



METOIKOS Project

**Albanian Migration to Italy:
towards differential circularisations?**

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EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

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The METOIKOS Research Project
Circular migration patterns in Southern and Central Eastern Europe: Challenges and opportunities for migrants and policy makers

The METOIKOS project looks at circular migration patterns in three European regions: southeastern Europe and the Balkans (Greece, Italy and Albania); southwestern Europe and the Maghreb (Spain, Italy and Morocco); and Central Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, and Ukraine). More specifically, METOIKOS studies the links between different types of circular migration and processes of integration (in the country of destination) and reintegration (in the source country). It identifies the main challenges and opportunities involved in circular migration for source countries, destination countries and migrants (and their families) and develops new conceptual instruments for the analysis of circular migration and integration. The project will develop policy recommendations (a Guide for Policy Makers, available in 10 European languages) for local, regional and national policy makers as to how to frame circular migration with appropriate (re-)integration policies. It will also organise three Regional Workshops (on Spain, Italy and Morocco; on Greece, Italy and Albania; and on Poland, Hungary and Ukraine). The project will foster online discussion on circular migration with a view to raising awareness about the challenges and advantages of circular mobility in the wider EU Neighbourhood and the Euro-Mediterranean region more generally.

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ISET – Institute for the Study of European Transformation, London Metropolitan University

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Abstract

The Italo-Albanian migration has been embedded in the socio-economic and political transformations of the two countries involved. On the Albanian side, the development of different migration patterns, including circularity, reflect existing social and regional differentiations and evolving geopolitical dynamics, constraining the right of Albanians to enter internal and international mobility. Through migration and remittances Albanians have both coped with and exacerbated existing social and spatial differentiations and inequalities. The structural decline in remittances and the possibility of the liberalization of EU visas expected in the medium term might underpin a deep transformation of current dynamics, including the onset of more circular migratory patterns. These different dimensions and aspects must be addressed jointly in order to understand the usefulness of circularity in understanding contemporary patterns of mobility and migration between Albania and Italy, beyond the opposed geopolitical rationales involved. The emergence of circular migration can be seen as corresponding to a more fluid repositioning of Albanian migrants within a wider Greek-Italo-Albanian transnational space which is characterized by important infra and inter regional dynamics, increased labour flexibilisation and geopolitical instability. In this context, circular migration might end up by both challenging and further reproducing existing socio-economic and geopolitical inequalities.

Keywords: Migration, Albania, Italy, Circularity, Inequalities, Geopolitics

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1 Introduction

The Albanian migration to Italy is a particularly strategic context for the study of circular migration for several interrelated reasons. Firstly, Italy played an important historical role in the development of the Albanian national identity and in the emergence of a transnational imaginary which encompassed its post-communist migration experience. Secondly, Italy was the second most important foreign destination for Albanian migrants and a very relevant geopolitical actor in the development of the Albanian migration and development agendas after 1991. Thirdly, Albanians in Italy were both intensely stigmatized and particularly integrated within Italian societies. The interplay between: the diasporic experience of Albanian migrants in Italy; their lower propensity to return and higher socio-economic and cultural capital when compared with Albanian migrants in Greece; and the link between Italian (geo)politics and the development of immigration policies in Italy and Albania offer an ideal background for the study of circularity and its relation to social inclusion/exclusion, integration, geopolitics and geographical/cultural proximity.

2. Albanian emigration to Italy: relevant historical and demographic dimensions

2.1 Short history of the Albanian migration to Italy

Because of their geographical proximity and of their geopolitically and economically mutually strategic positionings the territories currently falling under the jurisdiction of Italy and Albania have been historically part of a shared socio-cultural and economic space. The geopolitical, socio-economic and cultural relevance of this (unequally) shared space were very discontinuous across different historical phases. In fact, according to the Italian historian Morozzo della Rocca, ‘Albanians are a sort of recurring geopolitical obsession, a presence that periodically intrudes into the Italian imaginary, and then disappears in a lethargy of unpredictable duration’ (Morozzo della Rocca 2001). In this perspective, the post-communist Albanian migratory crises of the 1990s inaugurated a new phase in the history of relations between Italy and Albania, which both built upon and transformed their imaginary, socio-economic and cultural liaisons.

The opening act of the current re-emergence of the Italo-Albanian transnational space at the centre-stage of the Italian geopolitical imaginary is directly linked to migration, and in particular to the mass migrations which coincided with the end of the Albanian communist regime in 1991. Between the 7th and 10th of March 1991, as the Albanian communist state collapsed and the country was precipitated into a situation of violent political confrontation and extreme economic deprivation, some 25,700 Albanians crossed the Otranto Channel between Albania and Italy in boats and rafts of every type. A new crisis arose in August 1991 with the arrival of another 20,000 Albanian refugees on several overloaded ships. Whereas most of the Albanians who arrived in March 1991 were considered refugees and given legal immigration status, most of those who followed in August 2001 were repatriated as ‘irregular migrants’. The two migratory waves of 1991 were just the beginning of a dramatic and controversial migratory flow, which has its roots in the prolonged economic and political instability of Albania throughout the 1990s. After March 1997, as Albania teetered on the verge of civil war as a consequence of the collapse of ‘pyramid selling’ schemes, there was another mass migratory crisis. Figures released by the Italian Home Office in August 1997 indicated that 16,964 arrivals in Italy had been recorded since March. Of these, 10,425 had

been given a short-term residence permit, and 6,517 had been repatriated (Jameson and Silj 1998).

