

MAKING A NATION ABROAD: THE ROLE OF MIGRANT COLONIES
IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ALBANIA

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the crucial role of Albanian emigrants in the development of the Albanian National Movement, and the establishment of the modern state of Albania. It takes a transnational approach, by surveying the migrant networks that operated beyond the confines of government authority. It highlights the importance that the migration processes held for the development of Albanian nationalist sentiment. Albanian-speaking migrants developed ethnic self-awareness by interacting with various cultures abroad, which strengthened their ethnic solidarity among them. Albanian migrant colonies in the United States engaged heavily in efforts to help their homeland, challenging the assimilation paradigm. Instead, there are an example of acculturation: a process wherein they

selectively adopted certain American elements, and used these for the benefit to their homeland. They held the United States in high esteem, and even attempted to create a government based on the American model.

Due to the peculiar nature of the Albanian-speaking communities within the Ottoman Empire, where they were categorized by religion, they possessed no rights to be educated in, or to officially use, their vernacular language. Although well incorporated within imperial structures, the restrictions on the use of the Albanian language made it almost impossible to organize a coherent nationalist movement inside the Albanian speaking territories. It fell upon the Albanian migrant colonies established around the world to organize and support a unified nationalist movement. By the end of the nineteenth century, migrants stationed in Istanbul, Bucharest, Sofia, Paris, Brussels, and Egypt established cultural organizations and newspapers with the purpose of unifying the nationalist movement and spreading nationalist propaganda inside the Albanian-speaking territories. After the turn of the century, the Albanian community in the United States became the most important center of nationalist agitation. Despite facing many difficulties, as well as divisions among themselves, these migrants successfully mounted a campaign to establish the independent state of Albania, and lobbied the European Powers and, especially, the United States of America to assist in the consolidation of the newly created state.

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Introduction

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of the Albanian nationalist movement, which would ultimately result in the declaration of Albanian independence in 1912. It was the most peculiar nation-building process in the Balkans, because of the peculiar position that Albanian-speaking subjects held within the Ottoman Empire. Encircled by Balkan neighbors vying for the territory that Albanian-speakers occupied within the empire, most Albanian subjects accepted the protections and the opportunities that the vast Ottoman Empire offered them. A number of educated elites from Albanian-speaking territories, including the most prominent Albanian nationalist figures of Ismail Qemali, Pashko Vasa, and Sami Frashëri, served in the higher echelons of power in the Ottoman administration. Ultimately, faced with the rapid decline of the Empire they faithfully served, which could no longer provide protection for their homeland, they had no difficulties in turning against the interests of the Empire by supporting secession for the land of their birth.

The rise of the Albanian nationalist movement is a story of a “movement *in* movement,” as Kenyon Zimmer puts it in his *Immigrants Against the State* when describing the interconnected nature of the anarchist movement in

America.¹ The history of the Albanian nationalist movement is also a history of ethnic migration networks operating in a transnational milieu, with people and ideas crossing geographical and administrative borders in the age of rising nationalist sentiment in the Balkans and around the globe. Despite the measures taken by Ottoman authorities to limit the spread of nationalist feelings among Albanian-speaking people of the Empire, the constant movement of people within the Empire, and beyond, established a web of networks that became effective in dispersing nationalist ideas, and that was too wide to be neutralized.

Compared to the nationalist movements of their neighbors, who had common religions and written vernacular languages to deploy in order to spread nationalist sentiments, Albanian-speakers had none of these. Faced with a very heterogeneous populace composed of Christian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Muslim communities, the Albanian nationalists of the nineteenth century resorted to propagating religious tolerance among Albanian-speakers, and use of the Albanian language, as unifying factors. Albanian nationalists advanced the idea of “Albanianism” as an overarching slogan of unity; the term was coined by Pashko Vasa, who decried the disunity of Albanians in verse, declaring, “the religion of Albanians is Albanianism.”² In addition to the religious and regional differences among the Albanian-speaking population, its lack of an established unified

¹ Kenyon Zimmer, *Immigrants Against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchist in America* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 3.

² The poem in Albanian, and its English translation, can be found in Robert Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 84–88.

writing code made it difficult to diffuse nationalist ideas. After many attempts, with the heavy participation of Albanian migrant colonies dispersed around the world, a unified alphabet was created in 1908, just four years before the declaration of independence.

In order to strengthen national feeling among Albanians, nationalists resorted to what Russell King and Nicola Mai call the “downgrading of religion” as a strategy to distinguish Albanians from Ottomans.³ Downgrading religion served also the purpose of dissuading Christian Orthodox Albanians from sympathizing with their neighboring Greek and Serbian co-religionists. During this complex process of identity formation, Roman Catholicism was the least represented religion, but it also became the most important thread in propagating the “European” character of Albanians. The story of Scanderbeg was quickly resurrected to remind the European powers that Albanians had protected Christianity, and the gates of Europe, heroically. Scanderbeg, known as “the second Alexander, and Christian Gideon,” had valiantly resisted the Turks in the fifteenth century, and “he had been for twenty-three years, the terror of the Turks...at a time when all Europe trembled before them.”⁴ The strong focus on downplaying religion, no less in the Ottoman Empire, which only recognized religious (rather than ethnic) communities, is an indication that religion was a

³ Russell King and Nicola Mai, *Out of Albania: From Crisis Migration to Social Inclusion in Italy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 209.

⁴ M. L'Abbe J. E. Darras, *A General History of the Catholic Church: From the Commencement of the Christian Era Until the Present Time*, vol. 3 (New York: P. O'Shea Publisher, 1866), 617.

strong dividing factor among Albanian-speaking segment of the Empire. Nevertheless, through its efforts, the Albanian national movement bridged the religious differences among its people, and the national cause took primacy over religious identifications.⁵

This was part of Albanian nationalists' mission to create what Benedict Anderson called an *imagined community*, in which members of the "nation" identify with one another despite the fact that it is impossible for any given member to know "most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them."⁶ The Albanian nationalists had to accomplish an astounding amount of work in the social engineering of this nation, because they needed to create a very strong bond among people that were in fact loosely connected, and to do this with a very limited number of tools. Anderson argues that the "convergence of capitalism and print technology" was essential in setting the stage for "modern nations."⁷ But there was no capitalism, nor any printing presses to be driven by it, in the territory that would become the state of Albania. Albanian-speakers had a limited written tradition in myriad different alphabets, but a vernacular Albanian alphabet would not exist until 1908. Literate Albanian nationalists rightfully chose language as a common cultural identifier to avoid internal divisions, despite

⁵ Ger Duizings, "Religion and the Politics of 'Albanianism': Naim Frashëri's Bektashi Writings," in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, ed. Stephanie Shwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 62.

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin & Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1983), 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

the impossibility of correctly gauging popular sentiment on the issue of national independence.⁸ One alternative was the possibility of creating many nations of Albanian-speakers, based on religious affiliation, such as the separation of Croats and Serbs who shared a single language, but whose nationalisms were distinguished by Croats' Roman Catholicism and Serbs' Orthodoxy.⁹ However, the Albanian nationalists were successful in consolidating a single nationalist movement by promoting unity based on language.

Some of the most important works on the Albanian nationalist movement present a story of heroic resistance for liberation from the Ottoman Empire, and for the protection of Albanian lands from greedy neighbors.¹⁰ Works written in Albanian have emphasized the narrative history of Albania, focusing on the struggles of its people and its heroes, in a constant pursuit for liberation from times immemorial, espousing a primordial view of the Albanian nation. In most of these works unity of Albanians as a nation is taken for granted.¹¹ More recent scholarly works take into consideration the more complex nature of the Albanian nationalist movement, presenting more balanced approaches through the study of

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 53.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁰ For representatives of this view see Stefanaq Pollo and Arben Puto, *The History of Albania* (London: Routledge, 1981); Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1872-1912* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967).

¹¹ For representatives of this view see Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, *Historia E Popullit Shqiptar: Ilirët, Mesjeta, Shqipëria Nën Perandorinë Osmane Gjatë Shek. XVI- Vitet 20 Të Shek. XIX* (Tiranë: Botimet Toena, 2002) ; and Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, *Historia E Popullit Shqiptar: Rilindja Kombëtare, Vitet 30 Të Shek. XIX -1912* (Tiranë: Botimet Toena, 2002).

Ottoman documents. These works detail the heterogeneous nature of Albanian-speakers during the reign of Ottomans, and discuss the complex identity formation of Albanians in the face of Ottoman cultural influences, as well as the impact these influences had on people.¹² My project recognizes these more recent views, but highlights the importance of migration as a primary factor in the development of the Albanian nationalist movement, and of the modern state of Albania. I focus on how people in constant movement, around many corners of the world, were able to imagine and work to create a strong national community.

The migration of people, and their activities abroad, constitute the most important element in the history of the modern Albanian nation. The Albanian-speakers who left for Italy after the defeat of Scanderbeg guarded their language and ethnic culture with great zeal for centuries, and became the greatest agitators for Albanian autonomy and independence. Albanian-speaking migrant colonies formed in Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Istanbul, Belgium, Egypt, and United States, and also produced important supporters and agitators for Albanian statehood. Paradoxically, the most loyal administrators of the Ottoman Empire from Albanian ranks became the most ardent nationalists within the Empire itself. The lack of printing presses and capitalist enterprise within their homeland, and

¹² See Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Isa Blumi, *Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Social and Political History of Albania and Yemen, 1878-1918* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2003); George Walter Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913* (London: Tauris, 2006).

the absence of a unified alphabet, did not stop Albanians from producing a wide array of newspapers and other published works abroad, which highlighted the need for a unified Albanian alphabet and of national unity in the face of many dangers. Migrants mobilized resources and experiences abroad to spread nationalist propaganda among Albanian-speaking subjects of the Ottoman Empire.

The early resettlement in Italy of Albanian-speakers made these migrants aware of their shared heritage, in contrast to that of their Italian-speaking hosts. The experience was similar to that of the Palatine migration of German-speakers from the Western part of the Holy Roman Empire in the early eighteenth century, who in the course of the migration process “not only defined themselves in contrast to other peoples in British North America but also assumed a shared identity that did not yet exist among the families and friends they left behind.”¹³ The process of self-identifying as Albanians took place in all migrant colonies where Albanian-speakers settled. Coming from various religious, geographical, and cultural backgrounds, the community leaders of Albanian migrant colonies were able to find commonalities in foreign lands, and to identify their native language as the strongest link between them, harnessing the power of their native tongue in their endeavor to create a strong national bond among people from different backgrounds.

¹³ Philip Otterness, *Becoming German: The 1709 Palatine Migration to New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 2.

The Albanian community leaders in the United States engaged in “long-distance nationalism,” following the patterns of other ethnic groups arriving at the end of the nineteenth century. Matthew Frye Jacobson has studied the attitudes of Irish, Polish, and Jewish immigrants who came during the same period, and concluded that all three groups engaged heavily in the political affairs of their homelands, and strongly identified with their respective national independence movements.¹⁴ Emigrants living outside of their homelands continued to see themselves as part of them, and engaged in political action in relation to their homelands.¹⁵ The long physical distance imposed by the waters of the Atlantic Ocean only strengthened the bond between new Albanian arrivals to the United States and the homeland that they left behind. Instead of becoming Americans, the first migrants heightened their nationalist feeling for the Albanian lands, concentrated on establishing an Albanian press, and for the first time established a national church.¹⁶

Transatlantic Albanian migration to the United States, which began toward the end of the nineteenth century, opened new opportunities for the nationalist movement. In the United States economic opportunities were greater for migrants, and community leaders like Fan Noli worked diligently to unite a very

¹⁴ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Green Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 1995, 21.

¹⁶ Federal Writers’ Project Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts, *The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and the New* (Boston: Writer, Inc., 1939).

heterogeneous group of people, and to convince them to contribute to nationalist causes. When Fan Noli began his quest to unite the various Albanian migrant groups, he faced immense difficulties. Most migrants had lived their entire lives in the confines of a single village before migrating to the United States, and lacked any sense of “national” belonging. Nevertheless, once Albanian-speakers began arriving, they started to recognize commonalities among themselves, in contrast to Americans and other immigrants who spoke in languages that they could not understand. Most of the migrants who made it to the United States were workers in search of economic opportunities, and in many cases illiterate. By contrast, nationalist activists were for the most part highly educated. Yet they were able to convince fellow Albanian-speakers to support and love their homeland—that is, to imagine an Albanian national community to which they belonged. Community leaders were also polyglots who were able to communicate and cooperate with other ethnic groups, profiting from the exchange. For example it was with the help of the Russian Orthodox Church in America that Albanians were able to establish their autocephalous church in the United States. After declaring independence, Albanians requested help from European Powers in consolidating their statehood, but at the conclusion of the Great War, they started to view Woodrow Wilson’s America as the only honest broker for their interests, and accordingly directed their lobbying efforts and hopes toward America.

This project originated out of my desire to understand the large-scale migration out of post-communist Albania. It ended with the conclusion that the modern state of Albania is a creation of migrant groups residing outside their homeland. The migrant colonies created in Italy, Egypt, Romania, Istanbul, Bulgaria, Belgium, and the United States, among other places, were the primary engine of the Albanian national and cultural movements during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During the five-century long Ottoman rule in the Balkans, the Albanian-speaking population had an important role maintaining and resisting the Center. Many became prominent servants of the Empire (including the father of the Albanian nation, Ismail Qemali) and traveled the world as its representatives. Many others traveled in pursuit of education and financial opportunities. With restrictions placed by the Ottoman authorities on the use of vernacular Albanian in education, it fell on the leaders of the various migrant colonies to gather resources, and to spread the Albanian language and culture, through their many publications abroad—publications on which I have relied to tell their story. Theirs is an important history because it reveals the role that migrants played in establishing the Albanian nation, and recognizes the intertwined nature of Albanian relations with the Ottoman Empire. I hope that this project helps normalize these parts of Albanian history, which for most part highlights the heroic struggle of its people against the Ottoman Empire, and creates a more vibrant picture of Albania's people and their interactions with the

wider world. Telling the story through a migration perspective highlights the transnational nature of the making of Albania, and challenges the static and geographically limited nature of Albanian historiography.

Chapter 1. Historical Origins of Albanian Migration

Following the fall of the Albanian communist regime in 1991, international migration from Albania took place on a massive scale. The most recent estimates indicate the enormous size of this migration: In 1999 the number of Albanian citizens living abroad reached 742,000, and by 2010 it reached more than 1.7 million. These are staggering numbers considering that Albania itself only has around 3.2 million inhabitants. Of the total number of Albanians abroad, 44 percent live in Greece, 26.4 percent live in Italy, and 23.5 have made the transatlantic voyage to the United States.¹⁷ Due to this migration Albania has been recently called a great “laboratory” for migration studies.¹⁸ Yet despite some interest in recent migration trends by scholars, the historical component of this exodus has been neglected.

Migration has played a crucial role in the history of Albania and holds important cultural meaning among Albanians, to the extent that it has become an integral part of the national fabric. Stretching for centuries, migration has become a rite of passage ingrained in the Albanian psyche, at times celebrated as a blessing, at other times as a curse that has scarred the nation. Many songs and

¹⁷ Julie Vullnetari, *Albania on the Move: Links Between Internal and International Migration* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 70.

¹⁸ Russell King, “Albania as a Laboratory for the Study of Migration and Development,” *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans* 7, no. 2 (2005): 133.

stories testify to the blessings and the curse of *kurbet* (migration). Without the history of Albanian migration, there is no history of Albania.

Being a small country, Albania has had a unique historical trajectory that is worth considering, despite its neglect by Anglophone historians. This chapter will present an outline of the crucial events in its long history, with an emphasis on the role of migration. Prior to Second World War, Albanian history never received serious attention from historians, and after the war Albania was almost hermetically closed off by the Communist regime, effectively shutting its doors to foreigners willing to study its past.¹⁹ However, in recent decades new research has begun to correct this problem.

Being situated at the crossroads of the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and later Ottoman empires, Albania presents an enigmatic case of survival in the most challenging of circumstances. Due to its geographical location, the country's modern history has been a continuation of this struggle to survive its neighbors' attempts to take over. Just as in the time of ancient Greece and Rome, Albanian territory has more recently been contested by neighboring Italy, Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria.

As we have seen in more recent events, especially in the case of Former Yugoslavia, the Balkans continue to this day to be a heavily contested area, with

¹⁹ Robert Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2010), ix.

continuous political and economic instability.²⁰ This is a reflection of centuries of intermingling of various cultures, of competing interests among various empires over time, and finally, during the nineteenth-century, of rivalries among newly established nation-states. Very complex historical circumstances became even more burdensome in the case of Albania, which, compared to its immediate neighboring states, was a latecomer to the process of nation building in the Balkans.

Today's Albania is situated in southeastern Europe, bordering the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea, and Montenegro and Kosovo to the north and northeast. Macedonia and Greece are situated to the east and south.²¹ The southwestern tip of Albania lies on the eastern side of the Strait of Otranto, which provides access to the Adriatic and Mediterranean Seas, and is also one of the major routes from Western and Central Europe to the Near East. At its narrowest point, the distance between Italy and Albania is only forty-seven miles.²²

Despite being situated between some of the greatest ancient civilizations, Albania was considered an enigma until very recent times. English historian Edward Gibbons described Albania in the eighteenth century as a place “less known than the interior of America,” and in 1910, James Bouchier, a

²⁰ I refer to “the Balkans” in the geographical sense of the Balkan Peninsula; for other loaded definitions and terms see Marija N. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

²¹ Neil Olsen, *Albania* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2000), 12.

²² Nicholas C. Pano, *The People's Republic of Albania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 4.

correspondent for *The Times*, declared that little progress had been made toward “a scientific knowledge of this interesting land, and its inhabitants.”²³ This crossroads of empires and civilizations was long isolated from mainstream European history, resulting in various representations of it as a mysterious and misunderstood place.²⁴ Like any small nation attempting to find its place in history, Albanian historians have made an attempt to present a “glorious” history of this country, resulting in the creation of speculations and myths to serve the purpose of creating a homogenized nation. The selection of “usable” history, and the omission of other parts, oftentimes blurred the lines between myth and history.²⁵

Despite ongoing debates over the origins of modern-day Albanians, many scholars have concluded that they are most probably the descendants of Illyrian tribes, and it is generally accepted that some Illyrian tribes with a common language and culture had settled in the territory that is now Albania in the seventh century BC.²⁶ From the seventh to the sixth centuries BC Greek traders established colonies mainly around the coastal cities of Durrachium (Durrës), Butrint (Southern Albania), and Apollonia, and these cities were responsible for

²³ Anton Logoreci, *The Albanians* (London: Gollancz, 1977), 15.

²⁴ Robert Elsie, ed., *Early Albania: A Reader of Historical Texts, 11th-17th Centuries* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), vii.

²⁵ Piro Misha, “Invention of a Nationalism-Myth and Amnesia,” in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, ed. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd Jürgen Fischer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 42.

²⁶ Miranda Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 2.

furthering links with Illyrian tribes in the interior. In the third century BC the city of Shkoder was an important center, and the capital of the Ardiaean group²⁷ (composed of Illyrian tribes) until 168 BC, when it fell into the hands of the Roman Empire.²⁸ Illyria and other parts of the Balkans enjoyed many economic and cultural benefits from Roman annexation, because the Roman system of government eliminated many of the existing intertribal conflicts. The Romans also greatly improved the infrastructure of the region by building roads and aqueducts, including the famous military highway Via Egnatia, which linked the city of Durres with Constantinople, and passed through Macedonia.²⁹

After Roman conquest, another important period in Albanian—and Balkan—history began with the arrival of Slavic tribes into the region. By the sixth century AD, Slavic tribes already occupied a large expanse of territories in Eastern Europe, with the areas between the middle and upper Vistula and Dnieper rivers having the heaviest concentrations.³⁰ It should be noted that when discussing Slavs in the Balkans, we are talking about Southern Slavs, whose descendants live throughout territories of former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

²⁷ For more on the Ardiaean grouping, and their history as pirates of the Straits Of Otranto, see Arthur M. Eckstein, *Rome Enters the Greek East: From Anarchy to Hierarchy in the Hellenistic Mediterranean, 230-170 B.C.* (West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

²⁸ Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History*, 2.

²⁹ Logoreci, *The Albanians*, 16.

³⁰ Karl Kaser, *The Balkans and the Near East: Introduction to a Shared History* (Berlin: Lit, 2010), 14.

Southern Slavs' arrival in the Balkans added another layer of complexity to an already very complex part of the world.

The two major groupings of Slavic tribes were the Serbs and Croats. By the middle of the seventh century, Serb tribes began to enter northern Albanian lands via the coastal towns of Montenegro, and while the coastal towns of Shkodra and Durrës were able to repel the Serbs, large swathes of the countryside became Slavicized.³¹ By the ninth century, Slav speakers became an important element in much of what is today northern Albania, except for towns and high mountain areas, but by the ninth century Slav speakers who lived in the lowlands of this area began to gradually become major components of the urban population as well.³² Migratory movements of the Slav element on the Balkan Peninsula added another piece of the puzzle, and paved the way for an even bigger laboratory of interconnectedness and conflict among the region's various cultural, ethnic, and social groupings.

When the Roman Empire split in the year 395, Albanian territories became part of the Eastern or Byzantium Empire, and with the arrival of Slavs many Illyrian tribes in today's Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, and Serbia fell under their influence and became Slavicized, while southern Illyrian tribes, especially in the

³¹ Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short Story* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 25.

³² *Ibid.*, 24.

territories of today's Albania, were more resilient toward Slavic influences.³³ Albanians, who have rarely been major players in European and Balkan affairs, have always attempted to point to these ancient roots in order to strengthen their position as rightful heirs to European civilization and to bolster their position and standing in the world. Nevertheless, while definitive proof of the ancient roots of Albanians might never materialize, in the absence of other convincing theories, the Illyrian proposition seems to be the most plausible one. Between the eighth and eleventh centuries, the name of the Illyrian tribe of Albanoi, the same tribe mentioned by the geographer Ptolemy in the second century, began to be more frequently used when describing the populations of central Albania.³⁴ However, despite the second-century reference, there is no definitive way to connect the two and prove continuity, because for nine centuries there is no other mention of the Albanoi in the historical record, and they might have gotten the name from the mountainous terrain they occupied.³⁵ The connection becomes more tangible in the eleventh century, when we have more documents mentioning the Albanians.

Before the eleventh century, however, another invasion took place. The arrival of Slavs heightened the dangers to the Byzantine Empire, and weakened it considerably. During the tenth century Bulgarian tsars Simeon and Samuel were

³³ Piro Tase, *Të Huajt Për Shqipërinë Dhe Shqiptarët (Foreigners on Albania and the Albanians)* (N.p.: Edicioni 2, 2010), 74.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries, *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History* (London: Routledge, 2007), 25.

victorious against the Byzantine Empire, which resulted in Bulgarian control of Albania that lasted until the year 1018, when Byzantium once again took possession over the Albanian territories.³⁶ It was during the years under Bulgarian control that what might be the first documents that actually mention Albanians appeared. At the beginning of eleventh century, during Tsar Samuel's reign, a document explaining various world languages and religions mentioned Albanians and classified them in the group of "half-believers"—that is, non-Orthodox Christians.³⁷ After this, we begin to see the appearance of Albanians as a separate group in many Byzantine texts, including a description of another invasion of Albania—this time by the Normans—written by Byzantine historian Anna Comnena.³⁸ The following centuries would see Albanians described in writings as a distinct group of people, and as a more permanent fixture in the history of the Balkan Peninsula.

Another watershed moment in eleventh-century Albania was the great East-West schism, which resulted in the creation of the Eastern Orthodox Church based in Constantinople on one side, and the Roman Catholic Church based in Rome on the other. The East-West schism also divided Albanian territories in half, with most of the southern Albanian population adopting Eastern Orthodox

³⁶ Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History*, 3.

³⁷ Anonymous, "Fragment on the Origin of Nations, 1000-1018," in *Early Albania: A Reader of Historical Texts, 11th-17th Centuries*, ed. Robert Elsie (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 3.

³⁸ Anna Comnena, "The Norman Invasion of Albania, 1081," in *Early Albania: A Reader of Historical Texts, 11th-17th Centuries*, ed. Robert Elsie (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 6.

Christianity, and the population in northern Albania adopting Roman Catholicism.³⁹ This division also coincided with the division of Albanian language in its two main dialects. The Shkumbin River is the geographical dividing point, with Albanians south of the river speaking the *toskë* dialect, and Albanians to the north speaking the *gegë* dialect.⁴⁰ People who speak one dialect, however, have no difficulties understanding each other. These two dialects have continued to be practiced to this day, but this division has not been a great deterrent to the unification of Albanians in any considerable measure.

One more invasion shaped the history of Albania before the arrival of the Ottomans. The twelfth-century Balkan Peninsula saw the rise of the independent Serbian principalities of Zeta and Rashka, culminating in the fourteenth century with the establishment of the “Serbian Empire” led by Tsar Dušan (1331-1355), who was able to wrestle territory from Hungarians in the north and the Byzantines in the south.⁴¹ In 1340 Tsar Dušan reached the Albanian port city of Valona (Vlore), and by 1348 he had control over the rest of the Albanian territory, and these successes prompted him to declare himself the emperor of “Serbs, and Greeks, of Bulgars, and Albanians” in 1346.⁴² But Dušan’s hopes of overtaking

³⁹ Thomas Streissguth, *Albania in Pictures* (Minneapolis: Twenty-First Century Books, 2011), 24.

⁴⁰ Gjovalin Shkurtaj, *Sociolinguistikë E Shqipëse: Nga Dialektologjia Te Etnografia E Te Folurit (Sociolinguistics of the Albanian Language: From Dialectology to the Ethnography of Speech)* (Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese Morava, 2009), 113.

⁴¹ Frederick Bernard Singleton, *A Short History of the Yugoslav Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 25.

