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A Sea of Difference, a History of Gaps: Migrations between Italy and Albania, 1939–1992

PAMELA BALLINGER

University of Michigan

In September 2015, as the Mediterranean migrant crisis showed no sign of abating despite the looming prospect of autumn and colder weather, news blog *France 24* warned against the proliferation of "fake" images of migrants. The site debunked a series of photos and conspiracy theories, with the expressed aim of countering the xenophobic and anti-refugee political agendas of "far right Internet users." *France 24* singled out an image of a decrepit ship overcrowded with desperate migrants that had appeared on various Internet sites as an illustration of the mass "invasion" of contemporary Italy by refugees. *France 24* published the picture with this disclaimer, "This photo is being circulated online as if [it] represented the current refugee crisis in Europe. It is in fact an old photo."[1] For observers of both Albania and Italy, this image was instantly recognizable, capturing as it did the moment in 1991 and 1992 when Albania began its transition out of socialism and tens of thousands of Albanians boarded ships to Italy in hope of better lives there. Indeed, this particular portrait of the *Vlora*—commandeered in the port of Durrës by an estimated six thousand migrants and sailed to the Italian port of

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[1] "Beware the Fake Migrant Images Shared Online," *France 24/The Observers*, http://observers.france24.com/en/20150915-beware-fake-migrant-images-shared-online (accessed 9 Feb. 2016).

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Bari on 7 August 1991—has come for many in Italy to symbolize the sense of crisis that such events engendered at the time.

In analyzing the French media site's (well-intentioned) unmasking of the *Vlora* image and its tidy consignment to the past, historian Elidor Mëhilli cautions,

> The problem is that the debunking can obscure as much as enlighten. By disassociating the 1991 event from what is happening in 2015, the debunkers unintentionally created the illusion that these events are completely disconnected.
>
> Once assigning those thousands of bewildered Albanians to a different historical moment—having reinserted them into the post-Communist frame where they belong—we can then quickly move back to the urgent crisis. The Albanian bodies disappear into the virtual world where they came from, to let our screens populate once more with the 'real' bodies in crisis.[2]

Mëhilli makes these remarks in order to discuss continuities in how migrants have been and continue to be sorted into the categories of "fake" and "genuine" refugees. In the present article, I instead probe the question that Mëhilli underscores but does not develop; that is, that of disconnects or gaps in historical narratives, in particular accounts of migrations across the Adriatic Sea since 1939. How, I ask, do scenes of ships bearing migrants from Albania in 1991 and 1992 come to appear as discrete events anchored in a distinct temporal moment largely unconnected to either that of the present or the recent past? How might scholars go beyond a pervasive tendency to treat Italian-Albanian histories in terms of ruptures and isolation, instead inserting them into a wider sea of temporal and spatial connectivities?

Such questions acquire particular urgency given that the chaotic scenes of Albanian ships arriving in Italian ports captured in the 1991 photo unfolded not only at the intersection of two regime changes—the collapse of communism in Albania and the end of Italy's First Republic that had governed Italy since 1948—but also in the context of a longer and deeper history of Italian-Albanian political and economic entanglements. The demise of state socialism in Albania reinvigorated questions left unresolved by an earlier regime change: the defeat of the Italian fascist regime that ruled over Albania as a protectorate from April 1939 until the capitulation of the Italian military in September 1943. In the aftermath of fascism's collapse and the establishment of socialism in Albania, Italian citizens had sought desperately to repatriate back to Italy. Some were expelled by the socialist regime of Enver Hoxha, others fled surreptitiously in small fishing boats across the sea, and still others received help from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) for organized returns on U.S. and British navy ships loaned for the purpose. Some were unable to

[2] Elidor Mëhilli, "Europe's 'Fake' Refugees," *Reluctant Internationalists Blog*, http://www.bbk.ac.uk/reluctantinternationalists/blog/europes-fake-refugees/ (accessed 9 Feb. 2016).

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migrate to the Italian peninsula at all, or were repatriated only with the end of state socialism in the 1990s. These experiences, the starting point for my analysis, center on recursive but understudied flows across the Adriatic.

The story I recount here, then, is a tale of two shores and the passages—of ships, humans, and time—between Italy and Albania across the Adriatic. As a microcosm of the wider Mediterranean, the Adriatic has often been depicted through the now clichéd metaphors of bridge and barrier, as site and medium of both contact and conflict, similarity and difference. In my account, I instead highlight how the fluid medium of the sea generates friction and gaps, two metaphors usually associated with the terrestrial rather than the aquatic. At the same time, this "liquid" thinking reframes our familiar understanding of gap as a signifier exclusively of void and erasure. In this context, it is not trivial that observers often described late socialist Albania as an "island." Such an assessment privileges the notion of isolation etymologically built into the term island while ignoring its obverse: that of a "water-land," a space of connectivity and mobility. In rethinking migratory flows between Italy and Albania over the last seventy-five years, I draw upon these dual meanings of "islandness" inherent to its nature as a place where the sea encounters land and runs ashore. Symbolizing a particular kind of a *remainder* in the seascape, the island offers a means by which to reconceive a history that has never completely disappeared or been erased (a common trope of Italian Albania) but whose visibility has instead shifted with the tides of both history and historical scholarship.[3]

Rather than standing in merely as markers of absence or loss or discontinuity, then, the notions of remainders and gaps employed in this analysis make for generative accounts that open up and complicate several bodies of scholarship: (1) a historiography of Italian Albania that focuses on ruptures or breaks, most notably the collapse of Italian military and political control after the 1943 armistice; (2) work on Italian decolonization that views it as an abrupt and precocious, rather than protracted, process; and (3) a sociological/anthropological/international relations literature examining the postsocialist reconfiguration of political and economic relationships between Italy and Albania. Studies of Italian Albania (the bulk of them written by Italian historians or former protagonists) have privileged the dramatic story of soldiers and officials confronted with the disastrous collapse of the Italian military in September 1943. Fracturing Italy geographically and ideologically, these events also put soldiers outside the Italian peninsula in the crosshairs of both German forces and resistance groups. In many histories of Italian Albania, the story ends abruptly in 1943 or, at the latest, 1945. In Bernd Fischer's *Albania at War, 1939–1945*, the

[3] On socialist Albania as an "isolated island of Stalinism," see Carol J. Williams, "Albania's Bit of Democracy Sheds Light on Brutal Past," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 Apr. 1991. On islandness, see Marc Shell, *Islandology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 18.

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most important English language publication on this period of Albanian history, for example, Italians disappear from the text after the 1943 Armistice and exclusive attention shifts to the German occupiers. Even as he acknowledges gaps (in their conventional sense) in the scholarship by noting, "A complete history of the Italian occupation of Albania between 1939 and 1943 has yet to be written," Giovanni Villari repeats this problematic view that the collapse of military control is synonymous with the end of the Italian story in Albania. The English-language historiography of Albania that has emerged in the post-Cold War period similarly centers on key events and ruptures in Albanian history, most notably the initial alliances of the socialist regime and its later breaks with Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and China, respectively.[4] In reconstructing the experience of Italians, especially civilians, in Albania after the war's end, I complicate both the commonplace view that Italy's imperial entanglements there ended with the collapse of military control, and a historiographical tendency to conflate periodization (fascism, World War II, state socialism, the Cold War's end) with ruptures in historical time.[5]

The treatment of these historical periods and political regimes in Albania as island-like isolates also characterizes a more sociological body of work dedicated to Italian-Albanian relations after the end of state socialism. Much of this scholarship centers on the construction, during the post-1990 period, of the Albanian as Italy's "constitutive Other," one mirroring Italy's own internally colonized subject, the despised Southern Italian.[6] Such a reading compares the mass migrations of stigmatized Southern Italians to the New World to the ongoing arrivals of immigrants in Italy, neglecting the fact that at the end of the Second World War would-be Italian repatriates *literally* occupied the same place of those contemporary Albanians desperately trying to cross the Adriatic. In such accounts, history functions largely as analogy rather than as connective tissue. Treating the period between 1943–1945 and 1991 as a kind of blank space in the story of the Italo-Albanian relationship, these

[4] See Giovanni Villari, "A Failed Experiment: The Exportation of Fascism to Albania," *Modern Italy* 12, 2 (2007): 157–71, 158; and Bernd Fischer's *Albania at War, 1939–1945* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1999). For recent work on Albania, see Isa Blumi, "Hoxha's Class War: The Cultural Revolution and State Reformation, 1961–1971," *East European Quarterly* 33, 3 (1999): 303–26; and Elidor Mëhilli, "Defying De-Stalinization: Albania's 1956," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, 4 (2011): 4–56.

[5] On periodization, refer to Dan Diner and Bill Templer, "European Counterimages: Problems of Periodization and Historical Memory," *New German Critique* 53 (1991): 163–74; and Helge Jordheim, "Against Periodization: Koselleck's Theory of Multiple Temporalities," *History and Theory* 51, 2 (2012): 151–71.

[6] See, for example, Nicola Mai, "The Cultural Construction of Italy in Albania and Vice Versa: Migration Dynamics, Strategies of Resistance and Politics of Mutual Self-Definition across Colonialism and Post-Colonialism," *Modern Italy* 8, 1 (2003): 77–93. Ted Perlmutter similarly argues that perceived similarities between Italians and Albanians become a basis for rejecting solidarity, in "The Politics of Proximity: The Italian Response to the Albanian Crisis," *International Migration Review* 32, 1 (1998): 203–22.

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literatures then present Albanian socialism's collapse as having inaugurated a new period of Italian tutelage and "protection" in the form of military-led humanitarian operations (such as 1992's Pelicano, 1997's Alba, and 1999's Rainbow). In recuperating the history of Italy's protracted engagement with Albania, I aim to do more than merely "fill" such a lacuna in the history of Italian and Albanian relationships. Rather, I argue for a historical methodology of gaps that goes beyond facile notions of historical erasure, disruption, or discontinuity. Reconceived as akin to knots and nets[7]—that is, entanglements characteristic of the water-land of the island—gaps serve to open up unstable temporal and spatial tangles of connections across the Adriatic.