Although there have been no further mass emigration episodes from Albania since 1997, there is plenty of evidence to suggest a steady continuation of emigration to Italy. Since 1991, because of the restrictive visa policies implemented by the Italian State, many Albanians resorted to illegal entry into the country, mostly through dangerous rides on speedboats across the Adriatic Sea to the Apulian shores, from Vlorë to Otranto. According to very conservative estimates, which do not account for unregistered events and passages, until 1998 at least 550 people died in trying to reach Italian shores (Mangano 1998). On 29 March 1997, as a consequence of a collision between an Italian coastguard vessel and a boat carrying migrants, 87 people, the majority women, children and elderly people, lost their lives. According to the Albanian Human Development Report for the year 2000, the number of people drowned or lost during 1999 alone totaled more than 340 (UNDP 2000: 6) and between 1991-1999 an average of 1,500 Albanians per month went to Italy, either with a visa or as clandestines (UNDP 2000: 37).

After 1998, Albanians have been brought into the newly-established quota arrangements implemented by the Italian government in an attempt to control immigration according to labour market needs. One of the key guidelines behind this new Italian policy¹ is the yearly allowance of a definite number of legal entries for non-EU (*extracomunitari*) citizens. According to the legislative decree n. 286 of 25 July 1998, the President of the Council of Ministers sets every year the entry quotas of foreign workers according to the needs of the Italian economy. Migrants can be granted a permit to stay for a range of different reasons: because they have been requested and invited directly by an Italian employer, for family reunification, for humanitarian reasons, and within specific training and employment programmes. These initiatives are usually provided for by specific bilateral agreements between Italy and sending countries. For example, for the year 2000 the Italian Government fixed at 63,000 the number of people authorised to enter Italy to work as employees or as self-employed either seasonally or for an indeterminate period. Of this number, a quota of 18,000 was reserved for people coming from those non-EU countries that had entered into a bilateral agreement with the Italian government, in particular 6000 Albanians, 3000 Tunisians, 3000 Moroccans and another 6000 people coming from other countries that were still negotiating a bilateral agreement with Italy.

According to statistical data elaborated by the Albanian government, more than 1 million Albanians have migrated abroad since 1991 – 600,000 in Greece, 250,000 in Italy, the remainder in other European countries and in North America. This equates to one in four of the Albanian population, enumerated at around 3 m. in the 2001 census. In 2001, the Albanians were the second largest community in Italy after Moroccans (159,599), and ahead of Romanians (68,929) and Filipinos (65,353). In 2007, Albanians are the third largest migrant group in Italy (381,000), after Moroccans (387,000) and Romanians (556,000) – these estimates from Caritas (2007) are based on permits to stay plus a notional quota for ‘irregular’ immigrants.

¹ L. 40 of 6 March 1998 on *Disciplina dell'Immigrazione e Norme sulla Condizione dello Straniero*, published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* n.59 of 12 march 1998, Supplemento ordinario n. 40.

2.2 Differential reasons to migrate

The main explanations for the extent to which Albanians resorted to migration in the last two decades emphasises the role of poverty, demographic factors and political instability. On an economic level, it is important to underline that Albania is still characterised by the most widespread poverty of any country in Europe, the least diversified and most backward economic base, the enduring and pervasive threat of disappearing financial and human capital, inadequate fiscal resources, and the reluctance of foreigners to invest in the country (De Soto *et al.* 2002: 1). As of 1995, more than 23 per cent of Albanian families had one or more of their members involved in migration, and migrants were especially likely to come from larger families. Moreover, 31 per cent of those who migrated brought with them one or more family members (Mjsja 1995: 224). All of these data suggest that it was the most numerous - and thus economically more vulnerable - families that were more involved in migration. As a consequence, internal as well as international migration became a fundamental livelihood strategy for many households all around the country and remittances determined the economic viability of many Albanian families (King and Mai 2008).

Surveys undertaken by the World Bank in the early 2000s emphasise the continuing importance of the economic dimension of Albanian migration and show that 39 per cent migrated due to unemployment, 26 per cent due to economic insecurity, 20 per cent due to insufficient income, and 16 per cent to obtain a better future for their children (De Soto *et al.* 2002: 45). From the analysis of the three most nominated motives for having migrated it emerges clearly that the economic dimension is by far the most relevant force behind the Albanian migration. These considerations are corroborated by another questionnaire survey of 1,500 households, showing that 87 per cent of reasons to migrate were economic, while the rest were mainly social or political (Kule *et al.* 2002: 233).

Although emigration has been a very capillary and widespread phenomenon in Albania, some groups and areas have been involved more than others. As far as social groups are concerned, the analysis of the first Albania Living Standards Measurement Survey shows how 32.9% of the whole sample has considered migrating from Albania (42.3% for men and 22.5% for women) and that younger (under 25), more educated and unemployed people are, on average, more willing to migrate. Moreover, if household demographic variables do not seem to have a significant impact on the intention to migrate, the opposite is true in relation to the housing conditions of the potential migrant. Finally, people from urban contexts and those from areas characterized by the perception of a high crime rate and by land disputes are more incline to consider migrating (Castaldo *et al.* 2005: 2-3).

As far as areas involved in migration are concerned, the relationship between Albanian migration and existing social and spatial inequalities is a complex one, involving the interconnection of international and internal migration, the increasing polarisation and territorial re-distribution of resources and the rise of new economic and political elites. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge the existence of three main regional socio-economic environments, that influence greatly the extent and the way people recur to migration as the main coping strategy with the opportunities and predicaments offered by the post-communist transformation. The North, especially the mountainous region, is still the poorest part of Albania and is a region of internal migration, mainly to the central Tirana–Durrës and to the regional capital Shkodër areas, as well as of international out-migration, particularly to Italy

and the UK. Because of the enduring poverty of the area, there is very little evidence of return migration. This is not the case for the second socio-economic region, the South, where the relatively better economic performance and the proximity to Greece (the main migration destination) allow people to engage in to-and-fro migration and (less frequently) to return and invest their remittances, mainly in the coastal tourist industry (hotels and restaurants), in small shops and mechanical workshops. The Centre is the most affluent (or less deprived) area of the country and receives internal migration, as well as being the area with the highest number of returnees and a zone of emigration, particularly to Italy. Tirana and Durrës are Albania's urban-economic core, as these two districts alone received 60% of all inter-district migration during 1989–2001, which produced a massive population increase (De Soto *et al.* 2002: 3). These dynamics are crucial for the analysis of the usefulness of the concept of circularity in capturing the transformation of Albanian migrations, which needs to be mapped across the complexity of the socio-economic and cultural transactions underpinning an intra- as well as trans-national social field (Vullnetari 2009).

