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# Defining social spaces by way of deletion: the untold story of Albanian migration in the postwar period

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# Defining social spaces by way of deletion: the untold story of Albanian migration in the postwar period

Isa Blumi

***Abstract*** *European migration has been characterised since the end of the Second World War as one shaped by migratory work schemes and economic opportunism. The underlying rationale which induced hundreds of thousands of people to move to Western Europe during the period, therefore, has been largely reduced to economic factors. This article challenges the value of such approaches by identifying a largely forgotten community whose extensive settlement in European cities has never been studied as part of this postwar migration. The case of Albanian-speakers reveals a large number of reasons why people settled in Europe. The article further explores the sociological consequences for these Albanian communities as a result of their unrecognised condition in their host societies, in particular as it concerns their capacities throughout the postwar period to politically organise and to adopt measures of self-representation that were deemed important to them.*

KEYWORDS: FORCED MIGRATION; INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS; IDENTITY; RACISM; MIGRANT LABOUR

## Introduction: finding the origins of invisibility

In the postwar era, unaccounted for, ignored and in the words of postwar Afro-American writer Ralph Ellison, 'invisible men' haunted the teeming laboratory-like cities of the industrial world. At first glance, this assertion may seem inapplicable to continental Europeans who thought their cities were immune from the racial tensions Ellison described in American cities in the early postwar years (Ellison 1952). This skepticism has been reflected in studies of the postwar West European city which is assumed to be neatly segregated along easily defined social and ethnic categories (Abadan-Unat 1976). By infusing Ralph Ellison's masterful treatment of the subaltern experience in postwar America into the study of postwar migration to Europe, I hope to challenge some of these assumptions. Indeed, Ellison's rendition of the 'Black American' experience can provide insight and lend voice to those otherwise hidden from the European gaze: 'I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me' (Ellison 1952: 3).

Ellison's American city, with its deletions, empty quarters and unconsidered humanity, while not intended to do so, powerfully captures the phenomenon of the postwar diasporic voyager in Western Europe as well. It is, therefore, Ellison's commentary on the racial frontiers of humanity in America – a testimony about the powerful dislocations of the modern world – which provides the descriptive and figurative foundations for the following article.

A number of scholars have recently studied the fluidity of the post-modern

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self, providing interpretive inspiration for this study on what are ostensibly Europe's invisible people. In particular, it is through critiques of recent reiterations of the Liberal confidence in modern, universal forms of subjectivity, that we have developed a better appreciation for diverse levels of association, exclusion and reciprocal bonding otherwise 'unseen' (Stolcke 1995). Indeed, it is the blindness of Habermas and others in respect to the diverse experiences of the 'European' civil space that initiates the mysterious premonitions of the diasporic voyager in the first place (Habermas 1998). The following search for one such voyager in postwar Europe – the 'Albanian' – suggests as of yet unknown mysteries await scholars who are willing to study the social interactions of Western Europe's history in new ways.[1] Much as Appadurai (1996: 165) has exposed the emergent forms of non-territorial affiliation and solidarity, and Canclini (1995: 129–30) the scenographic and architectural separation of assumed uniformity, the following story of personal anxieties and sense of vulnerabilities as a particular kind of 'foreigner' in Western Europe will acknowledge what was once ignored.

At the same time, such an exercise helps expose similarly important forces that immediately affect that experience of invisibility. Much as I suspect the problem is evident among Afro-Americans in US cities, Western Europe's Albanians demonstrated for many years an inability to articulate a collective political, social and cultural identity that would have given substance to their traumas of invisibility. This article therefore explores as much the failures of the host society for not providing the conditions for self-actualisation among Albanians, as the disjointed forms of a present, self-constituting memory and the continuous re-negotiation of 'difference' embedded in that memory by Albanians themselves.

This two-pronged approach offers another angle of interpreting the European postwar experience and reinforces the need to investigate an all-too-often marginal, if difficult to grasp, dynamic of the modern world. By explaining how it was possible for perhaps hundreds of thousands of Albanians to disappear for more than 40 years from West European history, the following theorises how the *perceived* invisibility of so many people has impacted on their ability to constitute community. In addition, it demonstrates how these conditions of invisibility for migrant communities enable individuals to recollect the process of their inherent cultural hybridity and negotiate the ever-changing present they experience through a specific use of externally-imposed identifying categories. This should have particular value in the context of the ongoing debate in some countries concerning 'what to do' with non-Europeans who work, live and die in the societies bounded by the European Union (Elwert 1982). In fact, it is suggested that because of the 'revelations' made here, the notion of a 'single Europe' suddenly takes on new hues of tension and fragility; the assumed stability of the notion of the 'other' also becomes confused, fluid and enabled with an agency previously assumed nonexistent.

## Historical foundations to a European exile

Europe in the twentieth century has been witness to countless migrations, often constituting irreparable demographic transformations to entire blocks of geographic and, as a consequence, historical space. Many of these migrations have been products of modern state-building projects, endeavours that are then

disguised with phrases – 'population transfers, exchanges, relocations and settlements' – that are all perfectly construed euphemisms seeking to initiate a process of rendering invisible the 'victims' of these forces of modernity. In such a context, the diasporic voyager is faced with immediate strategic concerns: everything in this unstable state of being is suddenly visible and invisible at the same time.