IMPERIAL AFTERLIVES AND REMAINDERS OF HISTORY

In the last five years, public awareness within Italy of the history of Italians in Albania and their complicated journeys home after fascism's end has grown, prompted in part by an award-winning play and several museum exhibits.[8] In claiming to recover and fill the gaps in a supposedly submerged history, such cultural offerings trade upon simplifying narratives of a pervasive Italian colonial amnesia. The one-man play *Italianesi* that debuted in 2012, for example, garnered widespread acclaim for its revelation of the supposedly "forgotten" tragedy of Italians trapped in socialist Albania. The production recounts the fictional story of Tonino, a man interned for forty-four years in an Albanian labor camp because his Calabrian father, sent to Italian Albania during World War II, had been deemed a spy by Hoxha's communist regime. Moving back and forth in time, Tonino's extended monologue details life in the camp, his initial euphoria at obtaining an Italian passport in the 1990s, and his bitter encounter forty years later in Sardinia with the father he had never known. Contrary to the critics' breathless exclamations over this "tragedy unknown to most Italians,"[9] however, the experiences of real-life Italians in Albania and their complicated migrations after the collapse of the Italian Empire have not remained hidden from view. Indeed, the playwright and star of *Italianesi*, Saverio La Ruina, learned of this history in a straightforward manner from an Italian newscast and subsequently wrote to one of the "Italianesi"

[7] Here I refer to debates on "anthropological knots" summarized in Sarah Green, "Anthropological Knots: Conditions of Possibilities and Interventions," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, 3 (2014): 1–21. Green draws her understanding of knots from Tim Ingold's thinking on threads and lines, as well as work on double binds. In contrast to Ingold's focus on "mesh-work" that interweaves, Green highlights nodes of friction created by these tanglings. I add to this the metaphor of the net or the skein, which traps and tangles some things and lets others pass through depending upon scale, tides, and so on.

[8] These exhibitions include: "Modena-Tirana: Andata e Ritorno" (Musei Civici di Modena, 2015); "Sue Proprie Mani" (MAXXI, Rome, 2015); and "La Presenza Italiana in Albania: La Ricerca Archeologica, la Conservazione, le Scelte Progettuali" (Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome, 2016).

[9] Giulia Morelli, "Italianesi," *Sipario*, 7 July 2013, www.Sipario.it (accessed 31 Jan. 2017).

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(a neologism signaling the hybrid nature of these subjects) who appeared on that program.[10]

In conceiving his play, La Ruina was no doubt aware of Gianni Amelio's critically acclaimed film *Lamerica*, which featured the experience of an Italian trapped in communist Albania. Released in 1994, just a few years after the collapse of state socialism had prompted Albanian migrants to arrive en masse in the ports of Bari and Brindisi on ships like the *Vlora*, the film presented a pointed condemnation of Italy's decision to deny entry to most of the migrants. It followed a pair of corrupt, neocolonial Italian businessmen who go to Albania to privatize a shoe factory. At the film's moral center is Spiro Tozaj, an old man fished out from a political prison to serve as president of the Italians' dummy company. Ultimately, he and Gino, the Italian investors' arrogant junior partner who the Albanian authorities strip of his passport, join the desperate groups making their way to Durrës in the hopes of finding passage to Italy. Like Gino, Spiro (né Michele Talarico) actually hails from Sicily. Trapped in Albania during World War II and believing it is still the 1940s, the "Italianese" Michele comforts the broken and defeated Gino once they finally board a decrepit ship headed for Italy, telling him that they are going to "Lamerica."

Whereas *Italianesi* focuses on one man's movements between Italy and Albania, *Lamerica* adopts a broader lens in its juxtaposition of two experiences of Italian emigration: the movement of settlers and soldiers to Italian Albania during the 1940s, and the mass migration of Italians to the New World in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The film makes the comparison in order to prick the conscience of contemporary Italians unwilling to welcome Albanian immigrants. Yet the film's privileging of the myth of America that fueled Italians' desires to seek a better life ultimately emphasizes the parallel or analogous hopes of Albanians in the 1990s (Italy as contemporary Albania's America) over the direct historical precedent of Italian occupation of Albania. In this, it resonates with the body of sociological scholarship that sets up contemporary Albanian journeys as the mere mirror of Italians' recent past in traversing another sea: the Atlantic. The historical question of just what happened to individual Italians in Albania when the fascist regime collapsed—a question about decolonization and the afterlives of empire and its protagonists—thus becomes subordinated to the political fable of Michele and Gino's respective voyages of hope and despair and the "lessons" for an Italy coping with mass immigration.

Perhaps the shallowness of this historicity explains why, despite *Lamerica*'s supposed achievement in the early 1990s in laying bare a "collective historical repression" about Italy's imperial past and offering a means for "the

[10] See the interview with La Ruina, at http://franzmagazine.com/2013/01/29/italianesi-saverio-la-ruina-quanto-dolore-dietro-a-unidentita-negata/ (accessed 17 Apr. 2017).

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return of history,"[11] the same rhetoric of shock and discovery so easily repeats itself nearly two decades later with the reception of *Italianesi*. Such claims of filling the gaps of a forgotten history gloss over the fact that the reality of Italians marooned (or islanded) in Albania was never hidden or inaccessible in Italy. Not only did Italian newspapers in the 1940s and 1950s cover the diplomatic tensions between Italy and Albania over the question of repatriating Italian citizens, but many former soldiers and other protagonists subsequently published memoirs about their experiences in Albania. Furthermore, much of the Italian colonial legacy (including the built environment) has remained hidden in plain sight for those wishing to acknowledge it. Such traces possess what Rebecca Bryant deems a latent "'potentiality' … a temporal dynamism capable of exploding, imploding, twisting, or braiding the past."[12]

Reflecting on processes of imperial ruin, Ann Stoler reminds us that such traces not only mark the physical landscape but also "saturate the subsoil of people's lives and persist, sometimes subjacently, over a longer durée."[13] While much of the scholarly focus on what Stoler calls "imperial debris" focuses on the experiences of the formerly colonized, her admonition also applies to former settlers like those Italians and their descendants in socialist Albania. A number of these Italianesi moved to Italy in the early 1990s, the possibilities for their "repatriation" enabled by the same historical forces that made for the crush of Albanian migrants on ships like the *Vlora*; at the same time, however, the Italian government organized and sanctioned this Italianesi migration, in contrast to the policy of *respingimento* or "pushing back" (literally into the sea) applied to non-Italian Albanians. Nonetheless, those artists like LaRuina and Amelio who have paid attention to the dilemma of Italians trapped in Albania into the early 1990s implicitly depict them as survivals or vestiges that no longer make sense with the disappearance or rupturing of their original contexts (fascism, Italian Albania, and then Albanian socialism). In a recent study of Italians in Albania, William Bonapace repeats these claims to the "generalized oblivion/forgetting" surrounding Italianesi. Of those Italians repatriated from Albania in 1992, Bonapace observes, "They seemed to arrive (and at the end they did arrive) from another world, from an obscure reality, far away and mysterious; they seemed so mysterious with their rough faces,

[11] Luca Caminati, "The Return of History: Gianni Amelio's *Lamerica*, Memory, and National Identity," *Italica* 83, 3–4 (2006): 596–608, 603. Such assessments echo that of Amelio, who argues that the film critiques a "lack of historical memory." Gary Crowdus and Gianni Amelio, "The Lack of Historical Memory: An Interview with Gianni Amelio," *Cinéaste* 28, 1 (Winter 2002): 14–18, 15.

[12] Rebecca Bryant, "History's Remainders: On Time and Objects after Conflict in Cyprus," *American Ethnologist* 41, 4 (2014): 681–97, 684.

[13] Ann Stoler, "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, 2 (2008): 191–219, 192.

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dressed in clothes long gone out of style, with their out-of-date hairstyles…."[14] In such allochronic tellings, Italianesi signify a loss or absence to be overcome and their history a gap to be filled, but are also relics whose significance is overwhelmed by the emergencies of the present, in this case those surrounding mass immigration into Italy.

A more productive framing of such individuals and their histories might view them in terms of gaps as remainders, following upon Jean Baudrillard. Challenging the notion, "*When everything is taken away, nothing is left*," Baudrillard posits that the category of the residual actually encodes a "surplus of meaning, as excess." While he at one point deems the remainder a mirror, he does not envision it as a facile one-to-one reflection (of the sort favored by the Albanians-as-mirrors-of-Italy's-migrant-past thesis), but rather as "strangely asymmetrical,"[15] a phrasing that nicely captures the unevenness of the Adriatic historical space inhabited by these Italianesi. A number of anthropologists have picked up on Baudrillard's ideas of the remainder to explore cases of partition and loss that resonate with the Adriatic story told here. Translating his abstractions into anthropological discussions of scale and complexity, Marilyn Strathern highlights the utility of remainders as both objects and categories of analysis, given their production "at each juncture [as] something more is generated than the answer requires … material that is left over, for it goes beyond the original answer … [opening] up fresh gaps in our understanding."[16]

Picking up explicitly on Strathern's reading of the remainder, Sarah Green shows how we might mind, and mine, the active production of gaps in both the historical record and the reception of these historical experiences. In *Notes on the Balkans*, her study of the Epirus region straddling the Greek-Albanian border, Green focuses on the notion of marginality itself in a borderland rent by multiple violence in the twentieth century. Green explains that during her fieldwork,

> The issue of gaps and what they contain became a focus for me because people … kept referring to things that seemed to exceed, or constitute gaps in, other accounts I had available to me at the time.… I kept encountering stories, events, and relations that seemed to go beyond any of these accounts, which referred to things that such accounts rendered invisible or irrelevant and/or could not account for. So I have focused, time and again, on bringing these accounts into relation with one another, as a means to render visible the gaps and the interrelations they invariably contain.[17]

Green's informants often gestured toward gaps that appeared to inhere in both symbolic and physical geographies: "Albania in the geomorphological

[14] William Bonapace, *Italiani d'Albania: Breve storia di una grande rimozione: italiane e italiani dimenticati nel Paese delle Aquile* (Cedir: Città del Sole, 2015), 10.