2.3 Main demographic features of Albanian emigration

Demographically, the first post-communist researches undertaken in the mid-90s portrayed a predominantly young, single, male migrant population; nevertheless female and family migrations were of increasing relevance (Silvestrini 1995: 26-32). These trends were confirmed by Barjaba and Perrone (1996: 135) who, comparing their surveys conducted between 1992 and 1995, noted an increasing proportion of women and hence the tendency for Albanian migration to 'normalise' itself demographically, with more and more family integration and family reunion. However, Sokoli and Axhemi (2000), who provide useful data on Albanian emigration drawing on Albanian statistical sources, assert the continuing dominance of young males aged 20-34 years in the outflow. Although gender balance was gradually achieved in the main emigration contexts (Greece and Italy) as a result of periodic 'regularisations', which enabled family reunification visas, different migration dynamics still affect men and women. According to data from the 2002 Albanian Living Standards Measurement Survey, whereas 90% of men migrated in order to work, more than half of women migrated to reunite with their partner living abroad and only a third in order to work (Carletto *et al.* 2006).

A crucial demographic dimension of the Albanian migration phenomenon is its youthfulness. In 1998, 42% of the total population was under 19 years of age and the average age was about 24 years (UNICEF 1998: 14-15). Both in 1990 and in 2000, nearly one third of the population was under 15, which means that there is still an abundance of potential young emigrants for the next 10–20 years. These demographic considerations are significant if one thinks that it is mainly people between the ages of 15 and 45 that have been, and continue to be, involved in migratory dynamics, as these age groups accounted for 94.6 per cent of the total number of migrants until the early 2000s (Gjonça 2002: 31).

2.4 Future scenarios

The harsh conflicts of the recent past (the 1997 pyramid crisis in particular), the enduring polarisation of the political front and the widespread presence of corruption undermined the progress of economic reforms and the delivery of vital infrastructures and utilities (electricity, paved roads and water in particular), which are unable to meet the needs of the population (King *et al.* 2003). To this scenario of structural fragility, one should add the rise of criminal

phenomena in Albania, as the process of post-communist transformation was characterised by the emergence of local alliances between political groups/public functionaries and local power brokers. The consequence is that the Albanian state is still unable to guarantee the exercise of the rule of law as well as safety for a large sector of the population. The continuing appeal of emigration for many people in Albania needs to be read against the scenario of poverty, unemployment, low wages, minimal pensions/social welfare and insecurity outlined above. At the same time, according to the IOM (2006), recent years witnessed a decline in emigration numbers as a consequence of ‘more realistic perceptions by prospective Albanian migrants of opportunities in Europe’, because of restrictive admission policies and border controls, and of often ‘unfriendly’ attitudes in host countries (IOM 2006).

According to a recent survey (EFT 2007) migration will continue to play a role in Albania in the short term, with 44.2% of 18–40-year-olds interviewed saying they were thinking of migrating and 17.8% actually being able to do so because of their access to necessary social and economic capital. According to the survey, males were slightly more prone (46.9%) to migrate than females (40.9%). The survey also confirms that there is a link between educational level, employment status and the desire to migrate as almost 50% of people with primary education wanted to migrate, compared with 40.1% of those with a university degree, while the intention to migrate was higher among unemployed respondents. Finally, the survey highlights that the choice of the destination country and the foreseen duration of the migration period was strongly affected by educational level. Migrants with primary education preferred Greece, while those with secondary general and vocational education preferred the UK and Italy. Almost two-thirds of potential migrants with primary education wished to stay in the destination country for three to ten years. A third of those with secondary education wished to stay from three to five years.

3 Albanians in Italy: hierarchies of differential integration

In Italy, a recent country of immigration, there is as yet no overarching model of immigrant incorporation. Policy measures have been *ad hoc* and frequently contradictory. There seems to be an acceptance of the economic rationale of harnessing migrant labour and of the inevitability of immigration in a scenario of enhanced global mobility; and yet the trend in legislation – from the Legge Martelli (1990) through the Turco-Napolitano (1998) to the Bossi-Fini law (2002) – has been to pay lip-service to integration and instead to keep immigrants as a marginalised, temporarily-resident fraction of Italian society (Zincone 2006). Italian press and other media have reinforced this stance by continuously representing immigrants as outsiders and a threat to the nation. Throughout the 1990s and since, Albanians have been the lightning-rod for this negative discursive framing of immigration. Until 2008, more than any other group in recent years, Albanians were subject to a brutal campaign of stigmatisation and criminalisation by the Italian media (Mai 2002). As in Greece (cf. Lazaridis 1996), *albanophobia*, an all-encompassing and irrational fear of all things Albanian, became entrenched within the perceptions of the Italian population as a whole. Meanwhile, on the other side of the Adriatic Sea, the process of post-communist transformation was characterised by ‘emigration fever’. Leaving the country was seen as the only route to economic survival and improvement and – especially for younger people – to expressing their own identity. Especially for young people, Italian TV projected lifestyle models which were very different from those assigned to them by communism. In this way the idea of migrating abroad (above all to Italy) could be seen as the logical outcome of a wider process of disembedding of Albanian young people’s identities from the homogenous, moralised,

collectivist-nationalist landscape that prevailed before 1991 (Mai 2001). Hoxha's xenophobia was replaced by a people's xenophilia targeted particularly at Italy as the symbol of Albanians' aspirational Westernness. What is important to underline here is that Albanians, especially teenagers and young adults, had already undergone a process of *anticipatory assimilation* to Italy and its way of life even before their 'migratory projects' became realisable. Moreover, years of watching Italian television had given most young Albanians a reasonable command of the Italian language – an invaluable headstart should they end up by migrating there.

