadvantage are structural and political, related to the personal, economic, social, and cultural circumstances in which people find themselves at different points in their lives (Brown 2011). Mendola and Pera (2022) notionally combine the ideas of “intersectional vulnerability” and “intersectionality of risks” to develop the concept of the “multiprofile of disadvantage”, which results from “the intersectional confluence of individual, contextual, and institutional factors” (p. 117) and which creates and/or aggravates the vulnerability of people on the move. For example, Mesarič and Vacchelli (2021) found that staff members at

third-sector organisations working with women during pregnancy and in the post-natal period identified a broad range of social conditions that either rendered women vulnerable or compounded existing vulnerabilities. These included, but were not limited to, immigration status (linked to a lack of entitlement to services), social isolation, language barriers, contact with the criminal justice and social care systems, destitution, and racist abuse. A key argument in this research was that the processes through which these women's capacity for autonomy is thwarted are embedded in power relations to such an extent as to be often made invisible.

## **The empirical context: Albanian (onward) migration**

### **From Albania**

In the early 1990s, Albania, along with the former Eastern Bloc, transitioned from socialism to a free market economy. Until then, Albania had been isolated from the rest of the world, even from other socialist states, after alliance fallouts with the USSR, China, and Yugoslavia. Isolation and economic hardship pushed large numbers of Albanians to migrate in search of better life opportunities abroad. The early exodus from Albania followed three migratory waves (Vullnetari, 2012). The first wave started in 1991 during the end of the socialist regime. The second wave began in 1997, which was marked by the collapse of large-scale pyramid schemes that further devastated the country's economy. The third wave occurred between 1998 and 1999, during the Kosova war, when Albanians from Albania intermixed with Albanians from Kosova and sought asylum in other European countries, including the United Kingdom.

It is estimated that about a million Albanians had left the country by the beginning of the new millennium (Dimitriadis, 2022). To gauge the scale of the migration, it is worth noting that the country's population in 2022 was estimated to be just under 2.8 million (INSTAT, 2023). This means that the Albanians who left Albania by 2001 represented a quarter of the population. According to the annual report issued by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (2023), the country continues to experience a decrease in its population due to outward migration, which noted a 10.5% increase in 2022 compared to 2021 and amounted to more than 46,000 individuals.

### **To Greece**

Greece, the only Balkan country with a free market economy during the Cold War, became a significant destination for Albanians during the first two migratory waves. The shared political border, though mountainous, also facilitated Greece as a choice for migration. Across the Adriatic Sea, Italy, perceived as the epitome of the West in the Albanian consciousness (Mai 2001, 2004), also received a large number of migrants who arrived there primarily by sea. In Greece, data from the last census conservatively estimate the number of residents with Albanian citizenship to be under 400,000 individuals (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2023). This figure indicates a 20% decrease in the Albanian population between

2011 and 2021, which can be attributed, among other factors, to the effects of the 2008 Great Recession, which led many to return to Albania or to onward migrate to other destination countries (Gemi & Triandafyllidou 2021; Qori & Meksi 2023). Initially, Albanians arriving in Greece were welcomed as refugees escaping a brutal regime. However, as the number of Albanian migrants increased, they were quickly stigmatised and stereotyped as violent and criminal (Ladaridis & Wickens, 1999) and perceived as a threat to the ethnic homogeneity and sovereignty of Greece (Psimmenos, 2001). Albanians became and remained the ethnoracial Other, which is fundamentally different from what it means to be Greek, including physically (Ndoci 2024). Greek mass media played a significant role in shaping these perceptions (Kapllani & Mai 2005). These negative perceptions affected many aspects of the lives of Albanians in Greece. For example, the absence of regulatory policies until 1997 led those who arrived in 1990 to remain undocumented for seven years, resulting in informal work and lack of access to services such as public healthcare. Additionally, housing discrimination made it difficult for Albanians to access housing in general or quality housing specifically, such as apartments with central heating or reduced street noise (Polyzou & Spyrellis 2024). These perceptions also manifested in acts of physical aggression, exemplified by the 2022 hate crime in which a landlord murdered an Albanian family renting from him (both parents and two children aged under three) (AlphaNewsLive).

Albanians developed various strategies to avoid the stigmatisation and essentialisation of their ethnic group. One was claiming affiliation with the Greek minority of southern Albania, which led to broader social acceptance as long-lost brothers separated from the motherland for nearly half a century. This claim also provided easier access to residence permits and the naturalisation process in Greece (Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2017). Often, this claim to ethnic Greek origin was facilitated by changing personal and family names to Orthodox Christian names commonly found in Greece. Even if not legally formalised, many Albanians informally adopted Orthodox Christian names or Hellenised their names in everyday interactions with Greeks (Giannakopoulou, 2020; Ndoci, 2024). For the second generation of Albanian migrants, those born or raised in Greece from a young age, a shift in language dominance to Greek was another resource that allowed their Albanianess to remain unnoticed (Gogonas, 2009; Gogonas & Michail, 2015). Language shift was also reinforced by parents' general lack of efforts to support the acquisition and maintenance of Albanian (Chatzidaki & Maligkoudi, 2013).

