
‘Looking for a More Modern Life...’: the Role of Italian Television in the Albanian Migration to Italy

Nick Mai

Department of Sociology
London School of Economics

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Introduction

When the communist regime collapsed in early March 2001, 25,700 Albanians tried to escape a situation of violent political confrontation and extreme economic deprivation by trying to reach Italy in a flotilla of boats and rafts of every type. This was to be the first act of a very dramatic migratory flow, which has its roots in the prolonged economic and political instability of Albania. Throughout the 1990s, the restrictive visa policies implemented by the Italian state forced many Albanians to smuggle themselves into Italy by risking their lives on dangerous rides on speedboats across the Adriatic Sea to the Apulia shores. Whereas during communism emigration was forbidden, nowadays more than one in five of the current Albanian population lives abroad and migrants' remittances are a key strategy of economic survival for Albanian households and society more in general. In fact, about 200,000 Albanians currently live and work in Italy, out of a total population of 3,800,000 in Albania (Barjaba 2000, 69).

The main focus of this research will be the role played by Italian television in the migration of young Albanians to Italy. Because of the geographical proximity of the two countries, Italian television could be seen in communist Albania. Indeed, the first explanations for the reasons behind this migratory flow 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). In fact, many of the Italian and international journalistic and scholarly accounts of the role of media in potentially eliciting migratory flows seem to implicitly conceive of the relation between media consumption and mobility in terms of a magnetic attraction of countries who ‘receive’ Western television programmes (and ‘send’ migrants) to countries who ‘send’ television programmes (and ‘receive’ migrants in return). If it is uncontroversial that the Italian media, and especially television, have played a major role in the Albanian migratory experience, the precise nature of this agency needs further exploration.

This article will analyse the multiple ways in which the consumption of Italian television was implicated in the emergence of ‘migratory’ life-trajectories and ultimately in the migration of young Albanians to Italy. It will address the ‘migratory project’ of Albanian young people by focusing on the way the desire to enjoy different lifestyles is implicated in the decision to migrate. The term ‘migratory project’ both encompasses and transcends physical displacement, as it designates the range of desired and desirable identities and lifestyles through which young Albanians imagine themselves. These emerge from the interplay between new practices of cultural consumption and supervening social needs at home.

In order to understand the relations between media consumption, social change and the increase in the imagination and enactment of mobility, it is important to underline how prospective and actual Albanian migrants have been subject to different, competing and contradictory regimes of subjectification (Rose 1996). The socio-cultural context of contemporary Albania is characterised by the encounter between very heterogeneous and contradictory models of personhood. The encounter between family-bound and collectivist narratives of subjectification and the individualised life trajectories disseminated by Italian television fostered deep dynamics of social change, one of whose main manifestations was the phenomenon of youth migration.

The relation between youth identity formation, media consumption and socio-cultural change will be addressed by referring to foreign television-watching as a ‘cultural formation’, an organisation 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, 70-71). Every cultural formation is characterised by a specific ‘sensibility’ which is ‘a principle of articulation’ describing and defining a cultural formation’s effects in people’s everyday lives and thus the way in which a particular formation is lived (Grossberg 1992, 72). In this perspective, migration and foreign television-watching should be considered respectively as a *potentiality* and as a key *cultural formation articulating the emergence of new*

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individualised identities within the wider process of transformation of Albania's socio-cultural landscape.

Finally, the article will analyse the 'subjective transformation' (Passerini 1997, 56), brought about by the lived experience of migration, by comparing the migratory project of prospective migrants with the re-collection of the experience of 'actual' migrants. In this perspective, the *a priori* imagination and the *a posteriori* recollection of the migratory experience will be considered two different stages in the process of cultural construction of the migratory project, which will be analysed both before and after the lived experience of migration. This article draws on the results of my own doctoral research, 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 cultural landscape.¹

Before moving on, I would like to mention here Steven Sampson's distinction between two separate and inter-related phases within the historical process of Eastern Europe's release from communism: *post-communism* and *post-post-communism*. According to Sampson, what distinguishes the two periods is not so much the 'intensity' of East-West relations, but their 'quality' (Sampson 1998, 156). I would like to focus on this aspect as it is key to understanding the way Italian television-watching evolved as a cultural formation during the 1990s. The direct encounter with Western people and institutions, whether this happened at home or through migration abroad, and the change in the West's power positionality within Eastern European societies defined the passage between the two periods. If, during post-communism, the West is experienced and imagined *in absence* as a fantasised and utopian 'place one escapes to', during post-post-communism the West is an overwhelming *presence* within 'people's life strategies and (...) consciousness in a way that it was not before' as it becomes 'the principle economic, political and cultural force' (...reproducing...) the conditions of life for the East' (Sampson 1998, 156). It is according to this Sampsonian conceptualisation of post-communism as an era shaped by an imagined, utopian and dialectic relation between two ideologically opposed worlds and their material, cultural, economic and social landscapes that the term will be primarily referred to in this chapter. Since it is the change in the qualitative relation between East and West that determines the passage between post-communism and post-post-communism, here I would like to underline how the post-communist period encompasses - in other words, both precedes and follows - the actual collapse of the communist state.

