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The Albanian Diaspora-in-the-Making: Media, Migration and Social Exclusion
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Unlike many other groups living and working in Italy, Albanians have not gathered in communities. Moreover, only a minority of them have referred to home or diasporic media in order to recreate and sustain a positive sense of 'ethnic' belonging while living abroad. In fact, most Albanian migrants rely solely on Italian public and private television for entertainment and information. On the other hand, but in a sense consistent with the above picture, Albanian individuals and families seem to have integrated into Italian society better than many other migrant groups. They have developed family-based private networks of friendship and solidarity, which have generally increased the success of their migratory projects. Although some of these aspects can be understood as a consequence of their recent settlement in Italy, the peculiarity of Albanians' diaspora-in-the-making can be better explained by analysing the interaction between the two main roles Italian media have played in the mass migratory outflow that accompanied the process of Albanian post-communist transformation. Firstly, Italian media have articulated an aspect of Albanian people's identities that Albanian culture could not provide. Secondly, they have been the main source of information about Albanians living and working in Italy for Italians and Albanians alike, thus playing an active part in enforcing Albanian migrants' social exclusion and marginalisation.

Keywords: Media; Migration; Social Exclusion; Diaspora; Identity

Introduction: Key Terms and Concepts

This article draws on the results of the two main research projects I worked on over the last few years. The first research was my own doctorate, which analysed the way Italian media were implicated in the emergence of individualised life trajectories, practices of consumption and identity formations within the Albanian social and

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cultural landscape (Mai 2002a).[1] The second research project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, focused on the relation between the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion experienced by Albanian migrants living in Italy and Greece and the campaign of stigmatisation orchestrated by the media against them.[2] The two main perspectives through which the relation between media and migration will be addressed in the present paper follow the trajectory of this research experience. Italian media will be analysed both as a catalyst for the emergence of migration at home (in Albania), and as sources of information for and about migrants in the context of emigration (Italy).

As far as the first aspect is concerned, the exit from Albanian communism was bound up with the emergence of individualised transnational identities on the part of Albanians, especially young people. This was the outcome of a process of negotiation between, on the one hand, the collectivised and nationalised models of personhood, regimes of everyday life and material environment available in Albania, and on the other the alternative lifestyle models provided by Italian and other foreign media. In the paper I will refer to the term 'diaspora' as a fluid and dialogic experience of identity reflecting the lived experience of multiple belongings and allegiances across cultural, linguistic, ethnic and national boundaries. More specifically, diaspora can be seen as shaped by a 'critical dialogism' challenging the monologic exclusivity on which dominant versions of national identity and collective belonging are based (Mercer 2003). The term 'diaspora' implies a relation to identity based on 'real or imagined relationships among scattered fellows, whose sense of community is sustained by forms of communication and contact such as kinship, pilgrimage, trade, travel, and shared culture' (Peters 1999: 20). This shared culture includes, according to Peters, language, ritual, and both print and electronic media. It is according to this conceptualisation of diaspora as an experimental and critical relationship to one's identity that I define the nature of Albanian people's consumption of Italian television as 'diasporic'. In fact, Albanian contemporary society can be seen as a 'diaspora space' (Brah 1996: 208) where both those who 'leave' and those who 'stay put' experiment with multiple, both old and new, subject positions, values and social practices. What is particularly interesting about the concept of 'diaspora space' is that it implicitly acknowledges the key role played by imagination in the elaboration of migratory life-trajectories across moral, economic, gender, age and other boundaries, whether this happens 'abroad' or 'at home'. Above all, it underlines 'the infinite experientiality, the myriad processes of cultural fissure and fusion that underwrite contemporary forms of transcultural identities' (Brah 1996: 208).

This diasporic nature of Albanians' consumption of Italian television continues also when they are physically displaced in Italy, thus making them reluctant to refer to home or 'ethnic' media, where these are available, for the articulation of their lived in-between condition. In this article I will argue that this factor makes them more vulnerable to the internalisation of the discourses of criminalisation and stigmatisation of Albanian migrants circulated by Italian media. Moreover, the reactive rejection of the communist collectivistic experience of association and national

belonging and the partial interiorisation of prejudice make Albanian migrants reluctant to associate together and fight discrimination and racism collectively. As a consequence of all of these factors, paradoxically Albanians in Italy are one of the best-integrated migrant groups at an individual/family level, yet the most stigmatised (after Gypsies) and most exploited at a collective level.

In this paper I follow Stuart Hall's conceptualisation of identity in relational and processual terms. According to Hall, 'identities are never unified and, in late modern times, [they are] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular, but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices, and positions' (1996: 4). A conceptualisation of identity in these terms emphasises how this is constructed 'within and not outside representation'; thus identities are 'the product of the marking of difference and exclusion', which means that they are 'constructed through, not outside difference' (Hall 1996: 4). This implies that it is only in relation to a 'constitutive other' that a positive identity can be constructed and that therefore 'the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational, is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure' (Hall 1996: 5).

A definition of identity in these terms is very useful for the scope of this article as it implicitly acknowledges how identities are continuously challenged by people's mobility beyond established boundaries and by the strategic and continuous re-articulation of difference across contradictory social, economic and cultural contexts. In fact in late modern times identities are increasingly sites of contestation and struggle between different understandings and experiences of belonging within, between, and across societies and their actors. This acknowledges the potentially emancipatory role of global media in both responding to, and eliciting new needs emerging from, changes taking place in local societies.