### **To the United Kingdom**

The financial crisis of 2008 nearly drove Greece to bankruptcy, and its effects were acutely felt by precarious groups, such as migrants. In the years that followed, many sought to return to their homeland after losing employment or being unable to afford living in Greece (Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021). The loss of employment and the inability to secure other employment in a short time often led to the loss of residence permits, as Greek law ties permit issuance to legal employment and employer-sponsored health care benefits. As a result, many migrants sought to return to Albania after failing to renew their legal status. Others, especially those who had managed to secure Greek citizenship, decided to pursue

better life opportunities in third countries. Being EU passport holders allowed these individuals to onward migrate to countries such as Germany, Sweden, and the UK, which were among the countries receiving the highest numbers of migrants from Greece.

In addition to Albanians arriving from Greece, the UK received Albanians who onward migrated from Italy under similar circumstances after securing Italian citizenship. Another large population of Albanian speakers in the UK comprises ethnic Albanians who sought asylum in the country after the outbreak of the war in Kosova in 1998. Available census data for England and Wales (ONS 2022) shows that between 2011 and 2021, the number of Albanian and Greek speakers increased by two-thirds.

Based on EUROSTAT (2023) reports, 1,177,752 individuals emigrated from Greece between 2010 and 2021. After Germany, the UK emerged as the second most popular destination for migrants from Greece. According to Pratsinakis et al. (2021), approximately 40,000 individuals born in Greece lived in the UK in 2011. By 2021, that number had risen between 100,000 and 130,000. Greek passport holders of Albanian origin are an important part of this new migration from Greece (Karamoschou 2018). This migration is both visible and invisible. Albanian OMs are invisible because, to our knowledge, there is no quantitative data about the percentage of the migration from Greece that they constitute. At the same time, they are visible through the spaces they claim and inhabit in the diasporic Greek and Albanian communities in the EU and the UK. For instance, they socialise and work with and among ethnic Greeks in the UK, own or are employed in Greek food establishments, and create online communities with names highlighting their complex migratory trajectories.

In recent years, the UK has also received Albanian speakers arriving directly from Albania to seek asylum. According to Home Office data (Home Office, 2023), in 2010, the UK received 174 asylum applications from Albanians. Up to 2017, asylum applications by Albanians did not surpass 2,000 per year. Since then, the number of applications has been rising, with the largest number recorded in 2022, when 14,223 applications were lodged by Albanians in the UK. In 2023, the number of Albanians arriving in the UK dropped by over 90% (Filauri et al., 2024). Many of these asylum applicants arrived in the UK by crossing the English Channel on small boats. The heated post-Brexit political climate created conditions for media-backed xenophobia against Albanians. These conditions also affected Albanian refugees from Kosova and Albanian OMs, whose lives in the UK had previously not attracted much media or government attention (Dimitriadis, 2023).

## **Methodological framework**

### **Using biographical narratives in migration research**

Biographical narratives were the main research tool that we used for this study. Biographical narratives have emerged as an insightful tool in the study of migration, including in exploring the role language plays in migratory processes and the lived experiences of people on the move. Siouti (2017) highlights that by considering the experiences of migrants both in their



places of origin and in their migratory destinations, biographical approaches offer a way of examining migration that departs from methodological nationalism, the analytical framework that treats nation-states as the default and natural unit for studying social phenomena, thus obscuring understanding of processes that transcend national borders (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003). Biographical methods are therefore well-suited for studying transnational phenomena, including 'new' forms of migration such as onward migration, which we focus on in this article. Biographical approaches have also been previously utilised to investigate the experiences of Greek so-called 'neo-migrants', that is, people who left Greece due to the Greek government-debt crisis; see Siouti (2019). This is the cohort to which the participants in our study also belong.

A particular strength of collecting and analysing biographical narratives is that they foreground migrants as social actors "shaping their own destinies, as opposed to pawns merely responding to constraints imposed upon them by their society" (Brettell, 2003, p. 27). That said, biographical approaches do not treat the personal and the social as separate dimensions of the migrant experience. Instead, they highlight how "self and society" (Eastmond, 2007, p. 250) are entangled and co-constitutive (Apitzch & Siouti, 2007). In Worm's words, "biographical approaches to migration place the experiences and perspectives of mobile actors at the centre of the research and show how they are interwoven with overall social processes and social forces that give a biographical trajectory its direction" (2023, p. 182). The aim is to understand how migrants make sense of their worlds, both past and present, from their particular social positions and cultural vantage points, how they draw on their repertoires of resources to cope with change and heteronomous social conditions, and what aspirations or plans they might have for their futures (Gültekin, Inowlocki & Lutz, 2006; Eastmond, 2007; Siouti, 2019).

In sociolinguistic and applied linguistic research, narratives have been conceptualised as text types (or genres) as well as a mode of thought, knowledge, and communication that is fundamental in humans' understanding of the world. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) identify three main linguistic approaches to narratives: text-typological, narratological, and experience-centred approaches, with the latter underpinning a so-called narrative turn that emphasises the experiences of the storytelling subjects and treats storytelling – especially storytelling that takes place as part of research through the interaction of researchers and research participants – as socially and contextually situated events. Studying narratives within this framework is therefore seen as an interpretive, meaning-seeking, subjective, and particularistic endeavour (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 20). Eastmond (2007) makes this point when she writes that "stories cannot be seen as simply reflecting life as lived, but should be seen as creative constructions or interpretations of the past, generated in specific contexts of the present" (p. 250). More recently, Pukarthafer (2022) has repeated this notion, reminding us that biographical narratives are "transformed narratives of lived experiences of language, told and retold in diverse modalities and ultimately relating memories to present discourses and future developments" (p. 21), which are "always partial, co-constructed and changing over time" (p. 26).