[15] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Sheila Faria Glaser, trans. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 143, 145.

[16] Marilyn Strathern, *Partial Connections* (Walnut Creek: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), xxii.

[17] Sarah Green, *Notes from the Balkans: Locating Marginality and Ambiguity on the Greek-Albanian Border* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 160.

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accounts; gaps such as the invisibility of one kind of land degradation as against the visibility of other kinds; gaps such as the 'whereness' of the Balkans in accounts about Greece, and gaps such as *Gréki* in accounts about Greeks."[18] Whereas the designation Gréki (technically meaning "just Greek") possessed little salience on the Greek side of the border, it figured prominently as a category to mark out the paradoxically "visible invisibility" of ethnic Greeks in Albanian Epirus. In referring to the Gréki label as a remainder overflowing with meaning, then, Green demonstrates how such gaps are as much about surfeits of connection as absence and erasure. She notes again and again that gaps are not empty but rather generative, pointing toward a productive way to conceptualize the partial accountings of fascist imperialism and its legacies.

Whereas Green's analysis focuses on gaps in space more than in time (though the two remain bound up together), Rebecca Bryant's studies of the durable "detritus" left behind in post-partition Cyprus employ the notion of the remainder to highlight questions of temporality. Bryant trains her gaze on both "remainders" (non-contemporaneous objects that "can never be fit into neat narratives") and "remains" (including houses and personal objects "imbued with the stain of the Other" and even human remains).[19] Writing of home as both a material place and a metaphor, Bryant concludes, "Conflict histories are experienced at the threshold, the limen, of that home, the place where one is welcomed or not. May one go in, or must one stay out? Does one belong or not?"[20] For Italians in Albania at the war's end, as well as for Italianesi and Albanians in contemporary Italy, the Adriatic itself serves as the threshold upon which the question of home becomes most pointed and poignant. These questions of belonging thus knit together what are often treated as discrete and discontinuous histories.

Fittingly perhaps, it is neither a scholar nor a former protagonist but rather Albania's best-known novelist, Ismail Kadare, who captures best the gaps that riddle this historical terrain, even as they also provide connections through dense webs of dark intimacies. In *The General of the Dead Army*, Kadare depicts a fictional journey through Albania by two generals, one Italian and the other German, sent to recover the remains of their respective war dead. Arrogant and imbued with a sense of Albanians as the enemy, the Italian general slowly unravels when confronted with the costs of war and the realities of Italian brutality and cowardice. (Admittedly, he also discovers Italians buried with honor in partisan graveyards.) In Kadare's story, the dead themselves become the connective tissue of an ambiguous history marked by both heroism and dishonor, a history that weighs down on the Italian general like the sack containing the bones of the notorious fascist Colonel Z, which

[18] Ibid.
[19] Bryant, "History's Remainders," 694, 691.
[20] Ibid., 695.

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burdens him "as though he were carrying all the shame and the weight of the earth on his back."[21] This history persists, sometimes in fragments, like those of the fascist colonel's bones kept under the doorstep of the peasant woman who avenged her husband's death and daughter's rape at his hands, and sometimes whole and undigested, like the bodies of those soldiers preserved in sand and saltwater that left the Albanian locals convinced "their earth was unable to absorb the bodies of its invaders."[22] This dark tale is one in which the only Italians to be repatriated are the dead, but much of the actual drama in the early postwar period centered on the contentious issue of the repatriation of live Italians, some of whom would remain caught in the gaps of history until the end of socialism in Albania.

ITALIANS IN ALBANIA

Migrations between the two shores of the Adriatic have a long history, symbolized by the enduring presence of Arbëreshë or Italo-Albanians in the Italian peninsula who trace their community's origins to flight from the Ottomans. So, too, do expressions of Italo-Albanian brotherhood, which were prominent during the period of Italian unification in the nineteenth century. That said, Italy's *formal* imperial moment in Albania was very brief, lasting only from the military occupation of Albania and its union with Italy in April 1939 until the collapse of the Italian military with the armistice of 8 September 1943. Albania's incorporation into the fascist empire was preceded by a decade of close but sometimes tense relations between Italy and King Zog's monarchy. The forging of strong financial ties began in 1925 with the establishment of the Società per lo Sviluppo Economico dell'Albania (SVEA) and the National Bank of Albania (in which Italian financial interests held 26 percent of its capital). A secret military agreement followed soon after.[23]

Cultural organizations such as the Società Dante Alighieri also predated formal Italian rule. The Dante opened a section in the capital Tirana in 1930, and sections in Durrës/Durazzo, Elbasan, Korçë/Koritz, Kruja, Shkodër/Scutari, Vlorë/Valona, and Zogaj followed. Although ostensibly an apolitical organization dedicated to the spread of Italian language and culture, the Dante Alighieri had a long history of activism in the irredentist territories along the eastern Adriatic and its efforts in Albania constituted an arm of Italy's cultural penetration into Zog's Albania. In the years preceding the

[21] Ismail Kadare, *The General of the Dead Army*, Derek Coltman, trans. (Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2008), 210.

[22] Ibid., 240. Kadare's novel fictionalized very real efforts, carried out as the result of bilateral accords, to recover and return Italian and German war dead buried in Albania.

[23] Alessandro Roselli, *Italy and Albania: Financial Relations in the Fascist Period* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 33–42. Italian territorial ambitions towards Albania predated fascism. The Italian military occupied parts of Albania during World War I and administered a protectorate over the area between 1917 and 1920.

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official Italian period, the Dante Alighieri in Albania organized a photographic exhibition celebrating the Italian Empire in East Africa, hosted fascist officials like Francesco Jacomoni (who would become Albania's lieutenant governor in 1939), and commemorated figures such as the Duce's brother. In addition, the Dante brought to Albania teachers for Italian language courses and created Italian libraries, part of a denationalization policy that became more prominent after 1940.[24]

Although the Albanian Kingdom (Regno Albanese) would prove short-lived, the Italians made significant material investments in the territory, building upon the economic and cultural networks laid down over the preceding decade. Describing the architectural patrimony of elegant ministry buildings, wide boulevards, and apartment buildings left by the Italians in Tirana, Peter Lucas concludes, "The Italians built as though they intended to remain in Albania for a long time."[25] Italian initiatives included land reclamations modeled on those in the Italian peninsula, to be carried out by Società ITALBA (Imprese Trasformazioni agrarie e lavori bonifica), EBA (Ente Bonifiche Albanesi), and EIAA (Ente industriale attività agrarie).[26] The ETA (Ente Turistico Albania) came into existence in 1940 and, together with the ENIT (Ente Nazionale delle Industrie Turistiche), took its cues from tourism structures already well developed in Italian Libya and Rhodes.[27]

[24] For various details of these activities in the 1930s, turn to the documentation of the Archivio Storico Società Dante Alighieri (AS SDA, Rome), Serie Comitati Esteri, 1891–2002, Tirana 592A (1929–1937). On Italian-language libraries: AS SDA SCE Tirana 592 A 1929–1937, "Seconda Riunione del Consiglio Direttivo," 20 July 1933. On the plans to create a kiosk featuring Italian books and newspapers, consult AS SDA SCE Tirana 592 A (1929–1937), L. Sottili to R. Legazione d'Italia in Albania, 2 Sept. 1933. For the titles of books sent to such libraries, see AS SDA SCE Tirana 592C, "Appunto per l'Ufficio Libri," 18 Dec. 1941. By the 1940s, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was providing direct subsidies to the Dante for office furniture, teacher salaries, and concerts. AS SDA SCE, Tirana 592, sf. 7, "Dante in Albania," 10 Jan. 1944; "Appunto per il Comm. Solari," 7 Nov. 1944. For the Dante Alighieri's broader history, refer to Beatrice Pisa, *Nazione e politica nella società "Dante Alighieri"* (Rome: Bonacci, 1995); and Patrizia Salvetti, *Immagine nazione ed emigrazione nella società "Dante Alighieri"* (Rome: Bonacci, 1995).

[25] Peter Lucas, *The OSS in World War II Albania: Covert Operations and Collaboration with Communist Partisans* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 2007), 145. On Italy's architectural and archaeological legacies in Albania, turn to Roberta Belli Pasqua, Luigi Maria Caliò, and Anna Bruna Menghini, eds., *La presenza italiana in Albania: La ricerca archeologica, la conservazione, le scelte progettuali* (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2016).

[26] Alessandro Serra, *Albania 8 Settembre 1943–9 Marzo 1944* (Milan: Longanesi, 1974), 15–16. See also Ilaria Pulini, Rossella Ruggeri, and Cristiana Zanasi, *Modena-Tirana Andata e Ritorno: Immagini, Racconti e Documenti fra Italia e Albania* (Bologna: Moderna Industrie Grafiche, 2015), 30–35.