⁴² Francis Dvornik, *The Slavs in European History and Civilization* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 114.

the Byzantine Empire fell short when in 1371 his successors lost the battle of the Maritca River (today's Ormenio, Greece) to the Ottomans, opening the door for Ottomans to overtake the Balkan Peninsula.⁴³

The Byzantine Empire left an undeniable mark on Albania, which can still be seen in countless monuments scattered all over the Albanian landscape, especially in Southern Albania. So did the Greeks, Romans, and Slavs. However, Albania's historic trajectory was affected the most by the long, and more completely documented, reign of the Ottoman Empire beginning in the fourteenth century and stretching until the outset of the twentieth, when Albanians finally declared independence. But Ottoman rule was also met with resistance from Albanians, who attempted to accommodate themselves to the new conditions in the Balkans, and also made great efforts to preserve their heritage under the very trying conditions of the five-century reign of the Ottomans.

By the end of the fifteenth century most of Albania was under complete Ottoman control, but this era also provided the Albanians with a legacy that would later provide an immeasurable sense of pride in future generations of Albanians. It was during this time that the legend of Scanderbeg (Skënderbeu) was created, who to this day serves as a symbol of heroism and Albanian national unity, regardless of political or religious affiliations. His resistance lasted for

⁴³ Ibid.

quarter of a century, and its defeat triggered the first mass emigration of Albanians.

George Kastrioti Scanderbeg, known in Albanian as Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu (1405-1468) was born into the family of an Albanian feudal lord in the city fortress of Croya (Krujë) in today's north-central Albania.⁴⁴ The young George was taken hostage by the Ottomans, given extensive military training in the court of sultan Murad II (who ruled 1421-51), converted and educated as a Muslim, and given the new name of Iskender, which when combined with his title as a *bey* (an Ottoman chieftain), gives us his name of Scanderbeg.⁴⁵ He became a great military leader for the Ottomans, but he never forgot his roots in Albania, and was waiting for an opportunity to return to the place of his birth, Croya.

The opportunity to return presented itself to him in 1443, when he was sent together with another Turkish general to subdue the king of Hungary, John Hunyadi, in the battle of Nish, which the Ottomans lost.⁴⁶ Scanderbeg skillfully extorted an imperial order, which directed the Ottoman governor of Croya to hand over his title to him.⁴⁷ Croya would become an impenetrable fortress for quarter of a century, providing protection to Albanian noblemen and serving as a buffer

⁴⁴ Skendi Stavro, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1878-1912* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), 3.

⁴⁵ Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History*, 33.

⁴⁶ Constantine Anastasi Chekrezi, *Albania Past and Present* (New York: MacMillan, 1919), 29.

⁴⁷ Chekrezi, *Albania Past and Present*.

zone that protected the Adriatic coast from falling into Ottoman hands, denying the Ottoman Empire a very important strategic location. Scanderbeg became a living legend, not only among his people, but all over Europe, drawing commendation from Pope Paul II, who hailed him as a protector of Christendom.⁴⁸ However, the Albanian nobles who succeeded him were not able to maintain a united front, leading to the weakening of Albanian resistance to Ottomans and ultimately to the capture of Croya and Scuttari, enabling the Ottomans to secure a long-sought foothold on the Adriatic littoral.⁴⁹ The capture of the Croya fortress cemented Ottoman rule over Albania and also triggered a large-scale migration to Italy, creating many Arberesh⁵⁰ enclaves that to this day celebrate their Albanian roots, mainly in Calabria and Sicily.

According to various estimates, the number of Albanians who left for Italy after the fall of Croya reached about 200,000, and while the estimates for those who left for Greece are harder to come by, based on the proximity and the connectivity of villages, it is estimated that about the same number of people left for Greece.⁵¹ The arrivals in Italy had various reasons for settling there, but the fifteenth-century arrivals could be divided into two main groups: the ones who

⁴⁸ *Catholic World* (Paramus, N.J., 1865), 234.

⁴⁹ V.J. Parry, "The Reigns of Bāyezid II and Selim I, 1481-1520," in *A History of the Ottoman Empire to 1730*, ed. M.A. Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 54.

⁵⁰ "Arberesh" is the name of the Albanian minority in southern Italy and in Northern Greece. See Bernard A. Cook, *Europe Since 1945: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 2001); King and Mai, *Out of Albania: From Crisis Migration to Social Inclusion in Italy*.

⁵¹ Mark Tirta, *Lëvizje Migruese Të Shqipëtareve Te Brendshme E Në Popujt Më Afër (Internal Albanian Migrations, and Migrations to Nearby Nations)* (Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2013), 255.

were invited by the regional lords, and those who attempting to escape the Islamicization policies of the Ottomans. A group of mercenaries had been invited to quell a local revolt around the city of Crotona in 1448 by Alphonse I of Aragon, to which Scanderbeg obliged, and the troops he sent were able to successfully end the revolt, and were granted a permit to stay there.⁵² These mercenaries were followed by many other groups of Albanians in following centuries.

Twelve years after the death of Scanderbeg in 1468, Venice sent ships to evacuate Albanians and other refugees toward Greece.⁵³ Scanderbeg's son was too young to continue his father's fight, and he crossed the Adriatic to settle in the Kingdom of Naples, where he was followed by many other Albanian Catholics attempting to escape Ottoman punishment, who settled in various Southern Italian and Sicilian towns.⁵⁴ Another important episode in the exodus toward Italy was the movement of Albanians from Greece to Southern Italy, many of them probably escaping the Ottomans for the second time. In the years 1532-33 a large number of Albanians escaped from the region of Morea in Greece, settling in Southern Italy, where the number of Italian villages populated with Albanian migrants reached one hundred, about half of them situated in the Calabrian

⁵² George Nicholas Nasse, *The Italo-Albanian Villages of Southern Italy* (Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center, 1964), 24.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁴ King and Mai, *Out of Albania: From Crisis Migration to Social Inclusion in Italy*, 29.

Mountains.⁵⁵ These groups of migrants, like many other Albanians around the world, would work endlessly to keep alive their ethnic heritage, and to further contribute toward the body of political, religious, and cultural works that would develop the consciousness of what would later become the Albanian nation.

Ottoman policies toward Albanians in the sphere of education were concentrated toward suppression of Albanian instructions in schools. The new progressive constitution introduced by Young Turks in 1908 was used by Albanians to advance their rights in Albanian education, resulting in the opening of 34 private schools, 15 literary societies, and 3 musical societies in a short amount of time.⁵⁶ However, the Young Turks' policies were directed at "Turcification" of their Albanian subjects, which produced harsh a response against the aspirations of Albanians for education in their own tongue, resulting in insurrections by Albanians in 1909, 1910, 1911, and finally in 1912 when Albania declared its own independence.⁵⁷

Before the arrival of the twentieth century, when it finally become possible for Albanians to educate themselves in their own language, the migrants that had left Albania centuries before were carrying the torch of Albanian letters, and making great contributions to the Albanian language and culture. Italo-

⁵⁵ Robert Elsie, "The Hybrid Soil of the Balkans: A Topography of Albanian Literature," in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe: Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 2006), 283–301.

⁵⁶ Christo A. Dako, "The Albanians," *Yll'i Mengjezit (Morning Star)* 1, no. 3 (1917): 70.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Albanian communities were among the first to produce valuable literary works for the Albanians. Nicolo Brancato, and Nicola Figlia of Sicily were among the first poets, but Calabria produced the more famous Giulio Variboba, whose work *Ghiella e Shën Mariis Virghiër* (The Life of the Virgin Mary; 1762) is the first known book to be put in print by Italo-Albanians in the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ Girolamo De Rada (Jeronim De Rada) is not only the most known poet of Arbëreshi population, but he was one of the most prominent leaders of the nineteenth-century Albanian nationalist movement, wrote many literary works, and founded *L'Albanese d'Italia*, the first periodical in the Albanian language in the world.⁵⁹ Just as Albanians' identity was to be hybridized in Italy, many changes were happening in their homeland as well.

After being subdued, the Albanians that were left to deal with the Ottomans responded to occupation in various ways. One of the biggest changes brought to Albania was the introduction of the Islamic religion. In the beginning, apart from allegiance to the Empire, Ottomans did not pressure people to convert to Islam.⁶⁰ Later, the pressure to convert grew stronger through various changes introduced into Ottoman administrative practices. Many Albanians started to convert due to heavy taxation imposed upon Christian subjects.⁶¹ Albanians used

⁵⁸ Elsie, "The Hybrid Soil of the Balkans: A Topography of Albanian Literature," 284.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 285.

⁶⁰ Logoreci, *The Albanians*, 25.

⁶¹ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic World Past and Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 30.

conversion as a strategy to lessen the financial burden on their lives, but at the same time, in the private sphere of their home they attempted, to a great degree successfully, to retain many elements of their pre-Ottoman identities.

A very specific way to negotiate through rapid social change under the rule of the Ottomans was the wide practice of Crypto-Christianity by Albanians. It seems that based on this practice, the initial conversion to Islam, at least until the end of the sixteenth-century, was mainly symbolic. Initially, the only thing required was a name change, meaning that the conversion was seen more as an acceptance of Ottoman occupation, than a major push for a radical break with religious beliefs.⁶² As the time passed by, and Ottomans had to engage in many battles with other empires, the pressure on Christians to convert was growing. The outbreak of the war with the Hapsburg Empire in 1593, and the defeat by the Poles in 1631-34, contributed to the pressure to convert, mainly due to fear of disloyalty toward the Ottomans.⁶³ Under the pressure to convert, many Albanians reverted to Crypto-Christianity as a survival skill. People who converted under pressure found peace and clear consciousness in privately practicing Christian rites, and women who occupied the home sphere were essential in preserving the old religious practices.⁶⁴ Ultimately, the Ottomans used the carrot and the stick

⁶² Anton Minkov, *Conversion to Islam in the Balkans: Kisve Bahası Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670-1730* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 105.

⁶³ Dritan Egro, "Islam in the Albanian Lands (XVth-XVIIth Century)," in *Religion und Kultur im Albanischsprachigen Südosteuropa*, ed. Oliver Jens Schmitt (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2010), 48.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

approach to convert Albanians, where they incorporated them in the governing structures of the Empire, bestowing them with land for their loyal service to the Porte.

The religion of Islam spread mostly in the territories between the Christian Orthodox South and the Roman Catholic North, eventually encompassing the majority of Albanians.⁶⁵ About twenty percent of Albanians, mainly in Southern Albania, to this day profess Orthodox beliefs, due to the fact that they were integrated into the Ottoman political structures, recognized as an official religion, and were also allowed to own their own religious schools, hospitals, and monasteries.⁶⁶ Another important element in Albanian religious life has been the *Bektashi* religious order, whose teachings are based on both Christian and Islamic holy books, offering an alternative to Islam with much more lenient prayer rules, and much more liberal views on family and gender equality.⁶⁷ Despite being controlled by the Greek Orthodox Church, Albanians in the South were able to retain their attachment to Albanian ethnic identity, and played a major role in the nineteenth-century Albanian nationalist movement throughout the Albanian diaspora and especially in the United States. The *bektashi* religious order would also produce some of the major contributors to the Albanian nationalist cause.

⁶⁵ Robert Elsie, *A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology, and Folk Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 196.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

The nineteenth century saw the Ottoman Empire weaken militarily, and economically, forcing the Albanian population to migrate in larger numbers. The long occupation by the Ottomans, geography, and the relative ease of movement within the Ottoman boundaries, directed them to migrate mainly within Ottoman territories. In the middle of the nineteenth century about 60,000 Albanian tradesmen were practicing their trades in Turkey proper.⁶⁸ With Bulgarian autonomy becoming a reality in 1878, many Albanian farmers migrated there, and by the time Ottoman Empire crumbled, there were about 30,000 Albanians in Egypt and about 10,000 Albanians in Romania working as farmers, traders, and merchants.⁶⁹ With the establishment of considerable migrant colonies in places like Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, and Turkey, the beginning of the twentieth century opened the doors to transatlantic migrations. The twentieth century was a turbulent century for Albanians who attempted to earn a place as an independent nation among other European states. The road would be much longer for them because of the longer hold on their territories by the Ottomans, and due to a constant challenge to their territory by their Balkan neighbors. Albanian history continued its trajectory hand-in-hand with the migration of its people to distant lands until the end of the WWII, when Albania became a firmly communist

⁶⁸ Miaser Dibra, *Emigracioni Në Këngët Popullore Shqiptare (Emigration in Albanian Folcloric Songs)* (Tirana: Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike, Instituti i Antropologjisë Kulturore, 2010), 156.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

country that mostly put an end to the long-established and fluid movement of its people.

Chapter 2. Migration and Albanian National Awakening

By the time Albania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire, many other Balkan countries had already secured their independence from the Ottomans. Greece achieved its independence in 1830, followed by Serbia and Montenegro in 1878, with Bulgarians securing full independence by 1908, after thirty years of autonomy within the empire. None of these newly independent countries were satisfied with the territories under their control, and each of them had aspirations for further lands still under Ottoman rule in Macedonia, Albania, and Thrace.⁷⁰ An Albanian nationalist movement existed in the nineteenth century as well; however, the Albanian nationalists had to take into consideration their neighbors' territorial aspirations toward them, and co-opted the Ottoman Empire into their design to keep Albanian-speaking territories under ethnic Albanian control, rather than attempt to secure outright independence, until it became clear that the Empire was disappearing, and no longer could provide the desired protection.

The Albanian movement of this era is best described as “proto-nationalism”—a historical concept that came into use in the 1960s to describe the struggle between colonial administrations and local elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Fruma Zachs also uses to the term “proto-

⁷⁰ Eugene Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 18.

nationalism” when describing the process of self-definition that led to a shared cultural identity among Christian-Arab intellectuals under the Ottoman Empire, even though this phase of identity creation did not include struggle against Ottoman rule.⁷¹ In the development of Albanian nationalism, a similar approach was adopted by leading intellectuals in order to secure their territories from advances by neighbors and also to secure cultural rights within the Ottoman Empire. Albanian-speaking intellectual elites wanted to coalesce around the idea of “Albanianism” propagated by Vasko Pasha, and this idea would eventually come to fruition through the common element of the vernacular language. The idea of “Albanianism” helped create a more unified group identity, and strengthened group bonds through language, while at the same time bypassing many particularities based on geography, class, and religion. Pashko Vasa’s ideas about unifying people through language were crucial in the development of Albanian proto-nationalism. They would, through the passage of time, ultimately lead to the Albanian nationalist movement that succeeded in breaking away from the Ottoman Empire. Proto-nationalism can be considered as a stage toward building a national consciousness, until the Ottoman Empire was declared the main adversary. Ultimately the national consciousness would be shaped by

⁷¹ Fruma Zachs, *The Making of Syrian Identity in Nineteenth Century Beirut* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), 2.

nationalists based on the historical experiences of resistance to Ottomans, beginning with the resistance of Scanderbeg in 1443.⁷²

At first, the Albanian nationalist movement operated within the confines of the Ottoman Empire as an organized effort to secure cultural rights as Albanians. The desired autonomy would satisfy the rising national consciousness, and would provide territorial security from neighbors with designs on lands populated by Albanian speakers. However, the heterogeneity of the Albanian speakers, and the way that the Ottoman Empire administered its territories, made it hard for Albanians to organize a coherent national movement. Albanians had to take a different trajectory toward independence than their Balkan neighbors.

Albanian nationalism has until recently only been studied in limited fashion, portrayed as an independent movement for liberation from the long rule of the Ottoman Empire, disregarding the centuries of coexistence within the empire.⁷³ More recent scholarship has begun to take a more balanced approach, taking into account the complexity of the issue, and not dismissing the Ottoman view.⁷⁴ I will be taking the second approach, acknowledging that Albanians faced a different set of circumstances than their Balkan neighbors, due to the different historical trajectory that had created divergent conditions within the empire.

⁷² K.E. Fleming, *The Muslim Bonaparte: Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali Pasha's Greece* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 61.

⁷³ See, for example Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1872-1912*.

⁷⁴ Blumi, *Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Social and Political History of Albania and Yemen, 1878-1918*; *ibid.*; Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913*.

Among the many differences, perhaps the most crucial was the fact that Albanians were divided along religious lines, and included Muslims, Orthodox Christians, and Catholics. Another unfavorable circumstance was the fact that Albanians were never allowed to create their own schools in their native language, and until the twentieth century they lacked a unified writing system, making it almost impossible to easily spread nationalist propaganda. The Albanian nationalist movement had to tackle both issues in order to create a unified front.

Albanian nationalists chose to resolve the issue by attempting to create a unified alphabet that would be used by all Albanians, and at the same time avoid religious differences by rallying around the Albanian language, thus highlighting cultural similarities. The attempts to create a common alphabet, and rally around the idea of *Shqipetaria* (Albanianism),⁷⁵ were the most important strategies toward creating a unified nationalist front among Albanians. Nineteenth-century Albanian nationalism was one of the most developed nationalist movements among majority Muslim subjects of the Empire, and focused on re-awakening the “nation,” appropriately referred to as *Rilindja* (Rebirth). The re-awakening of the nation would be accomplished through a new approach in history and literature, centering on the goal of resurrecting the glorious Albanian past. The *Rilindja*

⁷⁵ The term “Albanianism” was coined by Pashko Vasa, in his famous poem “O Moj Shqypni” (Oh Albania, Poor Albania), written between 1878 and 1880, where he declares that the religion of Albanians is Albanianism, and the word would serve as a rallying cry for unity for the Albanian nationalist movement. The poem in Albanian, and its English translation, can be found in Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History*, 84–88.

movement would become successful in helping create a national identity free of religious affiliation, in contrast to the Kurdish nationalism that depended heavily on its Islamic heritage, for example.⁷⁶ If the religious differences could be bridged, creation of a unified writing system would make the spread the nationalist ideas much more efficient, and promoting unity based on language would suppress the divisions based on religion, highlighting the single constant among Albanian-speakers: their Albanian language.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the first documented writing in Albanian dates from mid-fifteenth century, and was of a religious nature. However, until the end of the nineteenth century, there is real scarcity of Albanian vernacular writings. This is not to say that the writings were non-existent, but the writing that is in existence from this period comes to us in a variety of forms. Territories populated by Albanian-speakers were in constant turmoil before the arrival of the Ottomans, and the five centuries of Ottoman control did not establish a more homogeneous political or cultural climate among Albanians. The main characteristic of Ottoman rule was the administration of its territories based on the religious makeup of the populace, and over time, while the Albanian language was one constant defining cultural characteristic, religion divided Albanians among the three major monotheistic beliefs of Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, and Islam. Due to these divisions Albanians used various languages

⁷⁶ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 142.

to express their thoughts, and when they wrote in Albanian, they had to use the Greek Cyrillic alphabet, the Latin, or the Arabic alphabet.

Toward the second half of the of the nineteenth century it was becoming clearer that the Ottoman Empire was becoming weaker by the day due to the nationalist movements springing up within it. With growing national consciousness among Albanian-speaking subjects, their demand for allowing the use of an Albanian alphabet in education caused extreme concern among the Ottoman rulers. Despite the fact that the call for allowing the use of the Albanian alphabet came from the circles that were well incorporated into the Ottoman administration and loyal to the Empire, the demand was not well received by the authorities. The Porte viewed the quest for a national alphabet as a dangerous signal for ethno-nationalist aspirations. But the reality was more complicated.

The biggest proponent for Albanian ethno-nationalism was Abdul Frashëri, who came from a family that was active in the service of the Empire; his brother Sami Frashëri was a prolific writer on Ottoman language and culture, authoring one of the best Turkish Ottoman dictionaries ever produced.⁷⁷ Albanian-speaking subjects like Frashëri were engaging in a complex dialogue with the Center, simultaneously professing loyalty to the Empire, and engaging in securing broad cultural rights for Albanian-speaking subjects. Sami Frashëri viewed this complexity in terms of having two homelands: the “principal

⁷⁷ Emine Ö. Evered, *Empire and Education Under the Ottomans: Politics, Reform, and Resistance From the Tanzimat to the Young Turks* (London, New York: Tauris, 2012), 27.

homeland” being the Ottoman Empire, and his “secondary homeland” being Albania. While professing his love for his “principal” homeland, he also declared that his love for his smaller Albanian homeland “was twice as great.”⁷⁸ Efforts to convince the Ottoman authorities of the compatibility of these sentiments fell on deaf ears, despite the long-displayed loyalties by the Frashëri family, and their long service for the empire. Being the only ethnic group in the Balkans that was Islamized in large numbers, Albanian-speakers were viewed by Ottoman authorities as an important part of the crumbling empire.

Other national movements in the Balkans had somewhat easier paths toward developing national consciousness, as they generally represented homogenous religious groups. Religion was not the only important element in the development of Serbian and Croatian nationalisms, but it did provide a defining factor in the developments of both. Roman Catholicism, with its byproduct of the Latin script for Croats, and Orthodoxy with its Cyrillic script for Serbs, created a clear dividing line within a group of people that otherwise shared the same language and similar backgrounds.⁷⁹ But religion was neither as divisive nor as internally cohesive among Albanian-speakers, for whom the only common denominator was the various dialects of the Albanian language. It was therefore natural for “the pioneers of Albanian nationalism to seek an Albanian cultural identity in language, since religion, and almost everything else in Albania, seemed

⁷⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁷⁹ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 70.

divisive rather than unifying.”⁸⁰ Albanian proto-nationalism based on perhaps the “nation’s” only unifying factor, the Albanian language, would strive throughout the nineteenth century to create a vision for a more unified nation. Against the resistance of Ottoman authorities to allow for the use of the Albanian language in schools, the struggle for spreading Albanian proto-nationalist, and later nationalist, ideas would move beyond Albanian-speaking territories into many colonies around the world.

The Ottoman administration enacted various reforms during the nineteenth century with the aim of preventing this outcome and creating a more centralized state, including educational reforms aimed at recruiting Albanian Muslims to serve as “loyal retainers of the state,” and at the same time preventing the development of “Albanian ethnonationalist separatism.”⁸¹ The legal, administrative, and fiscal reforms enacted between 1839 and 1876 are known as Tanzimat reforms, and had the aim of changing the tax code, reforming the military, and they also “promised equality for all the sultan’s subjects regardless of their religious community.”⁸² While the reforms offered many opportunities for education, these opportunities served the purpose of affirming Ottoman Turkish, and denied any opportunities for Albanian-language schools.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁸¹ Evered, *Empire and Education Under the Ottomans: Politics, Reform, and Resistance From the Tanzimat to the Young Turks*, 38.

⁸² Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 44.

The aim of the Education Act of 1869, which was part of the Tanzimat reforms, was to foster loyalty toward the sultan and the Ottoman state, and it allowed for the primary education to be conducted in the language practiced by the local communities, except in the case of Albanian-speaking communities. Albanian-speakers were the only community that was not allowed to practice their own language in education. Instead, Albanian-speaking students had the option of studying in Ottoman Turkish if they were Muslims, or in Greek if they were members of the Orthodox Christian community.⁸³ The main reason for this peculiar situation was that the Ottoman authorities viewed Albanians as a buffer that would serve to protect their holdings from encroachment by neighboring entities. Being the only majority Muslim population in the Balkans, Albanian-speaking communities would protect the last Ottoman holdings in the Balkans. Albanians, on the other hand, had to play their cards right in order to gain autonomy from the empire, and at the same time keep Albanian-speaking territories from being overtaken by their Balkan neighbors.

The Tanzimat reforms established to modernize the Ottoman administration did not receive a warm welcome among Albanian-speaking subjects. The objective of the reforms was to put into place a modern centralized administrative system based on those established in Western Europe, thus replacing the outdated feudal system in place for many centuries. However, it

⁸³ Evered, *Empire and Education Under the Ottomans: Politics, Reform, and Resistance From the Tanzimat to the Young Turks*, 49–50.

proved almost impossible to enact such reforms at a time when many nations were trying to break free from Ottoman rule rather than embrace a more centralized Ottoman state.⁸⁴ In theory the Tanzimat reforms represented progress, and a departure from feudal relations, but Albanian-speaking populations viewed the reforms as a further encroachment on their autonomy, because until their implementations it was the local Albanian-speaking lords who presided over the local administrative affairs. Bringing in new Ottoman administrators who had no knowledge of the local population, and introducing new forms of taxation, was seen as a hostile act toward a population that, up to that time, had been loyal to the imperial center.⁸⁵ Ottoman attempts to modernize the political structures of the empire, in most cases, provoked a negative reaction among Albanian-speaking subjects, and energized a more definitive aspiration for creating an independent state.

The years after the enactment of Tanzimat reforms in 1839 were characterized by many uprisings in Albanian inhabited lands, with a large number of peasants participating in revolts characterized by fierce resistance toward the reforms.⁸⁶ These popular uprisings against the Ottoman authorities played a central role in the development of Albanian national consciousness; however, an

⁸⁴ Zana K. Lito, *Sqipëria Dhe Tanzimati (Albania and the Tanzimat Reforms)* (Tirana: Botimet Toena, 2002), 20–21.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Dhimitër Shuteriqi, *Historia E Letërsisë Shqipe (History of Albanian Literature)* (Prishtinë: Enti I Teksteve dhe i Mjeteve Mësimore I Krahines Socialiste Autonome të Kosoves, 1971), 274.

even more important movement developed beyond the armed uprisings of feudal lords and peasants, and beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire itself.⁸⁷ The movement for creating an Albanian State on the political and ideological level took place mostly abroad among the many Albanian colonies scattered around the world. The second half of the nineteenth century could be called the golden age of an Albanian National Movement, encompassing a large number of people who contributed toward the development of an Albanian national consciousness. Building this national consciousness was part of Albanian nationalists' mission to create what Benedict Anderson called an *imagined community*, in which members of the "nation" identify with one another despite the fact that it is impossible for any given member to know "most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them."⁸⁸ This process also took place abroad, where Albanian-speakers could find commonalities among themselves, in comparison with other languages and cultures.

