Circular migration and new forms of citizenship. The Albanian community's redefinition of social inclusion patterns

Cristiana Paladini*

[a]LUMSA,Via della Traspontina 21, 00193, Rome, Italy,

Abstract

The persisting economic crisis in Europe and the policy makers need to propose quick solutions to the *migration problems* contributed to emphasize the concepts of circular migration and return in the last few years. The main aim of this paper is to underline the connections between these phenomena and the transformations in the relationships between migrants and their host countries, and - consequently – the changes in the way they contribute to build social processes. The work will focus on the Albanian community in Italy, which can be regarded as an interesting object of studies in consideration of his migration history and of the links between the two countries. Albanian migration changed completely in the last twenty years: from the violent media impact of the first arrivals in 90s to the so called "mimesis" as a privileged form of integration, until the actual role played by the second generation and the wide student community looking for public spaces to express their double identities. The myth of return, made real through the tourist Visa liberalization of 2011, has been quickly replaced for many migrants by the necessity of engaging circularity in order not to lose the status acquired in Italy. Nowadays, many migrants' families separate once again, many are going back and forth, others are trying to generate business connections between the two sides of the Adriatic sea. Atypical citizenships, that redefine the traditional borders and the common processes of social inclusion creating new forms of integration and new social spaces of cohabitation.

Keywords: Migration, return, circularity, integration;

1. Introduction and theoretical framework

The phenomenon of the return of migrants to their homeland has in recent years been the focus of intense institutional interest especially at Community level. In 2002, the European Commission released a Green Paper on return policy (European Commission, 2002), which recognized different types of reentry and advocated support for migrants who wish to embark on that route. The document made cautious proposals towards a set of guidelines for EU States on the management of the issue and possible support mechanisms for the accompaniment of any return flows (European Commission 2005). With the spread of the phenomenon, due not least to the economic crisis, academics specializing in the social sciences have launched intense debate about how best to define terms such as return and circular migration, on the various types of reentry, on the motivations and characteristics of those who return and on the elements influencing the success of reintegration in the country of origin (Cerase 1974; King 1986; Colton 1993; Stark 1996; Vertovec 1999; Cassarino 2004).

*E-mail address: c.paladini@lumsa.it

If a lot has been written on these subjects, there has been far less investigation of the implications of the relationships with the host country (Triandafyllidou, 2010).. The line of thinking that will be followed in this paper is precisely that linked to the relationship between new pathways and destinations. This report, in the opinion of the author, will reflect the changing needs of those who are developing plans for return and the transformations taking place in those communities which, indirectly through their members, are experiencing the process of circular migration.

Part of the process of return "preparedness" for a migrant who is preparing to go back – Cassarino uses this term to refer to the voluntary act of preparation for return (Cassarino, 2004 : 274) – depends on questions linked to the integration into the host county. New informational and educational needs are being created and, especially in the case of ideas for planning that involve both the country of origin and the host nation, the search is ongoing for new relationships to create bridges between the two lands. These new patterns are mostly still under continuous construction; and despite attempts at planning, and the investment of resources which it has often taken years to collect, have in most cases only been partially constructed, and are very much subject to change.

From this point of view, the interpretation that this paper gives to the concept of circularity is different from the positions held by the European Commission (EC, 2005) which were taken from the IOM itself (IOM, 2005) and describe more or less explicitly regulated processes, and moves closer to the considerations offered by Vertovec (Vertovec, 2007) which highlight the unstructured nature of many of these pathways and the influences on their development which are informed by social and cultural concerns as well as those reflecting issues connected to the economy and working life (Triandafyllidou, 2010).

From another point of view, in migrant communities, too, something is changing. The fact that an increasing number of members of these communities are planning re-entry or are undertaking circular routes helps build new processes of group interaction with respect to places of residence and of origin: support networks are being activated, helping to circulate information, acknowledging the most up-to-date news about ongoing changes in the countries of departure. Both transnationalist scholars (Portes 2001; Al-Ali and Koser, 2002) and exponents of Social Network Theory (Phillips, J. L., Potter, R. B. 2003, as cited in Cassarino 2004), highlight from different standpoints the establishment and maintenance of links between migrants and the host country. However, while trasnationalists understand the building of these relationships and influences as a process which naturally derives from the transnational character of the migrant experience, Social Network Theory sees this relationship as dependent on the form of social inclusion which is created in the migrants place of arrival (Cassarino 2004: 267).