In Italy, Albanians' identificatory orientation towards Italy crashed against rampant Albanophobia. The paradoxical coexistence (King and Mai 2009) between aspirational integration into and selective exclusion from Italian society underpinned Albanian migrants' relatively successful assimilation into Italian society. Their fast progress along the assimilation-integration trajectory has been achieved in a short space of time compared to longer-established immigrants in Italy. Quantitative data on Albanians in Italy reinforce the impression that Albanians are becoming increasingly integrated within the host society. The first index is geographical distribution. Albanians are the most 'dispersed' of all immigrant nationalities in Italy; that is to say, they are the group whose spatial distribution is most similar to that of the Italian population as a whole (Bonifazi 2007). Albanians are found in significant numbers in all Italian regions except Sardinia and are found not only in big cities but in small towns and rural areas too. Albanians are also highly mobile within Italy, arriving in Apulia, where of course some of them stay (in fact Albanians are 38 per cent of all immigrants in that region), but then fan out to the rest of Italy. The regional time-series data show that Albanians tend, more than other immigrants, to move to regions of central-northern Italy which are economically dynamic and which are most accessible to their region of arrival. Hence their main regions of diffusion and most rapid growth over the past decade stretch northwards up the Adriatic seaboard to Emilia-Romagna and across to Umbria and Tuscany (King and Mai 2008).

The evolving demographic structure of Albanians in Italy is another indicator of rapid stabilisation and integration. In the early 1990s less than a quarter were females; by the late 1990s the share was one third; by 2001 the ratio was 40 per cent. These gender trend-data show dynamic change towards demographic 'normalisation' (Bonifazi and Sabatino 2003, p. 970). Data on pupil enrolments in the Italian school system also confirm these 'normalising' trends, as 2006 the number of Albanian pupils has increased more than tenfold, and the share of Albanians amongst the total foreign pupil population has more than doubled. Albanians are now the largest foreign-origin group in Italian schools, accounting for 17.7 per cent of all foreign pupils, well above their share of the overall immigrant population (11.3 per cent). During the academic year 2004-05 there were 9,522 Albanian students studying at Italian universities, a quarter of all foreign students. At university level most students are not second-generation young people living with their immigrant parents, but 'primary' migrants. But the existence of so many third-level students is another facet of Albanians' close relationship to Italy across different age and social strata. The figures quoted exclude Erasmus and other short-term exchange students (Caritas/Migrantes 2006: 181). Another 'classical' numerical indicator of assimilation is intermarriage with Italians. Mixed marriages between Italians and foreigners have increased sharply in the past decade, reaching one in ten of all marriages in 2005 (ISTAT 2007, pp. 340-3). The data indicate that, although Albanians are one of the fastest-growing groups to intermarry with Italians, marriage rates remain low compared to other migrant nationalities. These trends could be an indicator of continuing stigmatisation,

but also of the prevalence of endogamy within the Albanian population because of their own strong family and kinship bonds and relatively balanced sex-ratio.

These positive quantitative indicators of the outcome of migrant integration strategies need to be measured against the qualitative experience of the process of integration by migrants themselves. In this respect, the relentless stereotyping of Albanians as criminals and more generally as rough, uncivilised people has two main important consequences. The first is the behaviour of Italians towards Albanians in various spheres of life such as employment and housing. This becomes less common as time passes and Albanians get legalised and progress to more stable jobs – this holds for all immigrants who start as undocumented workers in the informal labour market. More specifically anti-Albanian discrimination arises when Albanians try to access qualified jobs. The second consequence involves Albanians' internalisation of the stigmatising discourse, so that it affects their own self-presentation and their behaviour towards both Italians and other Albanians. For instance, sometimes parents want to ensure that their children are not identified as Albanian and picked on as a result, so they encourage them to speak Italian all the time at school and in public spaces (see also Zinn 2005).

Albanian associations that do exist in Italy were not established in the early years of arrival, in order to reinforce Albanians' ethnic identity and help each other settle down, but were formed in the late 1990s in order to respond to negative media images by recovering positive elements of identification. This delayed ethnic mobilisation is described in the American sociological literature as 'reactive ethnicity' and arises out of the 'confrontation with concerted attitudes of prejudice on the part of the surrounding population' (Portes and Rumbaut 1996, pp. 133, 222). The fact that Albanians' projective identification with Italians was not reciprocated and was in fact rejected led some Albanians to adopt another, more extreme assimilation strategy: mimesis (Romania 2004). This may be accompanied by an acceptance and internalisation of the rationales for stigmatisation. Others, instead, may be led to a reappraisal of their Albanian heritage, either through an embryonic and delayed growth of ethnic associations, and/or a return gaze to the homeland. But this is a confused gaze, for the homeland itself is full of contradictions – between its rejected communist past and an uncertain neoliberal future – and tensions – rural-urban, rich-poor, traditional-modern etc. (Fuga 2000).

The unjustifiably stark rejection of Albanians by Italian society needs to be contextualized within the process of transformation of contemporary Italian national identity. Much has to do with timing. Albanians arrived just at the time when Italy was itself going through a crisis of national identification which could only be resolved by projecting elements of that crisis onto a constitutive other (Mai 2002). But this rejective othering of Albanians is set within Italy's own internally racialised hierarchy – the fundamental opposition between the cultural construction of North Italian identity in terms of efficiency, honesty and hard work, and its South Italian symmetrical other, connoting inefficiency, corruption and laziness. As Italy fought to create a unified, 'European' national identity in the early 1990s, the Albanians intruded into the picture, replacing the semi-colonial internal other, the southerner, with a true colonial other, the outsider/insider figure of the Albanian immigrant, 'perilously close to Italians in physiological terms', and 'dangerous' precisely because this figure reminded Italians of their own disavowed southern past of poverty, emigration and brigandage (Mai 2003).