Specifically reviewing the contribution of narratives to the sociolinguistic, discourse linguistic, and applied linguistic study of migrants and migration, De Fina and Tseng (2017) categorise existing work into two broad fields: (a) studies focusing on the types of representations that migrants construct about their experiences, values, and relationships with out-groups through storytelling; and (b) studies examining storytelling as a practice within migrant communities and institutions that engage with migrants. Subscribing to a dynamic view of narrative as both discourse and social practice, they stress the centrality of three critical notions in approaching migrants and migration from a narrative perspective: positioning, voice, and agency. In relation to narrative positioning, they draw on Bamberg's (1997) work, according to which narrative positioning takes place at three different levels formulated as three questions: (1) how are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events? (2) how does the speaker position themselves to the audience? (3) how do narrators position themselves to themselves? Voice has to do with the strategies narrators mobilise to construct their perspectives, while agency relates to the responsibility and initiative that narrators show as both characters in their stories and as evaluators of their narratives.

From a methodological point of view, De Fina and Tseng (2017) consider the elicitation of narratives to be “an authentic terrain of engagement” (p. 391) between researchers and research participants. Asking migrants to (re)tell their life stories is a particularly fruitful way of gaining insights into their emic perspectives about the migrant experience in a way that is mindful of the fact that migrants' migration trajectories are often marked by negative experiences and unpleasant and traumatic events. By positioning themselves and others into the storyworlds and (re)tellings they construct, migrants can share their viewpoints and experiences indirectly and without feeling that they are being questioned. This, in turn, fosters the creation of rapport between researchers and research participants.

## **Participants**

We analyse data that we collected from thirteen individuals, nine men and four women. We recruited eight participants through calls for participants that we posted on Facebook and Twitter, including on our personal profiles and closed Facebook groups of which the membership is largely made up of Albanian OMs from Greece in the UK and so-called second-generation Albanian migrants in Greece. Four participants were recruited through snowball sampling, and two participants were recruited from Karatsareas's social networks in London. All participants had migrated from Albania to Greece as children and from Greece to the UK as adults. Participants' ages ranged from 27 to 35 years. All were dual Albanian and Greek nationals. All were born in Albania and migrated to Greece as children and their families. Participants started migrating to the UK in 2016, when they were broadly in their mid-20s, as soon as they had secured Greek citizenship and were issued Greek passports. After Brexit, all participants had secured either settled or pre-settled status in the UK as Greek citizens. Apart from two participants, all others resided in London at the time of the research. All were highly educated. Eleven participants had studied at university up to master's level, one held a PhD, and one had completed a BA degree. Almost all participants

were employed in highly skilled professional and/or managerial positions, broadly matching their previous education and training. See Table 1 for detailed information.

Pseudonym	Gender	Year of birth (Age)	Place of birth in Albania	Year of migration to Greece (Age)	Place of first settlement in Greece	Year of migration to the UK (Age)	Place of current residence in the UK	Highest qualification	Current occupation
Albana	F	1995 (27)	Sarandë	1996 (1)	Peloponnese	2020 (25)	Outside London	MA	Retail
Arbër	M	1992 (30)	Sarandë	1996 (4)	Peloponnese	2017 (25)	Outside London	PhD	Engineer
Ardit	M	1992 (30)	Kuçovë	1997 (5)	Athens	2016 (24)	Outside London	MA	Public policy
Aria	F	1995 (27)	Berat	1997 (2)	Kefalonia	2020 (25)	London	MA	Sales specialist
Ermal	M	1993 (29)	Tirana	1998 (5)	Lamia	2019 (26)	London	MA	Construction administration
Illir	M	1988 (34)	Vlorë	1999 (11)	Athens	2017 (29)	London	MA	Engineer
Mentor	M	1987 (35)	Lushnjë	1998 (11)	Samos	2017 (30)	London	MA	Engineer
Neritan	M	1995 (27)	Berat	1996 (1)	Athens	2018 (23)	London	MA	Shipping
Olta	F	1990 (32)	Kuçovë	1997 (7)	Athens	2020 (30)	London	MA	Sales specialist
Redon	M	1991 (31)	Ersekë	2001 (10)	Volos	2017 (26)	London	MA	Data scientist
Sinan	M	1990 (32)	Fier	2001 (11)	Corfu	2021 (31)	London	MA	Hospitality
Vasi	M	1995 (27)	Vlorë	1996 (1)	Athens	2019 (24)	London	MA	Risk analyst
Xixa	F	1994 (28)	Kuçovë	1997 (3)	Athens	2020 (26)	London	BA	Journalist

**Table 1.** Participants' demographic and biographic information.

## Methods and data

The study that we present in this article was part of a larger-scale project on the intersection of language and onward migration among Albanian OMs in the UK. As part of the project, we facilitated three two-hour focus group sessions with the participants with the aim of developing an understanding of their lived experiences of onward migration. In the sessions, participants were invited to provide information about their biographies and migration trajectories and to share experiences in relation to the role their languages played and continued to play in their lives structuring the narratives around the three main stages in participants' migration trajectories (periods spent in Albania, Greece, and the UK), treating the moves from Albania to Greece and from Greece to the UK as critical moments of biographical transformation that had the potential to foreground the effects of the social forces that participants had experienced (Pukarthofer, 2022). Participants were asked to reflect on opportunities they had been able to access thanks to the languages they spoke but also on opportunities they might have missed out on because they did not speak a particular language or because their competences in a given language were deemed to be an obstacle. They were also invited to share specific examples of both positive and negative experiences from their biographies, including in their everyday lives in the UK. They were also asked to sketch a picture of their social networks in the UK in terms of the ethn(olinguistic) background of the people they tended to form relationships with. They were finally asked about the most common issues they faced in the UK as dual citizens of Albania and Greece; what types of institutional support they had sought from local and national governments in Albania, Greece, and the UK; and, what types of support they would like to see in the future in relation to common issues and problems.