The research work in the field, focusing on Albanian migration, has made it possible to highlight certain aspects of the relationship between this community and Italy and to collect and collate the transformations that are taking place. In particular by examining whether and how the relationships established by migrants with the host country might change through the establishment of these new migratory patterns.

2. Methodology

This work is part of research into return migration which was carried out between 2010 and 2013 in northern Albania and which used different mechanisms of qualitative and quantitative analysis.

However, the specific investigation on the issues of migrants' relationships with the host country, which is the subject of this paper, was mostly carried out following the principle of multi-sited ethnographic analysis. The observation process concerned returnee migrants both in Italy and Albania (taking into account the various meanings of "return", from permanent return to more or less voluntary and more or less planned circularity). The choice of an ethnographic approach was made to meet the needs for an interpretation of migrant pathways based on personal experience, on the history built by individuals which becomes community history.

Specifically the following research material was collected:

- 60 in-depth interviews, in both Italy and Albania, with migrants who were about to return or who, while based in Italy, had become part of an established process of circularity. The interviews focused on migratory patterns, the relationship with the host country, the reasons for return, and their future prospects.
- 20 interviews with privileged witnesses, focused on trends, motivations, issues related to the return and on the changes this brings about to local contexts (local and national authorities, migrant associations, associations that provide assistance to migrants, NGOs, academics, local and national opinion leaders).
- 20 life stories, in Albania, in order to trace significant elements of personal life journeys (returnees and their families).
- Sampling of migrants was carried out maintaining balanced criteria related to:
- socio-economic grouping
- educational qualifications
- migratory history (the respondent's legal status and conditions on arrival, etc.)
- period of departure
- type of return (stable, circular, seasonal, etc.)
- reasons for return

The overall research work made use of cooperation with national and local organizations, and was carried out in close contact with the Italian NGO IPSIA, which over the three-year period between 2010-13 implemented a project in northern Italy on return migrants ("Progetto Risorse Migranti", in collaboration with Caritas Italiana, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs). These contacts, now deeply rooted in the north of the country, both in urban and rural areas, have made it possible to establish relationships of trust with the population and, with the help of a local mediator, at least partially to overcome feelings of diffidence towards the interviewer. It was thus possible to investigate the subject from multiple points of view.

3. The phases of Albanian migration in Italy

The history of Albanian migration is for many reasons closely linked to events in Italy. For a long time after the collapse of the Communist regime, Italy represented the symbol - sugar-coated by television and the idealization of collective narratives - of contact with the outside world. Secondly, it is undeniable that, as the second most important destination for Albanian migration after Greece, Italy has been a central geopolitical protagonist in the forms of development adopted by post-Communist Albania. And finally, certain characteristics of the process of social inclusion of the Albanian community in Italy mean that the study is of particular relevance to this work.

The migration which followed the fall of the dictatorship may be divided into the following principal phases: the first in the early 1990s with the collapse of the regime, the second after the collapse of the financial pyramid schemes in1997-98, and the third between 1999 and 2000 after the Kosovo war. After 2002,migratory flows gradually diminished, although the number of Albanian nationals living abroad remains extremely high. It is estimated that there are some 1,200,000 regular expatriates. Despite the problems associated with calculating the number of irregular migrants – a phenomenon which has steadily declined in recent years – there is no doubt that migration has had – and continues to have - a decisive impact on the whole country, especially when one considers that the current population of Albania is around 3 million (Mai-Paladini, 2013).

4. Stigmatization and integration: the paradoxes of Albanian migration

From the first landings of Albanian migrants on Italian coastlines in the early 1990s, for almost a decade Albanian migration to Italy received unprecedented media coverage – both for its intensity and duration. Although Albanians were not the first foreign communities present in large numbers on Italian territory (many immigrants

from the Maghreb countries had long been established), in the Italian collective consciousness Albanian migration has perhaps represented the watershed in the transformation of Italy from a land of emigration to a destination for immigration.

The visual impact, amplified by the mass media, of the Albanian cargo ship *Vlora,* and other large ships crammed with migrants landing on the coasts of Puglia, was striking. Geographically, Albania was close enough to Italy to be seen with the naked eye, yet after more than forty years of isolation it was an unknown, mysterious nation. A nation which entered Italian homes first through television pictures of the landings and then was to remain, with the accounts of landings in rubber rafts, the stories of the chaos following the end of the regime, and later in the criminalization of an entire people, which for a long time had been associated with smuggling, drug trafficking and organized crime. Due to the political climate, the question of migration and the construction of a "foreign problem" became a vote-catching issue. First stereotyping, then discrimination became so deeply entrenched that they were transformed into stigma, (Goffman, 1963) one which the Albanian people struggled for a long time to shake off (Devole, 2006; Mai 2005).