So, floating between their aspirational Italianness, their stigmatised de-italianised identities, and their uncertain relationship to a fast-changing homeland which gives them little to latch on to, Albanians take on a kind of subdiasporic identity as ‘Albanians living in Italy’, partially acculturated and largely unassimilated (Mai 2005). The lack of any published data on Albanians’ employment, housing or educational performance of children in schools precludes definitive conclusions. However, existing qualitative studies (King and Mai 2008; Melchionda 2003; Perrone 1998), suggests rapid progress in these spheres, although Albanians remain, like other immigrants from poor countries, well short of ‘native’ levels of achievement. Acquisition of legal status is often the key to progress in the labour market and to family formation. The specificity of the case of Albanians in Italy resides in highly asymmetric perceptions of this groups’ assimilation. Whatever one wishes to call the particular integration status of Albanians in Italy – acculturation without assimilation, asymmetric assimilation, or other terms such as ‘selective acculturation’ (Portes and Rumbaut 1996, p. 252) or ‘subordinate inclusion’ (Melchionda 2003, p. 16) – an overriding feature is its dynamic character and therefore its capacity for rapid change over the next decade or so, when the second generation comes to maturity.

Since the early 2000s, the success and dynamics of Albanian migrants in integrating into Italian society (King and Mai 2008; Melchionda 2003), the rise of Islamophobia following 9/11, the advent of new migrant groups and the enduring heritage of an inefficient and divided political system led to the gradual emergence of new ‘moral panics’ (Cohen 1972) around new constitutive others. As we have seen, Romanians are now Italy’s largest migrant group, followed by Moroccans and Albanians. In Italy, and particularly in Rome, a series of criminal offences perpetrated by Romanian citizens in 2007 led to the adoption by the police and by a number of key institutions, including the city council, of a rhetoric of ‘mass’ repatriation and expulsion which coincided with the inset of ‘Romanophobia’, a generalised alarm and xenophobia around the presence of Romanian citizens in Italian society (Mai 2010). The de-centering of the stigmatizing and criminalizing gaze away from Albanians, as well as the potential liberalization of EU visas, currently postponed to the end of 2010, might have very important implications for the evolution of the Albanian migration to Italy towards a higher degree of integration within Italian society and/or a wider degree of circularization.

4. The Impact of Migration in Albania: development, return and circularization

From a review of the available research literature on circular migration between Albania and Italy it emerges that the term has only recently been used as a specific heuristic term. In fact, there is only one study (Vadean and Piracha 2009) exploring the specific determinants of circular immigration in Albania, also in relation to return. However, in many cases circularity and the reasons underpinning circular patterns of mobility are mentioned an explored within the broader literature discussing the impact of migration on the development of Albanian society.

Migration had a long lasting and profound impact on the social, cultural and economic texture of Albania. On a demographic level, there has been a population decline of 3.6% between 1989 and 2001 and a significant reduction in the average size of households, due both to a decline of the fertility rate and to the involvement of household members in migration. At an economic level, the main impact of emigration on Albania is the inflow of remittances, which, after the dramatic events which followed the collapse of the pyramid schemes in 1997, are now once again playing a crucial role in securing Albania’s economic survival. Migration has

a strong impact also on Albania's human resources. One positive consequence is the removal of unemployment, either directly (when the unemployed emigrate) or indirectly (when emigrants vacate jobs which are filled by unemployed people). A negative consequence of the Albanian migratory flow is the phenomenon of the brain drain, as, according to estimates of the Centre for Academic and Social Studies in Tirana, nearly half of Albania's scientists and academics left the country during the 1990s (UNDP 2006: 4).

4.1 Remittances

In the mid 1990s, Albanian migrants working abroad were sending home remittances 'estimated to be of the value of between \$300 million and \$1 billion per annum, the country's major source of external income after aid, and equivalent of up to a third of GDP and several times the value of Albania's exports. Given low domestic income levels, modest estimates have suggested that an Albanian with a good job outside the country can support at least five people in Albania' (Hall 1996: 186). Another author calculated the remittances sent by one migrant to be 2.5 times the sum of the average Albanian wages of all of the members of a family (Misja 1995). Between 2000 and 2002 remittances contributed, on average, 15% of total GDP, were worth \$200 per head of the Albanian population, were double the value of visible exports, and made up 55–60% of the trade deficit (Nikas and King 2005).

Remittances tend to be used to improve basic living conditions at first and to be invested in housing and in economic activities at a later stage (IOM/ILO 2007; Vullnetari 2007). There is no agreement in the relevant literature about the positive or negative impact of remittances on the overall development of Albanian society, as they are associated with a decrease in the level of economic activities of farming families (King et al. 2006) and with the exacerbation of existing socio-economic divisions (Vullnetari 2009). Although there was an immediate improvement of the livelihoods of the families receiving remittances, research carried out by Arrehag, Sjöberg and Sjöblom (2005) questions their positive impact on family well-being and economic development as well as the long-term substantial improvement of living conditions for those receiving remittances. In the near future, remittances are very likely to fall. Since the mid 1990s family reunification led to a more balanced demographic composition of the Albanian expatriate communities. As new families are formed and enlarged abroad with the foreign birth of children, so the money available for remittances will be less, and there will be fewer family members in Albania to remit to (e.g., de Zwager et al. 2005: 51; Maroukis 2005: 220–221). However, the improving economic situation of Albanian emigrants in their host countries and the low rate of return migration to Albania suggest that remittances could rise alongside income and that the stock of emigrants residing and working abroad is likely to remain high in the medium term; therefore the flow of remittances may well be assured, at least until 2010 (de Zwager et al. 2005: 53).

