

## Internal Migration and Social Identity Construction: Implications for Prejudice and Stigma in Albanian Post- socialist Society

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**Abstract:** *Significant increase of internal migration in Albanian post-socialist society affected people's connections and their identity. New social phenomena were differently perceived by the existing city inhabitants and the newcomers. On the one hand, the concept of social identity struggled between inclusionary/exclusionary boundaries; on the other hand, prejudice and stigma triggered from this complex reality. This paper applies Social Identity Theory to examine how internal migration affects social identity and its implications on prejudice and stigma in Albanian post-socialist society. This qualitative study is based on desk research and secondary data drawn by national statistics and cross-sectional research conducted in Albania during the period 1991-2017. It concludes that more longitudinal studies should be conducted to understand the dynamics of social identity construction within the context of internal migration in Albania. This is necessary to promote a more inclusive society in order to accommodate social diversity and view internal migrants as local agents of development rather than objects of prejudice and stigma.*

**Keywords:** *Internal Migration, Social Identity Theory, Social Identity, Prejudice, Stigma*

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## Introduction

A growing body of research indicates that internal migration is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is rapidly growing in both, time and space raising various challenges (World Bank, 2009; Meng, 2012; Potts, 2012). Even though it affects the life of so many people worldwide, it is not easily measured. Thus, data about its scale are limited and outdated (World Economic Forum, 2017). Statistics estimate 740 million internal migrants worldwide (United Nations Development Programme, 2009).

Internal migration highly increased in Albanian post-socialist society. Formerly this phenomenon was strictly controlled by the government and subject to central planning of distribution of human resources. The exact number of the internal migrants in Albania is unknown for two main reasons: a) some certain groups such as Roma population are not officially registered as internal movers. Thus, they are under recorded in national censuses; b) statistics from the population registers of the local government units are inaccurate and unreliable (Vullnetari, 2014). However, the World Bank estimated around 500,000 internal migrants in Albania during the period 1991-2005 (UNDP, 2009). On the other hand, Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) (2002) estimated 252,735 people who migrated from one prefecture to another during the period between two censuses (1989-2001).

But the increasing scale of this phenomenon is triggered by uneven and complex realities among regions within a country (International Organization for Migration, 2015). Research shows that it is combined with stretching processes of fast urbanization. Thus, connections among people and their identity are dialectically impacted. In a broader sense, the concept of social identity offers possibilities to open up the influence of the environment on the self. It relates to: a) possible influences of the culture or ethnic group the individual is belonging to; b) personal situations and circumstances along with groups where individuals belong to or not; c) their direct contact with other people (Haas, 2008; Reicher, Spears and Haslam, 2010). According to Social Identity Theory, individuals strive to have a positive self-image in order to become a member of the group which enhances this possibility (Haas, 2008). They are involved in social comparisons to favorably differentiate in-group from out-group members (Dovidio et al., 2005; McLeod, 2008). While they think, feel, and act as members of collective groups socially constructed by the group's frame of reference (Padilla and Perez, 2003), they stigmatize other groups, devalue and discriminate them (Kurzban and Leary, 2001; Dovidio et al., 2005; McLeod, 2008).

Research carried out during the last decades in various countries and regions highlighted several causes of the discrimination of the internal migrants mainly: a) complex structures (Lee and Piper, 2013), b) legal and institutional barriers (International Labor Organization and International Office for Migration, 2001; Afridi, Li and Ren, 2012), c) socio-cultural barriers (Jungteerapanich, 2014), d) gender (Weber, 2014), and e) religion (Engbers, 2015). However, limited research has been documented on the impact of internal migration on social identity and its implications on prejudice and stigma especially outside Europe and North America.

The impact of internal migration on social identity construction has been little explored in Albanian post-socialist society as well. Literature shows that research conducted during this period mostly focused on: a) the challenges of this phenomenon on the new urban space (Cila, 2006; Mele, 2010; Pojani, 2013; Dirks, 2014), b) limited and inadequate service delivery (UNDP, 2000; UNDP, 2002; Hagen-Zanker and Azzarri, 2009) and c) gender inequality (United Nations Women, 2014; Jorgji, 2015). Very few studies addressed how internal migration shaped social identity and affected group boundaries between existing city inhabitants and the newcomers. In addition, very limited data are available to make some comparisons.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine how internal migration affects social identity construction and its implications on prejudice and stigma in Albanian post-socialist society. This qualitative study is based on two research questions: 1) To what extent does internal migration affect social identity construction and group boundaries in Albanian post-socialist society? 2) What are its implications for prejudice and stigma? Since research about this topic is scant in Albania, this study intends to contribute to this discussion by addressing this gap in the current literature and research.