[27] Stephanie Malia Hom, "Empires of Tourism: Travel and Rhetoric in Italian Colonial Libya and Albania, 1911–1943," *Journal of Tourism History* 4, 3 (2012): 281–300. Operating from 1940 to 1943, the state-run entity DISTATPUR had exclusive rights to publish propaganda works in Albania. The agency published postcards, a number of books in both Italian and Albanian editions, and *Drini* (a *Monthly Bulletin on Albanian Tourism*). Franco Tagliarini, "DISTAPTUR: L'Ente Editoriale di Tirana e la presenza italiana negli anni 1939–1943," *Albania News*, 20 July

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Within the broader Italian Empire, Albania occupied an anomalous position, conceptualized as a kind of "brotherly" union between Italians and Albanians. Although Albanians possessed an indigenous fascist party (*Partito Fascista Albanese*), the Italian king's lieutenant governor exercised executive power.[28] Following the proclamation of Libya as *quarta sponda* and the incorporation of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania into Italy as a regional district in 1939, Albania was envisioned as the empire's *quinta sponda*, or fifth shore. Stephanie Malia Hom argues that the idiom of hospitality (*ospitalità*) that informed efforts to create an Italian tourist sector in Albania also "became the dominant trope of colonial rhetoric in Italian-occupied Albania. As such, Albanians were framed as willing hosts to their Italian colonizer-guests and, implicitly, their hospitality indicated a willingness to become subjugated to Italian rule."[29]

While such initiatives never came to full fruition, they signaled Albania's importance within the fascist imaginary even as they brought a number of Italian civilians to live and work in Albania. Exact figures for these civilians are hard to come by, but they included state functionaries, workers on road construction and other public works projects, employees of various Italian companies with branches in Albania (such as Fiat), colonists brought to work on reclaimed land and agricultural projects, and teachers for Italian schools. One scholar estimates the number of Italian workers in Albania peaked at fifty-eight thousand during the war with Greece, most of them employed by Italian rather than Albanian firms.[30] In many instances, the spouses and children of Italian employees accompanied them or Italians married local Albanians. Minister of Foreign Affairs Count Galeazzo Ciano complained of the haughty attitudes that such Italians often displayed in their everyday encounters with Albanians. Far from being the gracious guests of Albanian "hosts," these Italians tended, in Ciano's words, to "treat the natives badly and … have a colonial mentality. Unfortunately, this is also true of the military officers and, according to [Governor] Jacomoni, especially of their wives."[31] After Albania became an operational headquarters for the attack on Greece, it served as temporary home to many such Italian military personnel, who mingled with the Italian civilians.

The memoirs of soldiers and other resident Italians paint a picture of Albania as tranquil until the campaign in Greece (October 1940–April 1941),

2010, http://www.albanianews.it/uncategorized/1240-distaptur-albania-anni-30 (accessed 17 Feb. 2015).

[28] Davide Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation during the Second World War*, Adrian Belton, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 46–51, 59, 60. For particulars on the institutional, political, and economic structures created in Italian Albania, go to Fischer, *Albania at War*, 39–59, 61–88.

[29] Malia Hom, "Empires of Tourism," 283.

[30] Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, *Nazione e religione in Albania* (Nardo: Besa, 2002), 172.

[31] Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Diary, 1939–1943*, Malcolm Muggeridge, ed. (London: W. Heinemann Ltd., 1950), 254.

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a disastrous rout that galvanized the underground Albanian Communist Party. Former military medical personnel Franco Benanti recalled, "Albania appeared to me a safe refuge, far from the theater of the gigantic war.… At Scutari, in Tirana, and Durazzo, I had seen Italian housekeepers and children circulating among the soldiers."[32] Alessandro Serra, an Italo-Albanian resident in Albania at the time of the war, provides a vivid depiction of the strange bubble that was Italian Tirana in 1940 and 1941:

> The Italian who in that period arrived in Albania found himself, amazed, in a world of delights. The war was on, yes: but in the zone of operations, and for the soldiers who fought and died, for the refugees who wandered through Albania and Italy. In central-northern Albania one lived as one did in times of peace: normal provisioning from Italy and—perils of the sea notwithstanding—abundant food and clothing. In the bars one still drank a cup of real coffee, in sharp contrast with that slush one drank in Italy. There was no stockpiling of grain, no rationing, while in Italy one needed a card in order to buy even a ribbon to adorn a young girl's hair. In addition, to minimize the inconvenience to Italians, the authorities permitted family members to join their loved ones. Thus from Italy came elegant women, with nursemaids who pushed prams, while in the cinemas they showed our best films.[33]

The documents of institutions like the Dante Alighieri testify to this disconnect between everyday life in Tirana and Italy's rapidly deteriorating military and political fortunes. In 1942, for instance, the association planned to build housing for its employees and appealed to teachers in Italy to come to Albania. Indeed, the Dante expanded its scope, creating a "Federation of the Committees" of various Alighieri sections in Albania. The planned program of activities for 1943 displayed tremendous optimism and little awareness of the looming collapse.[34]

Even with these varied sources, reconstructing the life of civilians in Italian Albania during this period remains challenging. Only in the last few years have scholars begun to expand the database of available sources by turning to private collections of family letters and materials and by recording oral histories.[35] The archival challenges reflect gaps (in the more conventional sense of absences) in the record. Large chunks of material for associations such as the Dante Alighieri, for example, are missing. Likewise, the documentation of the Fondo del Sottosegretariato per gli Affari Albanesi (SSAA,

[32] Franco Benanti, *La Guerra Più Lunga, Albania 1943–1948* (Milan: Mursia, 2003), 17.

[33] Serra, *Albania*, 17–18. These halcyon perceptions contrast with those of local Albanians, who experienced shortages and skyrocketing prices as the result of the customs union created between Italy and Albania and the imposition of strict monetary controls. See Fischer, *Albania at War*, 93–95.

[34] AS SDA SCE 592 C Tirana 1941–42, "Programma della attività per l'anno 1943-XXI," and also "Schema di Statuto per la Federazione e per i Comitati della 'Dante Alighieri' dell'Albania"; see also AS SDA SCE 592 D Tirana (1943).

[35] In his study *Italiani d'Albania*, for example, Bonapace draws upon numerous interviews with Italianesi. The Centro Documentazione Memorie Coloniali di Modena recently conducted a survey of private sources, listed in Pulini, Ruggeri, and Zanasi, *Modena-Tirana*, 113–17.

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Undersecretary of State for Albanian Affairs) has only recently become accessible. Furthermore, available diplomatic documents from the time must be read with a skeptical eye, keeping in mind the desire of many diplomats to flatter and please Count Ciano.[36] The privileging of the military experience in both the documentation and subsequent historiography means that civilians often figure only in the interstices or background of these narratives. Indeed, historians have studied Italian Albania and its aftermath largely from the point of view of military operations and diplomatic relations, and to a much lesser extent, economic ties. The experiences of Italian soldiers in the tumultuous period following Mussolini's expulsion from the Grand Fascist Council and arrest on 25 July 1943 and the armistice with the Allies that 8 September have received considerable attention, in contrast to the story of repatriations (and non-repatriations) that followed at war's end.

In Albania, as in Italy itself, many Italian soldiers greeted the armistice with relief, mistakenly believing it meant the end of the war. Their enthusiasm soon turned to confusion and then panic, though, as they confronted a difficult choice: either agree to the German demand that they turn over their arms, or take to the hills. The majority of those military men who submitted to the Germans' terms were deported to the Reich to serve as forced laborers. Others hid or wandered the countryside, aided by Albanian peasants.[37] Whereas some of these soldiers tried to reach Italy via Yugoslavia, others joined up with the Albanian partisans (the Lëvizja Antifashiste Nacional Çlirimtare, directed largely by the Albanian Communist Party). Those joining the Resistance included noncombatant military personnel, like the Parma division's medical doctor Vittorio Bruschi, who had been providing assistance to the partisans even before the capitulation.[38]

In several well-known instances, entire divisions went over to the partisan side. Of the six divisions that comprised the 9th Army in Albania, for instance, the Perugia and Firenze infantry divisions evaded the Germans and joined up with the antifascist forces. Within a week after the armistice they had been reconstituted as Comando italiano truppe alla montagna (Italian Mountain Command Troops) in the Albanian National Liberation Front. Members of various former Italian regiments also came together in the Gramsci Battalion,

[36] Villari notes the difficulty in actually viewing the documents of the SSAA; "A Failed Experiment," 158–59.

[37] For a typical account of those sent to Germany, see the diary of Silvio Forzieri, interned in Hannover from October 1943 to May 1945: Massimo Borgogni, ed., *Diario di guerra e prigonia del Sergente Maggiore Silvio Forzieri, 1941–1945* (Siena: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2003). Bonapace gives a rough figure of ninety thousand Italian military men imprisoned and/or deported by the Germans (with some four thousand executed in early October 1943); another forty-five thousand or so evaded capture, some by joining the partisans. Bonapace, *Italiani d'Albania*, 65.

[38] On Bruschi's experience, refer to the work by his daughter, Maria Rita Bruschi, *Dal Po all'Albania, 1943–1949: Un medico mantovano tra guerra e prigionia* (Verona: Script edizioni, 2013).

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the only Italian military formation directly incorporated into the Albanian partisan forces.[39]

In his memoir, Alessandro Serra notes that the German Command initially agreed to exempt Italo-Albanian soldiers from deportation, and with great difficulty he obtained a certificate of exemption. His memoir describes Tirana in September and October of 1943, providing glimpses of the experiences of Italian civilians there. Serra lodged in the apartment of a friend in the housing complex of the construction company ITALBA in New Tirana, living alongside the directors of the company, several workers and their families, and the owners of the Bar dell'Orologio (Clock Bar). The bar became the "meeting point for all those tormented souls: every morning we met there in search of news, for which we hungered even more than bread."[40]

The quest for information prompted Serra to visit the Apostolic representative to ask if the Vatican could assist in sending news to families back in Italy. Serra recounts, "Monsignor Nigris listened to me in silence, then he lowered his eyes, sighed and finally responded, 'My son, I am isolated like you! Your letters, sent with the Red Cross, never left Tirana!'"[41] As this example suggests, Italians experienced a world of gaps in which information flows were frequently blocked. Before deciding to join the partisans, for instance, the Italian military doctor Vittorio Bruschi regularly went to a center in Sarandë/Saranda (at that time known as Porto Edda) that had electricity just once a week in order to listen to the radio and catch snatches of the news. On the basis of these unreliable fragments, individuals calculated their risks and made decisions that would profoundly impact their lives. In the period between the armistice and 1945, most Italians in Albania neither received news from nor successfully communicated with their families abroad, as attested by the collection of letters from Italian family members contained at the Central State Archives in Tirana.[42]

In a situation of rumors and speculation, Italian civilians confronted the increasing hostility of the Balli Kombëtar (National Front) movement, an Albanian anticommunist group that had thrown its lot in with the German occupiers.