Fatal Attraction? Italy as 'America in the first post-communist years

Until 1990, Albanian national television consisted of only one channel, broadcasting 4 hours per day, between 6 and 10 p.m. In communist times there

was only one film per week, generally a repeat showing of an Albanian film, whose message 'was invariably political, patriotic and didactic and aimed primarily at indoctrinating audiences, rather than entertaining them' (Prifti 1978, 131). Albania also showed films imported from other socialist countries, and from the West or non-aligned countries at times, provided that they were ideologically correct in order not to harm or contaminate national Albanian Marxist-Leninist culture. The rest of the time was dedicated to politicised and propagandistic documentaries and programmes, aimed at the celebration of the country's successes under the guide of the omniscient Albanian Party of Labour (Dorfles 1991, 10).

Until 1973, Italian television watching was not specifically forbidden by law, although it was severely discouraged as an act 'liable to expose one to pernicious imperialist (Western) or revisionist (Soviet and Yugoslav) influences' (Logoreci 1977, 178). Because of the increase in general discontent with the cultural and economic policies implemented by the regime, and because of the increasing diffusion of TV sets in the early 1970s, in 1973 there was an official campaign against listening to or watching external broadcasts. Efforts were also made to curtail the reception of Italian and other foreign television programmes, by jamming their signals and prosecuting people caught in possession of an aerial designed to receive foreign broadcasts.

With the end of the Italian public service television monopoly in the late 1970s, which coincided with a proliferation of private stations and networks, jamming Italian broadcasts became more and more problematic for the Albanian authorities. At the same time, the authorities were increasingly relaxing their measures to prevent people from tuning into foreign television broadcasts, especially after the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985. However, until the end of 1990, tuning into foreign TV or radio programmes, while not explicitly forbidden, could still be considered a politically 'seditious activity' and could be punished with a period of four to eight years in prison. Moreover, talking in public or private about the contents of programmes of Italian television could equally be punished as an attempt to spread 'subversive propaganda' (Dorfles 1991, 8-9).

In communist times, Albanian television sets could only and purposely receive VHF waves, which would have enabled people to follow only the Albanian national channel and the (often jammed) RAI 1 signal from Italy. Other foreign public and private television networks broadcasting on UHF waves could only be seen with the help of a special aerial, which had to be kept indoors during the day and stretched out in the open at night, and of a *canoçe* (tin, in Albanian), an electronic device made secretly and illegally out of a couple of transistors, a condenser and a tin (hence the name). Although this equipment could run to the cost of a brand new TV set, illegal foreign television-watching became an extremely common practice for Albanians. Interviews carried out with the first

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Albanian migrants arriving on the Italian shore on the occasion of the March 1991 migratory flow revealed that 97 per cent of them watched Italian television regularly. About 89 per cent of those interviewed reported having learned Italian by watching Italian television (Dorfles 1991, 14).

Asking Albanian young people about their television-watching habits and tastes in 1991 about ten years later meant recalling both a different stage of development of their lives and a different historical period, which they seemed to remember with a feeling of nostalgia.

It was something extraordinary for us. I remember 'Sanremo'² very well. We did not get to watch television much in those times. There weren't that many TV sets around. Well, there were, but colour TV...there must have been only two or three in Tirana and only their neighbours or relatives could enjoy them...I once went with a cousin of mine, she was a neighbour and...it was...something coloured that looked like a dream. I remember that watching a colour TV gave us such a deep joy that we talked about it all year long. We had watched 'Sanremo' on colour TV! (F, 17, Tirana)³

From the interviews it is apparent that what drove Albanian people to watch Italian television was the search for *something new* and that what they appreciated most and looked for in Italian television was *beauty, entertainment and abundance*.