## **Methods and Paper Organization**

Both, desk research and secondary data analyses are used to address two research questions of this qualitative study. Secondary research is mainly focused on the review of the concepts of internal migration and social identity based on migration theories and Social Identity Theory. It is combined with an overview of the profile of the internal migration in Albanian post-socialist society, its dynamics and characteristics.

Secondary data are drawn by various national statistics, reports and studies conducted in Albania during the period 1991-2017. Institute of Statistics (INSTAT)

in Albania is the main official data source on internal migration. This national statistical institute is responsible to conduct censuses, process data, release results nationwide and produce reports. Population reports issued by it during the period under study have been widely used in this paper. Other data have been drawn by cross-sectional studies conducted in limited geographical areas of the country in different periods of time by several researchers and organizations with a specific focus on migration. Data collection period varied between 2-6 months and their target group covered both sexes and different age-groups. They highlight how internal migration failed to successfully accommodate the differences among the existing city inhabitants and the newcomers. The relational term of 'social identity' served as both, a function of similarities with 'us' and a function of differences with 'them'. Thus, prejudice and stigma triggered.

This paper is composed of five parts. Following the first part which presents introduction (including methods and paper organization), the second part provides a theoretical framework of the concepts of internal migration and social identity based on migration theories and Social Identity Theory. The third part provides a profile of the internal migration in Albania during the years of transition to market economy and how it affected social identity construction. Implications on stigma and prejudice are provided in the fourth part. Some conclusions are drawn in the fifth part followed by study limitations.

## **Theoretical Framework of Internal Migration and Social Identity Theory**

This section helps understand how the dynamics of the modern life 'on the move' affect groups' boundaries and shape both similarities and differences among people. It shortly explains the theoretical framework of the phenomenon of internal migration, its key characteristics and main drivers. Furthermore, it briefly describes the relational nature of the concept of social identity based on Social Identity Theory.

### *Definition of Internal Migration, Its Drivers and Some Theoretical Aspects*

Definition of internal migration is very challenging because internal migrants stay within country borders but move across provinces, municipalities, rural and urban settings. Especially nowadays the definition of this phenomenon is becoming more unclear because cities grow and consume satellite towns. On the other hand, satellite towns develop and provide residence along the outskirts of cities. But, the definition of the internal migration may depend not only on the classification of government entities but also on the purpose of migration (Fleury, 2016). Literature defines

internal migration as movement of people within the country, from one administrative unit to another (IOM, 2005; IOM, 2008; Cazzuffi and Modrego, 2016). It represents one of the most spread forms of migration (Geddes et al., 2012) even though discussion on its patterns and trends is limited due to lack of adequate data (Rees et al., 2016).

Research highlights four types of internal migration mainly: rural-urban, rural-rural, urban-rural, and urban-urban. But rural-urban migration is the fastest growing type of internal migration that dominates in most poor countries (IOM, 2005; IOM, 2008; Geddes et al., 2012). Internal migration flows differ from their direction, composition and duration (IOM, 2008). They can be temporary, permanent, circular, voluntary or for economic purposes, marriage or education (Fleury, 2016). But this definition of internal migration is not always a fitting word for migratory movement especially when it refers to the term 'voluntary' internal migration. It is hard to believe that departure of people from their place of origin that does not guarantee their livelihood is 'voluntary' (IOM, 2005). However, the literature mainly deals with permanent internal migration because official demographic, economic and employment statistics can easily track it (IOM, 2005; Rees et al., 2016).

Evidence shows that internal migration is fuelled by the effects of and interactions between economic differentials (Kanbur and Venables, 2005; Geddes et al., 2012; Rees et al., 2016), social inequalities (Kobzar et al., 2015; Cazzuffi and Modrego, 2016; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017), political instability and state fragility (World Bank, 2009; United Nations Children's Fund, 2014), demographic imbalances (Aroca and Maloney, 2005) and environmental hazards (Geddes et al., 2012; Clewett, 2015). The neo-classical approach views migration as an adjustment mechanism to labour market inequalities and employment (Boyle, Halfacree and Robinson, 1998; Green and Worth, 2015). The main goal of the internal migrants is to maximize utility (Cazzuffi and Modrego, 2016) through access to employment or improvement of terms and conditions in employment (Fielding, 2012; UNESCO, 2017). According to Food and Agriculture Organization (2016), more than 75 percent of the world's poor population resides in rural areas and depends on agriculture for subsistence. Lack of access to markets, poverty and food insecurity pushes them to migrate in urban areas.