The impossibility of freely exercising their perceived right to express themselves in the Albanian language forced many personalities to express their feelings in many varied works and further the Albanian cause in the limited mediums available at the time. One very important medium that would make it

⁸⁷ Good treatment of the crucial uprisings from 1833 to 1839 is given in Petrika Thëngjilli, *Kryengritjet Popullore Kundërosmane Në Shqipëri, 1833-1839 (Popular Anti-Ottoman Uprisings in Albania, 1833-1839)* (Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave e Republikës Popullore Socialiste të Shqipërisë, Instituti I Historisë, 1981).

⁸⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

possible to further the national cause was the printed press, which was developed mainly by the Albanian migrant colonies that took roots in many parts of the world. The restriction on the use of the Albanian language by the Ottoman authorities did stifle efforts to create works in vernacular language within the Balkans, however it was impossible to control the creativity of the ever-expanding web of nationalists that made possible the creation of many nationalist works. This creative web of networks sometimes operated within the confines of the empire, and sometimes beyond the reach of the authorities.

The peculiar situation faced by Albanian-speaking communities forced them to transport the fight for their cultural rights beyond their local communities. Finding it impossible to organize a nationalist movement within the Ottoman territories populated by Albanian-speakers, the movement for cultural autonomy spread in European centers of Albanian migration, Egypt, Istanbul, and finally the United States. Emigrants established colonies in these countries from which they could more freely promote their desired cultural rights.

The peculiar situation facing the Albanian population in the Balkans made it hard for them to detach from the Ottoman Empire and at the same secure their land from invasions from their neighbors. Despite being integrated into the Empire and serving it for many centuries, Albanian speakers were able to preserve their cultural identity and spoken language, but faced great difficulties uniting the heterogeneous population into one cohesive unit. One of the largest

handicaps was the lack of a unitary writing system that would make it possible to easily disseminate information and propaganda to the population. Nevertheless, the written Albanian word was able to flourish under the guidance of dedicated people scattered around the world in many Albanian migrant colonies. The development of the press in Albanian played a great role in accelerating the formation of a national consciousness that would ultimately lead to an Albanian independent state at the beginning of the twentieth century.

From 1848, when the first Albanian newspaper begun publication in Italy, to the declaration of Albanian independence in 1912, hundreds of publications saw the light of the day, and served as a bridge between the scattered communities of Albanians around the globe. In this six-decade span newspapers printed in Albanian appeared in Italy, Greece, Egypt, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, France, England, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Serbia, and the United States. The newspapers being published abroad also spurred the development of the press within Albanian inhibited lands, thus connecting the diaspora to its homeland. In the absence of an Albanian alphabet proper, the newspapers were published in Albanian and other languages variously employing the Latin, Cyrillic, Greek, and Arab alphabets. Albanian newspapers were very unique in “being written from left to right, and from right to left.”⁸⁹ The nineteen-century

⁸⁹ Blendi Fevziu, *Histori E Shtypit Shqiptar 1848-1996 (History of the Albanian Press 1848-1996)* (Tirana: Shtepia Botuese “Marin Barleti,” 1996), 7.

Albanian press represented a rich tapestry of various alphabets and ideas that ultimately translated into a more unified political movement.

It should be no surprise that the first Albanian newspaper was printed in Italy, because Albanian settlements in Italy are some of the oldest, dating back centuries. In 1448 Alphonse I of Aragon had asked the storied Albanian defender Scanderbeg for troops to help him quell a revolt in the city of Crotona, and after helping end the revolt, Albanian-speaking fighters asked for permission to stay because of the dangers they faced at home from the invading Ottoman armies. They were allowed to settle in a dozen villages in province of Catanzaro. The King of Naples sanctioned the land acquisition for Albanian-speaking settlers in hopes that their presence would discourage further revolts. In a similar episode that took place in 1459, Albanian mercenaries were granted other tracts of land for their services, and ended up populating another fifteen villages in the vicinity of the city of Taranto.⁹⁰ Another large wave of migrants arrived in Italy after the death of Scanderbeg, which also spelled the end of armed resistance to the Ottoman armies by Albanians, and completion of the Ottoman takeover of the Balkan Peninsula. These refugees were one of the last large groups arriving to Italy. The final large group of migrants were people who had fled Albania for

⁹⁰ Nasse, *The Italo-Albanian Villages of Southern Italy*, 25.

Greece, and then decided in 1534 to depart for Italy, founding and settling three villages in the Pollino Range.⁹¹

The story of Albanian-speakers in Italy is a testament to resiliency of culture through ages, and is an excellent example of resistance to assimilation. For over five hundred years they were able to carve out a life in Italy almost independent of surrounding influences. One of the main reasons for the survival of the language was the patriarchal makeup of the family structure, in which women stayed mostly at home and transmitted the Albanian language to future generations. Geographical and economic factors also played important roles in the survival of culture, due to the isolation of the villages in Sicily and the severe lack of Italian educational facilities. The people's strong desire to retain their native language also played an important role. If Italian was spoken in school and interaction with Italians, the preferred language in churches, clubs, and home was Albanian, even as late as the 1950s.⁹² Although Italo-Albanians started producing cultural works early on, by the mid-nineteenth century the Sicilian villages populated by Albanians had become better connected to nearby cities that provided better educational opportunities for Albanian-speakers, and many took advantage of these opportunities. Their educational attainments would provide benefits to their immediate communities, but many of the prominent intellectuals used their abilities to produce intellectual and cultural works that would also

⁹¹ Ibid., 26.

⁹² Ibid., 43.

benefit the wider Albanian-speaking population living beyond the borders of Italy.

Albanian-speaking migrants who populated villages in southern Italy were able to hold to their culture and language for centuries, and also develop many important literary works. Italo-Albanians, or Arbëresh, as they are known in Albanian, were able to create a very strong branch of Albanian literature outside the Balkans.⁹³ Sicilian archpriest Lekë Matrënga was the first to produce a work of Arbëreshë literature in Albanian, titled *E Mbsume Krështerë* (Christian Doctrine), at the end of the sixteenth century. This was a religious translation produced with the aim of diffusing Christian doctrine in the native tongue to the Italo-Albanians of Sicily. It was not until the eighteenth century that we see the first Arbëresh poet appearing in Calabria. Julio Variboba, known as Jul Variboba in Albanian, is considered by many to be the first real poet in all of the Albanian literature.⁹⁴ The writing of the Arbëresh holds a prominent place in the Albanian literature, and apart from many works in Albanian that deal with this branch of Albanian literature, Robert Elsie provides a great English-language survey of this rich literary tradition in his *Albanian Literature: A Short History* (2005).

The best known representative of Arbëresh literature, and the most popular among Albanians, is without a doubt Jeronim De Rada, known Girolamo De Rada in Italian. He was born to a parish priest father in the mountains of

⁹³ Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History*, 44.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

Cosenza, and following his father's wishes studied law at the University of Naples, but his foremost interest, and passion, always remained the collection of Albanian folklore and the study of literature. His love for Albanian culture extended to his passion for his Albanian roots, and in addition to being the most famous Italo-Albanian intellectual and writer, he is considered by Albanians to be the most prominent representative of the nineteenth-century Albanian nationalist movement in Italy. In 1848 he founded the *L'Albanese d'Italia*, a bilingual Albanian-Italian newspaper, recognized as the first newspaper in the world to be published in Albanian.⁹⁵

L'Albanese d'Italia was received very well by the Arbëresh population of Southern Italy. They enthusiastically started to demonstrate an interest in the newspaper that brought them news from Albania, and that honored their Albanian legacy and language, according to many letters sent to the newspaper.⁹⁶ The newspaper would make De Rada a very prominent member of the *Rilindja* movement, and a very respected scion among other members of the Albanian Nationalist Movement, inside and outside Albania. He was in constant touch with other members of the movement including poet and writer Zef Jubani, folklorist Thimi Mitko, Sami Frashëri, and many others with whom he exchanged

⁹⁵ Ibid., 48–49.

⁹⁶ Ahmet Kondo, *Çështja Kombëtare Në Faqe Të Shtypit Të Rilindjes (The National Question as Represented in the Rilindja Press)* (Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese “8 Nëntori,” 1982), 18.

information about the conditions in Albanian lands, various Albanian colonies that were springing up abroad, and issues tied to the movement.⁹⁷

It was appropriate that the first Albanian newspaper was conceived in Italy, where the oldest groups of Albanian-speaking migrants had settled, but the tradition of printing newspapers abroad would not end there. Other newspapers appeared in Egypt, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Belgium, Serbia, England, Croatia, and the United States. They would continue to carry on the message of Albanian nationalism, growing in intensity toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Some of these places also became vibrant sites of Albanian-speaking settlement, and nation-building activities.

One very significant such colony was founded in Romania, initiated by a prominent Albanian by the name of Naum Veqilhargji, who was followed by many of his compatriots from the Southern Albanian district of Korçë. Initially the colony had more of an economic character with migrants becoming tradesmen, craftsmen, or workers, where eventually some of them acquired great amount of wealth. Almost all of them were Orthodox Christians, and Romania being mostly Orthodox, but not pro-Greek, afforded them the possibility to practice their religion without the pressures of the Greek Church to Hellenize them. With economic betterment and the lack of pressures by the Greek Church, the Albanian-speaking community that mostly settled in Bucharest, begun to

⁹⁷ Ibid., 20.

direct their energies toward their Albanian language and their ethnic cultural heritage. The establishment of the colony in Romania, afforded a new place, and a possibility to the *Rilindja* movement to operate without limitations imposed to them in Istanbul, sending in 1880 the activist Jani Vreto to lay the foundation for an activist branch. One year after his first visit, an Albanian activist society was formed in the capital of Bucharest.⁹⁸

Albanian society Dituria (knowledge) was one of the most prominent societies abroad. In the beginning of 1885 it was founded as a society by the name of Drita (Light), under the direction of Anastas Avram Lakshe, who was one of the wealthiest members of the colony. After two year in existence the society was renamed Dituria, and became very active under the direction of Pandeli Evangjeli, who would serve as Albania's prime minister in the period between the two world wars. The stated purpose of the society was to help the national movement by printing books in Albanian, and the financing of the society was done through member dues and voluntary donations. The society was the pioneer in publishing works by Rilindja luminaries such as Naim Frashëri, Sami Frashëri, and Jani Vreto, and due to Ottoman restrictions on Albanian writings, they also smuggled the books into Albanian inhabited lands.⁹⁹

The Albanian colony in Bucharest became more successful and prominent, because of urban amenities being more similar to the ones in Albania versus other

⁹⁸ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1872-1912*, 145–46.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 146–47.

more advanced urban centers in Europe, which offered somewhat more familiar surroundings, and it was also closer to Albania. In 1887 the colony began to publish the newspaper *Drita* to limited success, and in 1895 started to publish the more successful *Shqipëria* (Albania) newspaper, which was directed by Aleko Cikozi, who also received aid in publishing from a certain Rumanian professor Pedresku.¹⁰⁰ The newspaper gained a more prominent role in history by publishing the memorandum of Bucharest in 1897.

Preceding the memorandum the society published an article titled “Dëshir’e Shqipëtarëvet” (Albanian Wishes) where they stated that they had no wish to see the destruction of the Turks, but they wanted to be recognized as a nationality with all the rights that other ethnic groups enjoyed for a long time. They requested equal treatment with Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks, who had always enjoyed their rights to express themselves in their vernacular in school and in other public mediums. They questioned Turkish policy to deny these rights to Albanians, who have been loyal subjects for the longest of times. The article also called upon Albanians to display unity, and avoid any division among themselves. Finally, it reminded Europe that they should support Albanians in their quest for their rights, because Albanians were an ancient part of Europe, and Europeans were obliged to help one of their own.¹⁰¹ Demanding their rights as Albanians, based on the ancient historical glory would become a recurring theme throughout

¹⁰⁰ Fevziu, *Histori E Shtypit Shqiptar 1848-1996 (History of the Albanian Press 1848-1996)*.

¹⁰¹ Visarion A. Dodani, “Dëshir’e Shqipëtarëvet,” *Shqipëria*, October 18, 1897.

the movement. The aim was to convince the European powers that Albania was not part of the Orient, but historically a full-fledged member of the Western Civilization.

The Bucharest society would continue to be diplomatic, claiming no enmity toward the Ottomans, and when the memorandum was published it was directed toward the Porte, demanding more rights for Albanians, but no demands for independence were present at this stage. Through the memorandum the newspaper demanded that Albanians were to be given administrative autonomy over Albanian populated lands. Despite the lack of demand for independence, the demands contained very strong elements of autonomy, and the purpose was to pave the way toward the main goal of independence through very specific demands as listed in the memorandum:

1. Consolidation of four Albanian populated *villayets* (administrative units) of Shkodra, Kosova, Monastir, and Janina into one, with an Albanian as its leader, and Monastir as its capital city.
2. The cities of Shkodra, Shkup, and Janina to be administered by an Albanian.
3. The Albanian language to be recognized as the official language of these *villayets*, and also to be used freely in school and church.

The demands for a consolidated territory under Albanian rule were accompanied by requests to free the political prisoners, and not pursue disarmament among

Albanians who need the armaments to defend themselves and the sultan. It ends in a conciliatory tone explaining that Albanians would use the arms to defend the Empire, and not against the Empire as its enemies suggested.¹⁰² The article clearly represent the desire for an independent and autonomous life, but is also clinging to the hope of securing some protection from the weakening empire, that realistically represented the fragile situation that Albanians faced in the presence of their stronger neighbors with continuing designs to encroach upon their territory.

After printing the memorandum, the society reiterated the reasons behind its belief that Albanians were fully capable of running their own affairs. It dismissed religious divisions, claiming that despite religious heterogeneity, the common thread of ethnic culture and language had persisted through many centuries, and any religious fanaticism among Albanians was the invention of enemies and traitors who would damage the national cause for their own interests. To those that doubted the Albanians' ability to exist independently, the author of one 1898 article pointed to the continued Albanian existence over many centuries, and claimed Macedonian and Illyrian tribes as examples of continued existence. The article continued by pointing out that it was the Albanian tribes, led by Scanderbeg, who in 1444 heroically resisted the Ottomans. It was the Albanians, and not the Greeks or Bulgarians, who prevented the Ottomans from conquering

¹⁰² Editorial Board, "Ndë Emër Të Llauzit Shqipëtar," *Shqipëria*, November 29, 1897.

Europe. As for the complaints of some Albanian Christians that their Muslim compatriots were fanatics and should not be trusted with the national cause, the author categorically dismissed such claims, pointing to the continuous work of Muslim patriots such as Abdyl Frashëri. “How can they be fanatics if they invite Christians to be godfathers to their children, claim them as brothers and sisters, and continuously visit them,... with thousands of gifts for them.”¹⁰³ Despite the claim that religious fanaticism was not part of the Albanian fabric, the fear that the religious proclivities of some would damage the Albanian nationalist movement was ever present in the writings of the time. The peculiar nature of the Albanian-inhabited lands, with all their geographical and cultural heterogeneity, and the peculiar environment created by many centuries of Ottoman rule, added another layer of complexity that was constantly in the minds of many intellectuals attempting to create a unified front in the face of subsequent challenges.

The press outside Albania continued to be in the forefront of the Albanian National movement, and the beginning of the twentieth century saw a more varied political message. Some newspapers were still hesitant to call for a final break from the Ottoman Empire, while the others no longer saw a purpose of dancing around the final status of Albania. The newspaper *Albanija*, published in Belgrade, did not see any chance of improved Ottoman attitudes toward Albanians. The first grievance was the inability of Albanian Muslims to educate

¹⁰³ Jani N. Mihail Lehova, “Bëhet Shqipëria Më Vehte?,” *Shqipëria*, August 15, 1898.

their children in Albanian, the only option being to study in Turkish schools. Predicting that the last days of the Empire were near, one author forcefully argued that the only solution was an independent nation, because the Albanians saw absolutely no benefits from being part of the Empire. “Was it not the Turk who brought only grief, and darkness to the Albanians?” asked the author.¹⁰⁴ The other Albanian colonies continued the call for separation as well, including the one in Bulgaria.

Shahin Kolonja was one of the most important members of the Albanian National movement to leave a mark on the Albanian migrant colony in Sofia, Bulgaria. He was a member of the prominent Ypi Family, and was sent for his secondary studies to Constantinople, where he also attended the Imperial College of Administration. Contacts with other Albanian intellectuals and writers deepened his desire to help the Albanian cause, and after his efforts to establish an Albanian-language newspapers failed, he dedicated himself to teaching for some years. He never gave up on his desire to establish an Albanian newspaper, and in November of 1901 he started publishing the newspaper *Drita* (Light). The newspaper was published until 1908, the year of the Young Turk Revolution, when Kolonja was elected as a member of the Young Turk Parliament. There he attempted to introduce a program for Albanian autonomy, but then became disillusioned with the Young Turks, spending the years from 1910 to 1912

¹⁰⁴ E. Berati, “Turqia Edhe Shqypnija,” *Albanija*, October 15, 1902.

waging a political battle against them.¹⁰⁵ Kolonja was a privileged member of the establishment who started lobbying for more rights for his fellow Albanians, and his ability to operate outside Ottoman-controlled territories enabled him to actively participate in the Rilindja movement.

The Sofia colony also recognized that the end was coming for the Ottomans, but scolded Albanians for being in a “deep sleep” and unprepared to take care of their own affairs when “the Turks would finally be forced out of Europe.”¹⁰⁶ Albanian Muslims were criticized for continuing to hope that the Turks would remain forever and continuing to support them in hopes of continuing to receive bribes in the form of titles for suppressing their own brethren. Strong critiques were also directed toward Albanian officials who imprisoned teachers for their efforts to clandestinely teach in Albanian. Nationalists also highlighted that religious affiliations had constantly changed in Albanian-populated lands, but the language forever remained the same, and religious fanatics could do great damage to the national cause. While the strongest criticisms were reserved for Muslim Albanians, Christians were also scolded for their part in contributing toward divisions. After the Turks were defeated,

¹⁰⁵ Robert Elsie, *A Bibliographical Dictionary of Albanian History* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 248.

¹⁰⁶ Editorial Board, “Gjum’I Rënd’I Shqipëtarëvetë,” *Drita*, November 20, 1902.

Albanians had to be prepared to defend themselves from other enemies, otherwise “If we continue to sleep, as we have done until now, death awaits us.”¹⁰⁷

One of the most prolific emigrant writers in Albanian was Faik Konica, who would play an oversized role in the Albanian-speaking migrants’ colony in the United States. Before making it to America, Konica left his mark on many European centers, including France, Belgium, and England, attempting through his writings to ameliorate the deplorable conditions of his Albanian compatriots. Konica was born on March 15, 1876 in Konitsa, which is now a part of Greece close to the current Albanian border. He was a member of prominent family, which enabled him to get an outstanding education. Konica completed his primary education—in Turkish—locally, continuing at the Jesuit College of Shkodra, where he was exposed to limited instruction in Albanian, as well as to Western ideas. He continued his studies at the French-language secondary institute in Constantinople, which he left in 1890 to further his studies in France. There he graduated from the University of Dijon in 1895 with a degree in Romance philology, and moved on to Paris where he studied medieval French, Latin, and Greek at the College de France. He finally finished his formal education by getting a Masters degree at Harvard University. His extensive education enabled him to fluently speak and write Albanian, Italian, French, German, English, and Turkish, and instilled in him a love for writing as well as a heightened cultural

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

awareness of others.¹⁰⁸ Konica used his knowledge to educate others about Albanian culture, and his fellow Albanians on the importance of culture and cultural heritage for the development of the nation.

Faik Konica began his career at his early age, and never stopped writing to advance the national cause. In 1896 he moved to Brussels, where he founded, at the age of twenty, the periodical *Albania*. Its main objective was to contribute toward the enrichment of the Albanian language, which it viewed as the mark of nationality, and also to ameliorate the living conditions of Albanians as a precondition to a strong, free, and unified nation. The periodical also provided rich samples of literary work and musical pieces, and concerned itself with history and science as well.¹⁰⁹ This periodical became “the most important organ of the Albanian press at the turn of the century.”¹¹⁰

Similar to other intellectuals in other colonies, Konica was aware of the divisions among Albanian-speakers and continuously tackled the subject. *Albania* adopted a direct style in criticizing this disorganization, and Konica declared, “today there are no Albanians in Albania, only Turks and *Kaure* (Christians), which means there are only Albanians who are ashamed of calling themselves that.”¹¹¹ He provided examples from the beginning of the nineteenth century when

¹⁰⁸ Robert Elsie, “Introduction to Faik Konitza: Selected Correspondence,” ed. Bejtullah Destani (London: Center for Albanian Studies, 2000), vii.

¹⁰⁹ *Albania*, October 30, 1899, sec. Front Page.

¹¹⁰ Elsie, “Introduction to Faik Konitza: Selected Correspondence,” viii.

¹¹¹ *Albania*, June 15, 1899, 9.

Albanians proudly declared themselves as such, but blamed the resurgence of the Greek nation for the demise of the Albanian nation. He claimed that when Greece became an independent nation, it was able to sow divisions among Albanians, leading the Muslim Albanians to identify with the Turks and Christian Albanians to take the Greek side.¹¹²

This narrative of disunity was a recurring theme among Albanian-speakers dispersed around the world, but Konica also viewed the Albanian language itself as being at fault for not possessing the complexity to express advanced and complicated ideas. Konica decided to reply to a letter from the political activist and the future signatory of Albania's declaration of independence, Dervish Bey Elbasani, in French, and blamed the Albanian language as the reason that he misunderstood Elbasani.¹¹³ In the same letter Konica also expressed his concern about other shortcomings plaguing the national movement. A learned man such as Konica realized the importance of the written language, but he was also conscious of the larger practical issues facing Albanian-speakers. He did not believe that a limited number of intellectuals could successfully create an Albanian nation without energizing the sleeping masses. "No, Albania does not exist: Albania is you and me and some other souls fond of justice and truth; but four million indifferent people and traitors could easily oppose these fifty or so men," declared

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Bejtullah Destani, ed., *Faik Konitza: Selected Correspondence* (London: Center for Albanian Studies, 2000), 6.

Konica in despair.¹¹⁴ While accepting the primordial existence of Albanians, Konica was also aware of the current conditions facing Albanian-speakers, and the difficulties present in organizing a coherent national movement capable of success in the larger context of Balkan and European affairs.

Konica saw the creation of a nationalist party as necessary, but proposed that such a party should conduct its activities in secret, to avoid displeasing the Turks. This clandestine organization would energize the Albanian people by reminding them that they lived in a very fertile land and yet starved for food, but would have plenty of food after repelling the foreigners at the right moment. Bread, not books, would transform the country.¹¹⁵ Konica was a man that held the highest regard for the written word and high culture, but he was also very pragmatic regarding the immediate needs of the impoverished Albanian masses. A sudden break from the Ottoman Empire would entice their Slavic and Greek neighbors to seize the Albanian-inhabited lands, so the secrecy of the national movement would give it the necessary time to gain the strength to prevent this. Konica clearly articulated the idea that Albanian nationalists should carefully orchestrate their independence movement by taking advantage of the protection of the Ottoman Empire to strengthen their position until the final break from the Ottomans.

¹¹⁴ Faik Konitza to Dervish Bey Elbasani, April 18, 1896, in *ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

The diversity of opinions on the Albanian National question at the end of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the twentieth also matched the geographical diversity of the places where these opinions originated. The colonies of Albanian-speakers in Romania, Bulgaria, Istanbul, and the United States established themselves as the leading centers of the Albanian National movement, but there were many other nationalist voices contributing from less obvious places. From 1902 to 1906, the Serbian nationalist newspaper *Albanija* in Belgrade, published articles in Albanian, Serbian, French, Romanian, and Italian. During its four-year existence, *Albanija* strongly supported Albanian independence. The newspaper suggested a better-organized movement in the form of a council that would be able to direct and synchronize Albanian demands. At the beginning the council would autonomously direct the affairs of the people, followed by the creation of autonomous institutions that would organize the economic and the social life of Albanians. Finally, the newspaper suggested the creation of an Albanian-elected administration, with the approval of the Sultan and other great powers.¹¹⁶ Calling for consent from the Porte and other great powers for autonomy was another diplomatic dance that took into consideration the low chances for gaining outright independence. However, it took just two months for the paper to realize that some sort of autonomy approved by the Porte would be impossible to attain.

¹¹⁶ *Albanija*, September 6, 1902.

The situation on the ground was becoming untenable due to Ottoman efforts to curtail any attempts to create Albanian-language schools in Albanian-speaking regions of the empire. It is ironic that the most loyal group up to this point, the Muslim Albanians, were also not allowed to study in any language other than Turkish. The newly arriving reports on discriminatory educational practices convinced the directors of the newspaper *Albanija* to dismiss their previous caution, and call for a complete break from the Empire. “What good came from the Turks,” asked *Albanija* in November 1902, less than two months after suggesting some form of supervised autonomy.¹¹⁷ Since the occupation of Albania by the Ottomans, the paper argued, Albanians had not seen any progress, and for that reason there was no longer any possible alternative for life under the Turks. Anyone still considering and propagating unity with the Turks was a paid Turkish agent, and should be considered a traitor to the Albanian cause.¹¹⁸ The turn of the century would see the calls for outright independence strengthening, but the Albanian-speaking intellectuals would not be united in their demands until the declaration of independence in 1912.