I will analyse Italian television-watching as a social and cultural practice, a 'cultural formation' which emerged in relation to the new identity positionality acquired by youth across the Albanian post-communist transformation. According to Lawrence Grossberg, a 'cultural formation' is a set of socio-cultural practices and events which is 'articulated into and functions within different contexts of daily life' in order to 'construct a new identity' (Grossberg 1992: 70–1). Every cultural formation is characterised by a specific 'sensibility' which is 'a principle of articulation' describing and defining a cultural formation's effect on people's everyday lives and thus the way in which a particular formation is lived (Grossberg 1992: 72). In the next section of the article, I will explain the way Italian television-watching evolved in Albania as a cultural formation during the 1990s by underlining how this was consistent with a change both in the sensibility articulating it and in the migratory project of Albanian young people that emerged in the process.

Italian Television as a 'Catalyst' for Migration

The first way in which Italian media were implicated in the Albanian migration refers to their role in having potentially attracted Albanians to Italy during the process of

post-communist transformation. Because of the geographical proximity between the two countries, Italian television could be seen in Albania since the early 1970s and, until 1991, it was virtually the only window on the outside world available to Albanian citizens. Indeed, the first explanations for the reasons behind the mass migratory flow which followed the collapse of the Albanian communist state in early 1991 highlighted the key role that Italian television had played in attracting Albanians to Italy. Migrants were described as 'encouraged by hopes of success, pushed by necessity and by the imaginary world provided by television' (Perrone 1996: 34). Soon after the arrival of the first migrants, myths were fabricated and circulated about the naiveté and credulity of the new migrants: Albanians expected to see Italian cats eating from silver trays (as they had seen on Italian TV commercials); they believed all Italian women were as glamorous and 'available' as those presented by Italian television; they expected to find 'money in the streets' and so on (Mai 2001). Notwithstanding the existence of much literature pointing out that economic survival was the key motive behind Albanian migration (Barjaba and Perrone 1996; De Soto *et al*. 2002; Dorfles 1991), the Italian media continued to emphasise the ways in which Albanian migrants were 'deceived' by the consumerist utopia provided by Italian television.

However, if it is true that the main indication provided by all of the studies mentioned in the previous paragraph is that the economic survival of the family unit is perhaps the main factor behind the Albanian migratory phenomenon, research also confirms that Italian television played a very strategic and important role: it came to be a unique source of information about the outside world in a context where this information was filtered by the apparatuses of the communist regime. Although the focus of my doctoral thesis was Albanian young people between the ages of 15 and 30, I argue that my analysis of the relations between their cultural construction of Italy, the emergence of individualised life trajectories and the nature of the Albanian migratory flow underlines key general aspects of the Albanian post-communist socio-cultural transformation.

In particular, my concern in this section of the article is to suggest the ways in which Italian television helped to construct and shape the 'migratory project' of Albanian (young) people and to understand the way this role has evolved in relation to the Albanian post-communist situation. By 'migratory project' I am referring not so much to actual geographical displacement but to the wider discursive processes and practices of cultural consumption by means of which Albanians have come to imagine themselves with respect to a new transnational socio-cultural environment encompassing Albania and Italy. It is my contention that some culturally specific aspects of the Albanian post-communist transformation have influenced both the way Italian television-watching has emerged and evolved as a cultural formation and its changing role in the cultural construction of Italy as a potential destination of the 'migratory project'.

Starting from an understanding of youth as 'a *social process* in which the meaning and experience of becoming adult is socially mediated' (Wyn and White 1997: 4, emphasis in original text), I argue that Italian television played an important role in

the emergence of new individualised and 'migratory' Albanian youth identities. It is true that this process of selective cultural appropriation is now a very common feature of global television viewing, but I believe that aspects of Italian culture have been appropriated and incorporated according to the specific complexities and ambivalences shaping the relationship between the two countries in the last few decades. On the one hand, through the consumption of Italian television, Italy was associated with a utopian understanding of the West in terms of a universe of freedom and easy-to-attain material plenty. On the other hand, Italian television-watching established itself as a key cultural formation within the Albanian socio-cultural landscape. Italy provided the narrative and visual scripts according to which alternative models of personhood, lifestyles and regimes of everyday life were imagined with reference to the Albanian context. Because of Italy's resonance in Albania's past (as the former colonial power), and as a reaction against the claustrophobic experience of communism, Italy became *the* post-communist embodiment of Albania's aspirational Westernness (Mai 2003).

From the analysis of the interview material in my thesis (Mai 2002a) it emerged that the aspects of Italian television that seem to have the most appeal for Albanian young people are those referring to a hedonistic lifestyle which implicitly challenges the patriarchal and conservative morals of Albanian society. Whereas the generation of their parents seems to accept the renunciation of individual pleasure and the authoritarian values characterising Albanian society, Albanian young people want to enjoy a plurality of lifestyles, to engage in sex, leisure and education like their peers in Western Europe. I argue that the establishment of Italian television-watching as a key cultural formation within the Albanian post-communist transformation was consistent with the emergence of 'migratory youth'. This social subject emerged through the imagination of different ways of being, different realities, different lives—whether geographical displacement happens or not. It is in this respect that migration can be understood as a condition of subjective displacement, as an uprooting of subjectivity from the narrative and visual scripts which have previously shaped it and as an aspect of the emergence of new 'diasporic' identity formations in relation to supervening needs, priorities and possibilities. Thus, migration can be seen as a 'potential state of being' which any subject may pass through during his/her lifetime, whether it is followed by physical relocation or not (Pœrregaard 1997: 41). It is this migratory subject which Italian television both appealed to, and helped to construct, complementing, rather than being a substitute for, the cultural resources that were available within Albanian culture historically. The search for new articulations of their own identity has been ambivalently embedded in Albanian young people's migratory project. For many, migrating to Italy (or, for that matter, to Greece or elsewhere) has been a way of mediating between their 'late modern' desire to experience new aspects of their selves, and their socially more established and hardship-bound roles as loyal sons and daughters, sacrificing their lives for the survival of the family unit.