But the neo-classical approach emphasizes that decisions to migrate to the areas that offer the highest net return to human capital (Cazzuffi and Modrego, 2016) are taken at micro-level and macro-level (Aroca and Maloney, 2005; Hagen-Zanker,

2008). Micro-level theories have been focused on the decisions taken by individuals to migrate (Hagen-Zanker, 2008) and their characteristics (Cazzuffi and Modrego, 2016). On the other hand, macro-level theories explain migration as a result of uneven spatial distribution of labour (King, 2012) and the existence of macro-structural forces embedded in exploitative and economic power imbalances of global capitalism (Morawska, 2013).

Besides these, modern migration theory highlights a range of reasons that push people to migrate. Their motives vary between temporary and permanent migration. Spatial inequalities in quality of life increase their expectation to achieve better wellbeing elsewhere (Lall, Selod and Shalizi, 2006; Macours and Vakis, 2010; Dustmann and Okatenko, 2014).

In this paper, internal migration is defined as a permanent movement of people from one administrative unit to another with a special emphasis from rural areas to urban areas of Albania. Based on state statistics and national censuses, this type of migration highly spread in the country after 1991 when Albania changed its political system. Other types of internal migratory movements are neither discussed nor examined in this paper.

### *Social Identity Theory*

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a social psychological theory which was initiated by Henri Tajfel by the beginning of the 1970s. It intends to explain how individual behaviour reflects individuals' larger societal units with the help of group processes, intergroup relations and the social self (Hogg, Terry and White, 1995; Padilla and Perez, 2003). The core idea of this theory is that membership in a social group determines the behaviour of the individual (Davis, 2014). It defines social identity as a person's sense that he or she belongs to a certain group or social category along with the value and emotional significance attached to it (Tajfel, 1972). This definition implies two key elements: a) belief that an individual belongs to a social group; b) group membership is important to individual's self (Whitley and Kite, 2010).

Social identity provides a bridge between the individual and the society. It is a relational term which defines people as a function of their similarities and differences with others (Reicher, Spears and Haslam, 2010). Social identity is focused on the structures that differentiate one group from another (Burke and Stets, 1998). Besides this, social identity is shared with others providing a basis for shared action. Meanings attached to social identity are products of our collective history (Reicher,

Spears and Haslam, 2010) because group members enact roles that are part of group's expectations (Turner et al., 1994). Groups give their members a sense of belonging to the social world, a particular social status, protection, security and emotional support (Korostelina, 2014). That is why they are an important source of pride and self-esteem (Tajfel, 1979). Belonging to a certain group means being like other group members and viewing things from the group's perspective (Stets and Burke, 2000; Korostelina, 2014). According to Social Identity Theory, social identity has three main components: a) social categorization; b) social identification; c) social comparison (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Social categorization is a process that puts people including ourselves into categories. It labels them in ways that associate their self-image with the categories they belong to (Tajfel, 1979). It sharpens intergroup boundaries and produces group- distinctive normative perceptions (Hogg, Abrams and White, 1995). According to Tajfel (1979), people create categories due to their limited capacities to process information. Therefore, social categorization simplifies their understanding of the world. It helps individuals define their place in the society through segmenting, classifying and ordering the social environment (Tajfel, 1981).

Social categories precede individuals in their personal history. Individuals are born in a structural society where the sense of self largely derives from the social categories they belong to (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). They provide a self-definition of a person in terms of the characteristics of the category (Hogg, Terry and White, 1995). They make the individual have a unique self-concept because during the life course, the individual is a member of a unique combination of social categories (Hogg and Abrams, 1988).

Social identification is a process where individuals associate themselves with certain groups and adopt the identity of the group they have been categorized as belonging to (McLeod, 2008). They show emotional significance to their identification with a group and self-esteem bound with group membership (Brewer, 1991). Guided by the need to be unique and the need to belong, individuals perceive themselves to be similar and have positive qualities with in-group members. They maintain their distinctiveness and perceive themselves different from out-group members who possess less favourable qualities striving to remain detached from them (Brewer, 1991; Brown, 1995).