Every immigrant, to an extent, exists in this fluid, image-dominated world, struggling in a state of anxiety; forced to wait for the right moment of 'integration' (in Ellison's words, 'recognition') into Europe. At the same time, as she or he is waiting, the immigrant must fear permanent liquidation (becoming air, translucent, invisible) by way of a bureaucratic swipe of the pen or the sudden gaze of recognition by the neighbour, boss, classmate or guardian whose freedom from blindness can induce xenophobic nightmares. It is this often-denied 'selectivity' on the part of the generic 'European', as the invisible immigrant sometimes sees them, that energises the very act of rendering visible (in this article) the invisible Albanian.[2]

The Balkan wars in the 1990s highlighted what had been a forgotten dynamic locked behind the 'Iron Curtain' and perhaps resurrected nearly-healed wounds of Western Europe's own, recent memories of the diasporic consciousness. While this sudden power to 'see' suffering at the hands of the Balkan state seemed to reinforce the inherent 'kindness' and 'empathy' of European citizens, 'Milosevic's wars' were not some anomaly of the post-Communist era. Rather, the wars in Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia and finally Kosovo[3] were but residuals of a long history of forced expulsion in Yugoslavia. As it became abundantly clear while attempting to research this history of Yugoslavia's forced expulsion of its Albanian-speaking population in the pre-Milosevic years, this history of expelling hundreds of thousands of human beings has been largely ignored in Western Europe.

Frustrated by a lack of scholarship on the issue, I set out to shed light on this tragic episode in modern European history. It is when I began to informally speak to Kosovar-Albanian men who had settled in Western Europe as early as 1949 that I realised there was perhaps another significant story to tell. For the few statistical abstractions that characterise past work on these expulsions, the personal side of the experience was never considered (Bajrami 1981; Islami 1981).

From 1993 to 1995, and continuing for many years thereafter, I began an informal survey of men in various Kosovar and Macedonian-Albanian communities in Western European cities in order to clarify an underlying suspicion about the fluidity of these men's memories of their expulsion from Yugoslavia.[4] What I soon learned was that such memories had a dual purpose in narrating a 'lived' experience. The first level of the responses I recorded sat on a plane of expectation. That is, my informants answered questions for my benefit, a Kosovar man at a time when nationalist sentiments were high. At the same time, and often operating on contradictory currents, the informants proved to be actively constituting a present 'self' who was positioned in respect to what was happening around them at the moment. For many of the conversations that make up the data for this study, the war in Bosnia was being beamed across television screens. Indeed, it was often when the news reports emerged on the screens that the topic of my informants' own memories of exile came to the surface. In other words, the war in Bosnia and the collective concern for the plight of the latest victims of Yugoslavian policies provided the emotional and,

perhaps more importantly, the rhetorical conditions for individual perceptions of the 'diasporic' experience to take new form. That is, the manner in which they 'chose to remember' was as much a reflection on what was 'remembered' as an attempt to link their memories to the events (and perhaps the discursive conventions) they were watching on their television screens. Without exception, the way in which Kosovar men understood the wars of the 1990s was through the filter of their own personal traumas. What is also important to note, however, is that these men of various ages began to understand anew their own experiences through the filter of the war. This dual function of memory is suggestive when attempting to better appreciate the dynamics of 'post-modern' hybrid identities and 'double consciousness' discussed by others (Moreiras 1999).

I began to see that in order to understand the bleak personal world that some of my informants were forced to inhabit, it was necessary to consider not only the context from which they have been exiled, but also the way in which many have lived their lives in exile. The subsequent questions raised initiated the surfacing of transmuted memories in ways that made presumed collective and individual identities suddenly unclear to me and my informants. Despite the utter lack of primary source material in the form of demographic data, it became clear that the previously invisible Albanian was actually everywhere and their past, present and future could be seen, once new kinds of questions were asked.

## Second-tier migration

Recent appreciation of the 'immigrant issue' in Western Europe does not help in understanding much of the experience of migration in Europe's postwar period (Martin 1991). It is worthwhile, therefore, to theorise the institutional process of rendering the Albanian men of the 1950s and 1960s invisible in order to fully appreciate the changes that would take place in the 1980s, the period when they suddenly become visible. One key factor is that, contrary to common views held about European migration, large numbers of immigrants from the 1950s onwards were not 'Turkish' or 'Yugoslav' men seeking jobs. Rather, many of these men (and their families) were coming from a variety of ethno-linguistic backgrounds and personally did not associate themselves with either of these two 'identities'.

In addition to a need for recognising the cultural distinctiveness of those coming to Western Europe since the 1950s, the often forgotten pretext for their arrival is of paramount importance. Not only were many of these 'Yugoslavs' and 'Turks' actually Kurdish or Albanian speakers, but in large part they were persecuted 'minorities' in their countries of origin as well. This meant the overwhelming majority of Albanians came to West Europe on entirely different pretexts than those with whom they were ultimately associated in the 1950–80 period. Being a Turkish or Yugoslav guestworker and being a victim of political violence were two entirely different experiences, which were all but erased by the very associations attached to being 'ethnically' linked to the immediate countries from which they came.

This process is characterised here as the phenomenon of *second-tier migration*. The concept of second-tier migration is meant to specifically address the flow of tens of thousands of individuals to Western Europe by way of intermediary, officially recognised 'origin' countries. In the case of Kosovar-Albanians, these

were most likely Turkey or Yugoslavia in the postwar period. Since Kosovars' immediate country of origin during the immigration process was Turkey or Yugoslavia, they were categorised and subsequently treated as either Yugoslavs or Turks by the countries in which they settled. The impact of these associations with unrepresentative 'ethnic' identities was first a number of institutionalised rigidities that impacted on how they could formally interact with their host governments. Second, being imposed a 'false' identity created contradictory forces of both drawing people closer and further apart to their 'own' identity.