4.2 Return and circularity

The World Bank estimated the number of migrants returning to Albania in 2005 at around 83,000 (2008). IOM (2008) research shows that the majority of returning migrants are from Greece, that there is a positive attitude in Albania towards return within families with a history of migration and that return is conditional to the availability of secure employment. However, the same research shows that 60 per cent of respondents felt that reintegration upon their return was difficult, and only eight per cent reported receiving any assistance upon return (IOM 2008). These observations corroborate the findings of previous research, which

highlights the way in which the lack of security and adequate financial and logistical infrastructure hampers the process of return and reinvestment into Albanian society (King *et al.* 2003). Although the idea and the intention to return is still mentioned by at least half of Albanian migrants and there is some return to Albania ‘after all’ (Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2005), other existing studies (Barjaba 2000; King and Mai 2008) underline a weak propensity for Albanian migrants in Italy and elsewhere to return. Above all, this is because the current state of the Albanian economy offers little encouragement to do so.

Overall, existing research on circularity and return shows that the scale and duration of return has to do with the balance between push and pull factors operating in reverse – i.e., push factors from the destination country, and pulls from Albania. For the most part both these forces are relatively weak, hence limited stimulus for return is generated. In Italy, integration has been relatively rapid and despite their continuing stigmatisation by Italians, Albanians have come to identify with Italy and Italian popular culture, and increasingly see their future – and that of their children – there rather than back in Albania. Much the same story of relatively successful integration, especially since the post-1998 regularisations, is found for Albanians in Greece (e.g. Pratsinakis 2005). On the Albanian side, the pull factors attracting returnees are weak. Family pressures to return are countered by important elements, including a still-backward economy, extremely low wages and incomes, lack of infrastructure, a general climate of political and civic corruption, and a sense of pessimism about possible change. Above all, it seems, Albanians do not ‘trust’ their country; in the wake of the collapse of communism, there is very little by way of civic culture (Maroukis 2005: 219).

Infrastructure is certainly a major obstacle to return, not just in terms of personal inconvenience, but also because it hampers attempts to set up functioning businesses, which need guaranteed supplies of power and water, as well as decent road connections (De Soto *et al.* 2002: 8). Existing studies (King and Mai 2008; Giorgio and Luisi 2001) indicate a business orientation on the part of many Albanian migrants who want to return, but there are many objective difficulties to an economically successful return. Moreover, these opportunities are distributed according to the new Tirana-centric map of socio-economic development and internal migration in Albania, which is the economic heart of Albania and the only region where the population is growing, above all by internal migration. Elsewhere, opportunities for returnees are not so good. In areas away from the main towns, business prospects of returnee enterprises are limited by a shrinking market due to seasonal and permanent migration and depopulation. Missing infrastructure, poor market demand and depopulation are not the only obstacles to returnee enterprise. Business plans may also be frustrated by the lack of personal security, shortage of credit and general political instability. In these circumstances, success in the migration–development nexus in Albania can often depend on the pooling of family resources and expertise, rather than on the individual behaviour of the returnee acting on his (or her) own (King and Mai 2008).

As far as the specific issue of circular migration is concerned, King and Vullnetari (2003) highlight how the Albanian migration system can be seen as constantly evolving and therefore how return migration can be seen as interlinked with the emergence of circular patterns. Existing research showed that the length of stay abroad reduces the propensity to return. For example, Markova and Black (2005) established that Albanian migrants who have lived in London for several years sell their property in Albania and purchase houses in London. These findings are in line with research conducted by Bonifazi, Conti and Mamolo (2006), which indicates that Albanian migrants integrated relatively well into Italian society, and that the

number of those who do not intend to return increases with the length of their stay in the country. The steady increase in the share of female emigrants who leave to join their husbands abroad (King and Vullnetari 2003) reinforces the above findings. Complementary findings emerge from recent survey research by Lois Labrianidis and his colleagues, which shows that Albanian migrants in Italy, as well as being from less-poor backgrounds than those in Greece, also earn and remit more, but are less likely to be able to reintegrate back to Albania in the event of return migration (Labrianidis and Lyberaki 2004; Labrianidis and Hatziprokopiou 2005; see also de Zwager et al. 2005). Once again, this confirms the contrast between the back-and-forth nature of much Albanian migration to Greece, and its more permanent character in Italy. The different resources and patterns available to Albanians migrating to Greece and Italy are implicitly confirmed by Vadean and Piracha's analysis of the specific determinants of return and circular migration in Albania. Vadean and Piracha highlight the relationship between lack of education, seasonal work and circularity, as 'being a male, having a lower education level, originating from a rural area and having a positive temporary migration experience in the past are factors affecting circular migration'. At the same time, the amount of time spent abroad, legal residence, and accompanying family are positively related to permanent migration, while age, secondary education, failed migration or fulfilment of a savings target determine permanent return after the first trip.