The peculiar situation in which the Albanians found themselves made it very difficult, if not impossible, to organize a coherent movement that could present itself as the unified front in facing the challenges to their final goal of independence. Although well-integrated into the structures of the Ottoman

¹¹⁷ *Albanija*, October 15, 1902.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Empire, they lacked any institution that would make it possible for them to better organize on the ethnic and local levels. The Orthodox Church in Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria served as a point of reference and support in the development of nationalism among those nations, but Albanians lacked any such institutions that they could rally around. Being integrated into the empire was a double-edged sword for Albanians, because with the crumbling of the Empire and the rise of nationalism among the neighboring nations, Albanians had limited time to organize a successful campaign for an independent life. Also, the continuous and desperate efforts of the Ottomans to cling to the Albanian population as agents of the empire left little room for Albanians to organize for themselves. The only structure that they had known for centuries was that established by the Empire.

Another setback was the fact that Albanians were converted to Islam in large numbers, and the remaining Christian population was not allowed to create independent the kinds of religious institutions that existed in neighboring nations. However, it did make it possible for them to avoid the scrutiny faced by their fellow Muslim Albanians. Christian Albanians were not considered loyal agents of the Empire, which gave them the opportunity to look outwards and espouse nationalist ideas more freely. It was a Christian Ottoman administrator who put forward the idea of “Albaniansm” as a rallying cry against religious proclivities. This idea somewhat softened the impact of the lack of a unifying institution, and made language the unifying force among Albanians. The fear of nationalist

influence caused the central authorities in Istanbul to tighten their grip on Albanian-inhabited territories and vehemently oppose writings in the Albanian language, forcing nationalist activities to be concentrated in Albanian colonies outside of the Empire.

Migrant colonies of Albania-speakers made it possible to spread the nationalist message through the development of a global network of newspapers, creating a consensus on the necessary steps toward national independence. It was almost an impossible mission due to the lack of written tradition, a limited number of readers, and the lack of unified writing system. Regardless of these shortcomings, the spread of newspapers dispersed the nationalist message, written in versions of Albanian using the different writing systems at the writers' disposal. Depending on the training of editors, Albanian-language newspapers were printed using the Cyrillic, Latin, and Arabic alphabet. This limited their reach, because only people who knew certain writing systems could read particular newspapers, despite their shared spoken language. To strengthen the case for independence, and further unite the Albanian people, intellectuals spread among the various colonies realized the pressing need for the creation of a unified Albanian alphabet that could be used by all.

Chapter 3. Every Nation Needs an Alphabet: The Albanian Diaspora's Efforts to Create a Unified Writing System

Most participants of the Albanian Awakening movement recognized the need to establish a unified writing code, and considered it one of the most important steps toward a unified national movement. However, the task of creating an Albanian alphabet proved to be very challenging. Difficulties came from many different directions. The Ottoman authorities categorized people based on religious affiliations; various Albanian-speakers were therefore considered Greeks based on their Orthodox religion, Catholics were considered Latin, and Albanian Muslims were considered Turks. Based on this schema, the Ottomans allowed Greek-, Italian-, and Turkish-language schools to operate in Albania, and no others. Because of their refusal to recognize the existence of an Albanian ethnicity, Ottoman authorities strongly opposed the creation of an Albanian alphabet. Various religious authorities also opposed the creation of a unified writing code in fear of losing control over their followers. Moreover, the various cultural, geographical, and religious affiliations of the Albanian-speaking elites made them prone to preferring different alphabets.

The Albanian language started to be written relatively late, compared to those of similar nationalities in the Balkans. Some foreign force always occupied Albanian speakers' lands, and the political instability made it impossible for a

separate written language to take hold. The arrested development of the written Albanian language has also been ascribed to the spread of Christianity after the fall of the Roman Empire, and the spread of the Greek and Latin languages that were its main liturgical tongues. Greek liturgical writings spread with the Orthodox religion in southern Albania, and Latin ones in mostly Catholic northern Albania.¹¹⁹ However, with the arrival of the Ottomans and the conversion of most Albanian-speakers to Islam, the majority of Albanians had to use the Arabic script in writing. Yet despite the conversion to Islam, Albanian nationalism developed through constant resistance to the Ottoman authority, beginning with the declaration of an independent Albanian principality by Scanderbeg in 1443.¹²⁰ Despite their occupation by the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman empires, including the religious influences brought by these, the one constant element of continuity among Albanians was the use of the spoken Albanian language. However, the lack of a unified written code hampered the efforts of the Albanian nationalist movement to spread its message, and its leaders were aware of the handicap. The first mountain to be conquered was the alphabet, declared Boston's *Kombi* in 1908, while reiterating that it had been calling for a national alphabet so tirelessly that it had lost all its strength and energy in this endeavor.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Shaban Demiraj and Kristaq Prifti, *Kongresi I Manastirit* (Tirana: : Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, 2004), 11.

¹²⁰ Fleming, *The Muslim Bonaparte: Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali Pasha's Greece*, 61.

¹²¹ "Shkollat Shqip," August 28, 1908, *Kombi* edition.

But 1908 would become the year that Albanians finally decided on the establishment of unified writing code, which in actuality was the adaptation of two similar alphabets. The adaptation of two alphabets was done mainly for practical reasons, because one of them had a mix of Latin and Cyrillic letters, and would not be very practical for communication among the ever-growing number of Albanian colonies being established abroad, most of which adopted the Latin script. The second alphabet, containing only Latin characters, was seen as a much more practical system for communicating and printing literature outside of Albanian-inhabited lands. The same year saw great upheavals, giving nationalists hope that, finally, Albanians would have their own national alphabet to be used in Albanian schools. This great hope was a result of the ongoing Young Turk revolution, which promised greater autonomy for many ethnic groups within the Ottoman Empire.

The struggle for the creation of an Albanian alphabet was the culmination of the efforts by the Albanian National Awakening movement to create a unified nationalist platform. The unified alphabet would finally make it possible to patch together the many varied groups of Albanian-speakers and create a stronger bond among them. The idea of “Albanianism” put forward by Vasko Pasha was the first layer of glue applied to the complex patches of Albanian-speaking society, but it was not enough to cement the creation of unified body. The unified alphabet would serve the purpose of spreading the movement’s message among all the

segments of Albanian-speaking society. For the first time in history, it would be possible to disseminate the same information among all the different groupings. The existence of multiple writing systems had made communication on a large scale almost impossible. Various religious and regional rivalries also made it difficult to spread any idea without it being countered by opposing factions, and in many cases these divisions, and the efforts to overcome them, were used by the Ottomans and Austro-Hungarians to their own advantage.

The written word in the Albanian language has a long but fragmented history, reflecting the changing historical fortunes of Albanian-speakers through centuries of instability and rule by various entities. This chapter will briefly reference the longer historical trajectory of the Albanian alphabet, but will mainly focus on the final efforts that resulted in the creation of a unified writing code that served the purpose of uniting a fractured people, paving the way for the creation of an independent Albanian state.

A Dominican priest by the name of Brother Brochart made the first known reference to an Albanian writing system, recorded in 1332, in his report to the King of France, Philippe de Valois.¹²² In the report, Brochart spoke about various lands he had visited and their suitability for the undertaking of crusades. When referring to the northern Albanians, he wrote that their language was very

¹²² Stavro Skendi, "The History of the Albanian Alphabet: A Case of Complex Cultural and Political Development," *Südost Forschungen* 19 (1960): 263–84.

different from Latin, but that they use Latin letters in their books.¹²³ The report clearly identifies the existence of spoken Albanian, however the assertion of many Albanian historians that the report is strong evidence that even before 1332 there were books written in Albanian, using the Latin alphabet, is less certain.¹²⁴ The Latin quoted phrase: “*licet Albanenses aliam omnino linguam a latina habeant et diversam, tamen litteram latinam habent in usu et in omnibus suis libris*” (The Albanians indeed have a language quite different from Latin, however they use Latin letters in all their books), does not unambiguously make clear if the author is writing about “Albanian language books written in Latin script, or simply books written in Latin.”¹²⁵

The more definitive, and less controversial, earliest documentation of writing in the Albanian language appeared in the year 1555. *Meshari* (The Missal), by the northern Albanian Catholic priest Gjon Buzuku, was primarily written to serve the purpose of the Catholic Church in spreading Catholicism in Albanian-inhabited lands. *Meshari* is an Albanian translation of the Catholic missal, containing prayers and rites that clergy needed to conduct mass during the year.¹²⁶ It also served the purpose of keeping Catholicism alive in Albanian lands, because the shortage of Catholic priests in Albania had a great impact on the rate of conversion to Islam by Albanian-speakers. Most priests were non-Albanians,

¹²³ Ibid., 263.

¹²⁴ Elsie, *Early Albania: A Reader of Historical Texts, 11th-17th Centuries*, 28.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History*, 9.

and did not know the local language.¹²⁷ Most likely Gjon Buzuku did not live in Albania, but was situated somewhere in the Northern Adriatic in the Republic of San Marco, or in the Venetian region, where many Albanian Catholics had settled as Christian immigrants escaping the Ottoman conquest of their native lands. This would also explain his literary education, and his training as a priest, in contrast to the Albanian-inhabited lands where his access to training would have been much more limited. The book had very limited effect, as it most likely fell prey to the Inquisition, or became irrelevant due to the decisions brought by the Council of Trent, which suppressed or withdrew from circulation many publications between 1568 and 1598.¹²⁸ Most of the subsequent books written in vernacular Albanian also had a religious character, and mostly due to the competing religious influences affecting the Balkans, it would take some time before the Albanian National Movement embarked upon the monumental task of creating a unified alphabet.

The alphabet used in *Meshari* contained Cyrillic elements, and did not attract many followers. Pjetër Budi in his *Christian Doctrine* (1618) used a different system of writing based on the Latin system, which was also employed by Frang Bardhi in his *Dictionary* (1635), and Pjetër Bogdani in his *Cuneus Prophetarum* (1685). This particular system is known as “the Alphabet of the Ancient Writers of the North,” or the “Catholic Alphabet,” due to its exclusive

¹²⁷ Egro, “Islam in the Albanian Lands (XVth-XVIIth Century),” 28.

¹²⁸ Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History*, 10–11.

use by the Albanian-speaking Catholics, and continued to be used by the Jesuit priests of Shkodër until the early twentieth century.¹²⁹ Apart from this group of writers who mainly translated religious texts stands Pjetër Bogdani, the first author to write original prose in Albanian, and thus the father of the Albanian literature.¹³⁰ Unfortunately for Albanian-speakers, this promising era of Albanian literature would not last long enough to leave a definitive mark on the adaptation of the Latin alphabet as a writing instrument; this would ultimately be adopted by Albanians only at the outset of the twentieth century. It is also important to point out that the majority of these early trailblazers were educated outside of Albanian lands, and their missionary work precluded them from remaining in one place, which was detrimental to establishing firmer foundations for Albanian literature.

The Ottoman conquest was essential in creating a rupture in the continuity of Albanian-language literature, and in the use of the Latin script. Life under the Ottoman occupation brought with it a different literary tradition, and also the adoption of the Arabic script by Albanian-speaking writers. During the five centuries under the Ottoman Empire, many people from Albanian-speaking *villayets* (administrative units) directly impacted Turkish culture. Among the many examples are Hoca Hasan Tahsin, who became the first rector of the University of Istanbul; the pan-Islamic poet Mehmed Akif Ersoy, who created of

¹²⁹ Skendi, "The History of the Albanian Alphabet: A Case of Complex Cultural and Political Development," 265.

¹³⁰ Robert Elsie, *History of Albanian Literature*, vol. 1 (Boulder; New York: Social Science Monographs, Distributed by Columbia University Press, 2005), 77.

the Turkish national anthem of 1921; and Riza Tevfik, who became one of the most prominent philosophers of his time.¹³¹ The abovementioned intellectuals all created works in Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, but their efforts also contributed to the creation of Albanian-language vernacular written using almost exclusively the Arabic script, during what is known as the *Bejtexhinj* period of Albanian literature.¹³² This literary tradition lasted throughout the eighteenth century, and the first five decades of the nineteenth, until the *Rilindja* Albanian nationalist movement began to return to a variety of newly created Latin alphabets.¹³³

The traces of the Greek alphabet in vernacular Albanian are fainter, and are mostly limited to translations of a religious character. In Southern Albania, the Greek Orthodox Church did not give any importance to the education of Orthodox Albanians in their vernacular language, in contrast to the Catholic Church's efforts during the Counter-Reformation in Northern Albania. The Greek Orthodox Church held a very negative attitude toward the spread of Albanian language, limiting greatly the possibility for the creation of any substantial literary works written in Albanian using the Greek Cyrillic script.¹³⁴ The Ottoman imperial authorities did not recognize ethnic entities, but only religious communities, and with many converts to Islam, now it became much harder to adopt a unified

¹³¹ Robert Elsie, "Albanian Literature in the Moslem Tradition: Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Albanian Writing in Arabic Script," *Oriens* 33 (1992): 287–306.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 291.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹³⁴ Elsie, *History of Albanian Literature*, 1:136.

writing system. Catholics continued the use of Latin, Orthodox Christians used Greek, and Muslims adopted the Arabic script. The Albanian nationalist movement of the nineteenth century would attempt to finally rectify the situation, by directing vast amount of energies toward the creation of a unified Albanian alphabet.

The drive for a unified Albanian alphabet had two main causes: the first was to strengthen nationalist feeling through writings that could be read by all Albanians, and the second was to create a vehicle that would strengthen the cooperation between Albanian-speaking colonies scattered around Europe and beyond. Demonstrating its desire to distance itself from Ottoman rule, the Albanian national movement decided by the end of the nineteenth century to turn to the Latin alphabet in order to chart a course away from the Orient and toward Europe. Members of the Albanian colony in Romania made this very clear in a short editorial that claimed it was clear to all Albanians that “the signs representing Albanian sound, should all have a Latin face.”¹³⁵ Emphasizing the importance of the written language for Albanians meant that they could finally write their own glorious history, and take their place among the other European nations that had already “taken care of their things.”¹³⁶ In order to join the European branch of nations, Albanians needed to cultivate their own language because language represented the “soul” of a people, which serves as a cohesive

¹³⁵ Editorial Board, “Alfabeti,” *Shqipëria*, May 17, 1897.

¹³⁶ An Albanian, “Gjuha Shqip Dhe Shqipëtarët,” *Shqipëria*, August 2, 1897.

vehicle that brings the people that speak the same language together. However, just speaking a language did not guarantee the continuity of a people, because no matter how heroic a nation is, without possession of a written language that nation will be doomed to fail.¹³⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, Albanian-speaking nationalists were coming to the definite conclusion that in order for the movement to be successful it was imperative to create a written Albanian alphabet, and the prevailing thought was that it should be based on a Latin script in order to create a rupture with the long Ottoman occupation, and continue Albanians' quest to rejoin the European family of nations.

Many Albanian colonies began printing newspapers and other publications in Albanian and other languages simultaneously. Depending on their place of residence, and the intended target audience, publishers would add sections in French, English, Greek, Bulgarian, Romanian, Turkish, or Arabic, with the intention of spreading the written Albanian language while also informing and swaying public opinion of non-Albanian-speakers in support of Albanian autonomy and cultural rights under the Ottomans. The greatest challenge to the spread of the Albanian language in a written form was the fact that it was written according to the preference of each publisher, sometimes only in Latin letters, and sometimes in combination with Greek Cyrillic letters. Many viewed this inconsistency as detrimental to the spread and the development of the Albanian

¹³⁷ Ibid.

language, and editorials called for rectifying this situation by inviting all “learned” Albanians to send their proposals on how to establish a unified alphabet.¹³⁸ The establishment of the alphabet was taken very seriously by leading intellectuals as one of the more sacred tasks of the nationalist movement, but everyone involved brought their own religious, cultural, and personal ideals to this endeavor.

Challenges to producing a definitive Albanian alphabet were innumerable. As intellectuals started offering their input, these differed according to their educational, religious, and cultural leanings. Some preferred the Latin alphabet, and others preferred Greek or Arabic letters, with people in-between preferring various mixtures from many alphabets. Others observed that the alphabets used until the nineteenth century were very important, but had a limited effect on the development of the written Albanian language, due to their temporary nature and the many interruptions in their use due to political conditions.

The final push toward the creation of the Albanian alphabet began with the creation of the “League of Prizren,” named after the city of Prizren (now situated within Kosovo), in July of 1878. The formation of the League also represented the decisive move toward the unification of Albanians, their push for more autonomous life, and ultimately national independence. Many important figures from all the Turkish provinces with Albanian-speaking populations participated in

¹³⁸ Editorial Board, “Përse Alfabeti I Jonë,” *Yll’ I Shqipërisë*, no. 3 (1898).

the establishment of the League, which requested the consolidation of all Albanian-speaking provinces into a single administrative unit with Albanian as an official administrative language. The League also requested the opening of new educational institutions where the Albanian language would be used and taught, and very importantly, the organization also declared that it would adhere to the idea of Albanianism, with no regard for the religious affiliations of the Albanian-speaking people.¹³⁹ The Ottoman authorities tolerated the League, or at least were reluctant to react, because the Congress of Berlin was discussing important matters regarding the Empire's political future, and Albanians were still considered more loyal Ottoman subjects who were countering the territorial ambitions of Greeks, Serbs, and Montenegrins upon Albanian-populated territories of the Empire.¹⁴⁰

Albanians sent a communiqué to the Congress of Berlin requesting to be recognized as a nation distinct from Slavs and Turks, and stating that their rights as Albanians should be taken into account. The Congress dismissed these claims, and also awarded some Albanian-populated territories to neighboring states, prompting Albanians to continue their fight for recognition.¹⁴¹ Realizing that the Congress of Berlin would not take into consideration Albanian demands for

¹³⁹ Selçuk Akşin Somel, *The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy and Discipline* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 210.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Agata Biernat, "Albania and Albanian Émigrés in the United States Before World War II," in *East Central Europe in Exile, Volume One: Transatlantic Migrations*, ed. Anna Mazurkiewicz (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 11.

autonomy, the League of Prizren tasked itself with the protection of Albanian territories from their neighbors, and also to prepare to look after Albanians' national interest in the wake of Ottoman decline. By 1881, the League had managed to take complete control of the district of Kosova, declaring itself to be the government of the province; however the Ottoman authorities decided that the rebellion should be quelled, and an army of ten thousand men led by the centralization advocate, Dervish Pasha, retook Prizren despite strong resistance by the Albanians.¹⁴²

Despite the military defeat, the League instilled a sense of urgency in the Albanian nationalist and cultural movement, spurring an increase in the printing of nationalist literature. The result was the establishment of more than thirty Albanian-language newspapers throughout the world, and the opening of several Albanian-language schools. The schools encountered many difficulties, due to pressure from Ottoman authorities on Muslim students to abandon vernacular schools, and the threats of Orthodox clergy to excommunicate families who wanted to educate their children in Albanian. The scarcity of economic resources further compounded problems. Faced with impossible odds in running their schools, Albanians formed many secret societies tasked with promoting teaching in Albanian; these were also suppressed by Ottoman and Orthodox Church

¹⁴² Vickers, *The Albanians: A Modern History*, 41.

authorities alike.¹⁴³ The Catholic Albanians in the Northern part of the country were a little more fortunate due to the help they received from neighboring Austrians in opening and maintaining Albanian-language schools.¹⁴⁴

Despite the very limited successes in maintaining Albanian schools, the movement for their creation used the resistance by the Ottoman authorities as a rallying cry for more autonomy, and energized Albanian migrant colonies within and outside of the Empire to become more active in promoting national rights. The push for education in Albanian also made the question of an Albanian alphabet an urgent matter in a need of a solution. As one of the greatest intellectuals of the Rilindja period, Konstantin Kristoforidhi, who had written books and translated the bible into Albanian, put it: “If the Albanian language is not written, in a short time there will be no Albania on the surface of the earth nor will the name Albania appear on the map of the world.”¹⁴⁵ This argument made sense to many Albanians because, after all, throughout the many changes in Albanians’ historical trajectory, and the most tangible common thread among Albanian-speakers was their language itself. Great urgency, however, did not create a quick solution, because the many divided factions proposed different solutions closest to their understandings of the issue at hand. After many

¹⁴³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁴⁴ Stavro Skendi, “Language as a Factor of National Identity in the Balkans of the Nineteenth Century,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 119, no. 2 (April 16, 1975): 188.

¹⁴⁵ Elisabeth Pond, *Endgame in the Balkans: Regime Change, European Style* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), 192.

deliberations, at the outset of the twentieth century there were two possible variations still standing. Both of were created in the prominent migrant colonies of Albanians in Istanbul and Bucharest, whose efforts toward a solution would be finally crowned in 1908.

At the height of the Albanian nationalist movements taking hold around the world, Albanian intellectuals regarded the creation of an Albanian alphabet as the most crucial element of their quest to deepen Albanian national consciousness, and continue toward autonomous life. In 1879 the prominent Albanian and Ottoman intellectual Sami Frasheri established an Albanian society in Istanbul, which published the “famous” Albanian primer introducing a new alphabet, making that year one of the most important dates in the development of the Albanian Awakening Movement.¹⁴⁶ One of the most important functions of the society was the publishing of books in Albanian. In addition to Sami Frasheri, the prominent patriots Pashko Vasa and Jovan Vreto also provided essential help in the publication of the Albanian primer.¹⁴⁷ The participation of Pashko Vasa cannot be overstated, since he was known to be the bearer of the idea of Albanianism.

The idea of Albanianism prevailed during the Istanbul society’s deliberations for the creation of an Albanian alphabet. “The Istanbul Alphabet,”

¹⁴⁶ *Kalendari I Vatres I Motit 1918 (Calendar of Vatra for the Year 1918)* (Boston: Shtypshkronja e Gazetes Dielli, n.d.), 23.

¹⁴⁷ K.A. Çekrezi, *Histori E Shqiperise* (Boston: Shtypshkronja e Diellit, 1920), 180.

as it was called, was a compromise between the many different ideas and ideologies of its creators. Some Albanian Muslims requested that the alphabet be created using Arab, and on the other side luminaries like Jani Vreto requested mixing Greek letters with Latin letters along with the creation of some new signifiers to complete the needs of the language. Hasan Tahsini's idea of creating an "original alphabet" from scratch did not find many supporters.¹⁴⁸ Most of the participants were prominent members of the nationalist movement of the time, and people like Vreto and Tahsini are still recognized as such; however, the differences in viewpoints seem to have resulted from participants' experiences with the particular languages that they could read, be it Greek, Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, or others that they had studied. The most prominent members, such as Sami Frashëri and Pashko Vasa, wanted the adaptation of the Latin characters, to symbolize Albanians' European belonging. Sami Frasheri stated that, "Albania is a place in Europe, and Albanians are one of the European nations, thus the Albanian language should be written with European letters, meaning the Latin letters."¹⁴⁹ Ultimately, it was decided that the alphabet would contain thirty-six letters to meet the needs of the Albanian language, with each sound represented by a distinct letter. The Latin alphabet was therefore combined with some Greek

¹⁴⁸ Demiraj and Prifti, *Kongresi I Manastirit*, 23.

¹⁴⁹ Sami Frasheri, "Gjuha Shqipe," in *Alfabetare e Gjuhes Shqip* (Konstandinopoje, 1879), quoted in *ibid.*

letters, and some Latin characters were modified to represent sounds not present in the Latin alphabet.¹⁵⁰

The solution of mixing letters to create a new alphabet was not a perfect one, but it was a good starting point, and it laid the foundation for the spread of nationalist writings until the adaptation of the 1908 version created in the Congress of Monastir. Sami Frashëri argued that it would be easier to acquire printing machines for a Latin-based alphabet rather than creating an original one, however, the same argument could have been made for the adaptation of Greek or the Arabic scripts, suggesting that the decision was made based on political calculations.¹⁵¹ The Albanian Society of Istanbul, after printing the first primer, was forced to move its printing operations to Bucharest and Sofia, due to restrictions imposed by authorities in Istanbul. Apart from the primer published in Istanbul in 1879, the largest number of Albanian pamphlets, books, and almanacs were published in Romania and Bulgaria.¹⁵² Among many very important works of the time printed in the Istanbul Alphabet was a history of the great national hero Skenderbeg; poetry by one of the greatest poets in Albanian literature, Naim Frashëri; important works on geography and grammar; and the important political treatise *Shqipëria: Ç'ka Qenë, Q'Eshtë, Çdo të Bëhetë ?* (Albania: What Was It,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 26–27.

¹⁵¹ Frances Trix, “The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, no. 2 (May 1999): 259.

¹⁵² Ibid., 262.

What Is It, and What Will it Become?) written by Sami Frashëri, which became “the manifesto” of the Albanian nationalist movement.¹⁵³

What is striking in the writings of brothers Sami and Naim Frashëri is the aggressive language used to depict the Ottoman rulers. It is more striking because the Frashëri brothers spent most of their time in Istanbul. In order to demonstrate that Albanians were European, it was essential to depict the Ottomans as non-European. In their quest to establish a state based on the model of advanced national states of Western Europe, the Albanian nationalists appropriated the late nineteenth-century discourse on the worthiness of races and nations.¹⁵⁴ “In this framework they made use of the post-Enlightenment Orientalist stereotype of the despotic Turk, in order to oppose to it the image of Albanians as an old, indeed the oldest, and pure European nation, longing to get rid of the Asian barbarism.”¹⁵⁵ The centuries-long Ottoman occupation was only seen as a disruption of the long and glorious European history of Albanians.