In response, the populations who had arrived in Italy decided that the best strategy towards integration was mimesis. They sought to blur into the Italian social fabric, making themselves as invisible as possible (Romania, 2004). This tendency, combined with a sense of Albanian national identity that was still being reconstructed after the collapse of the regime, meant that the inclusion process of Albanians in Italy and their relationship with their home country developed in a partly different fashion from that of other communities. This has been defined as a sort of "asymmetric assimilation" by Russel King and Nicola Mai (King and Mai, 2008, 117-138), who emphasize the paradox of a community that at the same time is both the most stigmatized and, according to numerous indicators of integration, the most similar to the population of the host country. The principal effect of this paradox, to which should be added the need to make sense of the more or less recent past of the country (not only under the regime, but what happened after its collapse, from mass migration to the civil war) was that the Albanian community folded in upon itself, preventing the formation of those "narrative communities" that, as Jedlowski maintains, by giving voice to the life stories of its members make it complete. By the silence on its experience and history, the Albanian community is made incomplete (Jedlowski 2009, p. 39, as cited in Gatta 2012, p. 18) enclosing within the private sphere, or the realms of family or friendship, the whole process of the negotiation of collective identity.

5. New migratory patterns, new forms of social inclusion.

In recent years there have been many changes to Albanian migration, on both sides of the Adriatic. On the one hand, social inclusion in Italy, looked at through the major indirect indicators of integration available (schooling, employment stability, family reunification, entrepreneurship), confirm the findings which had already emerged after 2000, the Albanian community is, in residential social contexts, perhaps the most integrated. (Mai and Paladini, 2013). The number of permanent residents and naturalized Italian citizens has risen (CNEL, 2013). On the other hand, the rapid –although unbalanced – levels of growth of the Albanian economy, the ease of movement for migrants who have now for the most part become regularized, the liberalization in 2011of tourist visas, have all driven tendencies towards closer relationships between the two countries. Since 2007, due to the first signs of the economic crisis, there has been an increasing propensity to return to the home country (ETF, 2007). Nevertheless, until at least 2011 numbers of actual returnees did not seem particularly significant. While reliable quantitative data is not available interviews with privileged witnesses and migrants during the first two years of the investigation (2010-2011) suggest that the first to return were those who had not managed to achieve family reunification or, more in general, those who had left part of the family in Italy. Furthermore, in some cases entire households have returned after one of the family members managed to find stable employment, normally through independent business activity. These first returns are not related to circularity: those who return remain in contact with the country of origin. If a returnee has opened a business activity, in many cases he/she chooses Italian suppliers. However, among the collated information there are limited examples of transnational activities or stable established links.

Interviewed in 2010, Ardian returned to Albania in 2008, after 17 years in Italy. "We decided to come back because, despite everything, Albania is the place where we imagined our family, our children's lives to be. But in

order to give them a good standard of living, in order to survive, we had to leave, I hope it doesn't happen again to our children because it is only us who know what it was like." ... "Italy, Florence, remains my home, I like to go back, but here there is so much work, it's difficult, if I can manage I take my wife and children too." ... "I buy the materials and machinery in Italy" ... "Our life now is here".

In an early phase of the study, the crisis plays an ambivalent role in the question of reentry. While on the one hand, as mentioned, the propensity to return seems to increase, and contacts for an eventual return are intensified. But a lack of available resources blocks the actual departure. Some of those who were planning to return postpone their plans until they are better off economically; they have not met the goals they set themselves before return. Fation (interviewed in Italy-2010): 'Of course I think about going back, we all do, always. But now it's not just a thought, I've put something aside, we have a house there, elderly parents. We will return soon, but now it is difficult, we had already started to look for something there, but I have those projects there, and now there's less work, we need more time, it's not as if when you leave you can put everything there, prepare everything, say to the family "Let's go now" and then come back and say "No, sorry" I was wrong "'.

The situation changes during the second half of the investigation: many students return from Italy, but also workers with long-term residence permits, temporary workers who have lost their employment contract, men or women who try to invest their savings in a business project in Albania, while their family remains in Italy. This trend, emphasized by the economic crisis, pushes many workers to enter the dynamic of circular migration.

These transformations, in the opinion of the author, have been a contributing factor towards a redefinition of relations with the host country and the country of origin. What emerges from the observation of respondents in Italy is that there has been an increase in the amount of information circulating on Albania, economic relations have become more consolidated, the voice of the expatriate community is stronger.