[39] On the Perugia and Firenze fighters, see Viscardo Azzi, *I Disobbedienti della 9a Armata: Albania 1943–1945* (Milan: Ugo Mursia, 2010).

[40] Serra, *Albania*, 73. While Serra's memoir gives few details regarding his background, it raises intriguing questions about the mobilization of Arbëreshë in the Italian project in Albania.

[41] Ibid., 74.

[42] Central State Archives (AQSH), Tirana, Leterkembimi i qytetareve italianë në Shqipëri, dosja 39–41/4, viti 1945. Most of the letters were sent from relatives in Italy to soldiers in Albania. Many of the writers describe the precarious conditions of life in Italy (including rations, shortages, and the black market) and express frustration that their loved one has not been repatriated. One letter complains, "Why didn't they repatriate civilians instead of military personnel? At least these [soldiers] are given food to eat by the government and their families receive a subsidy. And you other poor creatures, how do you make it without work or means?"; dosja 41, viti 1945, letter to Calderazzi Sabino, 20 June 1945.

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In the months immediately following the armistice the German Command applied both carrots and sticks, urging soldiers to come down from the mountains and sanctioning an assistance committee run by Italians. This Comitato d'assistenza tra gl'italiani (alternatively known as Comitato assistenza fra italiani) provided aid to needy Italians and organized roughly a dozen repatriation convoys that left Albania through Axis-controlled territories: first to Yugoslavia and then on to Italy via either Hungary or Austria. Members of this group soon ran afoul of the Germans, however, and the SS arrested its president and two other members on the charge of sabotage. Certainly, the committee appears to have put the needs of Italians first, since one former soldier claims it furnished as many as four thousand soldiers with identity cards that enabled them to pass as civilians and thereby elude deportation to Germany.[43] The Dante Alighieri in Tirana played a similar role, helping Italian soldiers escape the Germans. In February of 1944, the British Military Mission estimated that at least twenty thousand Italian soldiers remained in Albania.[44]

By the following November, Tirana had been liberated from the Germans and the nascent communist regime headed by Enver Hoxha had moved there from Berat. The Gramsci Battalion comprised of Italian soldiers was among those marching in the military parades celebrating the country's liberation. At this point, however, the government under Pietro Badoglio in Italy's south had no formal diplomatic relations with Albania, complicating questions of assistance to Italian civilians and soldiers alike.[45] In dealing with the question of repatriation of Italians still in Albania, the Italian government appointed General Gino Piccini, former commanding officer of the Firenze Division who had gone over to the partisans as part of the Gramsci. Despite Piccini's antifascist credentials, the Albanian authorities created numerous obstacles to a mass repatriation of soldiers and civilians. By early 1945, the Hoxha regime had confiscated much of the property of Italian firms and arrested and executed a number of Italian civilians charged with sabotage.[46]

[43] Benanti, *La guerra più lunga*, 166–67.

[44] Regarding the role of the Dante as a "refuge for soldiers," see AS SDA SCE Tirana 592 E, sf. 8, declaration of 10 Oct. 1947. For British military estimates, see Elena Aga Rossi and Maria Teresa Giusti, *Una guerra a parte: I militari italiani nei Balcani, 1940–1945* (Bologna: Mulino, 2011), 357.

[45] Rossi and Giusti, *Una guerra a parte*, 358.

[46] Benanti, *La guerra più lunga*, 199–203; Settimio Stallone, *Prove di diplomazia adriatica: Italia e Albania 1944–1949* (Turin: Giappichelli, 2006), 144–46. See also ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 10, "Nota Verbale," 22 Mar. 1946; and also AP 1946–50 Albania b. 3, "Nota Verbale," 11 Mar. 1946. These expropriations took place as the Italian authorities sought unsuccessfully to keep their requests for repatriation separate from Albanian demands for restitution of properties seized during the Italian occupation. Italian officials insisted that Italy and Albania had never officially been at war and thus Albania could not legally request war reparations (as also occurred with Libya). See Settimio Stallone, "Gli accordi del 14 marzo per il rimpatrio degli italiani dall'Albania," *Clio: Rivista trimestrale di studi storici* 39, 4 (2003): 687–701.

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In March 1945, Mario Palermo, undersecretary of war and member of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), traveled to Albania in the hopes of ameliorating the situation of Italians still there. The result was the Hoxha-Palermo Accord, five of whose twelve clauses dealt with repatriation. The agreement recognized the urgent need to repatriate all Italians who wished it, whether military personnel or civilians, and put the responsibility for carrying out such repatriation in Italian hands. Although the Albanian government reserved the right to retain Italian specialists necessary for reconstruction projects, the accord called for (but did not set out specific guidelines for) the substitution over time of these specialists with personnel voluntarily sent from Italy on specific work contracts.[47] In reality, the Hoxha regime would detain a number of Italians, some of whom would never return home.

REPATRIATIONS AFTER EMPIRE: CHALLENGES, BLOCKAGES, GAPS

Large-scale repatriations of soldiers to Italy began in May 1945, with members of Piccini's Gramsci brigade at the head of the line. Owing to the shortage of Italian ships and supplies, personnel of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) helped carry out the repatriations on ships provided in part by the British and U.S. navies. Although the UNRRA initially had excluded Italians from its repatriation work on the basis of Italy's status as a former enemy nation, a decision at UNRRA's Second Council session in 1944 permitted the *exceptional* return of "intruded" enemy nationals; that is, individuals from the enemy nations who had intruded into foreign territory and remained there once hostilities ended. Italians from Albania made up the principal group repatriated under this provision.[48]

Ongoing debates over just which Italian Displaced Persons (DPs) were eligible for UNRRA assistance complicated the task, even as UNRRA staff faced a humanitarian crisis when the Hoxha regime suddenly moved to deport all Italians not considered "useful." A cable sent in February 1946 from the UNRRA office in Tirana to its headquarters in London warned that in Albania, "large numbers Italians now being prepared for expulsion … under present exceptional circumstances all Italians here fall within Category DPs."[49] A week later, however, Chief of Mission D. R. Oakley-Hill complained in a letter to UNRRA's director of finance about the Albanian authorities stopping their trucks at a roadblock because those UN lorries carried Italian nationals. "London advises us that we may only assist the repatriation of those Italians who entered Albania after the Italian occupation, i.e. April 7th, 1939." In the

[47] Settimio Stallone, "Gli accordi del 14 marzo per il rimpatrio degli italiani dall'Albania," 697–98.

[48] George Woodbridge, *UNRRA: The History of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Volume I* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 479.

[49] UNRRA Archives (UNNRA, New York), S-0527, box 848, cable no. 01787.

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midst of seeking clarification on the shifting policy regarding Italians' eligibility for UNRRA assistance, Oakley-Hill huffed, "As it stands it places us in an absurd position, having to distinguish between one Italian and another in this arbitrary fashion." As a result, he concluded, "The best plan therefore will be to refuse to carry any Italians at all."[50] Eventually, after considerable debate and negotiation, UNRRA did carry out large-scale repatriations of Italian soldiers, employing a range of ships such as the *Marvia*, the *Thimble Eye*, and even some Yugoslav transports.[51] UNRRA staff in Albania had to improvise many of its policies for repatriating DPs, including but not limited to Italians.[52]

Whereas UNRRA had helped the majority of Italians in Albania to return to the Italian peninsula by 1947, several thousand Italian citizens who wanted to repatriate remained, most of them civilians. In practice, the Albanian government refused to honor the terms of the Hoxha-Palermo Accord and kept many civilian specialists, such as engineers and doctors necessary for reconstruction, against their will.[53] In July 1945, just four months after the labor/repatriation accord, the Italian government had sent Consul Ugo Turcato to Tirana. Lacking official notification of appointment (*lettera d'accreditamento*) Turcato was stonewalled. His mission unfolded within a rapidly mutating

[50] UNRRA, S-1010, box 8, file 7, UNNRA-Albania-Bureau of Finance and Admin-Personnel-Repatriation of DPS-Gerson, Frank. J., 31 Oct. 1945–19 Dec. 1946, D. R. Oakley-Hill to J. Halsall, "Italian Passengers and Their Furniture," 21 Feb. 1946.

[51] On repatriations carried out on the *Marvia* in April 1946, see AQSH, fondi 490, dosja 204, P. C. Floud to the Prime Ministry, "Repatriation of Italians," 26 Apr. 1946. For repatriations in July 1946, refer to Archivio Storico Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri (ASDMAE, Rome) Affari Politici (AP) 1946–50 Albania b. 3, "Relazione sull'arrivo a Brindisi, il 11 luglio 1946, di n. 30 connazionali provenienti dall'Albania." For subsequent movements on the *Marvia* in September 1946, see UNRRA S-1010-0008 UNRRA Albania Mission PAG 4/3.0.0.1: 8 UNRRA Albania—Bureau of Finance and Administration—Personnel Repatriation of Displaced Persons, Frank Gerson. For repatriations on the *Don Chisciotte*, see ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 3, "Repatriation of Italians from Albania," 15 Nov. 1946. For the transfer of Italians by UNRRA on Yugoslav boats, ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 3, "Appunto," 2 Sept. 1946.

[52] UNRRA S-0520-0244 PAG 4/1.3.1.1.2.0.1 Subject Files, "Albanian Misc.," note of 10 Jan. 1944, "CAWA/527 Appreciation and Plan UNRRA Mission Albania." As plans were being drawn up for the mission in 1944, UNRRA staff noted the precarious condition of many Italians and the possibility that the Hoxha regime might deport them. UNRRA S-0527-0002 PAG 4/30-0-3-4 UNRRA Subject Files, 1944–1949 Displaced Persons, Policy 1944, "Current Displaced Persons Intelligence: Quotations with Sources," 15 Dec. 1944. UNRRA also assisted Greeks and Chamerians (ethnic Albanian Muslims from Greek Epirus) in Albania. See UNRRA S-0520-0197 Albania: Repatriation from, Myer Cohen, "Displaced Persons in Albania," 20 Apr. 1946.