We adopted an auto-socio-bio-ethnographic approach (Busch, 2022) to guide us in how we run the focus group sessions. We centred participants as agentive subjects who narrated, communicated, and deliberated on the social meaning that they ascribed to social inequalities that they had faced in their lives as well as the effects these had on them. We were also attuned to participants' as well as our own positionings in the focus groups as listening subjects (Flubacher & Purkarthofer, 2022; McNamara, 2022) and the effects these positionings had on how participants weaved their biographical narratives. During the focus group discussions, we acted more as facilitators than interviewers. The discussions were led by Ndoci, who, as mentioned in the introduction, is an Albanian OM herself. Her positionality helped to foster a trusting environment, creating a safe space in which participants were able to share their experiences more openly. Karatsareas helped the discussions move forward from the perspective of someone who comes from the dominant ethnic-linguistic-cultural group in Greece and does not share the same experiences as the participants.

Sessions took place online. They were all conducted in Greek and audio- and video-recorded using Zoom's built-in functionalities. Recordings were transcribed, producing a corpus totalling 6 hours and 7 minutes of recordings and 46,793 words of transcripts. The transcripts were subsequently analysed thematically using NVivo for Mac (release 1.7.1). We followed

Braun and Clarke (2022) and started approaching the data and immersing ourselves in the multitude of topics and ideas that were present in the data set by thoroughly reading and rereading the transcripts and making note of initial ideas. We systematically identified significant phrases, which led to the creation of the initial codes. We then organised these initial codes into broader themes, which we reviewed, defined, and named. We paid particular attention to trends and patterns that emerged consistently across the three focus groups. We undertook the coding process together using NVivo 13 Collaboration Cloud. Throughout the process, we engaged in regular meetings and online communication to go through the coding process, discuss their perspectives on the topics and emergent themes, address any specific issues in detail, and resolve any discrepancies.

The theme of vulnerability, which we focus on in this article, was selected based on its prevalence and significance across the data set. There were 102 references (coded phrases) across the data set that we grouped under ‘experiences vulnerability’: 58 references were coded ‘racism’, 19 references were coded ‘stereotyping and profiling’, 10 references were coded ‘labelling and naming’, 9 references were coded ‘violence’, 4 references were coded ‘mocking’, and 2 references were coded ‘bullying’. These references were coded in terms of the participants’ migratory trajectories and relate to the three main points of those trajectories as shown in Table 2. The distribution of codes in relation to the participants’ migration origin and destinations underpin our decision to focus on Greece and the UK in the data analysis.

<b>Vulnerability experiences</b>	<b>Migration origin and destinations (number of references in dataset)</b>			<b>Total references</b>
	Albania	Greece	United Kingdom	
Racism	3	33	22	58
Stereotyping and profiling	7	5	7	19
Labelling and naming	2	7	1	10
Violence	0	9	0	9
Mocking	0	2	2	4
Bullying	0	2	0	2
<b>Total references</b>	12	58	32	<b>102</b>

**Table 2.** Results of coding on NVivo.

### **Albanian OMs’ trajectories of vulnerability**

#### **Escaping vulnerability in Albania**

A common reason for participants and their parents to migrate from Albania was to escape physical vulnerability. This pertained to the civil war that broke out in 1997 in Albania due to the collapse of large-scale pyramid schemes, which resulted in a large portion of the

population losing their life savings (Musaraj, 2011). As adults, some of the OMs who participated in our focus groups had returned to Albania for studies or work but found themselves unable to adapt to life or imagine themselves living in the country permanently (Gemi & Triandafyllidou, 2021). A significant reason included the absence of social welfare, such as livable retirement schemes, which drives more Albanians to migrate to other countries (Vathi, 2015). Other reasons included corruption and a mentality that was incompatible with the life philosophy they had acquired in Greece.

Many OMs also noted that their Albanian is often commented on as being Greek-accented, not good enough, or not standard enough, having acquired as children the regional varieties spoken by their families (Vathi, 2015). These linguistic criticisms, along with jokes that circulate in Albania about the linguistically and culturally assimilated Albanian migrant from Greece, instil feelings of discomfort and discourage them from considering a permanent return to Albania.