Apart from the strong Albanian colony in Romania, where many works were printed, the Istanbul Alphabet also spurred great activity by Albanian-speaking migrants in Bulgaria. The largest numbers of migrants in Sofia were economic migrants who were incorporated into nationalist efforts by prominent Albanian intellectuals, making the city an important hub for printing materials in

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Enis Sulstarova, “Rilindja’s Place in the Orientalism of Intellectuals in Post-Communist Albania,” *Annales: Series Historia et Sociologia*, no. 22 (2012): 393.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Albanian and distributing them within Albanian-speaking territories. Cooperation between the “Dituria” society of Bucharest and the “Dëshira” society of Sofia resulted in the establishment of the printing press “Mbrothësia” in Sofia in 1879, which profited from the experience of patriots Kosta Trebicka and Kristo Luarasi, who had done printing in Bucharest.¹⁵⁶ The presses in Sofia continued the tradition of printing books using the Istanbul Alphabet, resulting in the production of the *Tosk and Geg* primer, Naim Frasheri’s poems, the *History of Scanderbeg*, and many copies of Sami Frasheri’s treatise, *Shqipëria: Ç’ka Qenë, Q’Eshtë, Çdo të Bëhetë?*, all of which, with financial assistance from other Albanian colonies, were also distributed within Albania.¹⁵⁷

Many Albanian-speakers accepted the alphabet that was created in Istanbul as a good solution for spreading a more coherent message, but this writing system faced internal opposition, apart from abovementioned opposition by the Ottoman authorities. Among those intellectuals who opposed this alphabet was Jeronim De Rada, the famous Arbereshi poet, who had created his own alphabet, mostly based on Italian letters, which the Albanian colonies in Italy were using the most. When the Istanbul society proposed that he adopt their alphabet, he used the example of both the Gothic and Latin alphabet used by

¹⁵⁶ Fatjon Kica, “The Contribution of Albanian Diaspora in Bulgaria in the Development of Albanian Education, during the National Renaissance,” *Journal of International Scientific Publications* 12 (2014): 1196.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

Germans as an argument for not discarding his own.¹⁵⁸ Due to the great respect that De Rada enjoyed from many Albanian nationalists, when the storied Congress of Manastir concluded in 1908, it accepted the coexistence of two parallel alphabets based on his earlier arguments. The divergence was not so great among intellectuals, however, because most disagreements were based on how to adapt a Latin alphabet to serve the needs of the Albanian language. The exceptions were objections by religious authorities and figures who accepted only the Greek or Arabic scripts as good solutions to the problem.

The highest religious authorities in Istanbul strongly resented the establishment of an Albanian alphabet based on Latin script, and sent new clerics from outside to pressure the local Islamic clerics into resisting writings in the vernacular, declaring in many cases that it was a great “sin” to use Latin letters instead of Arabic ones.¹⁵⁹ Most Muslim clerics were designated by Ottoman authorities to serve as educators, and at the same time they were the cornerstones of the regime. They were in charge of educating Muslim believers to continue learning the Turkish language, and to only use Arabic script when writing it. Anyone reading or attempting to learn to read and write in the Albanian language using a Latin-based alphabet was to be declared a non-believer, and a great

¹⁵⁸ Jup Kastrati, “Lufta Për Njësimin E Alfabetit Shqip Në Vitet 1878-1908,” in *Alfabeti I Gjuhes Shqipe Dhe Kongresi I Manastirit: Studime, Materiale, Dokumente*, ed. Mahir Domi (Tirana: Universiteti I Tiranës, 1972), 79.

¹⁵⁹ Zihni Haskaj, “Roli Reaksionar I Klerit Ndaj Problemeve Të Alfabetit,” in *Alfabeti I Gjuhes Shqipe Dhe Kongresi I Manastirit: Studime, Materiale, Dokumente*, ed. Mahir Domi (Tirana: Universiteti I Tiranës, 1972), 124.

sinner.¹⁶⁰ Realizing that the creation of the Albanian alphabet had political ramifications, the authorities in Istanbul stood against any initiative that would serve Albanian nationalists, and Muslim clerics were viewed as an essential element in halting any initiatives that would distinguish Muslim Albanians from declaring themselves to be anything other than Turks.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul held the same view of the spread of Albanian education in vernacular Albanian, and deployed its clergy in similar fashion against the creation of an Albanian alphabet among Orthodox Albanians, many of whom resided in Southern Albania; as far as the church was concerned, they were considered to be Greeks. The Orthodox Church vehemently denied the right to use Albanian in church services, claiming that it was too “poor and primitive” a language, and went beyond mere propaganda by using violence, poisoning and excommunicating Albanian activists who propagated the use of the Istanbul Alphabet.¹⁶¹ The use of vernacular language was considered to be a great sin by the Greeks, who virtually denied the existence of Albanians by denying them the right to write their language and use it in schools.¹⁶² In their defense, one advocate of the Albanian vernacular wrote in 1899, “Can’t you see that Russians, who are good Orthodox Christians, use their language in church, and not the Greek language?...God has blessed every language, and Albanian is like any other

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 120.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 121.

¹⁶² *Kalendari Kombiar 1899 Mot”I Trete* (Sofia: Mbrothesia, 1899), 65.

language.”¹⁶³ The pressure from religious clerics did not deter activists, but instead seems to have energized them to continue in their quest for the affirmation of the Albanian language as a necessary tool for creating an autonomous life as a nation.

In contrast to the Greeks and Ottoman authorities, Austria-Hungary provided support for the creation of an Albanian alphabet, and was more supportive of the Albanian nationalist movement. In 1899, Bishop Preng Doçi established “The Organization for the Unification of the Albanian Language,” known simply as “The Union” (*Bashkimi* in Albanian), in Shkoder, with the purpose of creating a single alphabet with solely Latin characters.¹⁶⁴ This alphabet was supported by Austro-Hungary, which wanted to exert more influence in the Balkans, and also garnered the support of Franciscan and Jesuit orders, which were ready to use the alphabet in their schools.¹⁶⁵ The “Union” alphabet was challenged by another group, named “Agimi” (The Dawn), created by a Catholic cleric by the name of Ndre Mjeda in 1902, who based their alphabet also in Latin, but “contrary to Doçi’s, it followed the principle of one letter for one sound.”¹⁶⁶ The Austro-Hungarians continued to subsidize printing in Albanian, because they wanted the survival of the Shkodër Episcopate, but they now were more inclined

¹⁶³ Ibid., 66.

¹⁶⁴ Kozeta Sala and Elvira Shaplo, “The Unification of the Albanian Alphabet and the Role of Austria,” *European Scientific Journal* 7, no. 26 (2011): 141.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 142.

¹⁶⁶ Skendi, “The History of the Albanian Alphabet: A Case of Complex Cultural and Political Development,” 273.

to help the “Agimi” alphabet, because its founder was considered to be less confrontational with the followers of the Istanbul Alphabet, in anticipation of a final alphabet solution.¹⁶⁷ The tapestry of different alphabets would continue to exist until 1908, the year of the Monastir Congress.

The mosaic of different cultural and religious traditions created during centuries of foreign rule created unique challenges for the Albanian-speakers in their quest to finally settle on a unified writing code, and the changes taking place within the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century gave some hope that finally Albanians would be allowed to be educated in their native language, just as the other ethnic groups within the empire. Changes brought about by the Young Turk Revolution would instill some hope within the Albanian population that the restrictions imposed upon the use of their language would be eased, and that new constitutional reforms would create new opportunities to establish Albanian-language schools that had theretofore not been permitted. The hopes and the enthusiasm created by the revolution would not last for long.

Many Albanian nationalists viewed the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 with suspicion, but it also found many admirers among Albanian-speakers of the Ottoman Empire, who hoped that it would carry out reforms that would grant Albanians more cultural rights, especially by allowing the use of Albanian in education. The Young Turks made conscious efforts to attract Albanians to their

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

side by promising them that their position within the empire would be greatly enhanced, and were able to co-opt them due to both groups' shared goals of ending the absolute rule of the Sultan, and also of avoiding the intervention of other European nations into their affairs.¹⁶⁸ Most of the progressive forces among Albanians expected that the Young Turks would decentralize the power of the Porte, and grant more local autonomy. In the first phase of the revolution many Albanians were cautiously enthusiastic about a new "liberal" Turkey that would grant many rights to the oppressed minorities of the empire.¹⁶⁹ The anticipated reforms by the Young Turks prompted the establishment of the Albanian society of "Bashkimi" (Unity) in August of 1908, which would serve as a model to many other Albanian societies within the Empire.¹⁷⁰ Two month after the creation of "Bashkimi" in Manastir, "similar clubs were established in: Korça, Elbasan, Shkodra, Shkup, Selanik, Stamboll, Pogradec, Janine, [and] Vlore...followed later by clubs in Tirana, Durrës, Berat, Gramsh, Gjirokaster etc."¹⁷¹

This cautious optimism would soon dissipate, and would finally die in 1909 when the Turkish committee on cultural affairs of non-Turks in the empire decided in Selanik (Thessaloniki, Greece) that all education had to be conducted

¹⁶⁸ Hysni Myzari, *Arsimi Kombëtar Shqiptar: 1908-1912* (Prishtinë: Enti I Teksteve dhe I Mjeteve Mësimore, 1996), 16.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷⁰ Kristaq Prifti, "Lëvizja Politike-Kulturale Në Shqipëri Ne Pragun E Kongresit Të Manastirit," in *Alfabeti I Gjuhes Shqipe Dhe Kongresi I Manastirit: Studime, Materiale, Dokumente*, ed. Mahir Domi (Tirana: Universiteti I Tiranës, 1972), 55.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

in Turkish, and schools teaching languages other than Turkish would be closed.¹⁷² Despite this reversal, the movement for a more unified Albanian cultural and nationalist movement became much more coherent in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Albanian skeptics had taken a very important step toward a unified writing code, and began to realize that the only solution to be found for Albanians was the total break from the empire—a break that would take place on October 28, 1912.

Albanian nationalist leaders became disappointed with the failure of Young Turk Revolution to improve the cultural and educational rights of Albanians; however, the brief possibility of attaining those rights offered a window of opportunity to act on the establishment of a national alphabet. In anticipation of gaining the right to establish Albanian-language schools, Albanian leaders realized that they finally needed to adopt one alphabet in order to avoid divisions among the populace. In 1908, Midhat Frashëri, the nephew of Sami Frashëri, issued an invitation to all Albanian communities around the world to participate in the Congress of Manastir in order to finally resolve the issue of a united Albanian alphabet.¹⁷³

The “Bashkimi” society of Bitola took the initiative to organize the conference, which resulted in the gathering of about fifty Albanian intellectuals

¹⁷² Myzari, *Arsimi Kombëtar Shqiptar: 1908-1912*, 26.

¹⁷³ Trix, “The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform,” 265.

tasked with deciding which alphabet would be suitable for use by all Albanians. After long deliberations, the delegates elected a committee of eleven people to bring a final decision on the issue.¹⁷⁴ The only agreement among the committee members from the outset was that the alphabet should be a Latin one. The committee discussed the possibility of adopting one of the three most popular alphabets (the Istanbul Alphabet of 1879, the Bashkimi [or Unity] Alphabet of 1899, or the Dawn Alphabet of 1902), combining all three together, or creating a brand new set of letters.¹⁷⁵ On religious bases the committee had a mixed makeup of four Muslims, four Orthodox, and three Catholic members; the four Orthodox and two of the Catholic members supported the Bashkimi Alphabet, with the Istanbul Alphabet garnering support from the four Muslim members, along with that of the creator of the Dawn Alphabet, Ndre Mjeda.¹⁷⁶ The committee's close decision led to a compromise by which both the Bashkimi and Istanbul alphabets, with some minor modifications, were declared the official Albanian alphabets, using the case of German's double script as a rationale for the decision.¹⁷⁷ Ultimately, the mixed-letter Istanbul Alphabet would wither away by the time of

¹⁷⁴ Alexander Vezenkov, "The Albanian Language Questions: Context and Priorities," in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans, Volume One: National Ideologies and Language Policies*, ed. Roumen Daskalov and Tchavdar Marinov (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 504.

¹⁷⁵ Mahir Domi, "Alfabeti I Gjuhës Shqipe Dhe Kongresi I Manastirit: 14-22 Nëntor 1908," in *Alfabeti I Gjuhes Shqipe Dhe Kongresi I Manastirit: Studime, Materiale, Dokumente*, ed. Mahir Domi (Tirana: Universiteti I Tiranës, 1972), 35.

¹⁷⁶ Vezenkov, "The Albanian Language Questions: Context and Priorities," 504.

¹⁷⁷ Trix, "The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform," 267.

Albania's independence, leaving the all-Latin Bashkimi variation as the only Albanian alphabet, which continues to be used to this day.

To a casual observer of Albanian history, the divisions on the issue might appear to have had a religious character.¹⁷⁸ However, a religious explanation breaks down in light of the other work that the committee members had completed together; instead, the cultural milieu in which they operated is a more convincing explanatory factor. "Three of the four Orthodox Christians had become involved, through immigration or missionary work, in English speaking regions (one as an editor of a newspaper in Boston, another as a Protestant minister educated at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and the third as the representative of the British Biblical Society in Monastir)," and on the other side, all the Muslim members lived in Istanbul and served the Ottoman authorities as teachers, civil servants, and members of the parliament.¹⁷⁹ That these two groups came to any agreement at all is testament to their determination to overcome religious divisions.

The struggle of the Albanian National Movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to create a unified alphabet represents a complex case of a nationalist movement determined to navigate many obstacles to secure its existence. In the age of rising nationalist tides around Europe and the

¹⁷⁸ Vezenkov, "The Albanian Language Questions: Context and Priorities," 504.

¹⁷⁹ Trix, "The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bey: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform," 266.

weakening of empires, Albanians found themselves in a peculiar situation, wherein they had to decide between precarious existence within the Ottoman Empire, or searching for an autonomous life among their territory-hungry neighbors. Compared to their neighbors who had more stable cultural, linguistic, and religious milieus, Albanians had to overcome divisions based on culture, language, and religion. The only constant among them was their spoken language, despite the existence of the Tosk and Geg dialects. But in the age of the printing press, the Albanian language lacked a unitary alphabet. The scarce number of writings in Albanian went back centuries, and this scarcity and history of interruptions due to political factors left Albanian nationalists without means to clearly express or disseminate their thinking in written form. With the Ottoman Empire weakening, the Albanian National Movement realized that the moment was ripe for securing cultural rights within the Empire--in anticipation that this would offer protections for Albania's borders--and they pressed urgently for the creation of the alphabet to serve as a conduit of their nationalist message. After long efforts and deliberations among the Albanian migrant colonies, this resolve finally resulted in the creation of a unified writing system. The decision to accept two alphabets as a solution to the problem was seen by many observers as a sign of deep divisions among Albanians, but upon closer examination it instead reveals pragmatism in the face of adversity. The Albanian intellectuals were able to compromise, in part because they did not want to discard the many works already

printed using the Istanbul Alphabet, but they also made a political decision that would ultimately end in the adaptation of an alphabet based solely on Latin characters. The eventual triumph of the purely Latin alphabet was a reflection of the nationalists' aim to break from the East, by discarding Cyrillic and Arabic letters, and claim their place among nations of Europe.

Chapter 4. The First Arrivals to the United States, and the “Great Unifier”

By the end of the 19th century, Albania was the only Balkan country to not have gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire. As discussed in the previous chapters, Albanian-speaking territories took a different developmental trajectory, mostly due to the fact that all the newly created neighboring states had territorial aspirations toward Albanian populated territories. Also, another important element in this phenomenon was the more pronounced political and religious divisions amongst the Albanian-speakers. In this situation, Albanian educated elites, most of them educated in languages other than Albanian,¹⁸⁰ were still leaning toward more political autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, rather than outright independence. At the outset of the twentieth century the Albanians elites, scattered around the world, were attempting to create a unified front that would help to unify a population that was divided by religion and regional particularities. The center of activity would shift from Europe and Asia to the United States, which became the main hub of the battle to create a new state and nation.

¹⁸⁰ Most of the educated Albanian-speaking elites obtained their education in foreign languages due to the restrictions on Albanian-language schools in their place of residence. They were educated in Turkish, Arabic, Greek, Italian, and French, in religious or Ottoman-administered schools, with some of them later studying in American universities.

Because of the rich activity conducted toward the creation of the modern Albanian state, migration of educated Albanian elites to the United States holds a special place in the history of modern Albania. The central figures of the early Albanian community in America, like Fan Noli and Faik Konitza, are deeply revered among the Albanian population. Albanian migration to America was part of the “new immigration” that was reaching American shores, mainly from southern and eastern European destinations, in the late nineteenth century.

Albanians began migrating to the United States in 1876, when the first unnamed Albanian from the town of Korcha reached the New World. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Albanian educated elites had begun to organize among their fellow migrants and to spread nationalist fever without fear of repercussions by Ottoman authorities. In 1906, Sotir Peci established the first weekly Albanian newspaper in the United States, printed in Boston, named *Kombi* (The Nation), and with the involvement of Fan Noli and Faik Konitza, two fervent nationalists, the newspaper grew and was given the name *Dielli* (Sun) in 1909.¹⁸¹ With the growth of the Albanian community along the eastern seaboard, the number of Albanian organizations also grew. In 1912, Albanian community leaders like Noli and Konitza had some success in unifying the community by consolidating most of the Albanian organizations into one called Vatra (The Pan

¹⁸¹ Dennis L. Nagi, *The Albanian-American Odyssey: A Pilot Study of the Albanian Community of Boston, Massachusetts* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 45–50.

Albanian Federation of America).¹⁸² With this consolidation, the movement for Albanian independence from the Ottoman Empire, which had originated in Albania and other migrant centers in Europe and Asia, saw tremendous growth on the other side of the Atlantic.¹⁸³

Before becoming a vibrant community that would propagate and defend the creation of an Albanian state, the Albanian community in the United States had to establish points of unity and engage with the idea of an Albanian nation. By forging a new Albanian national identity, and propagating it among newly arrived migrants who had left a narrow regional world, Albanian leaders attempted to bring together migrant communities scattered along the eastern seaboard of the United States. The task of building a homogenized community would prove to be very difficult, despite the fact that the majority of Albanian migrants were arriving from Southern Albania. As discussed in the previous chapters, the population of Albania was highly fragmented, and herculean efforts were necessary in order to bring it together.

At the beginning of the twentieth century most Albanians self-identified based on a variety of factors—including family, class, religion, and geographic affiliation—so for many arriving in the United States before Albania’s declaration of independence, a unified categorization was impossible. In particular, the

¹⁸² Ibid., 50.

¹⁸³ Edwin E. Jacques, *The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 1995), 301.

Toskë/Gegë dialectic and geographical divisions had important roles in distinguishing the standing of one group from another, and, in Isa Blumis's words:

This proved invaluable in the larger context of Ottoman social politics, where stereotypes about one group or another often influenced the way policies were implemented in the region. For example, *Gegë* were considered less eloquent, and especially those living in the mountainous areas of the Kosova and Iskodra Vilayets, were often depicted as both violent, and borderline stupid; the quintessential hillbilly in other words. *Toskë*, on the other hand, since so many became part of the Ottoman intellectual elite and were most likely writing the description of the region, positioned themselves to be the eloquent, civilized approximates of a proper European, a position often still seen today in greater Albanian cultural politics.¹⁸⁴

Highlighting these internal divisions, especially in the context of the Balkans, brings forward the historical heterogeneity of the area, and challenges the homogenous self-representations of the various ethnic groups in the Balkans.¹⁸⁵ In the case of the Albanians who migrated to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, these divisions were also present among the *Toskë* community, which was represented in a much larger number than the *Gegë* migrants. The early activists among the Albanians in the United States were aware of these internal divisions and made the greatest effort to overcome them.

¹⁸⁴ Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912*, 21, 22.

¹⁸⁵ An outstanding source for understanding intra-ethnic variations of Albanian speakers, and other ethnic groups around them in the Balkans, is Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative Balkan Modernities, 1800-1912*; Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short Story*.

In 1900, there were only around forty-two Albanians in the United States, however this small number grew due to those who returned to their homeland and spread the “news of fortunes to be made in America” among their peers. Because the first arrivals settled in Boston, that city continued to receive new immigrants, and the number of Albanian-speakers continually grew with passage of time around the Boston area.¹⁸⁶ By 1907 the number reached into the thousands, however the 1910 federal census listed only 625 people of Albanian ethnicity. This was due to two factors. First, many had worked in other parts of the world before coming to America, and were probably registered based on their last destination prior to arrival.¹⁸⁷ Second, because of the lack of defined state boundaries, and the multiethnic nature of the Ottoman Empire, many Albanian-speakers were multilingual, and self-identified as Turks, especially the ones who had adopted the Muslim faith during the Ottoman rein. Immigration authorities in the United States, although aware of the existence of Albanian language and history, labeled some arrivals as Greeks, because they spoke the Greek language, and registered the others as Turks because they presented themselves as such. Some Albanians were almost certainly also placed in the “Other peoples” category; in 1907 there were about 2,000 people in this category, 1,300 of whom

¹⁸⁶ Nagi, *The Albanian-American Odyssey: A Pilot Study of the Albanian Community of Boston, Massachusetts*, 35.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

came from “Turkey in Europe.”¹⁸⁸ Three years later, in the 1910 census, there were over 32,000 people registered as being from “Turkey in Europe.”¹⁸⁹ While this categorization does not provide numerical certainty, it does point to a significant increase in the number of Albanian-speakers who were reaching the shores of the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century. Coming to America, for most Albanian-speakers at the turn of the twentieth century, meant being able to secure some material wealth and return to their place of origin. They were mostly low skilled, poor young men with no formal education who engaged in manual labor, or worked in service industries.¹⁹⁰ They did not plan to make America their permanent home, so they left their families behind in hopes of returning to them one day. According to some estimates, by 1919 there were about 30,000 Albanian-speakers in the United States, although only around 1,000 were females.¹⁹¹

The first arrivals’ numbers grew mainly through very concentrated chain migration. As with other chain migrations, over time this migration “resembled more webs of unending branches than a chain,”¹⁹² but during the first decade of

¹⁸⁸ U.S. House, *Dictionary of Races or People, Reports of the Immigration Commission*, Reports of the Immigration Commission, 61st Congress, 3d Session, 1911, 15.

¹⁸⁹ United States Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970: Part 1* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975), 118.

¹⁹⁰ George Henderson and Thomas Dele Olasiji, *Migrants, Immigrants, and Slaves: Racial and Ethnic Groups in America* (Lanham, MD.: University Press of America, 1995), 147.

¹⁹¹ Nagi, *The Albanian-American Odyssey: A Pilot Study of the Albanian Community of Boston, Massachusetts*, 33.

¹⁹² José Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 392.

the twentieth century these migrants came from a very limited area of southern Albania, centering around the town of Korcha. One such source of migration was the village of Katundi, which served as the first emigration center where the news about the “discovery” of America spread.¹⁹³ A priest by the name of Nicholas Christopher, who settled in Massachusetts in 1886, was instrumental in advertising the bounties that could be found in America among his fellow Katundi villagers. Father Christopher would spread the word about the fortunes to be made in America and bring a few fellow villagers or family members back with him to the United States on every trip he took.¹⁹⁴ The nearly 140 pages of signatures on a 1919 petition from Vatra confirm that the majority of Massachusetts Albanians¹⁹⁵ were from the southern Albanian town of Korcha.¹⁹⁶

At the outset of the twentieth century, Albanian-populated lands in the Balkans were poorly developed, lacking infrastructure, and without meaningful information about the world around them, so the task of informing the local population about the opportunities awaiting in America fell on returnees who

¹⁹³ Federal Writers’ Project Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts, *The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and the New*, 12.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ I describe the pre-World War I migrants as Albanian-speakers, and post-World War I migrants as Albanians. The State of Albania was declared in 1912, however the American public was more aware of Albania after the conclusion of the Great War. Immigration and Naturalization did not classify any arrivals as Albanians until 1924; see Social Science Research Council, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789-1945* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1949), 21. However, Albania was already officially recognized by the American government before that time.

¹⁹⁶ The Pan-Albanian Federation of America Vatra, *Statement of the Christian Orthodox Albanian Natives of the Districts of Koritza and Kolonia in Reply to the Declaration of the Pan-Epirotic Union in America, of May 1919* (Boston: Vatra, 1919); ANA, Fund, “Albanian Societies in the United States of America,” 1919, File 20.

visited their birthplaces. The lack of information through the press and other media was compensated by word of mouth. Stories about particular individuals dressed in western clothes and boasting an opulent lifestyle spread quickly among local populations, and were reinforced by the receipt of letters and foreign exchange checks from relatives abroad. According to one account, “In the local store and in the blacksmith shop, village news peddlers would gather to discuss grand possibilities awaiting young, healthy men in the new country.”¹⁹⁷

The imagination that was stirred through word of mouth and village gossip, continued to be stimulated by steamship companies that would offer to transport migrants to the land of abundance, and moneylenders would be on hand to finance the voyage—at a price. Elaborate schemes to finance the journeys of young Albanian speakers were organized in cooperation with steamship agents at inflated prices and high rates of interest. Because the Ottoman administration was reluctant to issue travel documents to young people, additional bribes had to be paid to officials. Land and other property was used as a collateral, and lenders also had agents installed within the Albanian community in the United States, to secure loan payments.¹⁹⁸ Despite the high cost, the desire to migrate only grew, and once people reached the United States they were always interested in finding

¹⁹⁷ Federal Writers’ Project Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts, *The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and the New*, 12.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

new ways to sponsor the journeys of their male family members and friends left behind.

Only a small number of these migrants could speak or write in English, and many turned to America's few Albanian-language newspapers to ask for information concerning the possibilities and regulations for migrating into the United States. Due to the impossibility of answering all such letters, *Kombi*, one of the first Albanian newspapers to be published in the United States, decided to publish special articles that would inform the Albanian population about the conditions for migrating. In one article the editor previewed the types of jobs that could be acquired in America, and informed readers of other requirements, including the nature of the interviews conducted by immigration authorities.¹⁹⁹ One writer expected that the United States would become the primary destination for Albanian-speaking migrants, because of the "unlimited" opportunities that it offered.²⁰⁰

As mentioned in the previous chapters, Albanian-speakers migrated constantly within the Ottoman Empire, and into various other parts of Europe; however, once they started to cross the Atlantic, the United States became one of their more desirable destinations. Despite the hardship experienced during the voyage, America began to occupy a prominent place in the consciousness of most Albanians. When Fan Noli reached New York in June of 1906, he compared his

¹⁹⁹ *Kombi*, February 8, 1907, 4.