At the time, when I watched (Italian) television, what impressed me most was the way information was presented and shows were prepared. Of course one must remember that our senses at the time were very closed while theirs were much more developed...so this...started the desire and the curiosity of Albanians, who were used to schematic formats, with standardised programmes: news, television, culture, shows...Then there was also something different, that great desire to know the unknown, to see what is happening over there, it was this that made that curiosity special (M, 26, Tirana)

When asked about what they particularly liked about Italian television in post-communist times (remembering Sampson's specific definition of this epoch), most of the young Albanians I interviewed replied that they were fascinated by the beauty of the people and of the material environment surrounding them. What struck them in particular were the colours, the pace and the variety of the programmes offered. Many particularly appreciated the direct communicative style and the freedom of expression of the presenters, both in entertainment and in news programmes. As far as favourite programmes are concerned, almost all of the

interviewees preferred by and large entertainment programmes - shows, films and even advertising itself - to information or documentaries.

I didn't like anything about Albanian TV, whereas in Italy programmes were real programmes...I liked them because they were beautiful...they showed beautiful things, talked about beautiful things in a beautiful way...I liked watching those ballerinas...those ballets...listening to those songs...the settings...everything (M, 24, Tirana)

As far as the relation between media and migration in post-communist times is concerned, the most politically relevant aspect of the process of appropriation of narrative and visual scripts from Italian television in relation to the migration of young Albanians is their association with an imaginary and inclusionary space of viewership, participation and entitlement that is linked primarily to the sphere of consumption and recreation and in relation to which the desire to migrate emerged. By tuning into Italian television Albanians could have access to programmes originating from many different Western countries and this played a major role in the association of Italy with the West as a mythical and unified utopian cultural construction. In fact, because of the regular 'subversive' presence of Italian television within everyday life discourses and practices and of its resonance in Albania's past⁴, Italy became the imagined space on to which Albanians first mapped their frustrated hopes and desires and their favourite destination. Thus, as the following excerpt indicates, through the consumption of Italian television, Italy was associated with a utopian understanding of the West as a world of free-for-all material plenty and where everything was possible.

People who left Albania immediately after the end of the one-party state...they saw the outside world as something...I mean paradise on earth, there is everything, there is happiness, they thought there one could reach happiness...Once they went there they found out that nothing is easy to get, especially from the economic point of view...I mean...they did not expect it...not to find it there... When Albanians left in 1991, of course there were economic reasons, but most left in order to distance themselves from a place that had been closed for half a century and they thought abroad was a place where they could realise all of their forbidden desires...a very rich place where you could find everything and achieve everything... (F, 20, Durrës)

Thus, in post-communist times, Italian media provided Albanian young people with a utopian, disempowering and deceptive representation of Western society in general and of Italian society in particular. However, they also played a fundamental and emancipatory role within the transformation of Albanian society. In fact, as I will explain in the concluding section, by rendering visible alternative

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models of subjectivity and social relationships, Italian media stimulated social change and have been deeply involved in the gradual re-definition of youth identities on the Albanian social, cultural and economic scene.

Out of Utopia: focus on the post-post-communist migratory project

Since 1991, the proliferation of Albanian private stations incorporating and translating foreign programmes into the Albanian mediascape has meant that most Albanian young people have divided their television watching time and interests between Italian, other foreign, and Albanian private channels according to their needs and preferences. Very few young people watch TVSH, the Albanian public service television. The proliferation of Italian and Albanian private channels and the incorporation of the variety and diversity of programmes available on the Western mediascape into the Albanian one is consistent with a change in television-watching as a cultural formation and in the attitude to foreign television-watching, especially Italian television. As far as the first aspect is concerned, it is important to point out that, whereas in post-communist times Albanian young people used to watch television out of curiosity and experienced it as an undifferentiated spectacle of the West, now they choose selectively to watch specific programmes to develop their personal interests and are proud of having built up a more critical attitude.

Yes, before 1990 I used to watch foreign television channels (...). When I first came into contact with those channels I can say that everything made quite an impression on me, I mean the world that was offered was...outside that vision we had here...beginning from programmes for children to the ads, to the news...and everything that followed in line...It was a general attractiveness, I could not point out one or two aspects or elements. Everything was attractive, also the fact that it was forbidden at the time was attractive. (...). Now I can watch at least 13-14 channels and to tell you the truth it is not that I am focused on any particular channel...rather I watch every channel, I don't have preferences, I watch both the Albanian and the foreign ones, both public and private. It all depends on the specific programme or the kind of information that is given (Blendi, 25, Tirana)

I found that, whereas all of the interviewees like films in general, younger people preferred shows alongside films, whereas teenagers particularly appreciated a specific genre, usually called 'for young people'. These are usually debate programmes produced by both Italian and Albanian private TV channels and they focus on the problems which are typical of young people's everyday life: relationships, problems with parents, education, sexuality, new fashions and trends.