The possibility of benefiting from various sources of information about the lived experiences of emigration, in particular from the narrative accounts of migrants living abroad, has led to the reformulation of a different migratory project in later post-communist times. This is now more and more focused on the concrete possibility to achieve specific objectives according to the feedback of the lived experiences of settlement and capitalist disillusionment offered by friends and relatives. As a consequence of the fact that the negative accounts of the experiences of migration to Italy (or Greece) were reinforced by Italian media's representation of Albanian migrants living in Italy, Albanian young people now direct their migratory ambitions to other 'more Western' destinations, in North-West Europe or North America, where their objectives might have better chances to be successfully met.

Here I would like to identify the interlocking of two parallel dynamics. In some respects, when one analyses the transformation of Albanian young people's migratory project, it is tempting to say that it seems as though the early post-communist understanding of the Western capitalist utopia of individual self-realisation, the so-called 'American Dream', has been merely re-projected further West, onto America itself, rather than onto Italy-as-America. This is particularly true of younger people's migratory project. However, I want to emphasise here that the utopian sensibility sustaining Albanian young people's migratory projects (and Italian television-watching as a cultural formation) was irretrievably challenged by the lived and narrated direct experiences of encounter and disillusionment *with the West, Albania's ambivalently constitutive and aspirational Other*. These experiences, for all of the interviewees, regardless of their age, educational background or gender, produced a *subjective transformation* which was consistent with a break away from the early post-communist utopian sensibility and with a move towards a critical, individualised and pragmatic sensibility, one which is more informed about capitalist modernity, its positive aspects and its predicaments.

I must return now to the way Italian television was implicated in the emergence of Albanian young people's migratory flow. I believe that its main role was to offer itself as a socio-cultural space whereby youth could articulate new 'migratory' identities (Berger 1973) by negotiating Western late-modern non-repressive regimes of subjectification (Rose 1996) with locally established roles and models of personhood. By addressing Albanian young people as desiring and consuming late-modern subjects, Italian television played an emancipatory function in relation to the Albanian hegemonic landscape of collectivist and authoritarian repression. Thus, Albanian young people's migratory project emerged in relation to their ambivalent desire to *find themselves* according to the narratives of late-modern entitlement circulated by Italian and other transnational and global TV networks and against the enduring prevalence of repressive collectivism they still encounter in the context they inhabit. In fact, most of the interviewees reported how their desire to *find themselves* was restrained by their fear of *losing themselves* according to the hegemonic and very conservative family-bound canons of morality (Mai 2002a).

The next section of the paper will focus on the nature and political and socio-cultural implications of Italian media's representation of Albanian migrants, by underlining the way they became Italy's main 'constitutive other' for the re-articulation of a new EU-compatible Italian identity from the early 1990s on. I argue that Italian media's portrayal of Albanian migration can be related to social and cultural dynamics which are deeply rooted in the recent history of the former country. In fact, because of Italians' subconscious association of Albania both with Italy's rejected past of poverty, backwardness and totalitarianism and with the necessity of internal and international migration for many Italians since the unification of the country, the Albanian migratory flow was particularly meaningful within the process of re-elaboration of the Italian national identity. This is because Albanian migrants have been able to evoke and re-present dynamics of social antagonism that had been historically repressed in the process of construction of an Italian unified state and culture.

The Genealogy of the Albanian Myth

After having historically been an area of intense out-migration, during the 1970s the Southern European countries (Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal) experienced a 'migration turnaround' from emigration to immigration (King *et al*. 1997). They became an important destination for people from African and Asian countries and, after 1989, from Eastern European countries too. Within this context, the case of Italy is paradigmatic as the country is both the one that sent most emigrants abroad among all European countries (more than 26 million since official records began in 1876; King and Andall 1999: 135) and the one that has been most identified as a key destination for the new migration into Southern European countries. Moreover, no other European country experienced such a large-scale interregional migration over the post-war period. Between 1951 and 1971, 2 million Southern Italians migrated to the North of the country (King and Andall 1999: 135). This dual experience of Italian international and internal migration laid the foundations for a confrontation between different local cultures within and beyond the national cultural space and represented a fundamental passage in the re-articulation of an Italian national identity since the unification of the country. Nowadays well over 1.5 million foreign people are living in Italy. Although the percentage of immigrants in relation to the Italian population is much lower than in traditional immigration countries such as France, Germany or Belgium, Italian media's representation of foreign migrants in Italy can be seen as having both responded to and engendered anxieties, fostering an interpretation of the migratory phenomenon in terms of 'social alarm' (Maher 1996: 160).