Social comparison aims at evaluating the social groups to which individuals belong to (Tajfel, 1978). Social Identity Theory implies not only social categorization of individuals but also groups' evaluation. Individuals prefer to positively differentiate

themselves from others. The outcome of comparison with out-groups might be advantageous or disadvantageous for their status (Taylor and Brown, 1988). Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that social identity can be positive or negative depending on the evaluation of the group that contributes to it. Since people have a basic need to have a positive social identity, self-evaluative consequences of social identity strongly motivate members of one group to keep self-enhancement by comparing themselves with others (Hogg, Terry and White, 1995).

### **A General Overview of the Internal Migration in Albanian Post-socialist Society**

This part describes the profile of internal migration in Albania after 1991. It examines how social identity construction appeared in the context of changing of the meaning of social category. It highlights the complexity of groups' boundaries created during the process of social identity negotiation where in- and out-groups interactions are redefined.

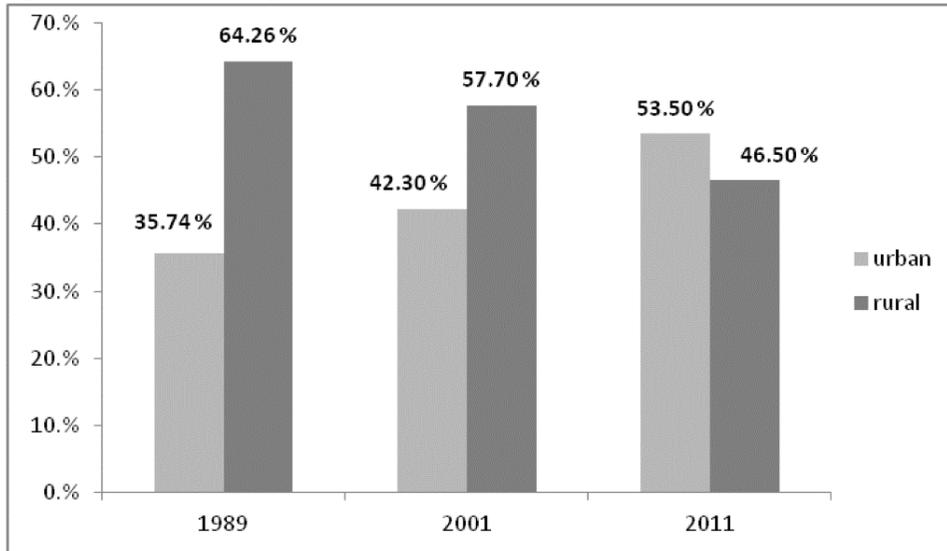
#### *Profile of Internal Migration in Albanian Post-socialist Society*

Internal migration has been one of the most dramatic features of the development of Albanian post-socialist society. It occurred rapidly and did not follow any normal trend (UNDP, 2002). Before the change of the political system, this phenomenon was tightly regulated and highly controlled by the central government (INSTAT, 2014). Policies that restricted the free movement of population were lifted after 1991 when the socialist system collapsed. The country was exposed to rapid and substantial changes that affected its social, economic and political structure. Mass uncontrolled and unplanned migration of population (mainly from villages and remote mountainous areas) towards towns and cities led to overpopulation of some urban areas (UNDP, 2000; World Bank, 2003) and drastic depopulation of some others (INSTAT, 2014).

Relocation of the whole household is one of the characteristics of internal migration in Albania. Statistics show that one in five families in Albania has experienced internal migration (INSTAT, 2010). The 2011 Census data revealed that 10 percent of the population now live in a different town or village compared to that of a decade ago. More than 10 percent of the internal migrants had moved multiple times (INSTAT, 2014). The unknown experience of multiple moves spread during the last decade. It was combined with high tendency of direct moves and impacted the total number of urban population. For the first time in the history of Albania, population living in urban areas outnumbered that living in rural areas (INSTAT,

2014). Figure 1 shows rural-urban population distribution trends in Albania based on data of the last three censuses.