[53] The 1945 mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross to Albania, which focused on the question of prisoners of war in the country, noted that a number of specialists detained according to the terms of the Hoxha-Palermo Accord had no real possibility to return to Italy. They lived with their families on miserable pay (60 Albanian francs per day). Red Cross officials Schirmer and Cuénod deemed twenty-eight Italian military doctors and nineteen nurses forced to work in Albanian hospitals "the only [Italian] prisoners of war" still in Albania. Archives du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge (ACICR, Geneva) B G 003 76-1 Mission de R. Schirmer and G. Cuénod en Albanie du 18 novembre au 22 décembre 1945, "Prisonniers Allemands et Italiens en Albanie visitée le 18.11.45 au 22.12.45 par le Dr. Schirmer e Mr. G. Cuénod de la Mission spéciale en Albanie."

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political climate in Albania as the regime drew closer to Tito's Yugoslavia (which sought to incorporate Albania within a Yugoslav-led Balkan Federation) and, above all, to Stalin's Soviet Union. As the United States and Britain dragged their feet on the question of diplomatic recognition of Albania, the regime took punitive action against their ally, Italy. Albanian officials shut down the only foreign banks operating at that time, the Banco di Napoli and Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, expropriated the goods of several Italian firms, and initiated an anti-Italian campaign in the press that took many of its cues from Yugoslav propaganda. As tensions escalated, the Albanian authorities ordered Turcato to quit Albania. He left the country on 21 January 1946.[54] Italy and Albania would not normalize diplomatic relations until May of 1949, though another 350 Italians returned home in early 1948 as relations began to improve.[55]

In the interstices of these negotiations between states there operated local committees, to this point little studied, that provided assistance to Italians in Albania. In order to fill the vacuum on the ground and aid impoverished Italians, for instance, a Comitato Antifascista Italiano had come into existence in 1944, apparently taking over (with the approval of the new Albanian communist authorities) from the older Comitato assistenza fra Italiani. I have found only brief mention of this antifascist committee, which is sometimes referred to as the Gruppo Democratico-Popolare Italiano or Circolo Democratico Popolare. An internal document from the latter states that the Comitato Antifascista Italiano later dissolved in the face of the fusion of the Gruppo Democratico with the "Circolo Garibaldi."[56] Branches of the Circolo Garibaldi existed in Tirana, Shkodër/Scutari, Durrës/Durazzo, Vlorë/Valona, Berat/Berati, and Korçë/Koritza. Members of the Circolo communicated with UNRRA, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Italian and Albanian governments, suggesting it played an important but sometimes slippery role, not only as an advocate of the Italians in Albania but also as a mediator between very different actors and interests.

[54] Settimio Stallone, "La difficile missione del console Ugo Turcato in Albania (29 luglio 1945–21 gennaio 1946)," *Clio: Rivista trimestrale di studi storici* 34, 1 (1998): 143–71.

[55] Rossi and Giusti, *Una guerra a parte*, 394–95.

[56] AS SDA SCE Tirana 592, sf. 7, "L'attività scolastica italiana in Albania negli anni scolastici 43/44 e 44/45." Various documents of the Circolo Garibaldi actually use the name Circolo Democratico Popolare Italiano "Giuseppe Garibaldi." See, for instance, AQSH, Circolo Garibaldi (CG), dosja 95, viti 95, "Celebrazione liberazione Italia del Nord," 27 Apr. 1945. One document states that the Gruppo Democratico Popolare Italiano originated in the days following the liberation of Tirana, when Enrico Danek, Gioacchino Magnoni, and Ugo Merola contacted the command of the Gramsci Battalion. "The men of the Gruppo Democratico Popolare immediately had a notable part to play in the functioning of the Circolo Garibaldi." AQSH, CG, dosja 52, viti 1945, "Verbale," 3 Aug. 1945. AQSH, CG, dosja 14, viti 1944, contains lists of contributions made by Italian companies to both the Comitato Antifascista Italiano and the Circolo Garibaldi in December 1944. Seventy-four companies donated money, revealing the wide range of Italian commercial interests still present in Albania at that time.

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Although the Circolo may have been born out of the need to provide immediate aid to Italians in Albania, particularly those seeking repatriation, it quickly expanded its scope. Here, then, critical gaps in humanitarian assistance made for a generative space in which the Circolo could extend its influence and create new kinds of connections between Italians, both civilians and ex-military, in Albania. The Circolo contained diverse sectors tasked with political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian tasks and framed in terms common to socialist institutions: discipline and control, (self-)critique, treasury/finances, theater and music, sports, work/labor, press and propaganda, and assistance.[57] Though its statute stated that it remained an apolitical association, the organization stressed an antifascist line and its solidarity with Albanians in the partisan fight. Nonetheless, the Circolo declared that it would provide assistance to any and all Italians, including those who had not fought on the side of the partisans.[58] This included food and housing for needy soldiers and civilians, including some Italian women married to Albanian men.[59] Soldiers without shoes received particular attention in 1944 and 1945.[60]

The Circolo also served as a social center for Italians still in Albania. Military doctor Vittorio Bruschi, who had worked with the partisans after the dissolution of the Parma division, ended up employed in a Tirana hospital as a result of being deemed a "necessary" worker (according to the language of the Hoxha-Palermo accord). The Circolo Garibaldi in that city provided him with a place to socialize and eat with fellow Italians, as well as listen to the radio—a "lifeline" connecting Italians to the mother country.[61] The Circolo also hosted dances, which served as fundraisers. Indeed, the Circolo possessed semi-autonomy in the financial realm, and many documents mention donations by Italian companies in Albania and private citizens.[62] The Italian government also supplied monies, although this created its own difficulties. The Turcato Mission, for instance, had funneled subsidies to members of the Circolo under the table. After the mission was expelled, a diplomatic pouch containing

[57] AQSH, CG, dosja 1, viti 1944, Seduta del 9 Dec. 1944.

[58] AQSH, CG, dosja 2, viti 1944, Gregorio Pirro, 14 Dec. 1944.

[59] On the establishment of a canteen for those in need, see AQSH, CG, dosja 15, viti 1944, "Oggetto: Conv. Mensa," 30 Dec. 1944. AQSH, CG, dosja 45, viti 1944, contains several documents outlining the creation of a kitchen for transiting soldiers and civilians. On aid to an Italian woman married to an Albanian man, see AQSH, CG, dosja 16, viti 1944, letter of 27 Dec. 1944.

[60] See the letter from the "Comitato Assistenza fra Italiani in Scutari," 9 Dec. 1944, contained in AQSH, CG, dosja 3, viti 1944.

[61] Bruschi, *Dal Po all'Albania*, 40.

[62] AQSH, CG, dosja 14, viti 1944 (lists of contributions). Also AQSH, CG, dosja 28, viti 1944, 29 Oct. 1944, refers to the "help provided on the generous initiative of a woman, well known to many of you, and the generosity of contributors" in providing recreational possibilities for Italian comrades who had returned from the partisan campaign. One letter of thanks from Circolo President Gregorio Pirrò (dated January 1945) referenced clothing donated by the Bulgarian Vice Consul. On this, see AQSH, CG, dosja 65, viti 1945, Pirro to Bellei-Ditta Siderurgica, 5 Jan. 1945.

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receipts of the sums distributed was illegally opened and the Albanian government confiscated those monies.[63]

In the political realm, by contrast, the Circolo never exercised genuine political autonomy. One of its founders, Gioacchino Magnoni, claimed that he initially avoided becoming part of the association's executive branch (Presidenza generale) because he "found it too subjugated to the interests of the Albanian Government and to those of a certain political party." When Magnoni did later become head of the Circolo (after serving as its repatriation director), between September 1945 and January 1946, he soon came under pressure because of his relationships with members of UNRRA and the Italian Mission. Forced to resign in 1946, he was disciplined within the Circolo for carrying out supposedly subversive "propaganda" work, and forced to return to Italy.[64] By this point, officials in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered the Circolo "under the direct influence of the Albanian government, with the result that the assistance to Italians is subordinated to discriminatory criteria."[65] Reading the documentation of the Circolo Garibaldi in light of assessments by Italian functionaries, and references in memoirs by Italians who interacted with the group, helps us take account of critical obfuscations in the documents.

From the very start, in fact, the Circolo carried out data collection and surveillance that served the needs of the Albanian authorities, thereby filling in gaps in the new regime's knowledge about the Italian citizens still in Albania. At the moment of its founding, for instance, the Circolo conducted a census of Italian workers in Albania expressly for the regime.[66] It drew up lists of specialists that helped the regime identify useful Italians, some of whose repatriations Albanian officials likely blocked as a result.[67] In 1945, the Albanian government tasked the Circolo with determining the savings of certain Italians and the amounts they hoped to send to families in Italy. Yet the Circolo did advocate for some Italians who ran afoul of the Albanian authorities, including those who had been arrested and imprisoned.[68] A letter from the Circolo's president to the Italian Mission in Albania defended one

[63] On this, see various documents in ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 3: letter of Gennaro Imondi, 3 Apr. 1946; letter of Eliseo Canavese, 8 Aug. 1946; letter of Gioacchino Magnoni to Ugo Turcato, 5 Aug. 1946; letter of Ugo Turcato to MAE, "Fondi assistenza a disposizione della Missione Italiana in Albania," 16 Aug. 1946.

[64] ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 3, Magnoni to Turcato, 5 Aug. 1946.

[65] ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 2, "Memorandum per l'U.N.R.R.A.," 23 Feb. 1946. As Italians repatriated in 1946, the Italian government sought to identify those who had collaborated with the Albanians to the detriment of fellow Italians. See, for example, ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 3, Telespresso, "Italiani accusatori di connazionali," 5 Jan. 1946; also letter of Piceci and Scalo, 1 Oct. 1946.

[66] AQSH, CG, dosja 1, viti 1944, Seduta 9 Dec. 1944.

[67] AQSH, CG, dosja 164, viti 1945.