The evolution of Italian television-watching as a cultural formation in the last twenty years is reflected in the evolution of the cultural construction of Italy as country of destination. As regards Italian television's function as provider of information about the opportunities offered by migrating abroad, the multiplication of the availability of alternative foreign and Albanian channels has meant that Italian TV has lost the status of the privileged "window on the world" and is now but one among the many providers of entertainment and information. Later in the 1990s, Albanian young people could access a greater variety of sources of information about the lived experiences of emigration, most importantly the narrative accounts of disillusion with capitalism which were provided by returning migrants. The fact that for a growing number the experience of migration to Italy and to the West in general is now marked not so much by longing but by bitter disillusion is consistent both with a fragmentation of the cultural construction of the West as a unified and utopian promised land (Lubonja 2001), and with a repositioning of Italy within this more diversified and plural imagined space. The possibility of having access to a wider range of sources of information is a very important factor in the post-post-communist evolution of the cultural construction of Italy as a potential destination for Albanian young people's migratory project. This is in fact now marked by a very pragmatic, informed and realistic approach.

Look, now people don't see it (Italy) as the paradise on earth anymore...many people went there...there are so many contacts...now people don't watch only shows like 'Domenica In' on Italian TV...they watch more news and know more or less the way people live in Italy and this has made them more aware (M, 33, Durrës)

I don't watch Italian news very often, but I saw a couple of programmes where...there was a devaluing of Albanians, a discrimination, a contempt for Albanians. We have a very bad reputation over there and I think Italians don't want us. (...) I had many contacts with people who have lived there...they told me that it is very difficult to live there, to find a job or go to school and settle down (M, 17, Tirana)

Moreover, Italian people, capital and institutions are now a visible and tangible presence in Albania; they allocate strategic resources such as jobs, recreational or educational opportunities and the possibility to migrate to Italy. The encounter and engagement both in Italy and in Albania with Italian (and, of course, other Western) people, institutions, enterprises or projects is a turning-point in the passage from post- to post-post-communism and is a key element in the relativisation of the utopian sensibility associated with the migratory project that accompanies this passage, as the following excerpts illustrate.

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Yes, I think the way Albanian people see Italy is different now...for the fact that Italy is not America anymore. That was the case before 1991. It was the USA for us...I mean all the Western countries and all the Western cultures. Our image of the West was Italy and now it is not anymore (...) now I think that Italian people are the same as we are, but they are more bastard, more racist...I can have an idea because of the different kinds of Italians I have met...of different ages...different cultural levels...different social levels, from different parts of Italy and altogether they represented the social structure of Italy...waiters, ambassadors, prostitutes, representatives of NGOs and so on...(M, 24, Tirana)

Well, before 1990 it seemed as if it was another world...it seemed as if they were not people like us...I don't know how but not like us. While now that life seems closer, maybe because we have got to know a lot from our relatives, they went into that reality and told us about it. I also had contacts with Italians and other foreigners here and maybe this also made me see that reality closer (F, 29, Tirana)

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 stigmatisation of Albanian migrants living in Italy⁵, Albanian young people started directing their migratory project to 'more Western' destinations where their ambitions were perceived as standing better chances to be met, such as the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, the United States and Canada. In fact, nearly all of the Albanian young people I interviewed have friends and relatives who are living and working in Italy and Greece, and some also in the UK, Germany and America. Their accounts are now considered the most trusted and reliable source of information of the actual lived experience of migration by all of the interviewees, who then complement this information with that provided primarily by Italian public and private TV, and then by other global television channels.

I have a friend in Germany, another in Italy, my brother lives in America...they have all told me their experiences (...) I would not want to go to Italy because here I have a good job...I mean I am an accountant, but there in Italy I could only be a waiter...for years on end...I would like to have a better job than that... (M 26, Durrës)

My expectations about Italy have changed a lot...watching TV, reading newspapers, talking to the immigrants who come back here...it has changed a lot...Italy is a place...very difficult place...you can't find work immediately, if you don't have a base, you can't make it.

And before, what did you think?

Before...I don't know... I had a very very different idea from the one I have now. Really different from the one I have now.

Do you think people changed their minds because they are more informed?

Yes, sure.

Where did this information come from?