This process has a decisive impact on the dynamics of identity construction. The negotiation of the collective identity, which for a long time had mainly been relegated to the private sphere, emerges and becomes more visible.

There is a growing number of associations, above all of students (among foreign students at Italian universities Albanians are by far the most numerous), but also alongside these community associations, there are those grouping members of the second generation, others formed by business people. Albanians are beginning, later than other nationalities present in Italy, to bring out their own identity, including outside of their community boundaries.

Meeting spaces are changing their original functions. In bars, in clubs, in front of schools or migrant workshops, on a daily basis we may see the activation of that process which Gatta has described as "the embryonic formation of public spheres daubed with the primary ingredients of social life: playfulness, time-wasting, sociability." (Gatta, 2012: 8). In other words, the community retakes possession of social space for the discussion of issues of common interest, political debate, the building of participation; all that which makes individuals active citizens (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1997), contributing knowingly to the transformation of the society into which they are inserted.

The other side of the coin, more linked to the worsening of the economic crisis, has to do with the effects of reentry on households and on networks that have been built up over the years in Italy. As has already been mentioned, more and more families are being split up: among returnees who have gone back in the past five years, 80% of those interviewed had left family members on the other side of the Adriatic. In these cases, circularity is an obligation, an inevitable consequence if families are to survive (Mai and Paladini, 2013). It's not just temporary workers who are leaving, but increasingly also new Italian citizens who are unable to support themselves because they have lost their job. Many of them, even those who have started up a business in Albania, come back to Italy at the first opportunity of finding a job, even for only a short time. Often it is the parents who return, while the new generations stay behind, studying or trying to obtain specialist qualifications in Italy. Sometimes, however, it is the youngsters who, unable to find a job in Italy, try their luck in a country where often they have never lived.

Luka, 19, has just opened a pancake shop (interviewed in Albania - 2011). "I'm from Emilia-Romagna born and bred, my girlfriend's there, my friends. Luckily there's internet." "I studied, at the Hotel Management and Catering School, like everyone in Rimini, but at the moment there's just no work around – nothing. What could I do? So I gave it a go" … "I used to come here in the summer with my parents. I was born in Italy, you know? My father and my uncle were always telling me about here. And there wasn't a pancake shop. My uncle opened one in Tirana, and

it's working out " …"We'll give it a go and then we'll see. I'm going back in 15 days' time, then I'm coming back here, then I'm going at Christmas. No way can I stay here all the time."

That process of integration – which to a certain extent had already started with the preparations for departure and which also inevitably entails family reunification, the finding of stable employment, the ability to plan in the medium- and long-term - is called once again into question, and with it the personal identities that were negotiated, not only through the sense of belonging to the country of origin, but also through that which has been built up in the new territory of residence through personal experience, through the development of relationships.

Strong community footholds are replaced by uncertainties; the places to which they have grown accustomed are replaced after moves to new locations. It is a continuous process of reconstruction in which identities are likely to wither into new absences (Sayad, 1999), which may be defined as "triple", in that they reflect what has been lost upon departure, upon arrival, and also the return to a place that is no longer your own.

6. Conclusions

The continual growth of social complexity, and therefore of different forms of individual mobility, entails the need to think of migratory patterns like that of reentry as part of an ongoing change, and no longer as exceptions to traditional routes. Studying the evolution of the migratory history of a community means not only understanding its relationship with the country of origin but also outlining the forms of interaction with the area of destination and tracing possible evolutions of this relationship. While on the one hand the study of Albanian migration has highlighted some special characteristics of the relationship with Italy, it is also possible to trace trends common to other communities, and to hypothesize elements that may foster social insertion. The social inclusion that emerges from the investigation is first of all a process that is built on two countries. This implies the need on the part of academics and policymakers to reconsider integration as a pathway that may concern two societies, building new ways of experiencing coexistence and interpreting citizenship, bringing with them therefore new needs to which it is necessary to find answers.

References

Al-Ali, N. and Koser, K., eds. (2002). *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home*. London: Routledge.

Ambrosini, M. (2011). *Sociologia delle migrazioni*, Bologna: il Mulino.

Arendt, H. (1956). *The human condition,* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Barjaba, K. (2000). *Ondate senza Ritorno*. Rome: IOM.

Caritas/Migrantes (2006). *Immigrazione Dossier Statistico* 2006. Rome: IDOS.

Cassarino, J. P., (2008). The Conditions of Modern Return Migrants. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 10 (2).

Cassarino, J. P. (2004). Theorising return migration: the conceptual approach to return migrants revisited. *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 6 (2): 253–79.