### **In Greece, “they clip your wings.”**

Participants generally thought of Greece, their first migratory destination, with fondness and initially denied ever experiencing racism growing up as ethnic Albanians there. However, as the focus groups progressed, almost all of them shared experiences of microaggressions or, more directly, xenophobia. For instance, Neritan felt discomfort and even exclusion by being racialised (Urciuoli, 1996; Alim et al., 2016) as the Albanian kid with an Albanian name in a classroom full of traditional Greek names. This led him to adopt, via baptism into Greek Orthodoxy, a Greek name by which he introduced himself for a while as he “felt ashamed to say his actual name” (see also Komninaki, 2016; Giannakopoulou, 2020). Redon, who had migrated to Greece from Albania at the age of ten in the early 2000s, initially narrated that he did not experience racism, only that he felt “singled out by the rest of [his] classmates”. Later in the interview, though, he recalled a time when he experienced physical violence at school, being punished for something someone else did. Being the Albanian kid in the classroom left him vulnerable to taking the blame for behaviour deemed unacceptable in educational institutions. It also left him vulnerable to physical punishment by members of those institutions that were meant to protect him as a student. This vulnerability was not mitigated by any of the other teachers, who not only did not intervene but chose to ignore the punishment Redon received.

Some of the participants internalised the blame for the discriminatory and/or xenophobic behaviour they received, attributing it to the “reactionary personalities” they displayed as children. They also mentioned being parentified (Dariotis et al., 2023 and references therein) and having to act as caretakers for their younger siblings due to their parents working long hours. For instance, Ilir, who arrived in Greece at the age of eleven in 1999, quickly took on the responsibility of gathering the documents for the residence permit renewal of the entire family. While still a child, Ilir was tasked with adult responsibilities because proper structures were absent in Greece to ensure children did not take on their parents’ roles. Additionally, some participants acted as language brokers (Crafter & Iqbal, 2022; Arumi & Rubio-

Carbonero, 2023) for their parents in dealings with state institutions. This dual burden of parentification and language brokering added significant stress and responsibility to their lives, further complicating their integration and experiences in Greece. Consider Redon's and Ilir's experiences in Extracts 1 and 2.

**Extract 1.** "The teachers just closed the doors."

The teacher grabbed me from there and threw me out, and the principal was waiting outside to beat me. The tragic part was that the doors of all the other classrooms were open, but the teachers just closed them. I was kicked, slapped... and then went back to class. – Redon

**Extract 2.** "I was the one to take care of the documents."

I have a lot of experience with Greek bureaucracy because, obviously, every year, I was the one in my family to take care of the documents of my sister, myself, my mother, and my father, which is about ten years, 13 years. Because [the permits] were renewed annually. – Ilir

Redon's experience highlights the extreme physical abuse and neglect faced by some participants. The response of the other teachers, who chose to close their classroom doors rather than intervene, underscores the systemic nature of the discrimination and violence endured. This not only exacerbated the immediate physical harm but also reinforced a sense of isolation and vulnerability. Ilir's words highlight the significant burden placed on young OMs, who were often responsible for navigating complex bureaucratic processes on behalf of their families. This responsibility, typically an adult role, underscores the parentification and stress many experience.

Participants reflected that their bureaucratic dealings in Greece added stress to their, and their families' lives (Sapountzis & Xenitidou, 2018), motivating them to onward migrate. Some recounted the difficulty in renewing their residence permits (see also Cavounidis, 2018), which remain at risk today. Others spoke of the challenges, bureaucracy, waiting time, and emotional stress of securing Greek citizenship like Ardit, who lived and studied public policy at the post-graduate level in northern England. In his narrative (Extract 3), Ardit expressed frustration over the uncertainty of his naturalisation process in Greece.

**Extract 3.** "Aren't they going to give my my citizenship? I've been here since kindergarten."

I have submitted my documents [for citizenship], and it won't come through... Something was eating me away from the inside. Come on, what's going to happen? I've been here for 20 years. Aren't they going to give me my citizenship? I've been here since kindergarten. Aren't they going to give me my papers? Anyways, in 2016, as soon as I received the decision for citizenship, I started looking for tickets to come to England the very same day. I think the next day I booked the tickets to fly two months later. So, on June 16, I migrated from Athens to England. – Ardit



Born in the early 1990s in Albania, Ardit migrated with his family to Athens at the age of five and completed his education there. Disappointed with the lack of employment prospects and drained by the xenophobia he had to navigate in Greece, he onward migrated to the UK in 2016, shortly after becoming a Greek citizen. In his narrative (Extract 3), Ardit recounts the four years he waited for his naturalisation to be approved. During this time, the law that initially granted him citizenship was deemed unconstitutional by the Greek Supreme Court. During that period, Ardit's application and those of many others in the same position were not processed until 2016, when a new naturalisation law was passed. These four years of wait left Ardit vulnerable, with limited employment opportunities unrelated to his studies, and exposed him to xenophobic sentiment towards Albanians. In this state of vulnerability, Ardit felt a sense of injustice. He believed that his twenty-year presence in Greece and the completion of the Greek educational system should have qualified him as Greek and entitled him to the benefits of citizenship. As soon as his citizenship was granted, Ardit sought to remove himself from this vulnerable position and take advantage of his Greek citizenship by onward migrating to the UK.

Participants in the focus groups also spoke of their encounters with Greek institutions, the Greek police, and Greek customs officers, as well as the fear and uncertainty of crossing the border between Albania and Greece, even as residence permit holders. Ardit, for example, recounted the countless times he had been subjected to document control in the streets of Athens while going about his daily business. See Extract 4.