Appreciating this factor dramatically changes how postwar European migratory settlement can be studied. As observed from within the Albanian-speaking diaspora in Western Europe during the 1990s, this process of second-tier migration would have important effects on the cultural development and levels of political activism within Kosovar-Albanian communities throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

How this translates in Western Europe is of primary interest as it demonstrates the deeper complexities within migrant communities in general. For example, we have neighbourhoods in Western European industrial cities that developed around close-knit groups originating from Albanian-speaking regions of Yugoslavia such as Gostivar, Prizren, Peja or Skopje. These neighbourhoods have been more or less completely ignored by European observers because, on the surface, one only sees 'Turkish' migrants inside a 'Turkish' migrant neighbourhood (Basgöz and Furniss 1985). That they are decidedly not Turkish in self-articulation becomes all the more clear when we understand why it was of particular importance for individuals to avoid being identified as 'Turk' in Western Europe.

That Albanian-speakers taking place in second-tier migration did not want to be identified as 'Turks' does not mean, of course, that they were successful. There are a number of reasons why these groups were not more successful before the 1980s in becoming visible to the outside world on terms other than secondary identities. The two largest reasons for the failure, I believe, are first that an overwhelming majority of Europeans were not willing to see these 'guests' in any way that might force them to deal with them as people deserving of sympathy, empathy and rights (Malkki 1998). The second reason for the failure of Albanian-speakers to break from secondary identities is the fiercely parochial quality of their settlement in Europe. Paradoxically, the localism noted has consequentially intensified the sense among scholars of 'Turkish' migration that these groups of individuals were nothing but 'Turks' or 'Yugoslavs', just as their host societies identified them in the data.

I come to this conclusion after much time spent with second- and third-generation Albanian migrants. Most of these Albanian-speakers come from communities that actively sought to distinguish themselves from the arbitrary affixation of secondary ethnic identities by Europeans. They did this largely by reconstituting communities in Western Europe along lines that strictly respected village or regional identities. These communities, however, were inherently small and lacked, at least initially, the economic and organisational wherewithal to take on the larger issues that plagued all migrants. Faced with institutionalised and socialised discrimination, racism and anti-Muslim chauvinism (as most were faithful Muslims), many individuals, in particular the younger members, pursued strategies of personal extrication from their parents' tight-knit communities. For many, that these small communities could not break out of the

stereotype of being 'Turkish' gave little incentive for them to support their parents' efforts to maintain a dignified existence on their own terms. Quite the contrary, in order to break out of this 'Turkish' identification trap, and all the racialised stigmata that accompanied it, youngsters often used 'adopted' identities – such as Yugoslav – seen as 'less tainted'. Understanding the channels taken to accomplish this will go a long way in understanding the relative dispersal of the Albanian experience in Western Europe during the last 50 years and suggests possible parallels were occurring in other communities throughout Europe.

## Assimilated pasts: the case of Balkan expellees becoming 'Yugoslavs'

How this capacity to fit and modify individual and collective claims within an established administrative context translates in Western Europe is of primary interest as it demonstrates the deeper complexities of immigrant communities in general. I noted before that Albanian-speakers caught up in second-tier migration were not always successful in 'dis-identifying' themselves from the Turkish label. Often, the individual, caught in the web of association, enacted an attempt to communicate 'our sense of powerlessness' through violence. Ellison translates this urge to be seen on one's own terms in a stunning initiation to his narrator's rage in the first pages of his book. His character's comments on how he wished ' … to strike out with … fists, … curse [and] … swear to make them recognize you' (Ellison 1952: 4) speaks of this Albanian sense of frustration and desire to be seen.

The demand for respect from local teenagers caused some interesting manifestations of collective 'rage' that translated into 'street battles with the Germans'. A number of informants who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s as teenagers in the German cities of Düsseldorf, Stuttgart and West Berlin spoke of these fist fights that would be provoked by being called 'Turk' or 'Arab'. The anger mostly surfaced on individual levels and would sometimes lead to more permanent pathologies that became legendary among hosts who phrased it as the Albanian/Turkish 'criminal nature'. For the majority of informants, however, violence did not become a daily affair. Parents played a significant role in restricting potentially damaging relations between 'weak, vulnerable Muslims' [i.e. Turks] and Germans. Most often, informants said they had to internalise the anger and many suggested a 'self-hatred' became a part of the daily struggle not to submit to the provocations of their German classmates, as their parents demanded. This sense of internally confined and, perhaps, unrealised rage had been rationalised in the 1990s as a sign of 'moral superiority' and 'dignity', a reflection of the self-affirming rhetoric used by the popular political leader, Ibrahim Rugova, in Kosovo at the time. There is an interesting dynamic of perceived power in both the immigrant's life in Western Europe and those following Rugova's demands of passive resistance. The fear that 'fighting back' would result in nothing but pain, suffering and state retribution has been a long and deep tension dividing Kosovo-Albanians for generations. Allowing one's rage to surface at a time of powerlessness was something Ellison's narrator felt counter-productive as well:

> Most of the time (although I do not choose as I once did to deny the violence of my days by ignoring it) I am not so overtly violent. I remember that I am invisible and walk softly so as not to awaken the sleeping ones. Sometimes it is best not to awaken them; there are

> few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers. I learned in time though that it is possible to carry on a fight against them without their realising it (Ellison 1952: 5).