Albanian migrants' status within the Italian mediascape changed quickly from that of 'political refugees' in March 1991 to that of 'economic migrants' just six months later.[3] From then on, Albanians have been the most heavily stereotyped group in the context of the wider representation of migration-related events in Italy, with particular reference to their involvement in the trafficking and sexual exploitation

of women and in thefts and burglaries of a particularly ferocious nature. More specifically, the visual and narrative scripts through which Albanian migration was represented by Italian media can be grouped according to three main sets of narratives: tales of moral depravation with reference to Albanian migrants' involvement in crime; discourses of demonisation of atheism or essentialisation of religious difference (Islam); and discourses of backwardness, exoticism and isolation.[4]

According to Vehbiu and Devole, the migration of Albanians in Italy evolved as a key 'myth of the other' (1996: 77), whose symbolic importance can only be grasped if we contextualise its emergence within the post-Cold War European political and cultural context on one side and the post-colonial nature of Italy and Albania's relationship on the other. In the paper, I will refer to myth as 'one of the ways in which collectivities establish and determine ... their own systems of morality and values; ... a set of beliefs, usually put forth as a narrative, held by a community about itself ... which ... can also be an instrument of identity transfer', as 'it enables a new identity to be superimposed on an older one, so that the collectivity sustains itself by creating an identity homogeneous enough to let it live with, say, major upheavals' (Shöpflin 1997: 19, 22). This conceptualisation of 'myth' is appropriate for the ensuing analysis, as it is consistent with an understanding of identity in processual and relational terms, which potentially acknowledges the role of discourse and therefore of the media in the shaping of identity formations.

Returning to the genealogy of the Albanian myth, it is worth mentioning that from the early 1990s onwards Italy witnessed the demise of a 45-year-long political regime, collapsing under the pressure of scandals and accusations of corruption. The situation of financial bankruptcy in which the Italian state budget was left and the constraints posed by the process of European integration undermined Italy's perception of being entitled to belong to the 'European' socio-economic and moral space. As Italy's ability to cope both with the Maastricht Treaty's financial parameters and with the implementation of the Schengen accords became a site of political struggle between Italy and other EU member-states, curbing illegal (and in particular Albanian) immigration became a priority for the Italian political class. The anxieties which emerged in this process are the key context within which Italian media's campaign of criminalisation and stigmatisation of Albanian migrants can be understood in its full political and cultural resonance.

The history of the Albanian migration to Italy is deeply embedded in the social, cultural and political environments of the two countries. The advent of separatist and federalist political formations such as the Northern League and the growing intolerance against foreign migrants were consistent with a crisis in Italian citizens' relation with their state. In fact, as a consequence of all of the dynamics outlined above, during the 1990s the traditional post-1945 cultural construction of 'Italian-ness' came into crisis, while at the same time a new version began to emerge according to the symbolic polarisations shaping Italy's national identity since its very beginning: North/South, Europe/Africa, Christian/non-Christian, developed/back-

ward. It is in this context that foreign migrants became Italy's 'constitutive other' against which a more EU-compatible articulation of Italianness was produced.

But before analysing the way Italian media's representation of Albanian migrants impacted on the negotiation of their identities in the context of emigration, it is important to understand why, of all migrant groups, Albanians became the main 'other' against which Italy built a new articulation of its national identity.

According to Sniderman *et al.* (2000: 85), the discourses sustaining and articulating Northern Italians' prejudice against Southern Italians are not only strikingly similar to those differentiating Italians from immigrants, but 'so far as there is a difference between their judgements of Southern Italians and immigrants, it is the latter, not the former, who are viewed more favourably'. To put it in a nutshell, 'if Northern Italians do not think much of immigrants, they think even less of their (Southern) compatriots' (Sniderman *et al.* 2000: 86). The positionality of Southern Italy and of Southern Italians within the process of construction of Italian national identity is very important here. In her analysis of the rise of nationalism in former Yugoslavia, Renata Salecl underlines how the hatred of the 'other' which psychologically sustains nationalism is nothing but the outcome of a process of projection onto the (constitutive) other of an aspect of the 'same' which is considered unbearable and unacceptable (Salecl 1993: 105). These considerations are important for my argument in this article as they highlight how '*any given nation and nationality defines itself in relation to differences within it*, to the "vertical" arrangements of such constitutive categories as ethnicity and "race", class and gender' (Allen and Russo 1997: 5, emphasis mine). Hence, the level of stigma which is still attached to Southern Italy should be related to its positionality within Italian national identity, which is that of a 'denied colonial subject' (Mai 2003).

Against the rhetoric of 'unification' contained in official accounts of the history of Italian nation-making, the 'real' history of the Italian South is one of colonisation, and 'the construction of Southerners as an "inferior and immodifiable race" served greatly to justify the military intervention that insured the unification of the peninsula against southern resistance in the mid-to late 1800s' (Verdicchio 1997: 191–4, quoting Ganduscio 1970). Because of their relative somatic invisibility and of their common status of denied colonial subjects, Albanian migrants became Italy's main constitutive other because they were subconsciously associated with Italian Southerners—the primordial other against which Italian national identity was articulated historically. The narrative and visual scripts circulated by Italian media in the 1990s constructed Albanian migrants as the strategic embodiment of aspects of 'Italianness' which came to be perceived as EU-incompatible. Thus, in the context of the crisis of Italian national identity and its historical articulation of internal economic and socio-cultural differences, the cultural construction of Albanian migrants as a non-Italian golem served to consolidate within Italian citizens 'a feeling of belonging to an *ethnos*, to an Italianity that was believed to be compromised and left behind by the processes of global and European integration' (Vehbiu and Devole 1996: 12).