[68] See the letter of 5 January 1946 and the request for mercy for four imprisoned Italians, in AQSH, CG, dosja 81, viti 1945.

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man, Arturo B., who had moved with his wife to Shkodër/Scutari in 1940 to run a *trattoria* (restaurant). At the time of his repatriation he tried to export 485.000 Lira. Another Italian denounced him and the money was found hidden in a false-bottom box. Arturo then approached the Legal Section of the Circolo and offered a "gift" of 100.000 Lire should the Circolo succeed in recouping his lost earnings. Though the Circolo turned down what amounted to little more than a bribe, it did advocate for Arturo B. with the Italian Mission. "There is no doubt that B. did something illegal," it was argued, "but one is dealing with a timid and ignorant individual for whom one should admit many mitigating circumstances."[69] The Legal Section also dealt with various cases of thefts between members of the Italian community, providing a means of dispute resolution.[70]

While the records of the organization indicate extensive involvement in helping Italians leaving Albania, in some instances the Circolo exerted moral pressure on Italians to *return* to Albania. In one case, an Italian had left behind his fiancé and two young children and was urged to come back. In a similar example, the Circolo argued that a man who had left behind an Albanian woman he had promised to marry and by whom he had a child had to, at the minimum, marry by proxy in order to prevent "great damage to the good name of Italians abroad."[71]

As these examples suggest, the Circolo engaged a variety of issues related to the moral health of the Italian community. In 1945, for example, the association established a Scholastic Commission for Italians in Albania and forwarded offers by nuns to teach elementary school classes.[72] These efforts, together with its organization of a variety of cultural activities, suggest that the Circolo's adherents may have envisioned it as ultimately providing the institutional basis for an Italian minority in Albania along the lines of those organized in Yugoslavia in the Istrian and Kvarner regions. A memo written in 1944, for instance, expressed the hope that "once the situation normalizes, the Circolo Garibaldi will be the Italian Association open for moral and physical assistance, for physical and intellectual culture and for a healthy democracy free of any sectarianism or violence."[73] Tito's Yugoslavia exerted a strong tutelary influence on Albania until Yugoslavia's expulsion from the Cominform in 1948, so it would be no surprise if the Circolo was modeled on the Unione degli Italiani dell'Istria e di Fiume founded in 1945, though I have yet to find direct evidence for this. Be that as it may, any such hopes were dashed by the break

[69] AQSH, CG, dosja 66, viti 1945, letter of 1 Oct. 1945.

[70] AQSH, CG, dosja 67, viti 1945, letters of 15 Feb. 1945, 12 Apr. 1945, and 11 May 1945. See also AQSH, CG, dosja 116, viti 1946, "Disaccordi fra Italiani."

[71] AQSH, CG, dosja 105, viti 1946, letter of 14 Sept. 1945; a similar appeal was made on 19 Sept. 1945.

[72] AQSH, CG, dosja 93, viti 1945, letters of 1 Oct. 1945 and 10 Dec. 1945.

[73] AQSH, CG, dosja 58, viti 1944, letter of Magnoni, 12 Nov. 1945.

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with Yugoslavia, Stalinization, and increased diplomatic isolation after successive periods of close alliance with the Soviet Union, and later China. We can also presume that too few Italians remained in Albania to form a meaningful organizational nucleus.

The Circolo Garibaldi appears to have dissolved in 1949, the point at which the documentary trail runs cold (although some protagonists claim the organization ceased to exist even earlier). This may have reflected the departure of its core constituency, since most of the ex-military medical personnel detained in Albania finally received permission that year to return to Italy.[74] Vittorio Bruschi, for example, arrived in Trieste in June of 1949 after six years in Albania. Since 1945, the regime had forced him to work long hours in multiple hospitals. Despite pressure and intimidation, he had refused again and again to sign a labor contract, one of the regime's tactics to demonstrate that Italian workers remained in Albania voluntarily, as per the terms of the Hoxha-Palermo Accord.[75] Further repatriations occurred in 1951, after which the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs claimed, "There remain practically no Italians who are not imprisoned (*in stato di libertà*) who desire to return to the Patria; very few co-nationals have asked for and obtained permission to remain in Albania for personal reasons." However, another document from the same year acknowledges that any Italians living "freely" in Albania were, in reality, "subject to strict surveillance and subjected to continual harassment. In fact, none of these tries to approach our legation and if they meet someone from our legation on the street they pretend not to know him."[76] Such an assessment demonstrates the Italian government's awareness that some Italian citizens remained in communist Albania, trapped in the gaps created by fascism's collapse and the exigencies of the Cold War.

In fact, throughout the 1950s there emerged occasional reports about Italians detained in Albania. An August 1955 article in *Corriere della Sera*, for example, detailed the fates of several Italians, both civilians and ex-military. These included the mechanic Primo Fumagalli who had been arrested multiple times, Fiat employee Federico Vasconi condemned for "political motives" to

[74] One official Italian document estimated that by March 1949 six hundred "arbitrarily detained" Italians remained in Albania. See Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (PCM) 1944–47 b. 3402 (2.7/14628), letter of 23 Mar. 1949. On medical personnel, see ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 3, "Appunti: Sanitari italiani trattenuti in Albania," 4 Sept. 1946; ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 42, letter of Giuseppe De Marchis, 8 Nov. 1949; ACICR BG 017 05.005 Italiens en Albanie 26.03.1945-14.07.1949, letter of 4 Feb. 1948 from Pierre Colombo.

[75] Bruschi, *Dal Po all'Albania*, 41–49. Others leaving that same year included former Italian police officer Sordello Ruggero and his wife, who departed with 274 fellow Italians on the ship *Stadium*. ASDMAE AP 1946–50 Albania b. 42, letter of Sordello Ruggero, 6 Dec. 1949.

[76] ASDMAE AP 1950–57 Albania b. 517, "Promemoria sulla Situazione in Albania," June 1951. The second letter is in the same file: Legazione d'Italia in Tirana, "Relazione sugli avvenimenti maturatisi in Albania durante l'anno 1951."

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twenty years in jail (later reduced to ten years), and Giuseppe Tel, an elderly hotel owner in Shkoder/Scutari. All of them languished in Tirana jails. The article claimed that 3,400 Italian citizens were being kept in Albania against their will. The Red Cross continued to work to reunify families that had been divided when Italian citizens returned home leaving behind spouses and children. In 1961, for instance, the head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Tracing Services wrote to the Albanian Red Cross urging them to take up the question of reuniting these families and to use their influence with the Albanian authorities to effect reunions. Although the Italian Red Cross appears to have pressed the ICRC to intervene, I have found no evidence of any permanent family reunifications during the 1960s and 1970s. That was a period marked by Albanian withdrawal, symbolized by its 1978 break with its final ally, China.[77] Beginning in 1962, the Albanian government did permit some Italian Albanians to visit relatives in Italy for brief periods, keeping their spouses and children behind as guarantees; from the other direction, selected family members from Italy received permission to visit Albania on state-organized tours.[78] These contacts remained fraught with risks for those in Albania, however, and the distance of both space and time fragmented many families separated by the Adriatic Sea.

IMPROBABLE RETURNS?

With the crumbling of the socialist regime in Albania in 1990 and 1991, the Italian government once again became concerned about the remainders of Italy's imperial history there. In a story overshadowed by the drama of ships crowded with Albanian migrants crossing the sea to Italy, a number of individuals appeared at the Italian consulate in Tirana and requested help repatriating to Italy. Some clutched dog-eared documents attesting to their former Italian citizenship, while others could proffer only their claim to have been Italian or to have an Italian parent. In response, the Italian state sent a mission to Albania to conduct a census of these claimants. Margherita Boniver, then minister of the newly formed Ministry of Italians Abroad and Immigration, met with dozens of elderly Italians in Tirana. The end result was the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affair's 1992 Operazione C.O.R.A. (Comitato Operativo per i Rimpatriandi dall'Albania), by which the Italian military repatriated approximately eighty individuals and their families to Italy. Others instead made their way to Italy on tourist visas or as Albanian citizens and requested political asylum.

[77] ACICR B AG 210 007-002, "Italiens en Albanie. Article paru dans le 'Corriere della Sera' le 12 août 1955 parlant de 3400 Italiens encore détenus." For the 1961 requests, turn to ACICR B AG 233 103-003, "Cas des ressortissants italiens ayant épousé des personnes de nationalité albanaise et désirant faire venir leur famille en Italie," letter of P. Jequier, 8 Dec. 1961.

[78] Bonapace, *Italiani d'Albania*, 106–10. Other Italian visitors to Albania in the 1970s and 1980s included members of the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist Partito Comunista d'Italia. Pulini, Ruggeri, and Zanasi, *Modena-Tirana*, 80–83.

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Still others still remain in Albania today. Although scholars like Perlmutter claim that 1997's Alba represented Italy's first military humanitarian mission in Albania, in fact CORA preceded that by five years.[79]

Many of the repatriates and their descendants belong to the Associazione Nazionale Cittadini Italiani e Familiari Rimpatriati dall'Albania (ANCIFRA), founded in Asti in 2001 and with sections in Tivoli, Milan, and Trieste. When I first stumbled upon ANCIFRA's website, I imagined an association along the lines of those for Italians who left Yugoslav Istria, with which I was familiar from previous research. Instead ANCIFRA's sections are extremely small and seem to operate primarily as lobby groups to advance the interests of these repatriates, rather than providing the core of social and cultural communities. Despite various efforts to contact members of ANCIFRA by email and phone, it took me a good while to locate anyone willing to speak with me. This contrasted with the large Istrian associations filled with eager interlocutors.