But as much as the 'passive' resistance advocated by Ibrahim Rugova and the parents of Kosovar teenagers growing up in this environment provided a moral mantra, the unrealised need 'to be respected' turned into dramatic fissures within individuals and communities. Among Europe's Albanian communities there are some interesting parallels with how Afro-Americans fragmented into camps that either advocated armed resistance (Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam) or passive resistance as preached by Dr. Martin Luther King.

For those less inclined to take the route of violence, a powerful combination of sociological forces determined to what extent the crude categorisations of the host would be used to satiate intense individual needs for inclusion. Caught in such a bureaucratic and social limbo, a number of reactive strategies were adopted by individuals eager to shed associations with secondary identities which resulted from second-tier migration. Therefore, we find second- and third-generation Albanian-speakers before the 1980s adopting the 'Yugoslav' identity the European bureaucracies gave them. There were clear psychological gains to be had for those who actively associated themselves with a state that produced Nobel Prize-winning authors and world class sports heroes. For many of those interviewed, the choice between being completely marginal due to their ambiguous and unappreciated place in the world, and being associated with Yugoslavia, was simple.

Even more telling is that large numbers of those expelled from Yugoslavia and who passed through Turkey on their way to Western Europe also insisted on being identified as Yugoslavs. In this period, if one were asked from where he/she originated, it was more likely than not that the answer would not be Kosovo, or a specific town, but Yugoslavia. I found even those who were uprooted as adults from their homes in Yugoslavia and forced to migrate to Turkey actively claimed to be Yugoslav in Western Europe. According to informants in Holland and Germany, the main reason for this was the fact that being associated with Turks was fraught with consequence in these two countries. Since Turks in host societies were discriminated against in a number of ways that did not necessarily apply to those from Yugoslavia, the option was available for individuals to immediately take a step up Europe's discriminatory hierarchy, at the bottom of which the Turks sat.

This process of applying external identities to fit the conditions set by host societies is particularly important in the case of Albanian-speakers for they clearly had a variety of options to take. As will be evidenced below, many adopted Italian and Greek identities as well in order to fit into specific economic niches within their host societies.

One of the most telling expressions of communal identities is their active attempt to influence how their host societies see them. The most important instrument of countering stereotypes has been to collectively influence how and through what means images of the community are disseminated to the host society. Successful communities will hold demonstrations, participate in parades, distribute literature, support exhibitions and other 'outreach' programmes. The period under question, however, demonstrates the dramatic failure of various Albanian communities to use such effective, community-based methods to counter the falsities that obscured the Albanian individual. What

these Albanian diasporas ultimately failed to accomplish is to provide any information to their host societies about their dramatic historical pasts, which many felt was the most important thing for their 'European' neighbours to know. Many of my older informants, for instance, felt it was of particular importance that German and Swiss neighbours knew that they were only in Western Europe because they had no other place to go. The desire to disassociate with the 'other' migrants was intense as many of these latter were perceived as lazy and eager to cash-in on generous social security benefits. One will find in most migrant communities a reappropriation of European racist terminology and stereotyping, something Albanian-speakers were particularly eager to do in order to demonstrate their distinctiveness. The issue, therefore, was not that there were negative images of Albanians *per se* circulating around; rather, the issue rested on the fact that the existence of an Albanian community in Stuttgart, Zurich or London was not recognised by the host state or the society at large. That many were being lumped together with the other 'undesirables' made it a difficult 20 years.

In the end, I believe the failure of these Albanian diasporas to articulate a positive and productive collective image is most attributable to the fact that there was not one Albanian community. As mentioned above, most communities spread throughout Western Europe grouped themselves around village or district loyalties. There was no sense of a larger community on which to base organisational goals. It must be remembered that those who were expelled before 1980 never lived in a political or cultural environment which promoted their Albanian identity. None of the people I met who made up the first generation of expellees studied Albanian at school and most only grew up reading depictions of Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia through Serbian texts, which actively sought to deny the existence of Albanian-speakers. This strongly indicated that how communities make larger collaborative links is greatly determined by how individuals have been formally socialised. That most of those who arrived in Western Europe before 1980 were products of a society that openly persecuted and actively sought to erase non-Slav and Muslim history from the region goes a long way in explaining the organisational capacities of these dispersed groups of expellees. Back in the Balkans, the village was the only organisational space known to those who were suddenly thrust into an environment that required an inordinate amount of organisational and political skills. It was only to be expected that they stuck to what was most familiar to them.

A related answer for the failure of Albanian-speakers to create a unified diaspora lies in the relationship individual Albanians had with actors who helped them retain associational links to others groups in conditions widely seen as adverse to their sense of dignity and economic well-being. Under such conditions, communities can only be reinforced through positive manifestations of their place in the world order. Positive images of the migrant community, however, are hard to come by in host societies. It is therefore critical that such positive images are highlighted.

It is rarely considered what an impact the mass media has on creating psychological spaces for such positive reinforcement. I suggest that, for migrant communities, their ability to communicate to their host society through mass culture is key to their success. Clearly in postwar Europe, where state-controlled

programming was still a dominant factor, 'public access' to the airwaves was limited. The number of possible ways of reaching the masses available for most of the postwar period would have to remain in the domain of publishing newspapers and organising rallies. Unfortunately for most communities, these options were relatively expensive and often tightly controlled by host societies eager not to antagonise diplomatic relations.