Cerase, F. P. (1974). Expectations and reality: a case study of return migration from the United States to Southern Italy. *International Migration Review* 8 (2): 245–62.

CNEL (2013). *Indici di integrazione degli immigrati in Italia. IX rapporto.* Roma: CNEL.

Colton, N. A. (1993). Homeward bound: Yemeni return migration. *International Migration Review* 27 (4): 870–82.

Commission of the European Communities (2002). *Green paper on a community return policy on illegal residents*. COM 175.

Commission of the European Communities (2005). *Migration and development: some concrete orientations*. COM 390.

Commission of The European Communities (2005). *Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on Common Standards and Procedures in Member States for Returning Illegally Staying Third-country Nationals, Communication from the Commission.* COM 391.

Commission of the European Communities (2007). *On Circular Migration and Mobility Partnerships between the European Union and Third Countries, Communication from the Commission*. COM 248.

Devole, R. (2006). *L'immigrazione albanese in Italia*. Roma: Agrilavoro Edizioni.

ETF (2007). *The Contribution of Human Resources Development to Migration Policy in Albania*. Tirana: European Training Foundation.

Gatta, G. (2012). *Luoghi migranti. Tra clandestinità e spazi pubblici*. Cosenza: Pellegrini.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Government of Albania (2004). *National Strategy on Migration*. Tirana: Albanian Government in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration.

Habermas, J. (1962). *Storia e critica dell'opinione pubblica*, trad.it (1971). Roma-Bari: Laterza.

IOM (2005). *World Migration 2005: Costs and Benefits of International Migration*. Geneva: IOM.

IOM (2006). *Return and Readmission, The Case of Albania*. Tirana: IOM.

ISTAT (2010). *La Popolazione Straniera Residente in Italia*. Rome: ISTAT.

Jedwloski, P. (2009). *Il racconto come dimora. Heimat e le memorie d'Europa*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri.

King, R. ed. (1986). *Return Migration and Regional Economic Problems*. London: Croom Helm.

King, R. and Mai, N. (2008). *Out of Albania*, Oxford: Bergharn.

King, R. and Mai, N. (2009). Italophilia meets Albanophobia: paradoxes of asymmetric assimilation and identity processes among Albanian immigrants in Italy, in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 32(1), pp. 117–138.

King, R. and Vullnetari, J. (2003). *Migration and development in Albania,* Working Paper C5, Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty, Brighton: Sussex University.

Mai N., Paladini C. (2013). Flexible circularities: integration, return and socio-economic instability within the Albanian migration to Italy. In A. Triandafyllidou, *Circular Migration between Europe and its neighbourhood* , Oxford University press.

Mai, N. (2001). 'Italy is Beautiful': the role of Italian television in the Albanian migratory flow to Italy, in King, R. and Wood, N. eds. *Media and Migration: Constructions of Mobility and Difference*, London: Routledge, pp. 95–109.

Mai, N. (2002). Myths and moral panics: Italian identity and the media representation of Albanian immigration. In Grillo, R.D. and Pratt, J. eds. *The Politics of Recognising Difference: Multiculturalism Italian Style*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 77–95.

Phillips, J. L., Potter, R. B. (2003). Social dynamics of foreign born and young returning nationals to the Caribbean: a review of the literature. *Geographical Paper* No. 167.

Portes, A. (2001). Introduction: the debates and significance of immigrant transnationalism. *Global Networks* 1 (3): 181–93.

Romania V. (2004). *Farsi passare per italiani. Strategie di mimetismo sociale*, Roma: Carocci.

Sayad, A. (1999). *La double absence. Des illusions de l'émigré aux soufferances de l'immigré*, Paris: Seuil.

Stark, O. (1996). *On the microeconomics of return migration*. (Occasional Papers No. 1/1996). Vienna: University of Vienna, Center for International and Interdisciplinary Studies.

Totozani,I., Onorato,M., Keta, M. (2007). *Report on the implementation of National Action Plan on Migration,* Tirana: European Institute of Tirana. Available online: http://www.soros.al/nosa/en/migration_strategy.pdf.

Triandafyllidou, A. (2010). *Towards a Better Understanding of Circular migration METOIKOS Concept Paper.* Firenze: European University Institute.

Vertovec, S. (1999). Conceiving and researching transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22 (2): 447–62.

Vertovec, S. (2002). *Transnational networks and skilled labour migration*, Oxford: esrc university of Oxford.

Zincone, G. (2006). The making of policies: immigration and immigrants to Italy, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32(3): 347–375.