In the next and final main section of the paper I will focus on the second way in which Italian media are implicated in the Albanian migration to Italy: in being sources of information for Albanians and Italians alike on the presence of Albanian migrants in Italy. In particular, I will analyse the way the continuation of Italian television's diasporic function for Albanian migrants living in Italy, the lack of alternative and autonomous 'ethnic' media and the consequent partial interiorisation of stigma have influenced the negotiation of an Albanian identity in the context of emigration.

'I am not like other Albanians', or the Logic of Self-Deception

From March 2001 to July 2003 I worked on a research project focusing on the processes of social inclusion and exclusion experienced by Albanian migrants living in Italy. This allowed me to cross the Otranto Channel and to follow the phenomenon of Albanian migration as it articulates across the sea onto the Italian discursive, socio-economic and political landscape. I interviewed 150 people from three different areas of Italy which are representative of different migratory patterns and socio-economic contexts: the town of Lecce and the region of Apulia in the South, Bologna and Emilia-Romagna in the North, and Rome and Latium in the Centre. Of the 150 people interviewed, around two-thirds were Albanian migrants, the others being Italian employers, people dealing with migration in an institutional or NGO context, and Albanian people involved in the creation of Albanian associations.

From the analysis of my interview material and other literature on Albanian migration to Italy (Melchionda 2003) it becomes clear that, in 10 years or so, Albanians have been able to extricate themselves from the condition of extreme socio-economic vulnerability and marginality which they had to endure upon arrival in Italy. Although the majority of Albanian migrants are still working in manual and unskilled occupations, they are no longer confined to the most humiliating and exploitative working and housing conditions, which now tend to be left to other more vulnerable and recently arrived migrant groups, such as the Romanians and the Moldovans. In fact, the most defining feature of the Albanian experience of emigration to Italy is its extreme dynamism. During the 1990s Albanian migrants were able to emancipate themselves from social exclusion by establishing family-based networks of solidarity and support, and through the development of interpersonal relationships of friendship and solidarity at an individual level at work and in other areas of social interaction. However, their individual powerlessness in relation to the hegemonic stigmatising narratives circulated by Italian media means that their individual efforts can never completely overcome the exclusionary practices and attitudes enforced in the wider public sphere encompassing them. In fact, their personal experience of relative success is in sharp contrast with the way Albanians are still represented by Italian media. Moreover, the campaign of stigmatisation and criminalisation which Albanian migrants have been subjected to since 1991 has many implications for the way Albanian people are now trying to re-configure the

co-ordinates of their 'ethnic' identity—both individual and collective—in the context of emigration.

In fact, when asked about occasions in their everyday lives in which they felt they had been unjustly treated, most interviewees, of any educational, economic and social background, spontaneously indicated media as the main factor of social exclusion and marginalisation, hindering and preventing their access to key resources such as employment and housing. Many accused Italian media of fabricating a de-humanised Albanian *monstre*, connoting backwardness, ferociousness, immorality and abject poverty. The existence of this cultural construction was partially reflected in the way Italian people almost inevitably failed to recognise their interlocutors as Albanian whenever the interviewees revealed their origins. Here are two interview extracts which illustrate this phenomenon:

> I remember once there was a guy who, when he heard me speaking in Albanian, changed the expression on his face and then asked me if I was Albanian. As he could not believe it I got offended and asked him if he thought Albanians had tails and he failed to spot mine! But this has happened so many times, in shops, everywhere (female, aged 32).

> Once a colleague of mine asked me if I was sure I was Albanian. 'Why are you asking me this?' I replied. 'Because you don't have the face of an Albanian, I mean you don't look like one'. And I said 'And how is the face of an Albanian supposed to be?' He could not reply, but I remember that at the time in the restaurant there was another Albanian. He was undocumented and of poor rural origin. He pointed at him and I told him: 'But he has a very different life from mine, he has been working all his life in the countryside, he is worn out. I am a student, I was lucky enough to have a better life, he cannot even dream about the kind of life I lead. Perhaps you only met that kind of Albanian, but they are not all like that. The majority of the people who migrated are farmers because such was the nature of our society under Communism, 60 per cent rural, 40 per cent urban' (male, 24).

The cultural construction of the Albanian migrants as a fixed and stereotypical 'constitutive other' within the process of refashioning of an Italian identity is perhaps best reflected in the fact that 'you don't look like one' was the most common reply given by Italian people when they realised they were talking to an Albanian person. Moreover, many migrants pointed out how, according to their perception, the adjective 'Albanian'—*albanese* in Italian—had become an insult among Italians. In my interview schedule I asked respondents if they were aware of any specific expression used by Italians to insult Albanians.

> Well, the most common is simply 'Albanian' ... they say things like 'Look at that person over there, he looks like an Albanian' (female, 22).

> Well, they simply say '*albanesi*' and then look at each other when they hear us talk in the street ... you can feel that they don't like you. ... I feel very bad about this. ... I might lack national pride. ... I might be a masochist ... but I often find myself thinking that we deserve it ... I mean ... Albanians did lots of bad things in

this country . . . it is true that there is a strong prejudice, but it is also true that it must originate from somewhere. What I don't like is the fact that whenever I say 'I am Albanian' they say 'Oh, my God!' I immediately say 'No, look, don't judge me for the way other people behave, judge me as an individual, on the basis of the way I behave to you' (female, 26).