In this period before the explosion of the internet and cable/satellite television, the most effective way to win the sympathies of a host society was through associating with famous individuals seen in the mass media. International sports stars, in particular, transcend the politics of race and ethnicity better than any flag-waving demonstration. Collective sympathies from host countries were probably most shaped by the successes of sports celebrities and if individuals could make associations to that star, a new dynamic was possible. Sharing the glory of a victorious football team or even the popularity of an international actress dilutes tensions of personal exchanges between migrant and host. The social spaces in which the divides of suspicion, jealousy and fear are today best traversed and seen are at the local bar while a sports match is keeping the patrons affixed to the TV screen.

For the Albanian there was (and still is) no example of such an internationally produced comfort zone. First, the Stalinist Albanian state's political and cultural isolation meant the rare mention of Albania in the media was usually associated with totalitarianism and the bizarre. Being associated with ideological backwaters was not going to get people out of the closet. Add to this the inability of Albanians in Yugoslavia to represent that country in sports or cultural forums *as Albanians* meant that, even here, there was no visible figure who could provide a positive representation of the individual Albanian to a wider audience.

It has been this phenomenon of silence in the commercial entertainment world that has shaped, in part, the relationship Albanian communities have had with each other and the outside world. With no significant claim to a popular historical record and no prominent internationally recognised voice representing them, there was little incentive for the outward claim of one's Albanianness in the 1950s and 1960s. For those who did proudly display their heritage, the common response in Western Europe or North America was ignorance and, according to some, derision (Blumi 1998).

In failing to represent oneself beyond the confinements of a largely ignorant host-society's understanding of what an Albanian was, there is no way for such a cluster of dispersed communities to find those 'new spaces of representation' that Stuart Hall suggested were key (Hall 1990). Albanian identity claims by individuals throughout the period 1944–81, as a result, were largely submerged in superficial layers of adopted identities: identities that were either imposed, or voluntarily adopted to reinforce a sense of self-pride as well as economic security. That such adoptive realities directly obstructed individuals from articulating their heritage in an organised manner goes a long way towards explaining why Albanians, Kurds, and Chechens suddenly emerged in the 1980s. It is not that they were not there before, it was just that they lacked the vital instruments of public relations and internal organisation to distinguish themselves from identities imposed upon them by historical forces largely geared towards denying their existence.

## The creation of apolitical communities

That second-tier migration has an impact on communal organisation and the propagation of 'home cultures' in Western Europe is clear when we consider the individual strategies to avoid being associated with the 'generic Turk'. The Albanian in postwar Europe represents the perfect case-study of fused, hybrid and even contradictory identities that dictated an individual's social and economic interaction. This same experience of the Albanian suggests that in many cases, apolitical constituencies are thus created. These communities appear to simply wish to disengage from the politics of identity that so often resulted in their persecution and marginalisation, both in the Balkans and later in Western Europe. It is clear from testimonials given by Albanians in Western Europe that European societies throughout the postwar period effectively marginalised migrant populations through a variety of bureaucratic and societal interactive practices that were often racist in nature. This fact forced many individuals to actively reject their own cultural heritage and painfully suppress their initial experience of ethnic cleansing from their homeland in order to avoid European racism. This has led to the establishment of a dangerously apolitical mass of people who failed to pursue what many would consider basic human rights to be represented and participate politically in the society at large.

Here lies the crux of the issue of postwar migration for Albanians, at least until 1981. The exasperated experience of the politics and economics of identity intimidated individuals enough that they concealed their collective voices and activities. Being marginal within a demographic of spatial and cultural grading may have induced individuals to seek assimilation through this denial. In studies on migration, the process of assimilation is often ignored at the personal level. Interviews conducted with those who successfully made the transition from being Albanian/outsider to Yugoslav/Greek/Italian or even, for the 'lucky ones', German/insider, reveal enormous guilt and pain. The often unaccounted-for violence of being the outsider not only translates in attacks by skinheads; it is also articulated in the long stares at supermarkets, poor service at department stores, and the persistent uncertainty of one's legal status that accompanies being a foreigner. A longing to fit in rather than stand out leads to deeper shading and silencing of communal activities, as not wishing to attract attention to one's distinctiveness suddenly becomes the central issue. A vicious circle is constructed around the incapacity of the host society to adequately deal with the consequences of difference as its ignorance is reinforced by all the unchallenged expressions of that distance.

Inside the communities, the consequences are even more harmful. Brown-eyed, dark-haired and olive-skinned Albanians, whose accents and faith betrayed any and all attempts to 'fit in', often developed extreme manifestations of self-hate and denial in this period. Patterns of internal coding even took place where people raised in Kosovo's cities discriminated against the '*katundare*' or 'country folk'. Albanians of lighter skin labelled the darker-skinned Albanians '*magjup*', a derogatory term for Roma. Children of migrants were especially 'protected' from their heritage, either by concerned parents or, more often than not, by the children themselves. The result, as already concluded above, was that the creation of organisations that could have possibly helped advocate the interests of the 'community' was actively avoided by the most educated and energetic sector of the community, its European-educated youth.