**Extract 4.** “As if I had stolen anything, killed, or done something bad.”

The police would take me to the police station without having anything illegal on me, nothing, just because I am Albanian. They would keep me at the station for two, three, even four hours, and, depending on the part of Athens I was in, my father would have to come with my passport to release me after five hours as if I had stolen anything, killed, or done something bad. – Ardit

Like many others who feared losing the precious passports that contained their sticker residence permits and wanted to avoid the bureaucratic hurdles in two countries to replace those documents, Ardit would leave his passport at home. As a man, he would be subjected to random document control by the Greek police through a process that heavily involved profiling men who might give a hint, through appearance or language, of not being Greek. When found without his residence permit, the police would take Ardit and other men in a similar situation to the police station. He would be held there until a family member could come to the station with his passport and residence permit, which the police would use to validate his identity and release him, provided his record was clear. Ardit found this process humiliating, as he would be treated like a criminal just because he was racialised and profiled as non-Greek. The process would also add extra stress on his family, who would potentially have to leave their jobs and other responsibilities to fetch Ardit's passport at whichever police station he was being held at the time.

As mentioned above, the 2009/2010 financial crisis played a significant role in the decision of many to onward migrate to the UK (Pratsinakis et al., 2021; Tzogopoulos, 2020). For many non-Greeks, securing employment in their areas of study became especially difficult due to the economic downturn. Others also cited nepotism as a hurdle they had to overcome in their job searches when employment opportunities were scarce (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2016). Neritan was among those participants (Extract 5).

**Extract 5.** “Those companies don’t have many migrants.”

I was constantly stressed in Greece about how I would find a job in a sector like shipping, where supposedly everyone chooses to find work. I spent a year there [in Greece] and could not find [work], while I saw all the guys from Greece finding jobs. I am not saying it was racist; maybe it was not racist, perhaps it was because someone would hire their friend or someone their child. I didn’t have anybody inside the companies. Generally, those companies don’t have many migrants; it’s usually many Greeks. – Neritan

Neritan came to Greece as a one-year-old and studied shipping specifically because it was a lucrative field in Greece that was generally unaffected by the Great Recession. After graduation, he saw his Greek peers get jobs in shipping companies, but he was unable to do so. Although he did not directly tie his lack of success in securing employment to his ethnicity, he did highlight nepotism. Family and friend connections continue to be crucial in white-collar professions, and Neritan, as a migrant, lacked those connections within the Greek shipping companies. Neritan also observed that shipping companies generally lack non-Greek employees, making it unlikely that the industry would move in a more inclusive direction while he was in the job market. As a result, in 2018, at the age of 23, he decided to onward migrate to the UK to escape the vulnerability of employment in Greece. This decision proved successful, as by the time the focus groups were conducted, Neritan was employed in his field of study in London.

A similar situation was described by Olta (Extract 6), who worked as a sales specialist for a multinational company in the UK when the focus group sessions took place.

**Extract 6.** “They clip your wings so you can’t move forward.”

The reason I left is because the way of thinking in Greece exhausted me. In a job, if you are good at something, they don’t let you move on easily. They tell you to stay put and clip your wings so you can’t move forward. That exhausted me and made me think I had a ceiling over me, and I couldn’t move. – Olta

Olta first migrated to Greece in 1997 at the age of seven. She completed undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Greece and felt that, as an Albanian, she was unable to rise through the ranks in the company where she was employed. For her, onward migration to the UK in 2020 was a way to achieve her career aspirations and realise her professional dreams.

Participants also reflected on their and their parents' linguistic vulnerabilities upon arriving in Greece. Unlike the OMs arriving in the UK, their parents migrated to a country without knowledge of the local language and often without professional qualifications that were recognised there (Giannakopoulou, 2020). As children, the OMs were put in Greek classrooms soon after arriving and were expected to catch up on their age-appropriate language skills without any specialised support from educators (Tsolakidou, 2005). Parents had to quickly teach themselves Greek to support their children in their schoolwork. In Extract 7, Ermal spoke of his parents' linguistic vulnerability when they migrated to Greece in 1998 without any knowledge of Greek. He juxtaposed this to his own proficiency in English when he onward migrated to the UK in 2019, which allowed him to reflect on the language barriers his parents encountered that he did not face in the UK. In addition, Ermal discussed his privileged onward migration, having secured post-secondary education, compared to his parents, who did not have any undergraduate education on which to base their survival in another country.

**Extract 7.** "Somehow, they made it work."

And there [in the UK], it made me understand and think that my parents went to a country whose language they didn't know and didn't have degrees. They went there, and somehow, they made it work. – Ermal

Olta also reflected on her own linguistic vulnerability upon arriving in Greece. As a seven-year-old, she entered elementary school in Greece after only three months without any knowledge of Greek. In Extract 8, she looked back, marvelling at the speed with which she acquired Greek so as not to hinder her educational success.

**Extract 8.** "I went to school without knowing a word."

I started school in September, and we arrived in Greece in June. So, I had only three months. Nobody in the family knew Greek, so I went to school without knowing a word. I don't know how I did it. – Olta

Recognising these vulnerabilities, migrants take action to improve their positioning in the world. For our participants, this takes the form of onward migration to the UK. Their Greek passports, knowledge of the English language, and higher education were mobilised on this pursuit. In the UK, OMs manage to escape the structures that make them vulnerable in Albania and Greece. Still, they encounter new challenges that render them vulnerable in different and unexpected ways.