Figure 1: Rural-Urban Population Distribution Trends in Albania, 1989-2011



Source: INSTAT (1990); INSTAT (2014)

Diverse drivers of internal migration in Albanian post-socialist society include: a) economic motives. People rapidly reacted against negative externalities caused by economic transformations during the first years of democratic transition. These factors pushed people away from collapsed agricultural cooperatives and state farms. In addition, destructive effects of sudden closure of industries in mono-industrial interior towns increased the trend of movement of their inhabitants towards big cities (King and Vullnetari, 2013); b) city life attraction. People were willing to benefit from advantages of 'modern' urban lifestyle. However, their aspirations were not always fulfilled. Both, the scarcity of well-paid jobs and their settlement in peri-urban informal areas hindered them (King and Vullnetari, 2013); c) democracy deficit. Fragile democracy was followed by weak state institutions, lack of rule of law and lack of trust in governmental structures. Democracy deficit activated traditional customary law especially in the Northern part of Albania. Revitalization of Kanun of Leke Dukagjini was followed by blood feud (honour killing). To escape from blood feud conflicts, many highlanders migrated from their villages to other parts of the country (UNDP, 2000; Peço, 2014; Meçe, 2017).

But, socio-economic and political development of the country determined not only the dimension, but also the direction of internal migration in Albania (UNDP, 2002). The majority of the internal migrants were from geographically landlocked, underdeveloped and mountainous parts of the North and North-eastern areas of Albania. Their total population decreased by 21 percent during the period 2001-2011. Newcomers were settled in lowlands and coastline particularly in Durres and Tirana regions. Statistics show that, after 1991, the annual population growth rate in Kamza Municipality located just 11 km away from Tirana (the capital city of Albania) was 66 percent (INSTAT, 2014).

This dramatic demographic boom recorded in main regions and cities of the country increased their population density. It affected their urbanization process and impacted relationships among the existing city inhabitants and the newcomers (UNDP, 2002; INSTAT, 2014). The 2011 Census data showed that 49 percent of the newcomers resided in Tirana while 15 percent resided in Durres (INSTAT, 2014). The majority of the newcomers (more than 50 percent) was young (aged 15 – 34 years). The distinct peak was reached by 20-24 age-group. Women were more involved in internal migration and they represented 59 percent of the total internal migrants. Different from men who migrated for employment purposes, the main purpose of internal migration of women was related to family issues. In general, the largest group of internal migrants has a lower secondary education (INSTAT, 2014).

#### *Internal Migration and Social Identity in Albania*

The structure of the Albanian post-socialist society was highly affected by mass rural-urban migration towards main cities (UNDP, 2000; Likaj and Baltaci, 2008; Titili, 2015). This was followed by the change of city values and gradual loss of traditional features of the city life. Socio-economic, educational and cultural differences between existing city population and the newcomers became evident. They were the main cause of tension and poor social cohesion (UNDP, 2000; Ndreka, 2014). The newcomers were not always welcomed by the existing city inhabitants. They faced their resistance to consider them ‘as part of their group’. Local norms and customs they inherited from their place of origin were deeply rooted in the mentality of the newcomers. They practiced them in the new communities where they were settled even though they were not easily ‘digested’ by the existing city inhabitants. Thus, boundaries between the existing city inhabitants and the newcomers were deepened (UNDP, 2002; Titili, 2015).

Lack of patience to accommodate social diversity became problematic especially in areas formerly recognized as populated by old city communities (UNDP, 2002;

Likaj and Baltaci, 2008). For instance, in Tirana city, existing inhabitants proudly categorised themselves as 'Tironsa' (a dialect word used by those who were born and raised in Tirana city or lived there for a very long time. It means 'We are from Tirana') (Bardhoshi, 2011). They identified themselves as part of this group and openly expressed their feeling of belonging to it. Its members attributed positive values to its membership and showed strong attachment to their group. They spoke in Tirana dialect to preserve their Tirana city group identity. The members of this group perceived themselves as being different from the newcomers' group. According to 'Tironsat' group, 'Tironsit' were kind and generous people. They respected their neighbours and the rules of the community life. They were very connected to their city and linked its development with their life events. But this group was very disappointed with the newcomers. Its members felt that the newcomers destroyed their cosmos and community life (Bardhoshi, 2011). In his study conducted in 2011 with 1000 participants (500 existing inhabitants and 500 newcomers after 1991 located in the periphery of Tirana), Janaqi (2014) found that 82 percent of the respondents from the group of the existing inhabitants perceived their culture as being threatened by the culture of the newcomers. According to them, the newcomers used harsh and aggressive vocabulary. They applied the 'rule of the strongest' to get what they wanted. They did not apply civilized means of communication (Ribas-Mateos, 2005; Bardhoshi, 2011).