A cycle of what one could call internal 'ethnic cleansing' is created under these internal conditions of identity perceptions. Marginal identities fail to articulate themselves through outreach programmes (which themselves really only became prominent in European politics in the 1980s), due to feelings of persecution or isolation. Failure to educate and familiarise the host society results in a further silencing of the second generation which sees little incentive to appropriate identities that only limit the possibilities of finding work, marriage, and education.

Individuals have the explicit power to construct the memory of the homeland, to create myths and sustain them. But when there lacks a positive psychological environment in which all certainties are in question, denial of one's 'negative' self is desirable. William Safran's notion of a 'diaspora consciousness' had been dramatically avoided by Albanians in the period under study. Their existential condition, under constant attack by self-defence mechanisms that denied existence from the inside as much as the hostility from outside, created an environment in which collective Albanian interests contradicted individual ones (Safran 1991).

How this is translated into organising communities is key to shedding new light on diasporas in Europe during this period. This dissolved core of a community which does not reinforce itself results in the individual being the central criterion of exchange. It was the individual who actively sought to control the terms on which he/she interacted with the outside world, so that a community-wide structure, even at the loosely formed village-based group, was all but negligible. We find that the desired goals of these distinct, self-differentiating potential 'communities' inherently contradicted the goals and ambitions of individuals who actively abandoned efforts to challenge the injustices of their history to assimilate better into Western European society.

## The pizza option

It is common knowledge among a number of communities that the most effective way of relieving some of the stigmata of one's foreignness is to excel economically. In this domain, there were creative ways for Albanian-speakers to exploit aspects of being a foreigner that also resulted in successfully shedding their marginal identities – Turk, Muslim and Yugoslav. How such second-tier identities became useful is most evident among Albanian-speakers who migrated via Greece or Italy, often themselves second- or third-generation Albanians. Many Albanian migrants (even those who followed the second-tier patterns through Turkey) adopted Italian-sounding names in order to fit into economic and cultural niches that were firmly established in Western Europe. In Germany and Scandinavia in particular, pizzerias and '*Gyro*' – ethnic fast-food shops – were popular ways of investing hard-earned family income. Albanians could successfully pass for Italians and many had the language skills to 'sound' Italian enough to at least establish membership of that community in smaller cities and towns. On the surface, therefore, these businesses looked like any other set up by southern European migrant families in the 1950s and 1960s. The result was usually that the small-business owners were accepted as Europeans once Italy and Greece became bureaucratically integrated into Europe.

Interestingly, many of these successful 'identity-hoppers' have revealed a strong nationalism as time goes on and their economic security becomes estab-

lished. Scratch the surface of any of these restaurants and one begins to see a hint of a community far different from what is being projected publicly. The employees in many Italian restaurants can be found speaking Albanian in the kitchen, reliving the experiences of the informal economic networks that operated in nineteenth-century Mediterranean cities. While no longer the case, until the mid-1980s at least, most of the staff in these small restaurants were family members or recruited from other families from the same village. While this regionalism predominated and may not have articulated itself as Albanian patriotism, the more economically secure the business owners felt, the more adamant they were in retaining their personal loyalties to an Albanian identity which was evolving in the 1980s. That factor may also explain the level of anxiety over successfully detaching oneself from marginal migrant groups. A class dynamic relevant to each European society cannot be ruled out.

## Post-Prishtina, 1981: the battle for Albanianness

Contradicting interests and relationships with the homeland took an interesting turn in the 1980s. The issue of Kosovo proved to be the catalyst that would ultimately start an inter-communal rivalry that translated into international intrigue and political violence. Throughout the twentieth century, Kosovars have periodically demonstrated the capacity to organise armed resistance to Yugoslavia's (Serb) colonial rule. After the massive repression of the immediate postwar period and many further years of oppression between 1948 and 1966 under the Serb Nationalist Minister of the Interior Alexander Rankovic, the 1970s, especially after the constitutional reforms of 1974, created new possibilities for Albanian political aspirations in Kosovo. More importantly, the cultural/pedagogical environment was created to enable a generation of politically-sophisticated activists to emerge.

The massacre of Albanian students in 1981, which marked the apex of collective Albanian consciousness in an organised form, finally transformed Kosovo into an international issue with corresponding political consequences for those who were targeted by the Yugoslav state (Mertus 1999: 11–29). Aside from the several thousand Kosovars imprisoned for long terms, thousands more fled to Europe to settle in what little there was of an organised Albanian diaspora. What is important to note is the dramatic difference between this new, now politically educated generation of expellees and their largely rural and uneducated predecessors. This post-Rankovic generation constituted a dramatic change in Kosovar (and Albanian) intra-communal relations, for they had been politicised in an environment that at once enabled them to organise as Albanians (the Albanian language was now permitted in schools and at Prishtina University) and persecuted them for such mobilisation. As a result of wide-scale coverage of Yugoslavia's repression of student protests, European civilians began to appreciate for the first time that there were Albanians in Yugoslavia who were being murdered. Armed with images of Kosovars being killed by Yugoslav tanks which filled the Western media in 1981 and an emerging cadre of provocateurs supported by Tirana, a new generation of Kosovar Albanians took the diasporas in Europe by storm.