²⁰⁰ *Kombi*, June 30, 1906, 1.

voyage to the tremendous pain that a mother suffers upon giving birth, but that is forgotten as soon as she lays her eyes upon her “beautiful and healthy” child.²⁰¹ In addition to the economic advantages that the migrants saw in America, they perceived it as more progressive than the Ottoman Empire, and the best country in the world for “knowledge, trade, and riches.” The main reason that America was so advanced, according to *Kombi*, is because it was the first nation to understand the meaning of “liberty, and independence.”²⁰² America was not praised exclusively by the learned Albanians; gratitude was sung by migrants from all quarters, with verses like, “Who opened America may his soul shine and shine / A fellow from Korcha and one from Katundi may their souls shine and shine,” praising the first two arrivals from the towns of Korcha and Katundi.²⁰³

The very first arrivals were mostly educated individuals who had first migrated to other countries in Western Europe and the various Ottoman provinces.²⁰⁴ However, most of their immediate followers were young men without much life experience in industrialized settings. Most seemed content with the hard life of immigrant work in America because it offered them opportunities for material enrichment; however they also faced some hardships that came with

²⁰¹ Fan Noli to Thanas Tashko, 15 June 1906, in *Letërkëmbimi I Fan S. Nolit (Fan S. Noli's Written Correspondence)* (Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese Erik, 2012), 25.

²⁰² June 30, 1906, 1.

²⁰³ Federal Writers' Project Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts, *The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and the New*, 5.

²⁰⁴ Constantine A. Demo, *The Albanians in America: The First Arrivals* (Boston: Society “Fatbardhësia” of Katundi, 1960), 10.

moving to a totally different environment. Arriving from a region where “the basic continuity in its economic history is poverty,”²⁰⁵ only a small improvement in life would initially suffice. Even today, Albania is still considered to be the most economically backward country in Europe, as a result of Ottoman economic policies that fostered economic development in the non-Albanian parts of “Turkey-in-Europe.” On the eve of its declaration of independence from the Ottomans, beyond the coastal towns, the interior of Albania could only be reached through very dangerous mule tracks.²⁰⁶

In addition to the hard life that awaited them in early twentieth-century industrial America, the new migrants had to make sense of their new environment, and make an attempt to adapt to these new conditions. Like other migrants to American shores, they also experienced the effects of “broken homes, interruptions of a familiar life, and separation from known surroundings, seen as aspects of alienation.”²⁰⁷ America’s social milieu was unfamiliar and hard to make sense of. The Albanians of the early twentieth century came from a heavily patriarchal society of large extended families. Early twentieth-century Albania could scarcely be distinguished from the “the way it must have appeared in the

²⁰⁵ Michael Kaser, “Economic Continuities in Albania’s Turbulent History,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 4 (June 2001): 627.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 628.

²⁰⁷ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951), 4.

fifteenth century.”²⁰⁸ In these largely patriarchal families, the young males were groomed and trained to continue the family bloodline, and their life was structured around a “primitive constitution,” known as the Canons of Lek Dukagjin, that heavily regulated life, including matters of marriage, land boundaries, and taxes.²⁰⁹ For most of the young males who migrated to America, the shock of the extremely different environment must have been compounded by the loss of support that the family social organization provided to Albanian-speakers in their homeland.

This social arrangement, which could have been seen as backward and primitive by Western standards, provided a social safety net in which responsibilities and benefits were divided among extended family members. This patriarchal family structure persisted for a long time in Albania, and according to a 1918 census, about fifty percent of the Albanian urban population lived in multiple family and extended family households.²¹⁰ Departure from these traditional patriarchal patterns began only with the communist takeover after the

²⁰⁸ Bernd Fisher, “Albanian Highlands Tribal Society and Family Structure in the Process of Twentieth Century Transformation,” *East European Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 281.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 282; For information regarding the Canons of Lek Dukagjin see: Shtjefën Gjeçov, *Kanuni I Lekë Dukagjinit (The Code of Lekë Dukagjini)*, trans. Leonard Fox (New York: Gjonlekaj, 1989); and Margaret Hasluck, *The Unwritten Law in Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954).

²¹⁰ Siegfried Gruber, “Household Formation and Marriage: Different Patterns in Serbia and Albania,” in *Household and Family in the Balkans: Two Decades of Historical Family Research at University of Graz*, ed. Karl Kaser (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2012), 267.

Second World War.²¹¹ Exact numbers for extended families outside urban areas are much scarcer, but considering the agricultural nature of rural areas, we can deduce that the number of extended and multiple families was much higher there.

In addition to the loss of the family structure, new Albanian arrivals to the United States had to also deal with the cultural shock of the industrialized society they found on the eastern seaboard of the United States. On the eve of its declaration of independence in 1912, Albania had the worst economy in Europe, mostly reliant on self-sufficient agriculture and the raising of livestock. Albania's rural population comprised more than 80 percent of the total, whereas its largest city, Shkodra, had just 25,000 inhabitants. The road network was underdeveloped as well, with only 185 kilometers of paved roads out of the total 300 kilometers. Only about 10 percent of the population could read and write Albanian, and in the small number of primary and secondary schools, instruction was conducted in Greek, Turkish, or Italian.²¹² Coming from a rural region where cities were almost non-existent to a city such as Boston, with a population of over half a million souls in 1900, the shock must have been enormous.²¹³

²¹¹ Riki Van Boeschoten, "Transnational Mobility and the Renegotiation of Gender Identities: Albanian and Bulgarian Migrants in Greece," in *Migration in the Southern Balkans: From Ottoman Territory to Globalized Nation States*, ed. Hans Vermeulen, Martin Baldwin-Edwards, and Riki Van Boeschoten (New York; Heidelberg: Springer Cham, 2015), 164.

²¹² Nicholas C. Pano, "Albania," in *The Columbia History of Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joseph Held (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 20.

²¹³ The number for the city of Boston found in Frederick Harold Fay, *The Population and Finances of Boston: A Study of Municipal Growth* (Boston: Municipal Print Office, 1901), 8.

Despite the novelty and shock they found in America, the newly arrived migrants were successful in finding ways to adapt to their new environment, combining various strategies from the Old World and the New. Many had come with the intention of returning after earning enough money, or when political conditions had improved. For this group the United State presented a temporary refuge, and integrating into the new society was the last thing on their mind. According to some estimates, only about 15 percent of Albanian migrants had wives with them.²¹⁴ Another indication of their sojourner mindset is their high rate of return, and the very small number of individuals who chose to become American citizens; by 1920 only 7.4 percent had chosen to become naturalized.²¹⁵

Realizing the intent to return helps us understand the aversion toward integrating themselves into American life, however practical decisions had to be made on survival strategies while away from home. After all, migrants had to establish some form of residence in order to survive, while at the same time earning money to support their family members left behind. One way of recreating the familiarity of home was to congregate in an Albanian-speaking milieu, and create spaces where they could meet, socialize, and gather information about employment. In New England, such a space was created in the worst parts

²¹⁴ Joseph S. Roucek, "Albanian Americans," in *Our Racial and National Minorities: Their History, Contributions, and Present Problems*, ed. Francis J. Brown and Joseph S. Roucek (New York: Prentice Hall, 1939), 333.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 332, 334.

of Boston, where many new arrivals first settled and lived under very bad conditions.

To save money on rent, men crowded together in tenements in the slums. Ten or fifteen men often lived together in a single flat, the *konak*. Existence in the *konak* was drab. In the homeland Albanians had been accustomed to an outdoor life; here they were cramped within the four walls of the most dilapidated houses in the worst slum areas of America's mill towns. After a long stretch at the work bench or the loom, they returned in the evening to dreary, cold tenements. Since there were no women, the immigrants had to clean the flat and cook their own meals. Different members took turns in the kitchen. Besides cooking, they washed and mended their own clothes and repaired their own shoes.²¹⁶

Konak literally means a government building in the center of town, but it could also refer to a regular wooden house, originally meaning a stop along a caravan route.²¹⁷ For Albanians it simply meant a residence, and a place of socializing, but calling it a *konak* probably made them reminisce of their houses back home.

The *konak* became an institution among the early arrivals, usually situated near transportation and places of employment, from whence they took to the streets of Boston with their pushcarts of fish or vegetables.²¹⁸ Despite the harsh living conditions, it provided some sense of normalcy and familiarity with Albanian customs and traditions, and a reprieve from very long workdays. Migrants helped each other, cared for the sick together, and found work for their

²¹⁶ Federal Writers' Project Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts, *The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and the New*, 10.

²¹⁷ Jason Goodwin, *Lords of the Horizons: A History of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Picador, 1998), 137.

²¹⁸ David Levinson and Melvin Ember, *American Immigrant Cultures: Builders of a Nation*, vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan Reference, 1997), 28.

community's needy members. Within these dwellings the old patriarchal structure based on seniority was recreated as well. The older members of the community were consulted before making any important decisions, and had the highest trust among the younger ones, or at least a sense of respect for the world in which they were raised. The senior members also took on the role of financial planners for the younger ones. The young members did not have familiarity with the banking institutions in the New World, so they entrusted their earnings to the older members. They then had to ask for permission to use their money, and their elders would decide if the expenditure was justified.²¹⁹

Before they began to organize in more conventional ethnic organizations, Albanian-speakers used the *kaffane*, or coffee house, as a space to congregate, eat, and socialize. Here they would pull together share any news from the homeland, and discuss employment opportunities. The coffee house was a place that reinforced ethnic belonging.²²⁰ The *konak* and *kaffane* served well the purpose of supporting the migrants in finding their way in the New World, and at the same time reinforced the ethnic ties among them. Most new arrivals had held a regional or village identity before coming to America, where they discovered immigrants of other nationalities, began to distinguish between these groups and themselves, and forged a shared "Albanian" ethnicity among themselves. Despite the

²¹⁹ Federal Writers' Project Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts, *The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and the New*, 10.

²²⁰ Levinson and Ember, *American Immigrant Cultures: Builders of a Nation*, 1:28, 29.

existence of multiple layers of village, regional, and professional identities in the context of the complex Ottoman Empire, new migrants started to recognize and reinforce their commonalities in America. For many, the encounter with other ethnicities made them become “Albanian” in the modern sense. Despite the recognized need to establish offices to offer aid to newcomers, most of the early migrants found help and community within these informal organizations.²²¹

Boston became a springboard for Albanian nationalists’ long and arduous journey toward realizing their desire to have Albania recognized as equal among other modern nations. The road to unity would challenge Albanian community leaders, who immersed themselves heavily in nationalist ideologies, and had high hopes of quickly creating a homogenized ethnic group that would contribute to the creation and maintenance of a modern nation-state. The Albanian-speaking community eventually arrived at that goal, but first it had to overcome the hurdles created by the fragmented nature of the ethnic organizations that started to spring up in the United States.

While the majority of new arrivals came to the United States for material gain, a select group of future community leaders had come to avoid persecution. These nationalists had the intention of uniting and organizing Albanian-speakers around the idea of an independent Albanian state. One of the first to arrive was Petro Nino Luarasi, whose efforts to establish Albanian-language schools had

²²¹ *Kombi*, July 23, 1906, 3.

drawn the ire of both Ottoman and Greek authorities. He was such an ardent nationalist that he risked not being admitted into the United States by refusing to register as a Greek with immigration authorities.²²² Luarasi would return to his native land after spending four years in the United States; however he planted the seeds that would grow into a vibrant Albanian community.

An educational pioneer in Albania, Luarasi also became the pioneer of the Albanian nationalist movement in America by founding one of the first Albanian community organizations, named *Mall' I Mëmëdheut* (Longing for the Motherland) in Jamestown and Buffalo, New York.²²³ Luarasi had previously attempted to open Albanian-language schools in Southern Albania. In 1890 he visited the Albanian colonies abroad to garner support for opening Albanian schools, and with the support from migrant colonies abroad, he was able to open and operate several Albanian-language schools, mostly in Southern Albania.²²⁴ He was condemned in the strongest fashion by Orthodox Bishop Filaretus for his education activities among his people, the Bishop declaring: “let him remain undecayed after death, let him never see blessing and happiness in this world until he repent.”²²⁵ In 1892 Filaretus excommunicated Luarasi for his attempts to promote the Albanian language, a language “which does not exist,” according to

²²² Elsie, *A Bibliographical Dictionary of Albanian History*, 288.

²²³ Beqir Meta, *Federata Panshqiptare “Vatra” (Pan-Albanian Federation Vatra)* (Tirana: Globus R., n.d.), 18.

²²⁴ Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening, 1872-1912*, 137.

²²⁵ “Miscellaneous News,” *The Adriatic Review*, March 1919, 278.

the Greek Church authorities.²²⁶ Ottoman authorities were also against his promotion of Albanian-language schools, and he was arrested, but able to escape and travel to the United States using falsified travel documents.²²⁷ Ultimately he did not repent for trying to promote education in his native language, and would continue his mission as a promoter of nationalist causes as a form of resistance toward church authorities for forbidding the use of Albanian language in schools. The aim of the society was to “sow the seeds of brotherhood, love, and unity, while opening the road to civilization through published books.”²²⁸ Luarasi was a very energetic person. “He was the Albanian Paul Revere who traveled the Albanian colonies, always preaching Albanianism. He was like a traveling library, his pockets always filled with pamphlets, magazines, and newspapers. He was Saint John preparing the way for those who were to follow him.”²²⁹ While he must have been a great preacher, the flock he was preaching to was not very responsive, for many reasons.

Albanian-speaking migrants were in the midst of discovering the hardships of the New World, and trying to adapt to the new environment. For most of them, day-to-day personal strife due to long days at work left little time to engage in community activities. They lived in small clusters, only engaging themselves in the *konak*, and living detached from the larger community of

²²⁶ Elsie, *A Bibliographical Dictionary of Albanian History*, 288.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ *Kombi*, July 15, 1906, 2.

²²⁹ Demo, *The Albanians in America: The First Arrivals*, 10.

Albanian-speakers, making it hard to create a viable unified movement. The matter was not helped by the fact that a majority of migrants lacked any experience with organized political life, and could not read or write.²³⁰

This illiteracy, a result of Turkish authorities' placing barriers on the education of Albanians, proved a significant hurdle. With the passage of the 1917 Immigration Act, Albanians in then U.S. campaigned to inform potential immigrants of the perils of the new literacy tests instituted by immigration authorities, and declared that it was imperative for them to learn to write before taking the journey. They also explained that one way to avoid being turned away upon arrival was to declare Canada as one's final destination, as no such law existed there. Those who declared themselves in transit would be accompanied by U.S. officials to Canada.²³¹ It is likely that many then found a way back into the United States to join their friends and families. Despite the many hardships presented by an uneducated flock, Luarasi was able to pave the way for other community leaders to continue his work, and he is probably the most unsung hero of the Albanian-American movement and in the Albanian nationalist movement in general.

The next individual to play an important role was Sotir Peci, who with the utmost personal effort was able to prepare and publish the first Albanian-American newspaper, *Kombi*, in the city of Boston. The first issue appeared in

²³⁰ Meta, *Federata Panshqiptare "Vatra" (Pan-Albanian Federation Vatra)*, 18.

²³¹ *Yll'i i Mëngjesit (The Morning Star)*, August 15, 1917, 91.

June 1906, and featured articles in Albanian, but also English, French, and Italian. It was a relatively large publication for the time, and was supported by both paid subscriptions and advertisements.²³² Peci followed the blueprint of other Albanian- language publications produced abroad, such as *Albania*, published in Brussels, with the aim of informing an international audience about the situation in Albania.

Peci's main aim, from the beginning, was to advocate for the engagement of his compatriots for the Albanian cause, and further develop their patriotic feeling; in other words, the publication became the "protector, fighter, advisor, and helper" of the national interests of Albanians.²³³ *Kombi* informed American opinions about Albania, but also served to inform Albanians about America, in addition to promoting the connectedness of Albania with the United States. Lamenting Albanians' total neglect of the press in furthering their interests, Peci called for unconditional support for his endeavor so that it might open the eyes of the world to the Albanian fight for liberty and recognition.²³⁴ The newspaper was in constant financial trouble, frequently calling for subscribers to pay for their subscription without delay.²³⁵ Despite many financial difficulties, the publication was able to stay afloat until the beginning of 1909, when its readers were informed that it would henceforth to be published in Manastir (Ottoman territory),

²³² Fevziu, *Histori E Shtypit Shqiptar 1848-1996 (History of the Albanian Press 1848-1996)*, 29.

²³³ *Kombi*, June 9, 1906, front page.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, front page.

²³⁵ *Kombi*, August 7, 1908, front page.

after the Congress of Manastir,²³⁶ in hopes of becoming a better pan-Albanian publication, and that its subscribers should continue to receive it in the United States.²³⁷ Despite many challenges during its existence, *Kombi* held a prominent place in Albanian history. Just like the Albanian society Mall' I Mëmëdheut, *Kombi* was another stepping-stone toward the more organized Albanian-speaking societies that would grow in the United States.

Mall' I Mëmëdheut was one of the societies that eventually integrated into the pan-Albanian society Vatra. Before that integration, the national Albanian society Besa-Besen was founded in Boston on January 6, 1907.²³⁸ Besa, an Albanian word meaning a sacred and unbreakable vow, was chosen as the name because it had a strong tradition in the history of the Albanians. *Besa*, or the pledge of honor, would serve as a rallying cry for uniting all Albanian-speaking organizations under one umbrella, in order to serve the needs of the motherland.²³⁹

Some other smaller societies with an Albanian character existed early on, and to varying degrees they were successful in promoting different agendas among Albanians. While ultimately most of them would dissolve into the

²³⁶ Refer to information about the Congress in the previous chapter.

²³⁷ *Kombi*, January 1, 1909.

²³⁸ *Kalendari I Vatres I Motit 1918 (Calendar of Vatra for the Year 1918)*, 25.

²³⁹ One of the most popular works that depicts the importance, and meaning of *besa* is Şemsedin Sāmi, *Besa* (Prishtinë: Rlindja, 1978). It is a play written in 1875 in Turkish by one of the most prolific writers of the Albanian awakening movement, and a prominent figure in the Albanian nationalist movement.

Albanian nationalist movement, there were also groups with distinct regional characters, and with different purposes. For example, a society with a distinct southern Albanian character was formed in order to serve the needs of people from the village of Dardha. Despite their good intentions and limited scope, these kinds of benevolent associations faced many difficulties. From the outset, the “brotherhoods” of “Dardha” and “Dashuria” had problems organizing members.²⁴⁰

The man that would lead the effort to unite all Albanians under one roof in America was Fan Stilian Noli, who arrived in the “mother city of the new world,” New York, on May 31, 1906. He immediately set out to survey the Albanian colonies in the United States. He did not know what to expect, but he was hopeful about the encounter.²⁴¹ Arriving in Buffalo in June, he was very enthusiastic, and evaluated positively the small number of his compatriots, claiming that they received him in the most hospitable manner, and were so welcoming and happy that he was not allowed under any circumstances to spend any of his money for food, because everyone seemed eager to buy him meals. He hoped that the United States government would recognize the legality of the Albanian association they had formed, which would begin publishing a small publication, to be followed by a larger one, expanding the reach of the association

²⁴⁰ *Kombi*, June 15, 1906, 3.

²⁴¹ Fan Noli to Jani Vruho, June 1, 1906, in *Letërkëmbimi I Fan S. Nolit (Fan S. Noli's Written Correspondence)*, 27.

among all Albanians. He had very high hopes, and suggested that upon the legalization of the association, Albanians should be prepared to support it monetarily, which would be essential for speedy expansion. He also wrote to a friend that as far as his personal situation was concerned, he hoped to find good employment after mastering the English language, but for the time being he had to be content with finding factory work, like most of his compatriots had already done.²⁴² For an intellectual like himself working in factories was unfamiliar and backbreaking work, but he saw so much promise in the United States that nothing could dampen his enthusiasm.

Fan Noli's correspondence with his compatriots serves as a reminder of the difficulties he faced, despite his initial enthusiasm. In many instances he felt exasperated with the divisive attitude of his compatriots, and their inability to cooperate. Upon visiting places like Southbridge and Worcester, where the combined number of Albanians reached over five hundred people, he declared in despair that it would be more beneficial to "throw them all in the sea," because there was not the faintest hope that any help would come from them. He was attempting to convince people to subscribe to *Kombi* in order to keep it alive, but he could only find five willing subscribers among the other "rotten, and disgusting" people unwilling to aid his cause. The lack of interest from Albanian colonies, both in the US and around the world, made it impossible to do anything,

²⁴² Fan Noli to Jani Vruho, June 6, 1906, in *ibid.*, 28.

considering that the newspaper had more than three hundred dollars in debt.²⁴³ Yet this indifference should not be surprising, as most of the people that Noli encountered were illiterate, and he returned to the newspaper in total disillusionment.

Before attempting to find subscribers, Noli had wholeheartedly begun to work as an assistant to the editor of *Kombi*, Sotir Peci, in high hopes that the newspaper would become successful in reaching Albanians in America. Peci had bought the printing press on installments, and was barely able to make payments, so Noli was working for free, apart from the arrangements for lodging and food that Peci had promised him. Beforehand, Noli had worked for about three months cutting wood in Buffalo, and the new job appealed to his intellectual interests, and maybe seemed easier than the physical work in Buffalo, but it did not offer the promise of wealth.²⁴⁴ Despite the hardships, Noli was able to help with the newspaper for about ten months, working with outdated equipment, helping with writing and printing, and relentlessly attempting to advertise the benefits of having an Albanian-language newspaper in the United States.

Upon finally realizing that Peci was barely supporting himself, let alone able to employ him, Noli resigned and decided to look for work in New England

²⁴³ Fan Noli to Thanas Tashko, September 9, 1906, in *ibid.*, 34.

²⁴⁴ Fan S. Noli, *Autobiografia (Autobiography)*, trans. Abdullah Karjagdiu (Tirana: Shtëpia Botuese Elena Gjika, 1994), 67.

factories.²⁴⁵ It is also apparent that Noli had quarreled with the editor of *Kombi*, as he loudly complained that his efforts had not been appreciated enough. Peci had promised him that he would reward him well when the proceeds from the newspaper started to roll in, and that he would be treated like a partner in the newspaper. After the fallout, Noli was upset that Peci claimed he had withdrawn from the newspaper voluntarily, and further declared that Noli was only a moral and intellectual supporter, ignoring all his work on the printing presses and his attempt to attract subscribers.²⁴⁶ This lack of recognition dampened Noli's spirits, but he was not one to give up.

Divisions among various Albanian societies persisted for some time, and sporadic attempts to unify the community were not bearing fruit. Despite the efforts of Noli, it would take several years to create a cohesive platform. Belonging to three different faiths, Albanians lacked the religious homogeneity existing among their Balkan neighbors. While Serbians, Bulgarians, and Greeks had their respective Orthodox churches, which also promoted their respective languages, Albanians lacked such an institution. Under Ottoman rule, Albanian-speakers were not allowed to conduct any educational activity in their native language because the administration wanted to suppress any nationalist feelings among them. Islamicized Albanians could only be educated in Arabic and

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 68.

²⁴⁶ Fan Noli to Thanas Tashko, May 20th, 1907, in *Letërkëmbimi I Fan S. Nolit (Fan S. Noli's Written Correspondence)*, 46–47.

Turkish, because the Ottoman Empire was organized around religious communities, and not ethnic ones.²⁴⁷ Likewise, Albanians of Orthodox faith therefore had access only to Greek Orthodox schools, and the small number of Roman Catholics had very limited access to Catholic schools.

Albanian-speakers in America therefore lacked any formal education in their native language, which made it difficult to generate interests for the written Albanian word. The first arrivals were mostly Orthodox Christians from the southern part of Albania, meaning that the small number of them that had any reading skills could only read in Greek. Most of them probably had a stronger religious identity than ethnic or national one. Fan Noli skillfully tapped into this religious sentiment by attempting to create an Albanian autocephalous Orthodox Church in 1908.

Before his efforts to create the church, Noli was instrumental in creating the pan-Albanian society Besa-Besen in Boston, in 1907.²⁴⁸ The society was better organized than its predecessors, and drew its inspiration from the “ideal” government of the United States and the “strength and unity” of the American people. Its explicit goal, as outlined in its constitution, was the creation of such a government in Albania, with hopes that the American model could be transplanted there. Falling back into deep-seated cultural ideas about respecting

²⁴⁷ Bideleux and Jeffries, *The Balkans: A Post-Communist History*, 27.

²⁴⁸ “Constitution and By Laws of the Albanian Society ‘Besa-Besen’” (Boston: Shtyp. E “Kombit,” 1907), ANA, Fund, Albanian Societies in the United States of America, File 57.

hospitality, the society also declared its gratefulness for the great opportunities that it found in this land of opportunity and liberty, but felt that it also owed its “own nation a great debt.”²⁴⁹

The constitution went on to declare that the purpose of Besa-Besan’s existence would be to foster unity among Albanians of all walks of life, regardless of religious belief or political considerations. It also called on members of any other nationalities who had a desire to help the Albanians to join the society. In addition, Besa-Besen set the goal of aiding the new arrivals, especially concentrating on educating the “intelligent” ones, so they would be able to return to Albania and contribute toward its development, and promoted the establishment of Albanian- and English-language schools in Albania, together with the production and distribution of literature supporting the Albanian cause.²⁵⁰ With Fan Noli chosen as its president, the immediate task of the society was to strengthen a crucial element in unifying Albanians—education in their native language through instruction on reading and writing Albanian, because most of them were illiterate. Besa-Besen remained active until 1912, when it became part of the pan-Albanian society Vatra.