This information came from...conversations with those refugees who come back...things one sees on television... (M, 21, Durrës)

Interestingly, there are not really any significant differences in the level of Albanian young people's awareness of the actual opportunities posed by migration to Italy between those who experienced physical displacement and those who 'stayed put'. The fact that nearly all of the interviewees had relatives and friends abroad and that they still watch Italian television regularly means that they have access to both the narratives of hardship and social exclusion provided by friends and relatives involved in migration in Italy, and those of discrimination and criminalisation of Albanians in Italy spread by Italian media which are 'consumed' in Albania. The circulation of both of these narrative accounts of the experiences of Albanian people in Italy has been a key moment in:

- the passage to the post-post-communist period in general;
- the evolution of the relations between Italian television-watching and the cultural construction of Italy as a country of destination in particular; and also in
- the change in the expectations embedded in the migratory project.

When one analyses the transformation of the 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.

I think if I went to Italy, I'd go for a visit, a week or two, I would go there just for holidays and absolutely no other reason. Now there is not only Italy...Albanians opened up a lot and aim at living in Switzerland, Belgium, England. They are aiming for something more. Italy and Greece are considered places where you can always go, whereas now Albanians, they want something more, something better...in the other Western countries. America in particular is a dream for everybody, from what I have seen and heard (F, 20, Tirana)

This is particularly true of the younger people's migratory project. However, I want to emphasise here that the utopian sensibility sustaining the Albanian young people's migratory project (and Italian television-watching as a cultural formation)

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was irretrievably challenged by the lived and narrated experiences of encounter and disillusionment *with Italy and the rest of the West*. These experiences, for all of the interviewees, regardless of their age, educational background or gender, produced a *subjective transformation* which was consistent with a movement 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 would like to go to America, There it is not so difficult to find a job and maybe if I make some money I could even continue education (...). Yes, I have relatives there...they told me, some positively, some negatively (...). They never say the same thing and even when they talk about the same thing, they think differently about it (...) it is difficult to understand where the truth is (M, 19, Tirana)

The main factor influencing Albanian young people's post-post-communist move away from the utopian sensibility articulating their migratory project is the direct encounter in their everyday lives with Western people and the Western capitalist socio-cultural context. This encounter is always significant and transformative, whether it is experienced through the narrative accounts provided by direct and trusted sources of information, or by working and living with and for Western people in Albania, Italy or other fragments of the now dismembered and less utopian galaxy of the West. The contact with Western people and forces produces a subjective transformation which changed both the way Albanian young people elaborate their migratory project and the way they engage in the cultural formation of Italian television-watching, as these excerpts show.

Something changed in the way I watch a foreign channel and in particular Italian television, in comparison to the way I watched it before the 1990s. Because what I see on television I can see it directly now, concretely. I mean, we have tried the products that are advertised on television and they do not look so misleading now (M, 18, Tirana).

Well, before 1990 it seemed as if it was another world...it seemed as if they were not people like us...I don't know how but not like us. While now that life seems closer, maybe because we have got to know a lot from our relatives, they went into that reality and told us about it. I also had contacts with Italians and other foreigners here and maybe this also made me see that reality closer (F, 29, Tirana)

When asked to explain in some detail their own reasons to migrate, the majority of interviewees - regardless of their age, gender or educational background - explained their desire to change and improve their living conditions, whether

through migration or not, by referring to their desire to conform to the Western liberal-democratic regime of normality, as this interview excerpt shows.

Do I want to migrate? Of course...I would like to go anywhere...to see new places, I would like to...basically to have a different life from the one I lead here...Then comes the material side of it...(but) only after...*I want to lead a normal life*...a normal life like the one our peers from other countries lead... (M, 20, Durrës)

Whereas most parents tend to conform to patriarchal values and to be more ready to accept the renunciation of pleasure which underpinned Albanian communism, Albanian young people want to have fun, to live free sexual lives, to study and to work, to go on holiday and travel - just like their peers elsewhere in Europe. But their ambitions to live a (Western) normal life are thwarted at every turn, as this excerpt explains.

Albanian young people want to lead *a life like everybody else*, like people...people...I mean...*in the normal world*...every young Albanian wants to have a good time I mean...to go to the disco at night...to go to the beach with a group of friends...he wants to...to go abroad...to see life there...I don't think that Italian young people...that there are differences between us...they see life more or less like we see it... I mean here we lack everything...it's not that there is something specific that is missing...everything, a place to stay...here in Albania there aren't places...you just hang around pool halls, lottery or bingo places...in a private club or home, altogether five possibilities. That is it. (M, 20, Durrës)

Within this hegemonic yearning for Western liberal-democratic normality, younger people are looking for both a normal and a different life abroad. They are moved both by the necessity to improve their chances to fulfil themselves professionally and by the desire to experience alternative, 'more modern' lifestyles.