From the interview data it is clear that Albanian migrants in Italy develop coping strategies to get round the use of the term, by saying 'I am from Tirana' or 'I am from Albania', rather than admitting to be an *albanese*. Young people, in particular, adopted a strategy of 'hiding' their Albanian identity in order to meet potential Italian partners and friends.[5] Interestingly, the burden of prejudice is felt to be much stronger at the beginning of the migratory experience, when the lack of solid interpersonal relations prevents Albanian migrants from negotiating their individual identities away from hegemonic stereotypes addressing them as part of a stigmatised group.

As I explained in the previous section, Albanian migrants became the main 'constitutive other' against which an Italian national identity was refashioned in the 1990s, as they were subconsciously associated with aspects of Italian culture, society and history which came to be perceived as EU-incompatible. Unwittingly, they found themselves trapped in a discursive field magnetised by the opposition between a cultural construction of the North as civilised, efficient and 'European' and a symmetrical cultural construction of the South as uncivilised, inefficient and 'African'. The following set of excerpts exemplifies the way Albanian migrants were forced to join the team of symbolic oppositions shaping Italian national identity by being positioned, together with Southern Italy, within strategically rejected aspects of Italianness such as criminality, backwardness, corruption, mafia, poverty, and the suppressed experience of fascism and colonialism.

> I remember this neighbour, an old man, he once asked us where we were from. We told him we were Albanian. He was shocked and told us that he had never seen a white Albanian. I found it so funny and told him 'Sir, you have no clue about Albania. We are all white over there, just like you' (female, 26).

> Once this woman asked me whether Albania was in Africa. I find them ridiculous sometimes because they claim to know so much about Albania and make bad judgements about Albania all the time (female, 22).

> Last week I was in Rome with a group of friends from the university. We were all Italians and I was the only Albanian there. . . . One of us had a friend living in Rome and we all stayed at his place. We were 12 and when he saw us at the door loaded with our rucksacks and bags he said 'Mamma mia! We are going to sleep like Albanians tonight, all crammed up' (female, 26).

> I remember once something happened, a guy told a stupid joke about Albanians but he did not know I was Albanian, so I guess it was not intentional. We were at a party and we started eating with our hands, for fun. Then he said, 'We are eating

like Albanians'. Nobody laughed as they all knew I was Albanian. I knew he did not know, but I felt insulted and I left (female, 24).

The multiple ways in which these symbolically strategic associations are articulated through discourse in everyday life and influence Albanian migrants' process of social inclusion can be best traced in the following event, as it was narrated by a young interviewee. A group of Albanian students at the University of Lecce went to the stadium to watch a football match where the local team was playing against one of the two Rome-based soccer teams, Lazio. During the game, Lazio supporters started insulting Lecce supporters by calling them *albanesi di merda*—shitty Albanians, to which Lecce supporters replied by shouting back, *no, albanesi di merda siete voi*—'no, it's you who are shitty Albanians'. The Albanian students found themselves silenced as they were encompassed by symbolic and discursive fields within which the adjective used to denote their own nationality, *albanese*, was associated with a doubly articulated cultural construction of the Albanian migrant. On the one hand the current use of the term *albanese* refers to the way Albanian migrants in the 1990s became the new symbolic embodiment of non-Italianness. On the other, this term partially complemented and overlapped with already-established subaltern and constitutive others, such as the Italian *terrone*, the Southerner.

The relevance of Italian media representation of Albanian migrants in their process of self-advancement and improvement within Italian society is also reflected in the way all of the Albanian associations I contacted in Apulia, Emilia-Romagna and Rome were formed in the mid-late 1990s in order to respond to the discourses circulated by Italian media. Unlike other immigrant associations in Italy and elsewhere which are often formed at an early stage of the immigration process as an expression of ethnic or national cohesion and identity, the scope of the Albanian associations was to provide alternative, positive elements of identification for Italians and Albanians alike. Although Albanian associations have tried to promote small-scale local events and initiatives in order to shake off Italian media's stigmatising representations of Albanian migrants, their impact on public opinion is still minimal or very limited.

> *I know you are part of the 'Vëllazërimi' association here in Lecce, why did you decide to become a member?*
> Because I care about the image of Albania and Albanians. I am very proud of being Albanian and I get upset when I hear people talking nonsense about us. Soon after I got here in 1997 I understood that there was a very strong prejudice against Albanians and I started thinking if there was a way to fight against this terrible image. . . . I guess it is a way to help people who are starting their lives here now, as I had to face many problems because of the existing prejudice and I think that if we do not do anything then nothing will change (female, 32).

> *Are you a member of an Albanian association?*
> No, but I am a member of the Foreigners' Council, a body set up by the Modena Town Hall. Not that it was very useful . . . on the contrary. I thought I would be given the possibility to build something, to provide Albanians with a better

> reputation, to provide a better representation of ourselves, to let other aspects be
> known ... through the organisation of cultural activities (female, 33).