Noli seemed to also push for affirming the Albanian language on the religious front, and started to actively advocate for the establishment of an Albanian Orthodox Church independent from the Greek Orthodox one. While this

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

might seem unrelated, the main purpose was to establish Albanian-language church services, and it appears to be driven by Noli's pragmatism, because most Albanian migrants belonged to the Orthodox faith. By establishing the Albanian church, Noli was attempting to further instill nationalist feeling through sermons in the Albanian language, and at the same time break to hold of the Greek Church and the "pro-Greek clergymen [who] systematically and blatantly spread ideas antipathetic to Albanian nationalism."²⁵¹ According to Noli, it was time to establish an Albanian church, with Albanian priests, who would conduct services and educate people in their native Albanian. The establishment of the church would immensely help in furthering the nationalist ideal, and help achieve goals that were presently out of reach.²⁵²

Founding an independent church was a hefty goal, and changing people's habits overnight no easy task, especially among those who had listened to Greek sermons for centuries. However, after propagating among the Albanian-speakers for some time, Fan Noli found the perfect opportunity to portray the Greek Orthodox Church in bad light, thereby strengthening his argument for an independent church. The opportunity was presented when an Albanian migrant named Kristaq Dishnica died in Hudson, Massachusetts, and the local Greek Orthodox priest refused to be present for his funeral services, because he

²⁵¹ Federal Writers' Project Works Progress Administration of Massachusetts, *The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and the New*, 42.

²⁵² Fan Noli to "Bashkimi" society in Bucharest (Romania), February 2, 1907, in *Letërkëmbimi I Fan S. Nolit (Fan S. Noli's Written Correspondence)*, 41.

considered Dishnica to be an Albanian nationalist. As a nationalist, Dishnica was excommunicated from the church (similar to the case of Luarasi, the Greek Orthodox Church in America extended the practice of excommunicating Albanian nationalists), so without any religious services he was buried in a Worcester cemetery. What became known as the “Hudson Incident” served as the spark that ignited the passions, and push for definite separation from the Greek Church.²⁵³ There is still some debate regarding the “incident,” and even the existence or non-existence of any Greek Orthodox priest in the vicinity; nevertheless the story was skillfully used by Albanian nationalists.²⁵⁴ Some momentum was built even before the incident, but now was the time to spring into action, which entailed finding religious institutions that would lend a hand, because it was obvious that the Greek Orthodox authorities would fight to stop such a move by the Albanian-speaking community.

The “Hudson Incident” provoked indignation in the Albanian-speaking community in Massachusetts, which gathered after the funeral and decided to look for an Albanian orthodox priest who would serve their needs. They approached Fan Noli, asking him to find a way to be ordained a priest in order to start services for them. He accepted and set forth for New York to find out if the Russian

²⁵³ Biernat, “Albania and Albanian Émigrés in the United States Before World War II,” 14.

²⁵⁴ William Wolkowic, “Albanians of Hudson and the Origin of the Albanian Orthodox Church,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 17, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 52.

Orthodox Church was willing to help.²⁵⁵ The Russian Orthodox Archdiocese accepted Noli's request and he was ordained in 1908, thereafter organizing the first Albanian parishes in the United States.²⁵⁶

Noli's establishment as a priest was advertised with fanfare, and he was given a full-page editorial in *Kombi*, where he stressed the importance of religious services in the Albanian language. He also dwelled on how the many religions practiced among Albanians had arrested the development of the Albanian nationalism, and used the Greeks as an example of a people with religious homogeneity, who had already achieved independence from the Ottomans. He did not blame any religious group in particular, but highlighted the damage done by foreign clergy, preaching to Albanians in foreign tongue, and suppressing their nationalist ideas and feelings. Founding an Albanian Orthodox church was a very important step toward a more unified nation, where Albanians would control their religious and national affairs themselves.²⁵⁷

On February 15, 1909, Besa-Besen began publication of the weekly newspaper *Dielli*, a continuation of the *Kombi*, which would shortly become the most prominent Albanian newspaper, as well as the only daily one, in the world, with Fan Noli as its first director. Another prominent migrant intellectual, Faik Konica, who had publishing experience in Europe, took over editorial duties in

²⁵⁵ Noli, *Autobiografia (Autobiography)*, 69–70.

²⁵⁶ Wolkowic, "Albanians of Hudson and the Origin of the Albanian Orthodox Church," 52.

²⁵⁷ *Kombi*, March 27, 1908, front page.

October of the same year.²⁵⁸ As we will see in the following chapters, Noli and Konica spearheaded a powerful political movement that would fiercely lobby for the existence of a national Albanian state. Their movement engaged other Albanian intellectuals in defending the idea of an Albanian nation, mainly through writing and lobbying in the United States and other parts of the world.

Before the declaration of Albanian independence in 1912, another milestone passed in the United States. With the idea of uniting Albanians in the United States now floating around, on December 24, 1911 the first formal step toward achieving this goal was taken at the urging of the leadership of Besa-Besen, in Boston. At the urging of Marko Adams, a commission composed of Faik Konica, Fan Noli, Kristo Floqi, and Paskal Aleksii formed to unify all Albanian organizations in the United States.²⁵⁹ The historical record on Marko Adams and Paskal Aleksii is somewhat sparse apart from their being mentioned as founding members of Vatra; however, Faik Konica and Kristo Floqi figure more prominently. Floqi finished his law studies in Athens in 1899, practiced law in his native town, became a popular dramatist, and after helping to found Vatra, he returned to Albania in 1912 to help the newly-declared Albanian state establish a new legal system.²⁶⁰ Konica was a diplomat, translator, and a prolific writer who published articles in 130 periodicals and in “nine different languages”—most of

²⁵⁸ *Kalendari I Vatres I Motit 1918 (Calendar of Vatra for the Year 1918)*, 25.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁶⁰ Elsie, *A Bibliographical Dictionary of Albanian History*, 141.

them lobbying for the Albanian cause—who lived until his death in the United States.²⁶¹ Theirs efforts resulted in the formation of the “Pan Albanian Federation of America,” or Vatra, on April 28, 1912. *Dielli*, which became the official organ of the society, and informed Albanian migrants about the society and its goals.²⁶² The next chapter will discuss Vatra in more detail, including its activities to promote and lobby for the creation of an Albanian nation-state, and its “rightful” place amongst the other European nations.

The Ottoman Empire lasted for five centuries, and among many groups who became the subjects of the Empire, Albanian-speakers navigated it fairly well by becoming part of the establishment in their native lands, and migrating and establishing themselves throughout the many outposts of the empire. We have seen how they established small Albanian colonies throughout the world, and at the end of the nineteenth century began to cross the Atlantic. They did this at a time when the Ottoman Empire was breathing its last breath, and nationalist movements were starting to take hold, creating new nation-states carved out from the former territories of the Empire. Greeks, Serbs, and Bulgarians successfully formed their independent states, and Albanians would follow suit as latecomers to the nation-building exercise. The opportunities for Albanians to move within the region were narrowing, and pressures from Ottoman authorities made it almost

²⁶¹ Wojciech Roszkowski and Jan Kofman, *Biographical Dictionary of Central and Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 484–85.

²⁶² *Kalendari I Vatres I Motit 1918 (Calendar of Vatra for the Year 1918)*, 51.

impossible for Albanian intellectuals to work from within toward achieving nationhood. For the masses, bad economic conditions in the former Empire, and the allure of the America, combined to motivate many to search for better economic conditions beyond the Atlantic.

For Albanian-speakers at the beginning of the twentieth century, America became a refuge for both the economic and the political migrant, and a place of convergence for the two groups. The economic migrants were mostly young and uneducated single men searching for riches in America, and to the intellectuals they were a blank slate that could be inscribed with the ideas of nationalism, far away from the sight of their former Ottoman rulers. At first, most of them settled in the northeastern United States, with Boston becoming the central hub of Albanian activity. Most engaged in hard physical work, or in the service industry, toiling from dusk to dawn, saving money to help their families left behind. They came mainly from Southern Albania at first, holding tight to their regional identities, with hopes of returning to their native land. It would take some time to convince them that their future was intertwined with the creation of an Albanian state, but persistent individuals worked tirelessly to convince them so.

Individuals like Sotir Peci, Fan Noli, and Faik Konica, among others, would work toward unifying the Albanian migrants, in many instances swallowing their pride and working through their own misunderstandings, divisions, and rivalries. Immigrant societies with a nationalist character and

newspapers in their native tongue served as a foundation toward a more consolidated Albanian movement. Finally, the formation of the independent Albanian Orthodox Church, and the creation of the organization Vatra, culminated the far-reaching efforts of Fan Noli to create a more homogenous Albanian outpost in the United States that would serve in some instances as a government in exile, campaigning on behalf of the Albanian state.

Chapter 5. We Belong in Europe, But America is Our Savior

On November 28, 1912, a group of Albanian representatives declared independence from the Ottoman Empire in the seaside port of Vlorë. A few weeks earlier, Albanian organizations abroad, in concert with individuals from their homeland, had organized a meeting in Bucharest where it was decided that the time had come to declare Albania an independent nation-state and organize a provisional government.²⁶³ The declaration of Albanian independence was a culmination of events spanning decades, and had taken a more definitive shape through the League of Prizren, discussed in Chapter 3. The strategy of working with the Ottomans as a way to protect the areas populated by Albanian speakers from their neighbors came to an end once it became clear that the Ottoman Empire was taking its last breath. However, the tumultuous era of the Balkan Wars and the First World War did not afford the new nation the needed time to organize an effective government, and this instability would force Albanians to seek another patron to provide protection. Albanians would first turn toward Europe, asking the major European powers to provide assistance in governance and protection of their territory.

The Albanian migrant colonies around the world took the lead in lobbying for the new Albanian state, engaging in activities and propaganda to demonstrate

²⁶³ Ramadan Marmullaku, *Albania and the Albanians* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1975), 28.

that Albanians fully deserved to be a part of the European family of nations, with the migrant colony in the United States becoming the backbone of this effort. The United States became the main hub from which Albanian leaders attempted to convince the world of Albania's antiquity, and its deserved place among the old European civilized nations based on its storied history. These efforts mainly concentrated on publishing literature in the United States and beyond, lobbying various American political centers for aid, and providing financial assistance to similar lobbying efforts in Europe. This chapter will conclude by reviewing the successful campaign of the newly created state to become a member of the League of Nations established at the end of the Great War.

The decision to declare independence was a result of growing national consciousness among Albanians, and the realization that the Empire would no longer be able to afford protection for the territory coveted by its neighbors. The Young Turk Revolution had also failed to grant the rights that Albanians had expected, leaving them only the option of declaring independence and turning toward European powers to guarantee Albanian borders. Ismail Qemali (also known as Ismail Kemal Bey), who is considered to be the founding father of Albania, described the great excitement of the Albanian people upon the unfolding of the old flag of Scanderbeg, "the last national Sovereign of Albania," which had lain folded for the previous 445 years. It was, he wrote, as "if the spirit of the immortal hero passed at that moment like a sacred fire over the heads of the

people.”²⁶⁴ For three decades Scanderbeg had fiercely resisted Ottoman armies, glorifying his name in Europe, and becoming known as “invincible.”²⁶⁵ Going back to the figure of Scanderbeg, long claimed to be the fiercest protector of Christianity from the Ottomans and the protector of the European gates, Ismail Qemali would finally attempt to return his nation to the embrace of Europe.

The founding father of Albania was a pragmatic leader who did not hide the fact that Albanians had been faithful servants of the Ottoman Empire, as he himself had been an exemplary agent of the Empire. Serving in the highest levels of the administration, and having been dispatched to various corners of the Empire as an able and trusted servant, he was one of many prominent Albanians to distinguish themselves while serving the Ottoman administration. He was heir to a very powerful Albanian family, who had faithfully served the Ottoman authorities as a provincial administrator in its efforts to consolidate power in territories inhabited by Albanians, and did not conceal his devotion to the Ottoman Empire.²⁶⁶ In one way or another, many prominent members of the Albanian National Movement were privileged members of society, who could travel throughout many important centers within the Empire and beyond to get educated or serve in different administrative posts, and in many cases similar to Qemali’s, they had benefited from the Empire.

²⁶⁴ Ismail Kemal Bey, “Albania and the Albanians,” July 1917, 156.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁶⁶ Bernd Fisher, “Albanian Nationalism and Albanian Independence,” *SEEU Review* 10, no. 1 (2014): 33.

The complex character of Ismail Qemali was a sign of the political and social realities of his own times, and a tale of complex identity formation, where local and imperial loyalties could coexist for some time, but ultimately the local cultural attachments proved to be stronger than the continued opportunity to be in the service of the Empire. He viewed the changing loyalties of Albanians in terms of national virtues of “fidelity to their words of honor and the religion of patriotism, with which goes the love of independence.”²⁶⁷ He continued by explaining that submission to different rulers was a necessary step in the struggle for survival, and Albania had never broken her oath of service to its ruler. “She waited for the other party to the contract to break faith; then released from her engagement, and having never lost sight of her aspirations, she profited by the opportunity to recover what she had lost.”²⁶⁸ According to its founder, Albania was predestined since time immemorial to become sovereign, but historical circumstance had forced her to perpetually wait until the right moment to reclaim her lost independence. In retrospect, Albania did in fact gain independence in 1912, but it was less clear at that tumultuous time that the perpetual cycle of gaining and losing autonomy would finally stop. Historical circumstances would make it very hard for the Albanians to secure a peaceful existence, despite their belief that the European powers would help them establish a firm foundation for their country.

²⁶⁷ Bey, “Albania and the Albanians,” 145.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 145–46.

Albanians became enthusiastic about the prospect of gaining autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, but the centralizing efforts by the Young Turks dashed their hopes quickly. By early 1910 many Albanian-inhabited regions of the Empire were in open revolt, and in May of 1911, a committee of Albanians gathered in the city of Vlora to demand the consolidation of the four Ottoman provinces of Janina, Scutari, Kosovo, and Monastir into one Albanian autonomous province within the Ottoman Empire.²⁶⁹ The large populations in these provinces were mainly Albanian, however the neighboring countries of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece held huge swaths of these areas under their control. With the crumbling of the Ottoman Empire in sight, the major players in the Balkans were making attempts to position themselves favorably, and the territories inhabited by Albanians were the most vulnerable due to their weak military and deplorable economic conditions. Without the protection of the Ottoman forces, and with no military capabilities of their own to defend their territory, Albanians' only hopeful option was to gain some form of legal grounding by consolidating the four provinces and gaining recognition from the main European powers.

The growing unrest in Albanian-populated territories, and the calls for unification of the four provinces, rattled their neighbors who had their own territorial designs. The growing Albanian National Movement irritated Serbs who

²⁶⁹ Robert C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2000), 9.

wanted to keep control over the province of Kosovo, and who also suspected Austria-Hungary to be the agitator among Albanians.²⁷⁰ It also accelerated efforts by Montenegro, which had territorial aspirations upon Northern Albania, to act, and by Greeks who wanted part of Southern Albania as their own territory.²⁷¹ Albanian lands were the last of the territories that still remained under Ottoman control on European soil, and the agitation by Albanians made it harder for the Empire to defend it from neighboring countries who had become stronger economically and politically, and also were under heavy Russian influence by this time. The desire by Albanians to become independent, and the desire by their neighbors to acquire much of their land, coupled with Russian intervention and influence, was one of the major factors that led to the establishment of the Balkan League, and the Balkan War of 1912 that landed the crippling blow to the already weakened Ottoman Empire.

The international rivalries that would ultimately lead to the Great War were both a curse and a blessing for Albanians. Because of Austro-Hungarian fear of the Balkan League, there was some hope that Austrians would provide aid for Albania. The great successes of the Balkan League members Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, and Bulgaria in the war against Turkey in 1912-1913 greatly alarmed Austrians because of the waning of their influence in the Balkans, and because of

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 10.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

the fear that the Serbian enemy was gaining the upper hand in the Balkans.²⁷² The First Balkan War did not go exactly as envisioned by its participants, and apart from the aim of defeating the Turks, many unforeseen issues caused friction between the Balkan League allies. Large parts of territory in Macedonia that were promised by agreement to Bulgaria were now occupied by Serbian armies, which now wanted to retain possession of all the Macedonian territories as compensation for the loss of territories in Albania.²⁷³ Austro-Hungarians who had worked diligently to undermine the Balkan League because of its “Russophile” nature were able to successfully exploit the divisions within it. Misunderstandings created during the division of spoils after the defeat of the Turks resulted in the Second Balkan War when Bulgaria attacked Serbian and Greek forces on June 29, 1913.²⁷⁴ Attempts by the Austro-Hungarian authorities to influence Balkan events, and to undermine Russian clients in the Balkans, were a factor in the preservation of the Albanian state.

Within this great turmoil in the Balkans, Albanians were scrambling to secure the existence of their newly declared independent nation. Upon being elected as the head of the Albanian Provisional government, Ismail Qemali swiftly informed the six Great European Powers about the development, requesting protection for the newly created country and recognition of the right of

²⁷² Margareta A. Faissler, “Austria-Hungary and the Disruption of the Balkan League,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 19, no. 53/54 (1939): 141.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

Albanians to create their own government. At the same time, he relayed the same information to all of the Balkan nations, also informing all parties that Albania would stay neutral in the Balkan Wars.²⁷⁵ Declaring itself neutral was mostly a symbolic statement, because the new Albanian government had to first secure recognition as a new nation, and Serbs, Montenegrins, and Greeks occupied large swaths of its pretended territory. However, despite Albania's inability to protect itself and secure its physical borders, the push by the six European powers of England, France, Russia, Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Italy to resolve the Balkan issues and avoid a larger confrontation brought some reprieve to the new state.

The Conference of Ambassadors of the great powers, charged with resolving the Balkan issues and helping the peace negotiations between the Balkan League allies and Turkey, started its proceedings on December 17, 1912.²⁷⁶ One of the largest issues to be faced by the participants of the conference was the issue of Albania and its borders. Serbia was demanding to have an outlet in the Adriatic Sea, and Austria and Italy were against this proposal, which in turn made them support Albania in its quest for independence, whereas Russia supported Serbian claims. Ultimately, while Austro-Hungary wanted to secure a large territorial deal for Albania and the Russians backed Serbian claims to

²⁷⁵ Owen Pearson, *Albania and King Zog: Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908-1939* (London; New York: The Centre for Albanian Studies in Association with I.B. Tauris, 2004).

²⁷⁶ Blendar Islami, *British Diplomacy and the Making of Albania, 1912-1914* (Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies, 2003), 23.

maximum territorial gains, a compromise was reached between the European Powers. The British foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey was essential in facilitating a compromise wherein the Russians convinced the Serbians to withdraw their claims for direct access to the Adriatic Sea, in exchange for guarantees by the Europeans to secure uninterrupted economic access to an Albanian port for Serbians. As Grey put it, “a Serbian Port on the Adriatic was not worth a European war.”²⁷⁷

The news of the acceptance of Albania’s autonomy by the European Powers, and of Serbia gaining commercial access to the Adriatic, brought a sigh of relief throughout the Atlantic world. The news that the six European Powers had reached a compromise over Albania meant that Europeans had averted a war, and the stock markets all over Europe reacted positively, as an optimistic sign that the existing monetary crisis in Europe was coming to an end.²⁷⁸ The world was relieved that the Balkan powder keg avoided exploding for the time being, and the autonomous Albania would enjoy a brief time of calm. After a brief euphoria, Albania would continue its fragile existence at the mercy of its aggressive neighbors, in hopes that the European powers would somehow finally award the ancient people of Albania with their long-desired return to the European family of nations.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 24.

²⁷⁸ “United on Albania, Powers Avert War,” *New York Times*, December 21, 1912.

The London Conference of Ambassadors decided on a stronger affirmation of Albania's independence on July 29, 1913, and set up control mechanisms for the new state. It declared, among other things, that:

1. Albania is constituted as an autonomous Principality, sovereign and hereditary by line of primogeniture, under the guarantee of the six Powers. The prince will be designated by the six Powers.
2. All bond of suzerainty between Turkey and Albania is abolished.
3. The control of the civil administration and of the finances of Albania is entrusted to an international commission composed of delegates of the Six powers and a delegate of Albania
4. The powers of the commission will continue for ten years, and can be renewed in case of need.
5. Security and public order will be guaranteed by an international gendarmerie organization. This organization will be entrusted to foreign officers who will have the higher and effective control of the gendarmerie.²⁷⁹

This settlement seemed for the moment to resolve the issue satisfactorily for Albanians, taking into considerations their lack of economic and military capabilities, and finally set up a strong foundation for the new state. It was also important that the new state was allowed to keep the pre-Ottoman flag that it

²⁷⁹ Islami, *British Diplomacy and the Making of Albania, 1912-1914*, 58–59.

desired.²⁸⁰ The nationalist leaders who wanted a clean break from the Ottoman Empire were satisfied and would continue to propagate the idea that Albania was deservedly retaking its place among the European family of nations. In the absence of direct representation in the London conference, representatives from Albania, and those who represented the Albanian colony in the United States, actively promoted their views outside of the conference, and seemed reassured by the prospects of a good outcome. They heavily promoted the idea of Albanian unity, trying to convince the diplomats and journalists that Albania had endured a long Ottoman occupation, but had never given up its European orientation.

The impulse to defend the European worthiness of Albanians was a result of many inconsistent descriptions of their people, based mainly on their isolation and arrested economic development. Religious diversity of the population was a reason that many outsiders considered them to be in constant religious warfare, and Muslim Albanians to be less civilized. The lack of infrastructure made it hard to travel beyond coastal towns for more detailed information, and “wild stories have long been current in regard to the conditions of the population.”²⁸¹ Their description as “wild” and “uncivilized” was used in sensational stories, while in fact “the average Albanian is not any worse than the average Balkanian, be he

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 58.

²⁸¹ *The New York Times Current History: The European War*, vol. 17 (New York: The New York Times Company, 1918), 281.

Greek or Bulgarian or Rumanian or Serbian.”²⁸² Greek propaganda, in its effort to undermine Albanian claims for independent existence and claim large parts of Southern Albania, did not see “race” and “language” as criteria for national independence, and speaking about southern Albanians, asked if they preferred to side “with wholly sympathetic Greece, or with predominantly Muslim Albania? Which do they prefer, race and language, or culture and religion?”²⁸³ The claims of inferiority based on culture and Muslim religion were driving factors behind the efforts of Albanians to discredit the narrative put forward by their neighbors with territorial pretensions.

There were also more nuanced, and even flattering, outsider views of Albanians. The claim that Albanians were brigands did not match the experience of a female traveler from Massachusetts, who “was not harmed or interfered with in any other way during her travels in Albania, but she was immediately captured and held for ransom by a band of Bulgarian highwayman as soon as she stepped out of Albanian territory.”²⁸⁴ As for the religious infighting among Albanians and their religious fanaticism, “it may be said that religious toleration exists in Albania to a degree found nowhere in the Balkans,” and as divided as they were “into Moslems, Roman Catholics, and Greek Catholics, they have always managed to get along far better than Catholics and Protestants in Western

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Edith Pierpont Stickney, *Southern Albania or Northern Epirus in European International Affairs, 1912-1923* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1926), 87.

²⁸⁴ *The New York Times Current History: The European War*, 17:281.

Europe.”²⁸⁵ There are also earlier descriptions of the religious tolerance of the Albanian ruler of the district of Janina (today in Greece), the famous Ali Pasha Lion of Janina, who had Jewish, Christian, and Muslim secretaries serving him, and of whom it was said, “that under his government all religions find an ample toleration.”²⁸⁶ Despite of his ambition and ruthlessness in politics, he was tolerant of religious differences. Regardless of the actual situation in Albania, the negative views of the Ottomans and Islam that prevailed in Europe and America had to be fought to get a better footing in Europe.

Ismail Qemali, the former Ottoman administrator and one of the most revered Albanian nationalists, was adamant in making it clear that when the decision to break from the Ottoman orbit was final, the destination could only be Europe. In choosing a sovereign that would take over from the provisional government, faced with a choice between a Muslim and European prince, he favored a Christian and European one, because he would have the support of all Albanians and would serve well the political considerations of the time. Only a European prince could now properly guide Albanian’s entrance into the “European family.”²⁸⁷ The seasoned diplomat was aware that Albania could no longer find protection in the embrace of the crumbling Ottomans, and he

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Richard A. Davenport, *The Life Of Ali Pasha, of Tepeleni, Vizier of Epirus: Surnamed Aslan, or the Lion* (London: Thomas Tegg and Son, 1837), 339.

²⁸⁷ Ismail Key Bey, *The Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey* (London: Constable and Company LTD, 1920), 373.

envisioned quick break from the East and final reorientation toward Europe. The Ottoman authorities did attempt to impose a ruler from the Ottoman Imperial family, and implied that European Powers would not properly protect and nurture Albania. Ismal Qemali answered that Albanians would be placing their hopes on their rights “to exist and have a nationality of their own, as well as the duty of the Powers to respect nationalities,” and also wished to have good relations with the Porte after the issue of Albania was settled.²⁸⁸

Qemali was well aware of the divisions that existed between Albanians, and saw the installation of a prince of European origin as a good foundation for a future liberal state. He was correct in predicting instability in the new nation, and by 1914 there were calls for speeding up the introduction of the new monarch. The Great Powers selected Prince William of Wied as the new monarch of Albania, and more than a year after the declaration of the Albania’s independence his arrival was anticipated with high hopes.²⁸⁹ Because of instability in the border with Greece and Serbia, coupled by the attempts of Qemali’s former minister, Esad Pasha, to take power, “it was high time that German Prince William of Wied came to his new kingdom of Albania” in order to bring stable government.²⁹⁰ William of Wied was hailed as the man who would bring stability with his rule, and also soften the nature of the people through the introduction of the arts, and

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 374.

²⁸⁹ “Reconstruction in the Balkans,” *The Independent*, February 9, 1914, 56.