Well, Albanian young people want to go abroad for many different reasons, for economic reasons, the *mentality* of Albanian society...the impossibility to adapt to this environment...*they look for a more modern life*...I mean, for a different vision of the world... (Esmeralda, 23, Durrës)

More specifically, younger people associate a modern lifestyle with the possibility of going out at night, be completely independent from parents and 'general opinion' (*opinionë*), to emancipate from a conservative mentality (*mentaliteti*) and, most of all, to live together with their partner without marrying (*bashkjetim*). When

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I probed the interviewees to describe a modern lifestyle, some answers came as follows:

A modern lifestyle is the only way life is now in year 2000...not like here...to have fun, to go to the disco...with friends, to kiss in the streets, to wear what you want without being prejudiced against (M, 16, Durrës)

I think that the best example of what a modern lifestyle would be here in Albania is the possibility to live with a partner without being married (bashkjetim). I don't think my parents or relatives would ever tolerate something like this. Once I spoke to my aunt, quietly, not to shock her...I told her 'I want to go and live with my boyfriend...without marrying'. She just could not believe it. I pretended to joke, but in reality I meant it (F, 17, Tirana).

Most interviewees considered the possibility of leading a 'normal' or a 'modern' lifestyle as a key factor in the development of their migratory project; many spontaneously underlined the link between the search for alternative lifestyles, migration and foreign media consumption. In fact, most of the younger interviewees associate the possibility of choosing a 'modern' lifestyle with the Western world and see migration as the only way to follow it.

I think a modern lifestyle here in Albania is a very normal thing to want...it is an important concept for young people, who want to have their life like other Europeans...the possibility to follow a modern life is the main reason for the emigration of young people because life here is very repressed...and very passive, while life outside is more active...young people nowadays have in the blood the desire to do something different...everyday...I mean, media have changed our culture... the change is about the way you see life...we do not see it anymore from inside the four wall of our places...but in relation to activities...we give a lot of importance to our qualification...the possibility to have an interesting job and to develop ourselves in our lives... (F, 17, Durrës)

Even though it no longer holds a position of uniqueness and absolute primacy within the Albanian mediascape, because of its historical and deeply transformative penetration within Albanian everyday life, Italian television-watching still preserves a particular status that distinguishes it from other global or Albanian potential providers of information and entertainment.

There are many foreign channels now, beginning from English, French, German channels, Italian...maybe all of the Italian channels, then Spanish,

Greek, Turkish channels. There are many more, but having said this I am fixated with the Italian ones. Maybe this is a kind of illness that comes from the fact that I used to watch them a lot when I was little (F, 23, Tirana)

Most Albanian young people still prefer Italian television programmes to the ones available on global media, because they are more familiar with the language, the genres, the communicative style and the visual qualities of Italian television programmes and the cultural environment they refer to. However, behind the continuing centrality of Italian media as a cultural reference for Albanian young people, one should distinguish between its two main functions of providing information: both about alternative lifestyles and models of personhood, and about the material, socio-economic and cultural landscapes surrounding these models. As far as the latter aspect is concerned, Italian television has definitely lost its primacy. Its role as main provider of information about Italy, Albania, and the rest of the world has increasingly been complemented and surpassed both by other global (and not Albanian) TV channels and, particularly with reference to Italy as a country of destination of the migratory project, by the narrated experiences of relatives and friends.

It is in relation to the role of providing alternative models of personhood and social interaction that Italian media still hold a primacy and a specificity within the pluralised and globalised Albanian mediascape. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, the programmes which are most appreciated by Albanian young people are the Italian programmes which deal with the problems posed by: firstly, the transformation of young people's hopes, desires and ambitions; and secondly, by the way these transformations clash with the values and beliefs of their parents or of the surrounding social environment. In this respect, I argue that the influence of Italian television is actually greater now than it was in the earlier post-communist times.

I like Italian television more now...since 1991 I grew up and I can enjoy and be interested in more and more programmes...whereas before...it was more curiosity for the new and...well, basically cartoons and other kids programmes...now I like more programmes on Italian TV...I like programmes like 'I Fatti Vostri' or 'Amici'...where they talk about couples...relationships...I mean, they talk about normal everyday life... (F, 22, Durrës).