In some other cases, the group of the existing city inhabitants viewed the group of the newcomers as rivals. They blamed them for deterioration of their quality of life. This was more evident in both, the labour market and in the share of the benefit of city services and facilities. According to the existing city inhabitants, the newcomers were like 'proletarians'. They had nothing to lose because they had a low level of education and did not have resources. Thus, they were willing to take up every job and did not negotiate for their salary. This sudden competitive situation fostered the 'in-group solidarity' among the members of the existing city inhabitants to help each other. For instance, in Tirana city, in many cases, they approached each other to ask a favour for other group members by saying 'Nimoje pak kët Tironsin tim' (a dialect expression used by people born and raised in Tirana or lived there for a long time. It means 'Help a little bit my Tirana fellow').

However, in the periphery of the main cities, there were cases when group boundaries were translated into a clear division of the territory. On the one side, there were areas characterized by modern patterns of lifestyle, on the other side, there were areas that failed to accommodate diversity (Titili, 2015). The strong sense of rural belonging of the newcomers was expressed in the identification of the new geographical location of their community. For instance, in the main road (heading

from Tirana to Kamza city), internal migrants from Kukës region had placed an orientation sign where it was written 'Kukës – 100 m djathtas' (it means 'Kukës is 100 m on the right'). But geographically Kukës is located in the Northern part of Albania about 130 km far from Kamza.

During the process of 'spontaneous regulation of their space', newcomers developed a dual social identity. On the one hand, they pretended to be residents of suburban environment. Thus, they identified themselves as city inhabitants and negotiated with the host society for their rights and equal treatment. On the other hand, they practiced their patriarchal mentality within the family and kinship (Sinani, 2013). Thus, they insisted on their rural identity and felt more comfortable within their rural social group. In his study conducted in 2011 with 1,000 participants (500 were newcomers and 500 were existing inhabitants from Tirana), Janaqi (2014) found that 93 percent of the newcomers did not feel comfortable to reside in an area surrounded by local inhabitants.

But newcomers' social identity construction was not a smooth process. It was dominated by old norms of gender division of labour and inter-generational conflict. Ndreka (2014) conducted a qualitative study in Spitalla area (Durrës city) which is highly affected by internal migration. In total, 400 participants were interviewed (132 males and 268 females). They were internal migrants from Dibra region (located in the North eastern part of Albania) who had migrated in the study area during the last 10 years. She found that female newcomers of this community were not very willing to be involved in community life making group boundaries stronger. Even though they were more deprived in the city than in their village of origin, they followed strict patterns of rural lifestyle. Their primary role was focused on family chores and child upbringing (Ndreka, 2014). Thus, they categorised themselves as rural women and identified themselves as members of this group.

In 2009, Çaro, Bailey and van Wissen (2012) conducted 25 in-depth interviews with migrant women from the northern part of the country who resided in four sites of Kamza. They found that their social networks outside their migrant community were poorly developed. According to the respondents, their dialect, tradition and way of living hindered their interactions with the host society. They perceived themselves as being rural and preserved their rural identity despite many years of migration to the city. One of the main reasons for this was that they were part of the clusters which shared strong tradition and the nostalgic feeling about their origin (Çaro, Bailey and van Wissen, 2012). Moreover, in his study, Doçi (2013) mentioned a qualitative research conducted with 800 internal migrants who were based in Breglumasi area (part of Tirana Municipality). From their face-to-face

interviews, it was found out that their community life was under patriarchal norms of male domination. In general, family life outside the community was very limited. Traditional gender division of roles had increased female subordination because of the fear of men not to lose the control over their wives and daughters (Doçi, 2013). Thus, male newcomers developed new mechanisms to strengthen their sense of rural belonging. They categorised themselves as rural people and were strongly attached to their rural identity.

Furthermore, inter-generational conflict dominated the process of social identity construction among the newcomers located in the main cities of Albania after 1991. Tensions were observed between the young generation of the newcomers born in the city (or migrated there at a very young age) and the old generation of the newcomers born in the rural areas. While the first group was proud to claim that it was from the city, the second one strongly emphasized that it was from the village. The old generation of internal migrants was happy to stick on its sense of rural belonging. It categorised itself as being originally from the village and attached itself to the group of the rural newcomers. Thus, it insisted to be located in those neighbourhoods of the cities where other rural families from their village of origin were accommodated.