An interesting consequence is the manipulation of the situation by the Albanian Communist Party in Tirana which used these young students, armed with their new freedom of expression as exiles in the West, to target their own

opponents from among Catholic communities expelled in the period immediately after the Second World War. While Albanian-speakers from Yugoslavia remained largely unorganised and often actively resisted their primary or secondary identities, the Catholic Albanian population, violently ejected by the Albanian Communist Party in the period from 1944 to 1960, were by far the most successful community in the West. The community was fiercely nationalist and proudly preserved their distinctive heritage through publishing houses, the construction of churches and Albanian-language schools.[5] That they were fiercely anti-communist and the fact that their host governments identified them as refugees from a Stalinist state helped in the Cold War context. Albanians from Yugoslavia, on the other hand, had no such luck since Western states actively courted Tito and his independent socialist state.

There is a significant generation gap between these two communities as well as an appreciation for history. Most Kosovars and Macedonian Albanians did not know much about the Catholics' dramatic flight from Albania since neither the Yugoslav nor Communist Albanian official histories bothered to mention it in their respective histories. The official publications that educated Albanian-speakers in Yugoslavia throughout the 1970s, in particular, ignored this dark past. In addition, in the only Albanian-language radio programme available to most Albanians in the world, Enver Hoxha's regime not only effectively silenced the history of Albania's important Catholic community, but persistently accused them of being a part of an 'anti-Albanian clique paid for by the capitalist West and the Soviet Union'. The skills of the Catholics to organise, therefore, were mostly used to further their own cause, in which Kosovars had little interest: the fall of Hoxha's dictatorship. The subsequent isolation of these two quite distinct Albanian groups would have explosive results in the 1980s as Kosovar Albanians freshly exiled in Europe finally attempted to shape what little the world thought of Albanians.

As noted earlier, the symbols of community and the personal investment one gives to claiming association emanate from how one can relate to one's heritage in a new, often hostile environment. What changes in the 1980s is not that Albania suddenly becomes a place of great interest (it does not), but rather the impact of Albanian state efforts to politicise segments of the Kosovar community. This, combined with the expressed desire for a new generation of Kosovars to form a republic within Yugoslavia and a growing sense in Europe that there was an issue here, created a new dynamic of community advocacy that produced new opportunities for previously silent aspirations. In sum, this repression of a new generation of Kosovars by Belgrade corresponded at one point with Hoxha's propaganda strategy, namely around the issue of establishing exclusive claim to the Albanian identity, and the two became inextricably linked.

For many Kosovars, the only formal manifestation that Albanianness existed conceptually was, for better or worse, Stalinist Albania. As a result of this rather manufactured image of Albania, many people idealised the potential of realising their legitimate dreams of greater political and cultural rights through the stated declarations of support from the Socialist State of Albania, the self-declared 'paradise' of the socialist world.

Importantly, Enver Hoxha's overall popularity was growing as Kosovar activists in exile mixed with Western leftists who had developed their own myths about Hoxha's Albania. Within many leftist circles, Albania became the

legitimate third way, the ideal Communist society, and being Albanian in this context suddenly became fashionable. While one would not suspect it today, the consequences of such a combination was the dramatic rise of Kosovars' political activism; as a result, political violence within Albanian circles emerged. Firstly, the decades-long attempt by Hoxha to silence his exiled Catholic opponents took on a new dynamic with this radical generation of 'Enverists' living in the West. Catholic Albanian businesses in New York and London were vandalised and active efforts to harass other prominent members of the Catholic community were carried out by Kosovar supporters of Enver Hoxha.

At the same time, political murders of top Kosovar activists were being carried out in Germany and Sweden. One well-known incident involved members of the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo, several of whom were ambushed outside Stuttgart in January 1982. The murders were eventually tied to Yugoslav secret police, but rumours circulated that the old antagonisms between Hoxha's Communist forces and the conservative nationalists of the North were replaying their battles 40 years later in the middle of the Albanian diaspora. Ultimately what resulted was a disastrous fragmentation of any potential effort to join forces, as political intrigue led to the creation of secretive groups that did not seek to publicise their efforts out of concerns of security. The consequences were, again, the failure to highlight the plight of Albanians in Yugoslavia and Albania. In the larger context of the Cold War, the respective concerns of Hoxha's exiles and Yugoslavia's victims were at opposite ends of the ideological divide. The years that followed saw a further fragmentation of the communities in the United States but a consolidation of particularly Kosovar identity in Germany, Switzerland and Sweden. While not the focus of this paper, it should be noted that the economic networks that began to develop in Europe were largely operational only after the creation of this politically active diaspora in the 1980s. Savings accumulated over the years helped to create strong economic foundations for further investment in a political identity that was now getting more international attention with the 'resurfacing' of Serbian nationalism after 1986. The older generation of Albanian-speakers would become marginal as a new generation of Kosovar refugees took on the responsibility of defining the hopes and dreams of Kosovars. This new generation adapted as best they could to a new geopolitical context to create the Democratic League of Kosova, a belated and unrecognised Republic of Kosova, and later the various groups that funded the war for liberation in the mid-1990s. In this dynamic of political change in Yugoslavia and Europe as a whole, the conditions for a fundamental change in how Albanian-speakers interacted in European host societies helped reshape a desire to be identified as an Albanian.