I think that foreign TV has got more experience and deals more with young people's needs...for example Canale 5 has this programme...a debate kind of programme, I don't remember the name now...but it deals with young people's needs and problems...the problems they have with

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their parents...these programmes are also made even here, but I have the impression that it is more difficult, because of the mentality of the audiences... (M, 22, Tirana)

In fact, although a couple of Albanian private TV channels have made programmes dealing with young people's problems following the examples set by Italian TV, most Albanian young people still prefer the original Italian programmes broadcast by Italian TV, as this excerpt clarifies:

We watch foreign programmes for young people because they give more things than the Albanian ones. Italian television in general talks about things Albanian young people are interested in, while Albanian TV is just not interested...they know more how to attract people...here they limit themselves to discuss the specific topic, while there, I mean, people in the show are natural...they appear...normal, while here they are fake...young people who go on TV there for example, when they talk about their problems...they cry, they fight, they discuss, they get angry...I mean, I have never seen anybody cry on Albanian TV, never! (M, 16, Durrës)

As far as the changes in Albanian young peoples preferences in relation to Italian television are concerned, the most significant transformation is related to the success of Italian private television networks. In fact it is Berlusconi's three Mediaset networks, Canale 5, Italia 1 and Rete 4, which are now the most-watched Italian channels in Albania, because of their wider choice of films and programmes 'for young people' (in the terms outlined above) and their 'communicative style' - as was put to me by many younger interviewees. The success of Berlusconi's channels, which was paralleled in Italy, should be analysed in more detail as it is embedded within the wider socio-cultural changes encompassing the emergence of migratory youth in Albania.

In Italy, both private and public networks have changed dramatically since the advent of commercial television in the late 1970s and this phenomenon must be analysed in order to go beyond any simplifying opposition between public service and commercial television. The changes in the programming of both public and private television networks in fact should be seen as consistent with a new function television came to have within Italian society as a consequence of wider social and cultural changes. Umberto Eco has framed the transformation Italian television underwent from the late 1970s in terms of the passage from 'paleo-television' to 'neo-television' (Eco 1990, 245-55). In opposing paleo- to neo-television Eco tries to capture the passage from a public service television addressing the viewer in a paternalistic and pedagogic way, whose programming was based on a neat differentiation between genres, to a new function and style acquired by both public and private television. The main features of 'neo-television' are the increase in broadcasting hours, the merging of genres and the

attempt to address the viewer in a more seductive, unchallenging and complicit way.

These new spaces of uninterrupted and populist entertainment offered by 'neotelevision' can be seen as offering themselves as occasions of mediated socialisation and recreation where a new, less judgmental and non-paternalistic mode of subjectification was articulated. In addressing people in a more populist and democratic manner and style and in passing from a 'monologic' to a 'dialogic' mode of talk (Scannell 1991, quoted in Livingstone 1998, 5), 'neotelevision' implicitly challenges the paternalistic and 'educational' stance of the Albanian national televisions and societies. In this perspective, I argue that Berlusconi's channels became even more popular in Albania during the passage to post-post-communism because they responded more efficiently to Albanian young people's desire to break away from patriarchy, paternalism and renunciation.

Conclusion: How important were the media?

The two key aspects emerging from the interviews I gathered in Albania during 1998-2000 are, firstly, that nearly every single young person I interviewed declared that they were willing to go abroad for a substantial period of their lives, whether to work or study; and secondly, that most acknowledged that watching foreign television was an important factor in the migration of Albanian young people. When I encouraged interviewees to reflect on how important they thought the media had been in the emergence of their own migratory project, the large majority of the interviewees underline the *indirect nature of the role played by Italian television*. In fact, both older and younger interviewees acknowledged the role of media in providing both information about potential destinations and, most of all, alternative lifestyles which are consistent with different ways to relate to and conceive the self in more individualist and fun-oriented terms.

The role of media, well, media...I think it is not the media as such that pushes young people to live abroad...young people emigrate because they are looking for a different lifestyle...a less inhibited lifestyle, more independent...which they saw through the media. Since in Albania there is no possibility whatsoever to follow such a style, they go where they think that there are more possibilities to follow it, abroad (Elisabeta, 20, Tirana)

In general I think that Italian media played an important role...I mean, Italian is the second language here just because of television! I think it played a great role in the transformation of people's mentality. I don't think that it was media that made people migrate, they were more important in more general terms, they brought about a sort of psychological change (Andi, 18, Tirana)

Mai, *'Looking for a more modern life ...'*

While the entertainment programmes broadcast by Italian television provided Albanian young people with a utopian, deceptive and dis-empowering representation of Western society, nevertheless, for the first time in Albanian history, they were given *individual entitlement to pleasure by being contradictorily addressed as desiring and consuming (Western late modern) subjects*. This was a key factor in Albania's gradual release from social collectivism, political authoritarianism and cultural homogeneity. By watching Italian television, Albanian young people gained access to alternative models of personhood and were addressed by different and contradictory regimes of subjectification at a time when Albanian society and the roles it assigned to individual and collective identities were undergoing a process of deep transformation. In this perspective, migration should be seen as one of the possible outcomes of a wider and contradictory process of disembedding of Albanian young people's individual identities from a homogeneous, collectivist and moralised national landscape.