A recent survey on 'The Contribution of Human Resources Development to Migration Policy in Albania' (ETF 2007) further corroborates the observations and analyses reviewed above. The survey highlights how a large majority of returnees were young (54.0% of them belonged to the 18–34 age group), males (89%) and had medium levels of education (35.7% secondary general and 20.4% secondary vocational). As it emerges from other literature reviewed in the report, the levels of education of returning migrants from Italy, the UK and Germany were higher than those from Greece. Returning women tended to be more educated than men. The most important reasons for migration were economic and the survey shows that most returning migrants worked for the longest period of time in the migration country in de-skilling sectors such as construction, agriculture, manufacturing, hospitality and catering (these last two, plus domestic help, were particularly relevant for female migrants). Only 10.2% of the returning migrants increased their skill level. The answers about the reasons for return varied according to level of education and employment status. Those with a low level of education came back mostly because they were forced, or for family reasons. People with university education, besides family reasons, were more likely to come back because they wanted to start a business (11.3%). Again, very few returning migrants (1.6%) were aware of any government support programmes intended to facilitate return. On their return to Albania, 74.3% of respondents found a job after an average search period of 3.4 months. Furthermore, the survey results show the existence of a positive relationship between return migration and self-employment, as 51.5% of returning migrants became self-employed or an employer. The remaining migrants found salaried employment. However, at the same time, 42.9% of returning migrants wished to re-emigrate from Albania, the main reasons being: 'have no job/cannot find job', 'to improve standard of living' and 'nature of work unsatisfactory'. Thus, the survey highlights an inversely proportional relation between the desire to re-emigrate and the level of education, which is corroborated by the higher rate of success and permanent re-settlement in Albanian of educated returnees. The survey findings show the relevance of socio-economic and cultural factors other than employment in the decision to re-emigrate and suggest, following Kilic et al. (2007), the hypothesis that many returning migrants have not yet attained an appropriate target level of savings and skills to successfully

re-integrate in Albania by engaging in self-employment activities. This can be seen as a major factor fostering successive re-emigration.

4.3 Focus on Albanian integration policies

Since the 1990s, Albanian migration policies responded to the geo-political pressures exerted by Italy (Chaloff 2008) and Greece in exchange of vital economic aid and the support for Albania's long-term aim to join the EU. In many circumstances, this interplay was negotiated under the threat of restrictive measures against Albanian migrants, which included mass deportation of irregular Albanian migrants in the case of Greece (Konidaris 2005). This means that, de facto, international co-operation and the policies and initiatives regulating the Albanian migration ended up by serving external rather than Albanian priorities (Chaloff 2008). However, in 2004 the potentially beneficial economic impact of external migration has been seized on by the government, which set out a blueprint for capitalising on migration as a development stimulus in its *National Strategy on Migration* (Government of Albania 2004). Covering the five-year period 2005–10, the National Strategy on Migration (NSM) aims to provide Albania with a more comprehensive and integrated policy on migration – moving from a series of ad hoc measures designed mainly to combat irregular migration to a more holistic policy based on migration and remittance management. In this respect, the NSM complements two other strategy documents approved earlier – measures to combat trafficking in human beings (2001) and the integrated border management strategy (2003). More specifically, the NSM covers the following policy domains:

- protection of the rights of Albanian emigrants abroad;
- linking up and strengthening the identity of Albanian communities abroad;
- channelling migrants' remittances into economically productive business investments;
- designing a better labour migration policy, in cooperation with destination countries, for instance in working out quotas of temporary or seasonal migrants destined for key sections of labour demand;
- encouraging circular and return migration, especially of skilled migrants;
- facilitating the travel abroad of Albanian nationals on short-term visas;
- developing an appropriate legal and institutional framework for managing emigration and return.

Critical analyses of the deployment of the Albanian NSM (Totozani *et al.* 2007; Chaloff 2008) highlighted its ambitious 'manifesto' character, because of the absence of the funds, co-ordination and infrastructures which are necessary to implement many of the foreseen measures (Chaloff 2008). At the same time, the NSM is an ambitious development through which the Albanian state can be seen as trying to regain ownership of the economic and cultural resources created by migrants in order for them to be available for the development of Albanian society and to avoid the negative consequences of 'brain drain'. To this end, the NSM circular migration strategy foresees the establishment of better services providing prospective migrants with updated information on emigration possibilities and the registration of migrants. Within this framework, circular migration, defined as a form of temporary migration lasting less than 12 months, is identified by the NSM as a particularly strategic asset.

However, the main provisions foreseen by the NMS regarding the promotion of circular migration remain the successful negotiation of bilateral agreements, particularly with Italy

and Greece, allowing Albanian migrants to keep being legally resident in Italy and Greece if they stay in Albania for more than 12 months. On the one hand, the NMS can be seen as willingly conflating circular with 'less-temporary' and more 'return' patterns of migration in order to capitalize on strategic skills and resources. On the other hand, the its 'circularising' ambitions crash against the geopolitical priorities of its two main neighbouring states: Greece and Italy. In fact, the evaluation of the implementation of the NSM undertaken by Totozani et al. (2007) underlines both how bilateral negotiations are undergoing and the lack of interest from the Italian (and Greek) governments. In fact, Italian migration policies, according to Chaloff (2008), concentrate on meeting the short-term needs of Italian employers through seasonal and dependent work quotas and only contemplate circular migration 'to the degree in which unemployed foreign workers are required to leave the country if they fail to find a new job'. In the process, the potentially negative and/or positive impact of migration for Albania is neglected. As a result of these dynamics at the moment circular forms of migration happen in the interstices between national policy frameworks addressing migration according to different and overlapping definitions, which are embedded in contrasting geopolitical priorities. Whereas Albanian migration law defines short-term emigration as lasting less than a year, Italy has a migration policy allowing seasonal work for up to 9 months. Although Albanians are accorded priority in seasonal work visas, the Albanian policy aims at extending the terms of seasonal migration, which it does not see as circular (Chaloff 2008).