²⁹⁰ “Anarchy in Albania,” *The Independent*, February 1914, 192.

the “erection of a splendid palace at Avlona as the center of a civilizing influence.”²⁹¹ The hope and optimism surrounding the crowning of the new Albanian king would never materialize.

The reign of the German Prince over Albania would not last long, due to the start of the Great War, and the promise of support by the Great Powers evaporated when a secret treaty between Great Britain, France, and Italy decided to divide Albania in 1915.²⁹² The inability of Albanians to defend themselves, and the geopolitical calculations of the European powers, were an indication of the great challenges facing Albanians in solidifying the existence of their newly created nation. The secret plan by the Powers would divide Albanian territory between Montenegro, Yugoslavia, and Italy, setting aside the central section of the territory to “become a self-governing Mohammedan state.”²⁹³ Despite the relative religious harmony present in Albania, in the European imagination, Albania as a tolerant state for all religions did not seem to hold water. In reality, Albania was divided more on a regional level, which made the consolidation of the state almost impossible, but Albanian leaders attempted to dispel this division by placing the Albanians’ “ancient” history in the forefront to validate their place among the European nations.

²⁹¹ “The Champion of Human Freedom Who Is to Rule Over Albania,” *Current Opinion*, January 1914, 22.

²⁹² Isiah Bowman, *Problems in Political Geography* (New York: World Book Company, 1922), 309.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

Albanian leaders were also aware that they needed to highlight that many Christians were part of the movement for an independent Albania. Fan Noli, who was ordained priest by the Russian Orthodox Church in the United States, was one of the leaders who consciously highlighted his Christian faith in his lobbying for Albania's independence. In the activities leading up to the declaration of independence, Albanian migrant colonies in Europe had requested someone that would represent Albanians in America; Noli was chosen and immediately informed the Russian church authorities in New York, asking for an excused absence from his religious duties and explaining the importance of his participation in the Albanian National Committee:

I have been chosen as delegate of the Albanian Orthodox Church in America...More than half of all delegates in the Committee will be Christians, and I am expected to lead the Orthodox delegation. The objective of the committee (Albanian National Committee) is to declare Albania an independent country under a Christian prince, and to secure the recognition by the European powers as a free country...The main reason for my selection is that the names of Christian priests on the committee list will leave a good impression in Europe. The committee will have at least three catholic priests and protestant missionaries, apart from other Christian members. As far as I know, I will be the only Orthodox representative.²⁹⁴

Fan Noli was considered to be one of the most prominent figures of the Albanian National Movement, and the declaration of the independence found him in England where he was ready to engage in the effort to garner support for

²⁹⁴ Fan Noli to the Holy Ecclesiastical Court of the North American Russian Church, November 23, 1912, in *Letërkëmbimi I Fan S. Nolit (Fan S. Noli's Written Correspondence)*, 83–84.

Albania during the London Conference of 1913. He reported about his long absence from United States in the newspaper *Dielli* of Boston, noting that he was very enthusiastic about his stay in London, where he has encountered great support for Albania, and informing readers about the impending London Conference of Ambassadors.²⁹⁵ Noli also conveyed his support of the new Albanian Provisory Government, and informed Ismail Qemali that he would stand ready to help delegates coming from Albania, and if they were not able to send representatives of the government yet, he would be honored to serve as its delegate. He was also ready to travel to Albania if his assistance was requested.²⁹⁶ In letters to Russian Church authorities, and when communicating with foreigners, Fan Noli always highlighted his Christian religious credentials, whereas when communicating with his fellow Albanians he placed the utmost importance in his duties as an Albanian who would not spare his efforts to serve his beloved country of Albania in any way possible.

Despite the perceived support for the Albanian cause in London, and high hopes of his possible contributions toward the nationalist cause, it seems that Noli's and other Albanian delegates' efforts to influence the events at the London Conference were very limited. In addition, the Albanian Provisory Government did not have the financial ability to support its delegates in London, and Noli had to request financial help from the Albanian migrant colony in Egypt after failing

²⁹⁵ Fan Noli to newspaper *Dielli*, December, 1912, in *ibid.*, 84–85.

²⁹⁶ Fan Noli to Ismail Qemali, December, 1912, in *ibid.*, 85–87.

to get financial support from his compatriots in the United States.²⁹⁷ Noli's efforts to help his country would not stop, despite many difficulties faced during his time in Europe, and he would continue to press for the Albanian cause in a very diplomatic way, avoiding highlighting Albanians' disagreements among themselves as one of the causes for the failures of the new state.

During the First World War, Albania's territory was continuously occupied by varying forces, and its government was struggling to project any semblance of stability. The failure of prince Wied to establish a stable government was a result of insufficient support from various Albanian factions, his own lack of leadership, and the failure of the Great Powers to provide him with promised financial support. Albania was occupied by the Central Powers and by Entente forces at the same time.²⁹⁸

In 1915, when Albania was being divided among many various states, Noli was back in Boston, tirelessly trying to help his fragile country to stand on its feet and energize Albanian migrants to be more active in their efforts to save Albania. He instructed the other most prominent member of the Albanian émigré community in the United States, Faik Konica, who was in Europe at the time, to write a brochure on Albania. The brochure had to be written in such a way that it would lay blame upon Europe for the failures of the state of Albania, and at the

²⁹⁷ Fan Noli to Jani Vruho, January 31, 1913, in *ibid.*, 89.

²⁹⁸ James N. Tallon, "Albania's Long World War I," *Studia Historyczne* 57, no. 4 (2014): 439.

same time “present Albania as blameless to the eyes of the civilized world.”²⁹⁹ Despite the obvious failure of the prince Wied in Albania, Konica was instructed by Noli to avoid harsh criticism of Wied, because the Albanians in America had great respect for the “first Albanian monarch, to come since the glorious Scanderbeg.”³⁰⁰ The Christian Monarch of Albania, and Albanians who did not show support for him, should be spared criticism in order to camouflage intra-Albanian rivalries, placing the blame squarely on European powers in order to present Albania as an able nation that could run its own affairs if there was no outside interference.

During his absence, the Vatra organization of Boston continued its activities to better inform the American public of the plight of Albania, and the American press started to write about Albania. Vatra started to be considered a strong nationalist organization, and its leaders Noli, Konica, Flloqi, and Dako, who were all educated in America, were seen as great influencers of Albanian affairs. The United States began to be considered a “foster mom” of the newly created country of Albania.³⁰¹ During the chaos of the First World War, Albanians were not able to organize any coherent governmental action that would protect independence, and the Albanian community of the United States became a kind of a government in exile.

²⁹⁹ Fan Noli to Faik Be Konitza, December, 1913, in *Letërkëmbimi I Fan S. Nolit (Fan S. Noli's Written Correspondence)*, 97.

³⁰⁰ Fan Noli to Faik Be Konitza, December, 1913, in *ibid.*

³⁰¹ Joseph Gould, “American Influence in Albania,” *The Independent*, September 1914, 138.

The Albanian American community became the most active lobby for Albanian independence during the Great War, and directed its efforts toward gaining support from the United States government, because the European governments had viewed Albania as a war spoil despite their promise to protect her. These efforts became much more intensive toward the end of the war, and by 1920 they had successfully raised close to \$200,000 for lobbying activities in the United States and Europe, in addition to \$223,000 contributed toward the budget of the restored Albanian government.³⁰² Many efforts were directed toward influencing the American delegation at the Paris Peace Conference to defend Albania, because Americans were seen as better arbiters of justice. Europe was no longer to be trusted, and “the hope upon which the Albanians have fixed their eyes is America, and from her they expect salvation.”³⁰³ Constantin Chekrezi, the representative of the Provisional Government in Washington, credited the American Delegation in Paris and President Woodrow Wilson with saving Albania from being partitioned by European states, stating, “the salvation of my country is due, I do not hesitate to say, wholly to the actions of the United States Government.”³⁰⁴ President Wilson had “become for millions worldwide the icon, and the most prominent exponent of the vision, which many others shared, of a

³⁰² Nicholas C. Pano, “Albanians in America,” in *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Society*, ed. Richard T. Schafer (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 48.

³⁰³ “Albania and America,” *The Independent*, July 10, 1920, 51–52.

³⁰⁴ “Says Albania Is Saved,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1920.

just international society based on self-determination.”³⁰⁵ After being disappointed with lack of support by European Powers, Albanians, maybe more than any other nation, had pinned all its hopes on Wilson’s America.

Chekrezi was a prominent Albanian who had come to the United States in 1914, and upon graduating Harvard University he took it upon himself to write a history of Albania to better inform the American public of his home country. His history is also based on the premise that Albanians are an ancient people of Europe and at the helm of civilizing world, thus deserving of their own independent state. While mentioning that there existed controversies about the origin of his people, he concludes that, “it is generally recognized to-day that the Albanians are the most ancient race in southeastern Europe.”³⁰⁶ Chekrezi bases his claims of the antiquity of the Albanians on the studies done by the German ethnographer Johann George von Hahn, who first claimed that Albanians were descendants of Illyrian and Pelasgian tribes.³⁰⁷ The book also cites the Albanian language as a strong evidence of Albanian antiquity, claiming that Albanian language “is much older than the Greek,” and that Homeric poems contain many words that “survive only in the actually spoken Albanian language.”³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

³⁰⁶ Chekrezi, *Albania Past and Present*, 3.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

Another prominent member of the Albanian-American community, the writer and publicist Christo Dako, together with Chekrezi, appeared before the Committee of Foreign Relations of the U.S. Senate in 1919 to make an appeal to save Albania.³⁰⁹ Due to time constraints, Dako did not go into ancient history, but confined himself to current events, making a plea to “mighty, just, and freedom-loving America” to intervene and restore Albania’s independence.³¹⁰ However, at the end of testimony Dako explained the aims of Albanians with the sentence: “We do not ask but that which is our own from time immemorial.”³¹¹ Dako, similar to Chekrezi’s writings, also explained the ancient roots of the Albanians to an American audience in his writings. He too believed that Albanians were the descendants of Illyrians and Pelasgians, strongly asserting that “Philip and his son Alexander the Great as well as all the Macedonians were not Greeks, but the forefathers of Albanians.”³¹² In claiming to have more history than the Greeks, Albanians in America were attempting to strengthen their claims that Greek aspirations for Albanian territory had no valid claims.

Probably the most prolific and sophisticated Albanian writer in America at the time, Faik Konica, also subscribed to the Illyrian origin of Albanians, claiming, “in ancient times, Albania was called Illyria and until late in the Middle

³⁰⁹ “The Albanian Question Before the Committee of Foreign Relations of the U.S. Senate,” *The Adriatic Review*, September 1919, 1.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

³¹² Dako, “The Albanians.”

Ages, to be precise up to the eleventh century, she was still known only by that name.”³¹³ His brother Mehmed Konica, who was a longtime diplomat serving Albania, was chosen as Vatra’s delegate to the Conference of Peace in Paris, and wrote a brochure on the importance of solving the Albanian question as a precondition for lasting peace in the Balkans. Mehmet Konica described Albanians as a descendant of Illyrians who had reached a high degree of civilization based on their weapons and tools found in archeological sites in Albania, Serbia, and Bosnia, and also described them as “among the first to manufacture, and export iron.”³¹⁴ The brothers Konica speak in their writings about “ancient” times, and a “high degree of civilization,” attempting to finally convince their audience that Albanians had been in the Balkans since times immemorial, and there was no longer a reason for them to wander around the world and beg for something that had belonged to them forever.

Another major accomplishment of the Albanian émigré community in the United States was its successful lobbying for Albania’s admission into the League of Nations. After eight years of tumult following the declaration of Albania’s independence, finally it seemed that the new country would get some sort of recognition on the world stage. Fan Noli’s relentless pursuit of this goal, and the support of the Albanian community in the United States, resulted in the admission

³¹³ Faik Konica, *Albania: The Rock Garden of Southeastern Europe*, ed. G.M. Panarati (Boston: Vatra, 1957), 15.

³¹⁴ Mehmet Konica, *The Albanian Question* (London: Williams Lea & Co. Ltd., 1918), 5.

of Albania as a member in the League of Nations on December 17, 1920. With relief, Noli informed Hil Mosi, another politician from Shkodra, that Albania had been accepted as a full-fledged member in the League.³¹⁵ Noli regarded Albania's admission into the organization as one of his greatest political accomplishments, and I believe that it was probably a more important event than even the declaration of independence of November 28, 1912.³¹⁶

After realization that the Ottoman Empire was taking its last breath, Albanian nationalists declared Albania's independence in 1912, and reoriented themselves toward Europe in hopes that the Great Powers would guarantee independence and help them move toward becoming a viable nation-state. Nationalists in Albania, and in the various émigré communities, mounted an effort to demonstrate Albania's worth as a new member among European nations. They emphasized their nation's antiquity, and the religious harmony of its people, as marks of civilization. The Conference of Ambassadors of 1913 recognized Albania's independence and gave some hope to the Provisional Government that it would be assisted in becoming a stable state. With the arrival of World War I, Albania would descend into chaos, and the same European powers that had guaranteed its existence decided to divide Albania and use it as territory as the spoils of war, serving their own political and strategic interests.

³¹⁵ Fan Noli to Lef Nosi, December 17, 1920, in *Letërkëmbimi I Fan S. Nolit (Fan S. Noli's Written Correspondence)*, 119.

³¹⁶ Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History*, 111.

With the Provisional Government in disarray during the war, and the continuous occupation of Albania's territory by various countries, the Albanian community in the United States took the initiative to solidify Albania's independence. From their dashed hopes of gaining acceptance by Europe, they turned their efforts toward lobbying the United States for their salvation. Albanian leaders in the United States mounted strong efforts to inform the American public of Albania's plight, and the injustices it suffered at the hands of Europeans. The most able members of the migrant community engaged in sustained propaganda efforts to portray Albania as a civilized nation, with storied history, and worthy of an independent existence, sometimes exaggerating their claims. Their efforts paid off, as they found in United States a better arbiter of justice during the Paris Peace Conference, where Woodrow Wilson resisted the further partition of Albania. The popular leader of Albanians in America, Fan Noli, then successfully led efforts to make Albania a member of the world community by securing membership into the League of Nations. This membership finally provided a measure of stability, and a forum where the new nation hoped to find some mediation in settling disputes with its neighbors who coveted its territory.

Conclusion

Ismael Qemali, the father of the Albanian independence movement, did not live to see the transformation of Albania into full-fledged European nation, or its short-lived experiment with democracy. He died in January of 1919 in Perugia, Italy, after a short illness.³¹⁷ This cosmopolitan figure, who had served both the Ottoman Empire and the state of Albania, was a pragmatist who loved his people, and was eager to help Albania join the family of European nations. Like many other leaders of the Albanian National Movement, Qemali believed in the necessity of replacing Ottoman protection with European stewardship, despite having served the Empire for most of his life. Qemali's efforts to redirect Albania from the shadow of the Ottoman Empire into the European fold had begun when he happily accepted the reign of prince Weid as the ruler of Albania—and perhaps inadvertently establishing a precedent for authoritarian rule in his beloved homeland.

Admission into the League of Nations was considered a great success by Fan Noli and his fellow nationalists, and Noli had high hopes that membership would help Albania's road toward stability. The League was supposed to bring stronger international legal standing and financial support for the state of Albania. The strong belief that the creation of an international body such as the League of

³¹⁷ Ismail Kemal Bey, *The Adriatic Review*, February 1919, sec. last page, last page.

Nations would strengthen the stability of Albania was in large part based on the high trust that Noli had for United States president Woodrow Wilson. Noli met president Wilson during Fourth of July celebrations in 1918, and urged him to support Albania, to which Wilson replied: "I shall have one voice in the next Peace Congress and I shall use that voice in behalf of Albania."³¹⁸ However, despite this pledge, Wilson displayed no such commitment to Albanian interests. It is more likely that Noli was swept up in the Wilson's rhetoric about the rights of small nations to "self-determination" and the effect that it had around the world, in what Erez Manela calls "the Wilsonian moment."³¹⁹ Wilson's advocacy for the League of Nations, and his talk about self-determination, "implied a new and more equitable model of international relations."³²⁰ Noli and his compatriots seemed to have had great faith in this international organization, based on the efforts that they invested in becoming a member of the League.

These high hopes for assistance from the League of Nations never really materialized for Albanians. Nevertheless, the efforts and resources invested by the Albanian migrant community in America toward League membership further raised the political profile of Noli, and made it possible for him to become a central political figure in Albania. The short-lived period political pluralism in

³¹⁸ Isaac Don Levine, *The Resurrected Nations: Short Histories of the People Freed by the Great War and Statements of Their National Claims* (New York: Frederic A. Stokes Company Publishers, 1919), 77.

³¹⁹ Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, 10.

³²⁰ Ibid.

Albania started in 1920 with the appearance of two main parties, with Noli leading the People's Party, also called the Democratic Party, and the Albanian landowner Ahmet Zogu leading the Progressive Party.³²¹ In 1921, Noli returned from Geneva and took the seat that was allocated to Vatra in the Albanian Parliament, distinguishing himself with elaborate speeches and, based on his diplomatic acumen, becoming foreign minister of Albania in the same year.³²²

Noli was a skilled diplomat with extensive knowledge of the world, but due to his extended time abroad, he had no real knowledge of local conditions in Albania itself. Nevertheless, he spared no effort in attempting to bring democratic changes to his beloved country. Building a national movement from abroad proved much easier, however, than confronting local landowning elites who had accumulated power through centuries of Ottoman rule. By 1924, the antagonism between the conservative forces led by Zogu and liberal reformers led by Noli came to direct confrontation. That year, Zogu's Party came to power, but clashes with Noli's supporters resulted in the so-called "June Revolution" which brought Noli to power and forced Zogu to flee.³²³ Seizing power through "revolution" and exiling Zogu into neighboring Yugoslavia, which still had aspirations for Albanian territory, would turn out to be a great political blunder.

³²¹ Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 19.

³²² Robert C. Austin, *Founding a Balkan State: Albania's Experiment With Democracy, 1920-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 29.

³²³ Mark Biondich, *The Balkans: Revolution, War, and Political Violence Since 1878* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 119.

Upon seizing power, Noli, in coalition with nationalist forces, presented a wide-reaching program with the aim of transforming the country from a backward bastion of landowning elites into a modern liberal democracy. He presented a twenty-point agenda that, among other things, contained provisions for a strong independent judiciary, radical reforms in governance, educational reform, school reform, tax reform, support for farmers, a balanced budget, enticements for foreign capital, and health reforms, all of which aimed to “eliminate feudalism, free the people, and establish democracy in Albania.”³²⁴ Ultimately, his reform agenda would fail, in part because he did not succeed in securing a loan from the League of Nations to help with the program, and never even began the much-touted land reforms to end feudalism.³²⁵ In December of 1924, Ahmet Zogu, with the assistance of the Yugoslavs, Albanian mercenaries, and White Russian soldiers, returned triumphantly to Albania and ousted Noli from power after just a few months.³²⁶ Noli fled Albania on December 27, 1924 and, after spending some time in Western Europe, returned to the United States, where he lived until his death in 1965.³²⁷ His exile effectively ended Albania’s fragile experiment with building democracy, and instituted a long period of authoritarian rule that lasted until the fall of communism in the last decade of the twentieth century.

³²⁴ Austin, *Founding a Balkan State: Albania’s Experiment With Democracy, 1920-1925*, 60.

³²⁵ Frances Trix, *The Sufi Journey of Baba Rexheb* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Anthropology, 2009), 65.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Pearson, *Albania and King Zog: Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908-1939*, 234.

After returning from Yugoslavia, Ahmet Zogu ruled Albania as president until 1928, then declared himself the King of Albanians, extending his rule for a total of fourteen years, until the Second World War. His reign was marked by economic stagnation, but did provide a period of some stability.³²⁸ King Zog, as he chose to call himself, ruled in corrupt fashion, by intimidating adversaries and ignoring the rule of law, and his rule ending in Albania's loss of independence to Fascist Italy in 1939.³²⁹ The Noli regime was unable to hold power for longer than six months, but a self-declared authoritarian monarch was able to hold on to power for fourteen years, testifying to the difficulties facing any attempts to establish liberal regimes in the Balkans in the interwar period. Noli's dream of founding democratic institutions similar to those he had encountered in the United States seemed improbable in a feudal environment where landowners were not ready to give up their long-held privileges. King Zog, meanwhile, coopted the legacy of the Albanian National Movement as he engaged in national memory-building through building monuments and cemeteries; in 1937 he requested that the Turkish government turn over the remains of Frasheri brothers, but the Turks refused to return the remains of Sami Frasheri because he also held an important place in Turkish culture.³³⁰ Thus in death the Frasheri brothers, who had wanted the establishment of a free and democratic Albania, were paradoxically caught in

³²⁸ King and Mai, *Out of Albania: From Crisis Migration to Social Inclusion in Italy*, 31.

³²⁹ Pano, "Albania," 26.

³³⁰ Elsie, *Albanian Literature: A Short History*.

a tug-of-war between an authoritarian monarch who wanted to honor their contribution to national independence, and what remained of the Ottoman Empire against which they had struggled.

The stories of Albanian nationalists like Ismael Qemali, Fan Noli, and the Frasheri brothers are inextricably bound up in their migrations to destinations ranging from Istanbul and Italy to the United States. Fortunately, in recent decades migration studies have moved beyond the limits imposed by the previous emigration-immigration dichotomy, and now attempt to contextualize migration history within global and transnational frameworks. This has created many possibilities to study previously neglected but important factors in migration history such as return migration, gender, race, and economics.³³¹ Migration is a dynamic process wherein people move within and across borders, leave their mark, and sometimes move yet again, taking with them accumulated cultural and political baggage. People like Noli, Qemali, and the Frasheri brothers were profoundly shaped by these complex migration experiences. They all died far from their birthplaces, but their homeland of Albania—both in reality and as they later imagined it to be from afar—shaped their worldviews as much as the great cities of Istanbul, New York, and Bucharest. These figures' activities and attachments cannot be understood within the once-dominant assimilation paradigm of migration studies. Noli was home in Albania, but maybe more so in

³³¹ Christiane Harzig, Dirk Hoerder, and Donna Gabaccia, *What Is Migration History?* (Cambridge UK; Malden MA: Polity, 2009), 7.

America, to which he returned and settled after his failed tenure as prime minister, and he loved America perhaps as deeply as Albania. He had been educated in Greek and American schools, and never in an Albanian one, yet he was an ardent nationalist who championed Albanian-language schooling. He was also deeply religious, but saw no contradiction in a multi-religious nationalist movement; nor did Qemali or the Frasheris, who also had no qualms about serving the Ottoman Empire and their local people at the same time for as long as such an arrangement was tenable. Sami Frasheri is therefore today considered an Albanian national hero of the highest rank, and at the same time is a revered figure in modern Turkish literature. The world left its mark on these people, and they in turn left their marks on the world, through their migration experiences. And ultimately, they succeeded in creating a nation from abroad.

However, the dictatorial communist regime of Enver Hoxha, which took power in Albania in 1944, was very effective in halting emigration. From the Second World War until the 1990s, the miniscule number of Albanian emigrants were defectors who escaped clandestinely and established anti-communist organizations in Paris and New York. But placing post-communist Albanian migration within its larger historical context reveals that the communist-era interlude represents an artificial break in a longer continuity of Albanian

migration patterns.³³² Networks established by migrants play an essential role in continuing migration processes. Networks migrate, not just individuals or families.³³³ In order to better understand the post-communist migration of educated elites from Albania, it is essential to consider the revival of “dormant” networks which re-established connections with potential migrants in Albania.³³⁴ The older migration to the United States, stretching from the end of the nineteenth century until 1944, as well as post-communist migration, are best explained by using transatlantic and transnational historical frameworks that trace migration networks over the entire twentieth century. The transnational approach is essential for finding connections that existed beyond the confines of the nation-state, even in almost hermetically enclosed societies like communist Albania. Thus far, however, post-communist emigration from Albania has only been studied by non-historians. Analyzing Albanian migration in general, and migration of educated elites in particular, through the transnational and historical lens highlights connections that non-historical studies have failed to uncover.

The long history of Albanian migration shaped Albanian nationalism and contemporary Albanian emigration in undeniable, yet unacknowledged, ways. Even under the harsh regime of Enver Hoxha, small numbers of Albanians

³³² Russell King, Nicola Mai, and Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, *The New Albanian Migration* (Brighton, Great Britain, Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 9.

³³³ Charles Tilly, “Transplanted Networks,” in *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics*, ed. Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87.

³³⁴ “Dormant” networks are best explained in Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930*, 68-71-392-93.

continued to emigrate and, once again, organized abroad on behalf of freeing their homeland from oppressive rule. After all, a people who created their nation through migration could hardly be expected to stop migrating altogether.

Albanian nationalism developed differently from its neighbors, due to both its origins in emigration and its lack of the religious conformity that could be found in neighboring countries. It was “natural” for the Albanian nationalists to seek unity in language instead.³³⁵ To create strong bonds among what Benedict Anderson calls the national “imagined community,”³³⁶ Albanian nationalists accepted the idea of “Albanianism” as the central unifying force of their movement. Anderson also asserts that “print capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the idea of the nation.”³³⁷ Due to a lack of capitalist enterprise and printing presses within Albania, its migrant communities abroad printed and disseminated the idea of “Albanianism,” first among themselves, and then among the people inside Albania, and along the way they also created a new unified alphabet. The “imagined” community of Albanians was at first conceived by Albanian colonies abroad, who borrowed the printing press to “build the image of antiquity” among themselves, and then spread it within their homeland, in most cases illegally due to restrictions imposed on the use of the Albanian language by the Ottoman

³³⁵ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 53.

³³⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

authorities. They were not able to create the liberal democratic state they wished for, but nevertheless they were able to lay the foundations for the independence of their beloved Albania.

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