But, this situation complicated the daily life of the newcomers' school children. They had to balance their traditional life at home/neighbourhood with their wish to be like other peers of host society in the school and community. Children reported that they were warned every morning by their parents to be away from other children who did not belong to their region of origin and did not have their customs (Andoni, 2017). In this way, their parents served as gatekeepers of children's social identity preservation. They wanted to keep group boundaries and transmit them to young generation. But children wanted to cross them, adjust to new city life and bridge with the group of city children. Therefore, they were in a dilemma because, after school hours, they had to go back to their strict family mentality (Andoni, 2017). Even young rural migrants with high expectations from city life were not able to bond in any social group. They tried to interact with young people from the existing city inhabitants group and be part of it. But group boundaries were not always flexible. Living for several years in the periphery of Tirana city, some of them started speaking in the dialect of Tirana. They dressed like Tirana city youngsters and went to night pubs. But when they 'categorised' themselves as 'Tironsa' and wanted to join 'Tironsat' group, its members laughed at them 'Ky osht Tirons i vjetër që ka 5 vjet m'Tironë' (it is an expression in Tirana dialect that means 'This person is an old Tirana citizen who lives here for 5 years').

Despite efforts made by children and the youth from the newcomers' group to change their social identity and join the city inhabitants group, the other members of the newcomers group positively evaluated their group. The process of social comparison with the group of the existing city inhabitants yielded positive results for both groups. Each of them evaluated their group as having more advantages than the other group. For instance, the group of the newcomers evaluated its members as hardworking persons who tried hard to make their living despite relative deprivation imposed by the local inhabitants. They perceived the members of the other group as being lazy. They valued the ability of their group members to use different coping mechanism to overcome difficulties faced. They appreciated in-group support (Janaqi, 2014). On the other hand, the group of the existing city inhabitants positively evaluated its group in various aspects including: high level of education, tolerance, civic education, politeness, etcetera.

### **Implications of Internal Migration on Prejudice and Stigma**

Internal migration impacts transformation of self and raises various social consequences. Segmentation of migrants has implications for their social identity. Arbitrary categorization of individuals has been stigmatizing and disempowering (Schimmele and Wu, 2015). Usually internal migrants are perceived as non-dominant groups exposed to negative social evaluations of their group, dilemma or threat of their identity (Tajfel, 1978).

Both, the intensification of the dynamics of the modern life and its unequal development path have provoked the tendency of negatively valued groups to tend to move into groups with a positive social identity (McLeod, 2008). Prejudice refers to negative attitudes or behaviours towards members of a certain group (Augoustinos and Reynolds, 2001). It is experienced by people who belong to certain categories or groups with negative evaluations (Haas, 2008). Prejudice has been traditionally understood as rigid, bad, unjustified, erroneous and emotional (Augoustinos and Reynolds, 2001). Research shows that ongoing prejudice can produce external attribution for negative outcomes. In general, minority groups have been devalued and prejudiced by the majority groups (Dovidio et al., 2005).

In their study on the impact of China's hukou system on social identity and inequality, Afridi, Li and Ren (2012) found that migrant children were labelled less intelligent and had low academic results. Migrant girls faced dual discrimination caused by discrimination against rural migrants and gender discrimination. They concluded that even though China is a homogenous society, long-term systemic approaches of social exclusion between rural areas and urban areas had played a

powerful role in prejudice and discrimination. This influenced behaviour of migrant children (Afridi, Li and Ren, 2012).

Moreover, social stigma is defined as a function of the possession of a particular attribute that conveys a devalued social identity in a particular context (Crocker, Major and Steele, 1998). It is a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype (Goffman, 1963) that arises during social interactions of the individuals with a social identity that does not meet normative expectations of the society for the attributes that they should possess (Kurzban and Leary, 2001). These attributes cause negative stigmatization of groups. They are usually associated with powerlessness and minority standing (Padilla and Perez, 2003).

Stigmatization is a process that affects both, how individuals perceive themselves and how they feel that the others perceive them (Goffman, 1963). It denigrates others by putting one group in a psychologically superior position (Turner, 1982). Stigmatized groups are very often subject to negative attitudes and negative treatment. Perceptions of discrimination can negatively impact their mental and physical health because they produce high levels of stress (Williams, Spencer and Jackson, 1999).