## Conclusion

The combination of socio-economic factors that changed the way Europeans interacted with the world also influenced how Albanian-speakers began to understand their collective identities. CNN, the internet and the deregulation of European mass media have liberated individuals and the communities they make up from previous conceptual rigidities. Much in line with notions of postmodernism in social theory, so too has the transformation in how Europeans live their lives revealed the complexities of their surroundings, in particular the migrant populations. The once-generic migrant community has subsequently

exploded into hundreds of little universes with their own tragic pasts and quite legitimate needs. The goal of this article was to provide an opportunity to bring this appreciation to the period when Albanians were not recognised, either by the historical forces at work or by those who would later publicly claim to be Albanian. I sought to suggest reasons for why these Albanians could not articulate distinctive identities in postwar Europe and to provide suggestions as to how we may better understand migration in postwar Europe by appreciating these realities of failed and suppressed identities.

Specifically for Albanians from Yugoslavia, the significant generation gap in how individuals perceived themselves, how they were socialised and their level of political sophistication goes a long way towards explaining the eventual, pronounced shift in Albanian identities in the 1980s. Clearly the political climate in Europe itself changed, making it easier for a new generation of politicised individuals to mobilise a new sense of distinctiveness that became the claim to individual existence. This factor would probably prove key to any similar study on Europe's Kurds, Chechens, Kashmiris and Tamils.

Europe was an impoverished continent until the early 1950s when massive development and the reindustrialisation of European cities created high labour demands. Large flows of 'Greek', 'Italian', and later 'Turkish' migrants created dynamics of exchange that have continued to impact on how social scientists read events. I have tried to expose the underlying problems with studies on migration in Europe that avoided deconstructing the intellectual and structural limitations to using ethnic and 'country-of-origin' criteria to study such migrations. Large numbers of Albanian-speakers were among the Greek, Italian and Turkish migrants who settled in Europe's cities and towns, their existence all but denied in official records that characterised them as ethnic attachments to their country of immediate origin. I noted that this phenomenon of *second-tier migration* compelled individuals to adopt identities in search of a place in the bureaucratic and social spaces provided by host countries. The desire to shed the stigma of being a foreigner was exaggerated among Albanians who, for a number of reasons, failed to establish their distinctiveness in Western Europe prior to 1981. Such failures, I suggested, resulted in the marginalisation of individuals that translated into manifestations of denial of self and the seeking out of adopted, secondary identities.

All the factors of shifting identities point to communal fragmentation which leaves the immediate appellation of being Albanian meaningless as far as the community is concerned in the long term. The consequences of not being able to sustain links to a homeland or have one's plight as a persecuted human recognised has enormous consequences for the individual and his or her relationship with the outside world. Not in control of how the world perceives her or him, the generic migrant is in a constant struggle to articulate a distinctive identity that ultimately contributes to such fragmentation. What is so discouraging about this period is that it demonstrates how one-sided the relationships between host societies and migrants are. The exclusivity of being 'native' has developed powerful traditions of personal and collective discursive exchanges, implicitly ostracising individuals so tied to such imageries. It is hoped such dynamics, such traumas and such histories can be reintroduced into narratives that study European diasporas as much as Ellison exposed the Afro-American experience in the US. By way of such a reintroduction, we may shed light on the humanity of the experience and the responsibilities of all of us in the perpetua-

tion of discrimination and the psychological pain that accompanies such journeys.

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### Notes

1 Each term that is under perpetual re-negotiation will initially be introduced in quotes but in subsequent renditions, the quotes will be left out. This does not mean, however, that the meaning of say, 'Albanian' has been in some way resolved. It should be assumed that the author does not accept a fixed explanatory value to the terms used. As will be made clear throughout, these terms have a fluidity to them that negates attempts to assert any enduring meaning to the identifying categories used here.

2 Mark Tirta provides a comprehensive study of Albanian migration in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, largely as a result of state polices to evict them (Tirta 1999).

3 For convenience, the internationally familiar spelling 'Kosovo' is used in this paper, rather than the alternatives such as 'Kosova' or 'Kosovo/a'.

4 The impetus of this research came from conversations which took place between 1993 and 1995. Most of the discussions then did not specifically seek to address the issues explored in this paper but over time I realised there was something shared among the men living in Sweden, Switzerland, Holland and Germany. After the Dayton Accords in 1995, I returned to Western Europe and began to speak to individuals (but not to 'interview' them) asking specific questions in regard to their experiences as migrants in Western Europe. Methodologically, I did not ask questions from a prepared list of questions, but allowed the flow of the conversation to dictate the kinds of questions I would ask. This I believe was necessary because, as pointed out in the paper, there was not one 'experience' of being an Albanian *and* migrant for most of the period in question. It should be noted that many of the conversations took place in social gatherings organised by various Kosovo-Albanian communities during the period. These conversations sometimes engaged many participants at one time, perhaps influencing the answers given to specific questions. In the context of the post-Dayton period, it is clear my informants and even the social settings in which our discussions were conducted were considerably different from before 1995. The atmosphere was patriotic and war was more or less taking place in central Kosovo. This fact most certainly enabled my informants to develop new kinds of memories of the past experience. In all, material for this paper has been taken from discussions that were held during the 1993–2002 period in Stockholm, New York, Prishtina, Gjakova, Zurich, St. Galen, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt and Bern with male members of various communities from present-day Macedonia, Northern Albania and Kosovo.

5 In 1966, Albanian Catholics in Detroit, Michigan created the American Albanian Catholic Charity, one year prior to Hoxha's official declaration of an atheist state. In 1971, having moved to Santa Clara, California, the group published the annual *Albanian Catholic Bulletin*, one of the more important productions by any Albanian community, for it resurrected and preserved much of the history of Albanian Catholicism and indeed, Northern Albanian history, which was all but wiped out by Enver Hoxha.

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