I feel that the overall Albanian experience of migration and social inclusion/
exclusion within Italian society can be considered as a situation of diaspora-in-the-
making. The relatively recent arrival of Albanian migrants is probably the main factor
behind the fragmented nature of Albanian associations and the vulnerability of
Albanian migrants to the internalisation of stigma and prejudice. Although there are
now quite a few Albanian associations in Italy, they are usually highly competitive,
fragmented and therefore vulnerable to being instrumentalised by the Catholic
Church and other social and political actors. True, this is a condition Albanian
associations share with most other 'ethnic' associations in Italy. But I argue that there
are more culturally and historically specific reasons behind the condition of fragility
of the Albanian diasporic experience.

Firstly, the complex way in which Albanian national culture had been articulated
and appropriated by the pre-1991 communist state means that it is difficult for
Albanians to find positive elements of national identification to confront stigmatisa-
tion at a collective level. However, under the pressure of stigmatisation and
criminalisation new occasions for the celebration of Albanian identity are establishing
themselves as important initiatives for the protean development of a feeling of
belonging to a 'community'. For example, most Albanian associations have re-
vitalised national remembrances such as the 'Albanian flag day' on 28 November,
which has become an occasion for families and individuals to meet and talk about the
varied experiences of being 'Albanian' in Italy. Secondly, the contradictory and
conflictive coexistence between the post-communist rejection of authoritarian
collectivism and the endurance of a centralised, personalistic and authoritarian
understanding of power relations within migrant associations undermines their
development and often leads to fragmentation, conflict and disillusionment.
However, at the same time it is also true that gradually many Albanian associations
have achieved more visibility and consistency at a local level. Thirdly, the
individualised nature of Albanian identities, which stems from the rejection of the
communist experience of enforced and abusive collectivism, is a very important
factor hampering the establishment of Albanian associations and undermining a
collective response to stigma. Finally, the high level of stigmatisation of *albanesi* in
Italy was also a very powerful deterrent against the emergence of associations that
might appropriate that term in politically, socially and culturally emancipatory terms.
Interestingly, the only nation-wide campaign countering Italian media's stereotypical
criminalisation of Albanian migrants was promoted by the IOM (International
Organization for Migration) office in Rome, which is also in charge of managing the
section of the entry quotas assigned to Albanian citizens by the current Italian
immigration law.

What all of these observations refer to is what is perhaps the most characteristic
aspect of Albanian migrants' experience of negotiation of their own identities in Italy:

ambivalence. On the one hand all of the interviewees declared themselves proud to be Albanian and reported many instances in which they strenuously defended the worth of their own 'Albanianness' at an individual and interpersonal level. On the other hand, when asked about their attitude towards other fellow-Albanians living and working in Italy, many interviewees reported experiencing a feeling of diffidence.

> In the beginning I did not know that there were so many Albanians here in Lecce. And to tell you the truth we had our reservations in the beginning in meeting other Albanians . . . with all the things the television says, even if then it comes out that it wasn't the Albanians . . . but in the beginning we did not want to be friends with other Albanians. When a friend of mine invited me around my daughter told me to keep away, not to go. When I went I met very nice people and thought that it would have been a real pity if I hadn't gone (female, 56).

The degree of Albanian migrants' acceptance of stigmatising narratives circulated by Italian media is illustrated by the following two excerpts.

> I saw many fellow-Albanians being ashamed to speak Albanian among Italians . . . they were ashamed of presenting themselves as Albanians. Why? Because . . . the television propaganda created a situation in which some of us are afraid to speak Albanian or to present ourselves as Albanians within Italian society (male, 42).

> Well, sometimes I found myself in situations in which other Albanians, not knowing I was Albanian, talked to me about other Albanians, thinking I was an Italian.
> *Really! And what were they saying?*
> That all Albanian women were prostitutes, that Albanian men have no honour, that they are lazy, drug traffickers and things like that. . . (female, 32).

These dynamics of internalisation of stigma were also mirrored in the diffident attitude toward 'unknown' Albanian migrants displayed by many interviewees and by their resistance and indifference to the idea of meeting up and associating as *albanesi* in order to collectively fight the criminalising stereotypes. The following interview clip illustrates this:

> *Do you belong to an Albanian association?*
> No, I am not interested. . . . I socialise with Italians. The only Albanians I socialise with are my family.
> *Why?*
> I feel a bit different from other Albanians.
> *Do you feel different in Albania or in Italy?*
> In both places, I would say. But not so much when I was in Albania. Now I see things in a different perspective and things for sure are different here.
> *Are you proud to be Albanian?*
> In some respects I am . . . but often I am not. I am very disappointed when I hear some of the bad things Albanians do in Italy. . . . I mean they do things that other immigrants don't do here.
> *How do you think that this affects you?* Well, I think I lost my trust and respect for them (female, 31).