Goffman (1963) distinguished three types of stigma: a) that related to various physical deformities; b) individual characteristics perceived as mental disorder and weak will; c) tribal stigma related to race, religion and nation. Frable (1993) identified two dimensions of stigma respectively, danger and visibility. It was assumed that the higher the visibility of a stigmatized person is, the greater its negative impact on social interaction is. Visibly stigmatized individuals with devalued social identity might be challenged in their daily interactions. Being aware of the negative connotations of their social identity, they might be excluded from interactions while try to minimize their stigma (Padilla and Perez, 2003).

Research conducted in 2013 with 868 individuals (mainly internal migrants) from Bathore Administrative Unit of Kamza Municipality in Albania showed that 27.4 percent of the respondents confirmed that they left their home in the northern part of the country to escape conflicts and blood feud consequences (Peço, 2014). But the existing local people in Kamza labelled them 'Chechens' or 'Maloks' (a pejorative word used for those who come from mountains). In addition, they blamed them as the main cause of high crime rate in the country due to the application of Kanun (Schwander-Sievers, 2008).

Not only internal migrants from the northern part of Albania but also internal migrants from the southern part of the country were subject to prejudice and stigma.

The existing local inhabitants in both Tirana and Durres main cities stigmatized newcomers from the southern villages and labelled them 'Katunars' (a pejorative word in the dialect of Tirana and Durres regions that implies uncivilized people who come from villages). They complained all the time by saying 'Na mbyten katunaret' ('Village people are suffocating us').

Prejudice about newcomers has been expressed in various ways. In his study conducted in 2011 in Albania with 1,000 participants (500 were existing inhabitants while 500 were new comers after 1991), Janaqi (2014) found that: a) 78.9 percent of the respondents from the group of the existing inhabitants did not want to educate their children in the schools dominated by children of the families who migrated in their host society after 1991; b) 54.3 percent of the respondents from the group of the existing inhabitants categorically refused to sell their land to a newcomer; c) 43.3 percent of the respondents from the group of the existing inhabitants declared that they openly expressed their direct prejudice towards newcomers; d) 85.7 percent of the respondents from the group of the existing inhabitants thought that they were more civilized than newcomers (Janaqi, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

This paper examined how internal migration in Albanian post-socialist society affected social identity construction and group boundaries along with its implications on prejudice and stigma. Focused on permanent rural-urban migration, it argued that this complex and diverse phenomenon exposed both local people and newcomers in different dilemmas and challenges about their social identity. Based on Social Identity Theory, it analysed how group membership assigned social identity by favouring in-group and unfairly discriminating, prejudicing and stigmatizing out-group. Usually viewed as having a lower social status than that of the local people, newcomers were negatively viewed, unequally treated and imposed to multiple identities.

But migration and human mobility are inseparable part of the modern life that goes hand in hand with transformative social processes and ongoing dynamics. Thus, more research is needed to understand both, identity negotiations in the host society (at societal level) and double norms/mechanisms that newcomers apply to ensure in-group positive social identity. It will be worthy to search how they negotiate within the group to make sure that its values will not be compromised by their inclusion in mainstream society. More longitudinal research is needed to capture various challenges of social identity construction among different age groups and gender.

Finally, at policy making level, it will be very helpful to design more accountable policies that encourage multi-cultural communication, diversity promotion and social identity respect. Prejudice and stigma towards the newcomers does not help social cohesion and the process of social integration. This attitude will not stop or minimize the phenomenon of the internal migration. On the other hand, it is not helpful for both, young and old generations to live in a hostile and fragmented environment. Awareness raising and education programs to promote inclusion and social integration are important to remove barriers among the groups. There is a need to view internal migrants as local agents of development and contributors of local change. This is important not only in short-term but also in long-term in order to achieve a more cohesive society based on mutual respect and peaceful co-existence.

### **Limitations**

This paper has four main limitations: a) firstly, it is focused on secondary data drawn by research conducted during the period 1991-2017. However, very few studies on internal migration and social identity in Albanian post-socialist society were available for analysis; b) secondly, longitudinal research on impact of internal migration on social identity construction in Albania lacks. Thus, data collected by some cross-sectional studies have been used. However, they were conducted one point in time and in fragmented areas; c) thirdly, some regions including Western Balkan countries and Eastern Europe are short in this research topic. Therefore, comparisons with other regions where the phenomenon of internal migration is evident have been partially applied; d) fourthly, the primary focus of this study is internal migration during the years of Albania's transformation to the open market economy. Thus, external migration is neither discussed nor addressed in analyses conducted.

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