Although a few of those repatriated to Italy in the 1990s included former male prisoners, like those featured prominently in *Lamerica* and *Italianesi*, the majority were Italian women who had married Albanian men in the 1930s and 1940s, many of them now widows, and their families/descendants. In contrast to Italy's African colonies, where almost all mixed relationships occurred between Italian men and African women, a number of Italian women had married Albanians. In some instances, these Albanian men had met their spouses while studying in Italy during the 1930s. When Albania became part of Italy these couples migrated there. Before World War II, Italian women marrying foreign nationals automatically lost their Italian citizenship and thus these women and their children perforce remained in Albania.[80]

In April 2011 I interviewed Nderim and Valmir (all informant names are pseudonyms), two men "repatriated" in 1992 from Albania with their wives and children. In both cases, their wives were products of mixed unions between Albanian fathers and Italian mothers who had lost their Italian citizenship. When these descendants and their families arrived in Italy they did not automatically gain citizenship, much to their frustration. Nderim's wife became an Italian citizen in 1997, but he had to wait another four years. Nderim and Valmir had both come to Italy (and currently live in Trieste) in order to provide their children with a better future, given that they themselves had left behind respected professional jobs in Albania. Valmir, for example, held a Ph.D. degree in chemistry that was not recognized in Italy, and they ended up stuck doing odd jobs. Both expressed extreme disappointment at the

[79] Perlmutter, "The Politics of Proximity"; Antonio Caiazza, *In alto mare: Viaggio nell'Albania dal comunismo al futuro* (Turin: Instar Libri, 2008), 207–10.

[80] Ibid., 207. See also the discussion of Italian women with Albanian husbands and children and the consequences of the patrilineal bias built into Italian citizenship, in Bonapace, *Italiani d'Albania*, 32–33, 93–96, 132–33.

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"empty" promises the Italian government made to encourage repatriation. This theme of a second abandonment upon arrival in the "homeland" also runs through *Italianesi*.

In contrast to Nderim and Valmir, who identified themselves both as Albanians married to Italians and "Italian repatriates," Veli possessed a strong sense of Italian identity. He migrated to Italy in 1991 (before the CORA evacuation) and now lives in Rome. Although born in Italy to an Italian mother and Albanian father, he had been separated from much of his family, living in Shkodër/Scutari with an aunt while his sister grew up in Italy. In a situation in which Italians had to hide their background, changing their names and speaking Italian only in private, he had insisted upon conveying his Italian identity to his son, who learned to speak Italian at home. At the same time, Veli expressed an ambivalent nostalgia for his former life in Albania, remembering wistfully, "the fifteen most beautiful years of my life there in Albania." As he put it, "With Italian parents we were treated in a particular way, set on the margins, and yet we could study there … [but] for us it was always a type of reservation." Indeed, the dangers of being an "Italian" always remained, as evidenced in the testimony of Polda Boveri, a woman originally from Tortona who married an Albanian and whose son received a five-year prison sentence in 1976 for singing an Italian song.[81] These conditions of marginality recall Green's depiction of gaps and margins as spaces defined not so much by lack but rather particular kinds of connections and emplacements.

The gaps explored here thus operate simultaneously on temporal and spatial scales. Although Italians tried to keep their heads down in Hoxha's Albania, for example, they traversed a built environment that bore the obvious traces of the former Italian Empire. Nowhere was this truer than for those who lived in Tirana, where the fascist imprint upon the architecture and layout of the historic center remains marked, even if the old *casa del fascio* today houses the university and the former Viale dell'Impero (Imperial Street) is now Bulevardi Dëshmoret e Kombit (Boulevard of the Martyrs of the Nation). Such landscapes remain gap-ridden in the senses used by Strathern, Green, and others: places overflowing with meaning but also fragmented, constituting a "precarious edge" around which "stories gather and dig themselves in."[82]

Given the importance of the spatial and material dimensions of these gaps in the Albanian story, it is no surprise that, just as repatriates have made difficult "returns" to Italy over the last two decades, some children of Italians who had repatriated from Albania in the 1940s have crossed the Adriatic from the other

[81] Caiazza, *In alto mare*, 208. On the risks in socialist Albania of speaking Italian in public and the burden for children who bore "the ignominious mark of 'Italian,'" refer to Bonapace, *Italiani d'Albania*, 96.

[82] Kathleen Stewart, *A Place on the Side of the Road* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 107.

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direction in search of their roots. These descendants feel the need to traverse, in the most literal sense, the terrain of their parents' lives, their bodies themselves becoming "an irreducible mediator of social forces—a gap, a space of friction, intensification, and proliferation."[83] For example, after piecing together her father's letters from his years of involuntary work as a doctor in Albania, Vittorio Bruschi's daughter traveled to Albania in 2012. There she retraced her father's steps and even met the now eighty-seven-year-old nurse Halit Mustaf Laci, who had worked at his side between 1947 and 1951. She concluded her trip with a visit to the State Archives in search of documents that would fill in the gaps in her father's story.[84] Likewise, the son of Francesco Tagliarini—the head of the fascist Ministry of Popular Culture, director of the tourist agency Drin and the editing house DISTAPUR, and founder of the tourist magazine *Drini* under Italian Albania—has made several trips to Albania since 2012. Franco Tagliarini has conserved his father's legacy, making available to researchers (including myself) and museum exhibitions his valuable collection of *Drini* issues and rare photos. Franco also collaborates with the young Albanians who run the *Albania News* website.[85]

In these different ways, Italians who made their way to Albania under Italy and their descendants continue to negotiate the gaps created by empire that, to paraphrase Stoler, penetrate the strata of individuals' lives. Such multidirectional flows across the Adriatic also underscore the potential for new solidarities between Italians and Albanians, as well as between contemporary Italians and their past. Seas have often been wrongly conceptualized as blank spaces, a notion embodied by one critic's reading of *Lamerica*'s final scene of the boat of migrants en route to Italy as being caught in an irreducible "suspension" in "the no-man's-land of the ocean."[86] But in these personal histories the Adriatic figures not as a rupture or site of erasure but rather as a gap in its most productive sense: a site for partial reconnections across time and space. This revisioning of the Adriatic transforms the boat at the heart of *Lamerica*, and our story here, into an island, a world that is at once self-contained yet enmeshed in nets and knots of connectivity.

CONCLUSIONS

Examining remainders of Italian Empire opens up productive gaps in our understanding of migratory flows across the Adriatic. The experiences of Italians in Albania compel scholars of Italy and empire to rethink both spatial and temporal dimensions of Italian decolonization. Italy's imperial end usually figures as abrupt and quick as the result of defeat in war, as a "non-event"

[83] Ibid., 130.
[84] Bruschi, *Dal Po all'Albania*, 51–60.
[85] Franco Tagliarini, personal communication, 31 Jan. 2012, Rome.
[86] Caminati, "Return of History," 607, 606.

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characterized by "a lack of any traumatic severing of Italy's colonial appendages."[87] In the case of Albania, however, we find a very long and uneven—that is, gap-ridden—decolonization process. Understanding this decolonization as a history of gaps goes beyond notions of amnesia or forgetting that threaten to foreclose understanding of the *extended* afterlives of Italian settlement in Albania. Italy's protracted disengagement from its imperial possessions created a large-scale, if uneven, commitment on the part of the Italian state to assist migrants from the lost territories, including those from Albania. The state's obligations toward these Italian "brothers"—rooted, in part, in a *jus sanguinis* citizenship regime that facilitates return migration/repatriation while making naturalization cumbersome for those with no claim to Italian blood—influenced Italy's restrictive policies regarding foreign refugees and other migrants throughout the Cold War and into the present.[88]

This is not to claim that nothing changed between 1945 and 1992, or between 1992 and 2017, in how successive regimes across the Adriatic have dealt with migration and the politics of difference. In excavating the gaps of Italo-Albanian history, however, we find threads of connection between past and present, not just ruptures. It remains a common view that in the postsocialist era Albania and Albanians serve as Italy's negative mirror. As anthropologist Nicola Mai puts it, "Albania's function became merely that of a mirror through which Italy recognized, disavowed and rejected its own (Southern) past of poverty, dictatorship and backwardness, in a process of projective disidentification."[89] This interpretation posits a largely psychological articulation of difference in the face of threatening similarity, one that highlights the similarities between Italian emigrants of the past and Albanian and other immigrants in the present. Seen in films like *Lamerica*, such a perspective analogizes Italian mass emigration in the past to contemporary mass immigration to Italy without acknowledging a key historical moment of transition and connection between the two, that is, the migrations after 1945 out of the former Italian possessions by subjects who could make some claim to Italian citizenship. Telescoping between Italians who left the peninsula in the era of mass migration and new immigrant arrivals neglects the ways in which Italians from Albania (and other former possessions) historically mediated this "us" and "them," thereby bridging the gap in both juridical and cultural senses.

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[87] Karen Pinkus, "Empty Spaces: Decolonization in Italy," in Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 300.

[88] On diffidence towards foreign refugees and other migrants, refer to Pamela Ballinger, "Beyond the Italies? Italy as a Mobile Subject," in Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Stephanie Malia Hom, eds., *Italian Mobilities* (New Brunswick: Routledge University Press, 2016).

[89] Mai, "Cultural Construction," 91.

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Abstract: This article examines extended debates after World War II over the repatriation of Italian civilians from Albania, part of the Italian fascist empire from 1939 until 1943. Italy's decolonization, when it is studied at all, usually figures as rapid and non-traumatic, and an inevitable byproduct of Italy's defeat in the war. The tendency to gloss over the complexities of decolonization proves particularly marked in the Albanian case, given the brevity of Italy's formal rule over that country and the overwhelming historiographical focus on the Italian military experience there. In recovering the complex history of Italian and Albanian relations within which negotiations over repatriation occurred, this article demonstrates the prolonged process of imperial repatriation and its consequences for the individuals involved. In some cases, Italian citizens, and their families, only "returned" home to Italy in the 1990s. The repatriation of these "remainders" of empire concerned not only the Italian and Albanian states but also local committees (notably the Circolo Garibaldi) and international organizations, including the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the International Committee of the Red Cross. In recuperating this history, the analysis rejects seeming truisms about the forgotten or repressed memory of Italian colonialism. Drawing upon critical theories of "gaps," the article addresses the methodological challenges in writing such a history.

Key words: migration, repatriation, refugees, decolonization, humanitarianism, fascism, gaps, Italy, Albania, Adriatic

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