Conclusion

When I first arrived in Albania in July 1998 to begin my doctoral fieldwork, the most distinctive aspect of both the urban and the rural landscapes was the omnipresence of satellite dishes 'gazing' out of the country in search of models of personhood and lifestyles which were 'other' than those hegemonic in Albania. Interestingly, during my subsequent fieldwork in Italy I noted that, unlike many other migrant groups, virtually no Albanian household had access to satellite television. In fact, virtually none of the people I interviewed were interested in watching Albanian television in Italy, and only a couple of interviewees were aware of the existence of Albanian newspapers published in Italy. In reality, all of the interviewees watched Italian television regularly and Italian television-watching was a key cultural formation in Albanian migrants' everyday life. It seems, therefore, that what one might call the pre-diasporic function of the Italian media in the process of post-communist transformation in Albania means that they are still a very important reference point for Albanian people's understanding of their role, presence and identity in relation to Italian society. As I explained in the first section of the paper, Italian media played an emancipatory role by acting as a catalyst for the formation of individualised life trajectories which inherently challenged the Albanian moral and socio-cultural landscape of repression and authoritarianism. However, I argue that the continuation of this 'diasporic' role in the context of emigration renders Albanian groups and individuals more vulnerable to the potential or partial internalisation of stigma, in the total absence of alternative and viable sources of information. Moreover, the individualised nature of Albanian migrants' identities—a reaction-formation to the collectivist overdose experienced during communism—deeply undermines the emergence of a collective response to dynamics of collective criminalisation. This is a main factor behind the fragility and fragmentation of Albanian associations. It is not by chance that it is usually the younger people, whose 'migratory projects' are often different from the family-based life trajectories and the authoritarian and repressive values which are hegemonic in Albania, who are least interested in associating under the 'Albanian' banner, as these two last interview excerpts demonstrate.

> *Why do you think Albanians seem to encounter more problems in creating associations?*
> I think there is a refusal, a rejection of the very idea of belonging to an association. ... [In communist times] associating was presented as a way for the individual to participate in the group, but in the end it was the contrary ... the individual aspect was lost ... I think that more than a refusal of nationalism there is a refusal of associations, of collectivism and collectivisation in general (male, 26).

> *Are you a member of any Albanian association?*
> No.
> *Would you like to be?*
> I don't know ... because I think in these matters it is better never to trust (Albanian) people who are older than 30. ... They have that old 1970s idea of the

youth movement ... I know the way they see it and I don't want to be associated with them. ... Their vocabulary ... I mean, their behaviour ... makes me realise that they will never understand certain things ... they think that just because they are older they are superior ... the very idea annoys me! (male, 22).

In conclusion, the outcome of the interplay between Italian media's cultural construction of Albanian migrants, the diasporic function played by Italian media 'before' and 'after' migration, and the individualised nature of Albanian migrants' life trajectories, is an identity formation which is shaped by the oscillation between the partial interiorisation and acceptance of stigma at a collective level and the resistance to racism, discrimination and stigmatisation at an individual level. Albanian migrants' ambivalent interiorisation of the stigmatising discourses circulated by Italian media can be best summarised by the following discursive mantra: 'Not all Albanians are bad, but I am good'. This was also a frequent answer to the question 'Do you think Italian television tells the truth about Albanians?' Interestingly, this discursive set was mirrored in interviews with Italian entrepreneurs, most of whom defended 'their' Albanian worker as good, unlike most other Albanians.

Moving to the analysis of the conditions of social inclusion and exclusion Albanian migrants are subject to in Italy, I argue that these dynamics of mirroring and othering reflect a cultural construction of Albanian migrants which is consistent with a regime of differential exclusion/inclusion. In this perspective, the visual and narrative scripts circulated by media have been a powerful agent of marginalisation engendering within both the host and the migrant communities stigmatising prejudices which made it very difficult for Albanians to access key survival resources such as adequate housing and non-exploitative working conditions. Here, I want to stress how the cultural construction of Albanian migrant as a *monstre* connoting backwardness, immorality and poverty seriously hampered Albanian migrants' attempt to emancipate themselves from their initial condition of illegality and vulnerability.

In the years preceding and following the collapse of the Albanian communist regime, Italian media can be seen as having played an emancipatory role as they acted as catalysts in the emergence of a new individualised life trajectory out of a socio-cultural and political landscape of repression, collectivism and authoritarianism. However, the potentially socially emancipatory character of Italian media with reference to the Albanian migratory flow changed dramatically after 1991. Because of the continuity of the 'diasporic' function of Italian television across the different phases of the Albanian migratory flow, the visual and narrative scripts they disseminated became the most powerful factor sustaining the processes of social exclusion Albanian migrants are now subject to in Italy.

Notes

[1]   My DPhil involved two years of fieldwork in Albania, between 1998 and 2001, and was built around the analysis of 200 semi-structured interviews with young Albanians aged 15–30 living in the cities of Tirana and Durrës. For a first analysis of my fieldwork data, specifically

pertaining to the role of Italian television in having supposedly 'attracted' Albanian migrants to Italy, see Mai (2001).

[2]   The Leverhulme project, entitled 'Albanian migrants in Italy and Greece: a study in migration dynamics and social exclusion', ran for two years, 2001–03, and was based at the Sussex Centre for Migration Research, University of Sussex. The Principal Investigator was Professor Russell King. Also involved in this project, doing parallel fieldwork in Greece, were Dr Gabriella Lazaridis and Maria Koumandraki, then of the University of Dundee, now at the University of Leicester. For some early outputs from this project see King and Mai (2002) and King (2003).

[3]   A few words of context are needed here. The 'March exodus' of some 26,000 'boat-people' to the coasts of Southern Italy took place before Albania's first democratic elections; hence, irrespective of the humanitarian obligation, these migrants could be justifiably labelled as political refugees. The 'August exodus', only slightly smaller in size, took place after the April election (won by the Communist Party, but they were in power for only one year), and therefore the Italian authorities could claim that these arrivals were economic migrants, not needy refugees.

[4]   For a more detailed analysis of Italian media's representation of Albanian migrants see Mai (2002b).

[5]   Refer to King and Mai (2004) for some detailed examples of this.

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