### **In the UK – "foreigners among foreigners"**

Onward migrating to the UK was constructed as an eye-opener for the participants, a watershed moment that placed them in a social context where they could retrospectively reflect critically on what it had meant to grow up and become adults in Greece as children of Albanian migrants. Comparing their lives in the UK with those they had led in Greece,

participants came to the realisation that racism was deeply rooted and normalised in Greek society and that they had been negatively affected by it. Life in the UK was presented as “the antithesis of life before [onward] migration” and an opportunity to overcome the trauma of the previous fragment in their migration trajectories by living lives that were truer to themselves, their identities, and their aspirations (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009, p. 610). The multitude of ethnicities, cultures, and languages present in the UK was portrayed as eliminating ethnic and racial differences, creating a sense of “intercultural belonging” (Noble, 2009, p. 51) to a visibly and audibly diverse and accepting society where everyone could succeed in everything that they set out to do (Wessendorf, 2019). In the UK, participants felt like they were “foreigners among foreigners” rather than being singled out and homogenised as “the foreigners” as they were in Greece (Vathi & King, 2013). They generally reported not experiencing any racism in the UK, whether in their workplaces, social interactions, or other contexts– a finding that aligns with the transnational experiences of Latin Americans who onward migrated from Spain to the UK (McIlwaine, 2021). Participants specifically mentioned feeling no reservations when discussing their origins or introducing themselves by their Albanian names. Some participants who had previously used Greek names in Greece said they used their Albanian names in the UK, even when socialising with Greek people.

Iilir, who migrated to Greece at the age of eleven and then onward migrated to the UK at the age of 29, commented on the radically different situation he encountered in the UK (Extract 9).

**Extract 9.** “Like chalk and cheese.”

I think that it was here that, for the first time in my life, I entered a group of people where I didn’t have the slightest feeling that there was racism. Completely different. Like chalk and cheese. – Iilir

Iilir was surprised by the absence of racist sentiment in his second migratory destination, which was a significant departure from what he had experienced in Greece. Similarly, Ermal spoke of the lack of significance that ethnoracial identities had in the UK (Extract 10).

**Extract 10.** “In a country like the UK, they look at what you are.”

I believe that in a country like the UK or the USA, where you have many nationalities, lots of foreigners and no one looks at where you’re from, but they look at what you are, what you can provide either to my company or generally to my society, it is much easier for us to achieve what we want in our lives than in Greece. – Ermal

Based on his experience as a construction administrator, Ermal maintained that people in the UK look past ethnicity and focus on how any individual can contribute to society. He contrasted this with his experience in Greece, where what he could achieve there was limited by his Albanian identity.

Some participants found the transition from a context in which they were constantly racialised to one in which they were not challenging at first. Mentor was initially reluctant to say the phrase “I’m from Albania”, referring to the negative repercussions this had on occasion entailed for him in Greece. Ardit shared that he carried his driver’s license everywhere he went, admitting that he had never been stopped or asked to produce any documents to prove his identity, origin, or legal status, like in Greece. Participants were also very keen to highlight the stark contrast between the UK and Greece in terms of institutional racism, or the perceived lack thereof, especially when it came to their interactions with the state. Extract 11 by Vasi encapsulates participants’ experiences succinctly.

**Extract 11.** “As soon as they saw our name, you saw a different treatment.”

The difference that I would say I experienced more, not in terms of racism but more in terms of how foreigners are treated, has to do with the state here in the UK. I mean, how they treat you in public services, public organisations, or any state service in general is completely different in relation to how they treated us in Greece. Not just as Albanians – for example, our parents – but even us, for whom it was difficult for someone to know that we were Albanian not only based on the way we looked or the language but because we spoke very good Greek. As soon as they saw, for example, our name that referred to something Albanian, immediately, suddenly, you saw a different treatment. – Vasi

Vasi commented on the stark difference he encountered in the UK in public services and dealings with British institutions compared to what he had experienced in Greece. Even when his fluent L1 Greek did not betray his Albanianess, his name would racialise him as Albanian, exposing him to discriminatory treatment based on his ethnicity.

There was, however, mention of stereotypes about Albanians and Greeks that circulated in the UK. Stereotypes about Albanians centred around crime, mafia, gangs, and drug dealing (Allsopp, Lala & Mai, 2023; King & Mai, 2008, pp. 114–117; Ndoci, 2023). Stereotypes about Greeks referred to notions of laziness and irrational public spending about the government-debt crisis. Participants who encountered such stereotypes, mostly from work colleagues, did not place particular emphasis on these interactions and diminished their seriousness by reducing them to jokes or friendly teasing. Stereotypes were one of the ways in which “the conviviality of the everyday is not in opposition to but is woven in with everyday racisms” (Wise & Noble, 2016, p. 427) and thus did not significantly mar the image of ‘racism-free’ UK life. However, others expressed caveats regarding the presumed innocence of reproducing racial stereotypes and the apparent absence of racism in UK society. Arbër mentioned that racism was present in the UK. In his experience, though, it was veiled and hidden behind humour and smiles, suggesting that British people are racist but try to hide it, whereas, in Greece, racism is “more brutal, rawer, more in your face”. This echoes the views of Iranians, Nigerians, and Somalis who onward migrated to the UK from Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands, respectively, and who believed racism in the country was not

as overt compared to their previous migration destinations (Ahrens, Kelly & van Liempt, 2016).