Thus, against a grim scenario of capitalist deception and disillusionment, I would like to emphasise how the utopian sensibility which is consistent with Western entertainment (Dyer 1991) can achieve an emancipatory significance when experienced from another socio-cultural landscape. In this respect, Italian television-watching established itself as a cultural formation, a catalysist which responded to and in turn stimulated Albanian young people's desire to break away from a collectivist order founded on renunciation of pleasure and individual self-fulfillment. The 'alternative' and 'emancipatory' character of the regimes of subjectification provided by Italian television can only be understood with reference to the cultural and social contradiction at work within socialist economies.

Although in the West communism was presented as the dialectical negation of modernity, in reality it was 'modernity in its most determined mood', and collapsed as a system because of its inability to adjust to the new post-hardship needs introduced by the advent of the late modern social and cultural order (Bauman 1992, 167-70). In this perspective, communism was unable to follow the passage from a social arrangement aimed at catering for established needs arising out of a social and economic condition of hardship, to a new post-hardship situation aimed at the production of new needs (Bauman 1992, 169). In this passage, needs, once seen 'as a state of suffering demanding reprieve', are now considered 'something to be celebrated and enjoyed'; and happiness is 'redefined as the expansion of one's consuming capacity and the cultivation of new, more capacious and ever more refined needs' (Bauman 1992, 167). Being consistent with collectivist, hardship-based and sacrificial regimes of subjectification, communism could not possibly adjust to an individualist and post-hardship environment as this would have meant undermining its very own foundations.

On the one hand, beyond the post-communist cultural construction of Western capitalist democracies as places where material plenty, entertainment and pleasure could be attained with little work and sacrifice, one can easily read the projection into the West of the communist utopia of a world free of material hardship, inequality and exploitation. On the other, it is easy to understand how for most Albanian young people communism was experienced as a 'betrayed modernity' because, while it attempted to emancipate its subjects by addressing them as part of a collectivist class-based identity, it determinedly repressed every other potential factor of individual differentiation. The position of youth under Albanian communism was paradoxical: it was particularly pampered and denied agency yet it was considered, perhaps more than other social actors, the very essence and core of the communist project. Its position within society was one of a silenced and inactive constituency under the gaze and scrutiny of the paternalist communist state. These dynamics are key when understanding the role of Italian television in the Albanian migratory flow, as Albanian young people sought and found on Italian television a 'more modern' version of modernity which could keep the betrayed promise for individual self-fulfilment ambivalently embedded in the communist narratives of subjectification.

If it is true that in post-communist times Italian media ultimately corroborated a very disempowering and reductive understanding of Western late modernity, the post-post-communist release from the utopian sensibility shaping contemporary Albanian young people's migratory identities leaves some ground for optimism. Beyond their strive for individual self-fulfilment and their fascination with an hedonistic lifestyle free from the repressive and conservative aspects of Albanian culture, I read not merely the familiar expression of youthful opposition to traditionalism, but the emergence of a new social subject in Albania: namely, migratory youth. This is a subject which imagines different ways of being, different realities, different lives - whether physical displacement is actually carried out or not.

¹ More specifically, my DPhil research, based on two years of fieldwork in Albania during 1998-2000, has drawn on around 200 semi-structured interviews with Albanian young people, aged between 15 and 30 years, living in the cities of Tirana and Durrës. For a more detailed account of the role of Italian television in having supposedly 'attracted' Albanian migrants, please see Mai (2001).

² The Sanremo Festival, a national song contest which is held once a year in the seaside resort of Sanremo, is perhaps the most popular show on Italian television.

³ For each excerpt, I indicated the gender of the interviewees with M or F, followed by their age and place of origin)

⁴ Albania was part of the Italian fascist empire from 1939 to 1943 and a *de facto* Italian protectorate since the end of WWI. Moreover, it was subject to Italian

economic and geo-political interests ever since the Congress of Berlin in 1888. For a discussion of the experience of the Italian occupation of Albania, see Fischer, B. (1999). For an analysis of the Italo-Albanian colonial and post-colonial relations, see Mai (2003).

⁵ For an analysis of the socio-political significance of the cultural construction of Albanian migrants in Italy see Mai (2002).

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