In Italy seasonal work has been managed in the last 12 years through databases and training/selection initiatives which had limited success. The implementation of quota-based managed migration schemes in Italy has systematically fallen short of the actual needs of the labour market, which implicitly and unofficially relied on the presence of irregular migrant labour. So far, Italian attempts to manage migration ended up by operating as a retrospective and contorted mechanism of regularization, which produced a highly exploitable and ambivalently documented migrant labour force (King and Mai 2008; 2009). However, some of the creative solutions adopted by the Italian governments in order to meet the quota systems might have a role within contemporary debates about the 'circularisation' of migration. For instance, between 2000 and 2001, in order to implement the Italo-Albanian bilateral agreement and to contrast the effects of the stigmatisation and exclusion of Albanians from the Italian labour market, the Italian centre-left Prodi government allowed selected (1500) migrants to obtain 'job-seeking' visas, which could be converted in a work visa if they obtained a permanent contract within 12 months. IOM functionaries defended the success of this scheme and claimed that it allowed most participants to get access to regular employment and also to avoid the risks relative to irregular entry in the country. Successful as it is likely to have been, the 'job-seeking' visa was scrapped by the subsequent Berlusconi centre-right government as it was deemed too vulnerable to manipulation from migrants who did not participate in the selection and training schemes. Flexible and fluid instruments such as the 'job-seeking' visa are unlikely to be re-proposed in current times, which are marked by the proliferation of new and old moral panics about the presence of migrants in Italy (Mai 2010). However, the 'job-seeking' visa might prove to be a possible policy suggestion, should it be associated with the political opportunity to promote the 'circularity' against the 'integration' of migrants.

5. Concluding remarks

The review of existing literature and research about Albanian migration highlights an increasing awareness amongst scholars about temporary forms of migration emerging at the intersection between circularity, transnationalism and the different forms of differential exclusion/inclusion of Albanian migrants in emigration settings. As we have seen, most of this ‘to and fro’ migration emerged in relation to the mobility of less educated male migrant employed in de-skilled sectors in Greece. In this respect the ‘exclusionary’ higher economic and social capital required to cross over to Italy and the geographical separation between Albania and Italy seem to have acted as criteria fostering both a higher degree of integration within Italian society and a lower degree of circularity. At the same time, migrants with higher education were able to gather the socio-economic resources and skills enabling them to build a successful project of return to Albania. In this respect, temporary, seasonal and circular forms of migration seem to be the ‘prerogative’ of the relatively less privileged strata of society and to both mirror and reproduce established and emerging socio-economic and spatial inequalities. In terms of future development, it remains to be seen whether the increased level of documentation and regularization of Albanian migrants in Italy has fostered the establishment of a virtuous circle between documentation, integration, circularity and the development of Albanian society. For the moment, it is important to note how new and old forms of circular migration emerge within the lack of co-ordination between the different nationally-based geopolitical agendas and priorities.

Understanding the specific and shared determinants of circular and permanent forms of migration and their combined and specific impact on the Albanian society remains very important in the current geopolitical and socio-economic situation, especially in anticipation of the postponed but forthcoming liberalization of EU visas for Albanian citizens, which was originally scheduled for 2009. The general trends outlined above and discussed more in general in this background report are very helpful in identifying potential ‘macro’ aspects influencing the adoption of specific mobility patterns and migration strategies by Albanian migrants. Yet, they do not account for the different ‘micro’ ways in which socio-economic inequalities are both implicated in the form of mobility chosen/afforded by individual migrants and distributed spatially within Albania. For instance, although migrants to both Italy and Greece come from all parts of Albania, emigration to Greece is particularly strong from the southern districts close to the border. Emigration to Italy, on the other hand, is relatively more common from the more urbanised coastal districts, and from the north. In addition to geographical proximity and communication links, religion and language have some influence on the patterns. The southern districts are where most of the ethnic-Greek, Orthodox minorities live. Albania’s Catholic minority – more likely to migrate to Italy – are in the north. And the western districts are where Italian television (and therefore informal language learning) could be most clearly received during the years before and during the post-communist transformation. As regards internal flows, these are dominated by movements between the rural north and Tirana (Carletto et al. 2004: 9). Durrës is in most cases the second destination of choice for internal migrants. Whilst Tirana and Durrës receive migrants from all parts of Albania, other cities such as Shkodër, Elbasan, Fier, Vlorë and Korçë receive most of their migrants from neighbouring districts.

The socio-cultural mapping of internal vs. external migration needs to be mapped onto the interconnection between migration and poverty. According to King and Mai (2008) poorer districts (in the north and north-east) tend to send internal migrants, and relatively better-off districts in the centre and south send mainly international migrants. So poverty acts as a push factor for internal migration and as a constraining factor for the more costly international migration (Zezza et al. 2005: 184–185, 191). These multiple distinctions between internal and international migration and, within external moves, between temporary and permanent migration and between Italy and Greece as destinations, advance our understanding of the dynamics of the various types of migration observable in Albania. However, to this intra-regional Albanian dimension one should also add an inter-regional international one, weaving different regional or more localised places together through established and emerging forms of circular, temporary and/or seasonal migration, as in the case of the relations between Apulia and the areas of Shkoder, Durres and Vlore, on the coastal strip of Albania.

When studying circularity, besides acknowledging these intra-inter-regional macro and micro factors and dimensions mentioned, it is also important to keep into consideration a further ‘micro’ individual/household level. Within individual households for example, two or more migration types may be engaged in, either sequentially or simultaneously, by various household members. Existing research, for instance, highlights that Albanian migrants in the London area had been first to Greece and then to Italy, en route for the UK (King et al. 2003). Further complications arise at this household-focused micro-level when we attempt to disentangle internal from international migration. Do migrants tend to move internally (and according to a circular pattern) prior to emigration? Or is it more common for migrants first to work abroad in order to finance an internal move, perhaps to Tirana, after return? Or are some of these multiple moves occurring simultaneously within the same household – for instance sons and daughters working abroad whilst their parents effect an internal relocation prior to a (partial) reunion of the household in a more rational, profitable location in Albania? These macro questions and micro levels need to be addressed jointly in order to understand the usefulness of circularity in understanding contemporary patterns of mobility and migration between Albania and Italy, beyond the opposed geopolitical rationales involved. The emergence of circular migration can be seen as corresponding to a more fluid repositioning of Albanian migrants within a Greek-Italo-Albanian transnational space which is characterized by important infra and inter regional dynamics, increased labour flexibilisation and geopolitical instability. In this context, circular migration can be seen as both challenging and reproducing existing socio-economic and geopolitical inequalities.

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