Arbër thought that Brexit was evidence that racism in the UK was a powerful driving force in society (Bhambra, 2017; Tudor, 2023). Ilir echoed this sentiment, reminding participants in his focus group that they had all arrived in the UK before the Brexit transition period ended on 31 December 2020, after which UK immigration policy changed dramatically for EU citizens. This meant that, as Greek passport holders, they had the luck not to have experienced the types of institutional racism other migrants – for example, asylum seekers or refugees – face when they want to migrate to the UK or when they live in the country under the social, political, and economic conditions that are known as the hostile environment (Griffiths & Yeo, 2021).

**Extract 12.** “Apply for a visa while your house is being bombed.”

I was the one who had to sort out my family’s papers – my sister’s, mine, my mother’s, my father’s – for almost 10–13 years. So, I have a lot of experience with Greek bureaucracy, and now I have a little experience with British bureaucracy, but I am from the opposite side. Because we, as I said, came before Brexit, things were simple with a mobile phone, a passport, and a selfie, and you’re done. You didn’t even have to queue at three in the morning. But those who come after Brexit to England, there you understand the bitter reality and what all asylum seekers go through. You understand the bitterness when the British state asks someone to apply for a visa while, at the same time, their house is being bombed. – Ilir

Ilir cogently captures how the change in the participants’ legal status (“but from the opposite side”) meant they found themselves outside the reach of hostile migrant policies. This placed them in a more privileged and less vulnerable position compared to others who attempted to migrate to the UK at the same time and to participants’ own previous experiences and vulnerabilities in Greece.

In Greece, Albanian OMs were the quintessential Other, essentialised and racialised as the opposite of what Greekness is ideologised as (Ndoci, 2024). Upon arriving in the UK, they found that their new migratory destination lacked the sociohistorical context for their racialisation. In the UK, where colonial history maintains racial divisions based on colourism, Albanians are simply white. This whiteness allowed OMs to evade the type of Othering that they experienced in Greece and to lead what they perceived as lives free of racism and racialisation.

## **Concluding discussion**

Albanian OMs from Greece in the UK have constantly moved in and out of states of vulnerability throughout their young lives. In their autobiographical narratives, they sketched their trajectories of vulnerability and how they applied their agency to escape the situations

that rendered them vulnerable, including onward migrating. Physical and institutional vulnerability led their parents to migrate to Greece from Albania in the hope that their children would enjoy life opportunities that they, as the first generation of Albanian migrants, did not. In Greece, OMs were educated, which facilitated their upward mobility along the socioeconomic ladder. After overcoming numerous hurdles, they acquired full legal status in Greece and were eventually naturalised as Greek citizens, allowing them to enjoy the same legal rights within Greece and the European Union. This, in turn, came with many affordances that positioned them as privileged among other Europeans. Deploying these affordances, Albanians sought to remedy their social vulnerability, manifested in various ways such as stigmatisation and scarce employment opportunities, by onward migrating to the UK. Indeed, in the UK, OMs reported escaping the social structures that rendered them vulnerable in Greece and Albania. However, they were faced with new and unexpected vulnerabilities, including being on the receiving end of stereotypical statements about both Albanians and Greeks. Despite these new challenges, the participants generally found the UK to be a more inclusive and accepting environment where they could pursue their aspirations and live lives truer to their identities. We, therefore, argue for a notion of vulnerability that is multifaceted and that extends beyond traditionally vulnerable groups such as refugees and asylum seekers. OMs navigate multiple social and institutional factors that expose them to legal and social precarity. At the same time, they take advantage of the new affordances that come with each migratory destination to move out of different types of vulnerability, only to find themselves exposed to new ones.

Having said that, we would be remiss not to place OMs' narratives in the broader sociopolitical context in which they occur. The focus groups were conducted in July 2022, a time when Albanophobic discourses were rife in the UK owing to the 2022 English Channel migrant crossings (Morris & Qureshi, 2022). Surprisingly, these discourses did not emerge as a prominent theme in the focus group sessions. OMs did not mention or critique the vulnerable social and legal positions in which these discourses, which were sometimes reproduced and adopted by the UK government, imposed on Albanian speakers in the UK. As mentioned above, only one participant, Ilir, openly reflected on OMs' privileged positioning as EU passport holders who had arrived in the UK before Brexit. This privilege allowed them to settle in a new country to study or work with minimum bureaucratic obstacles. Stricter migration policies post-Brexit have exposed Albanians seeking migration or asylum to the UK to new physical, legal, and social vulnerabilities, which the Albanian OMs in our study did not have to face. In fact, despite other vulnerabilities, OMs emerged as privileged in relation to other Albanian speakers in the UK. Their knowledge of English, higher education, pre-settled status as Greek citizens, and their ability to move between Albanian and Greek identities positioned them at an advantage not available to other Albanian speakers. For Albanian OMs, their Greek passports do not constitute a privilege but a right they are naturally entitled to by way of being raised and educated in Greece – a notion also reflected in Ardit's quote above (Extract 12). Our ongoing work suggests that the failure to recognise their privileged standing in relation to other Albanian speakers in the UK may be related to the absence of shared social networks between Albanian OMs from Greece, direct migrants

from Albania, and refugees from Kosova. We propose that, in navigating similar cases, researchers must be transparent towards vulnerable participants that the accounts they share as part of the research process will be contextualised against a broader social, economic, and linguistic backdrop, which may reveal them to occupy positions of power compared to other people in society. The privilege and vulnerability of research participants are multiple continua that are reconfigured as agentive subjects use their agency to negotiate their standing in the sociohistorical contexts in which they find themselves.

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