

## The benefits of suffering: migration and the formation of an Albanian national space at the turn of the 20th century

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### **Introduction: migration and the national space**

The present paper aims at providing an introductory explanation of the way the phenomenon of "migration" forged the affirmation of the Albanian national identity and structured the early conceptions of Albanian state-building. I here consider migration as a physical movement of persons from one context to another and as a discourse on such movement that was used by national activists in order to generate a sense of belonging. This investigation is based on the study of propagandistic material produced by Albanian activists between the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. During this period the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire were affected by major political and social breakdowns that determined the rise of the Albanian national movement and a significant increase of economic and political migration within the Balkans and from the Balkans to Western Europe and the United States.<sup>1</sup> Migration and national identity are originally intertwined with the concept of space. The relation between these three words must be considered in order to appreciate how migration influenced the construction of an Albanian identity.

From a subjective perspective, the adoption of a national identity, implies the feeling or the status of belonging to a certain spatial entity, be it territorial or only symbolic. In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger asserts that the concept of belonging consists essentially in a relation of opportunity between the individual (*Dasein*) and the usability of the environment.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on the phenomenological approach of Merleau-Ponty, it can be stated that space is not a void container in which subjects and things coexist with each other, but it is rather the togetherness of the interconnected functions and meanings of things that generate it.<sup>3</sup> The subject spatializes the world in which he/she lives according to the usefulness of things with which he/she interacts. In the Albanian case, the nation exists only as common transcendence of some individuals. At the turn of the twentieth century there was no Albanian state with delimited borders, and therefore by definition the nation was not a spatialized, but rather a spatializing entity the extension and the very presence of which varied according to the subjects that projected it. Migration, as I defined it above, is basically a movement of persons that should not be merely considered as a change of positioning from one place to another, but as a "modulation of an already familiar setting."<sup>4</sup> Besides its sociological implications, migration was also a discourse that was deliberately forged in order to enhance a feeling of collective interests.

This paper reflects on the relation between the process of spatializing the nation and migration as a modulation of a familiar setting. In the following sections I will illustrate the way in which the phenomenon of migration related to the affirmation of an Albanian space, how the experience of territorial loss and population displacement which occurred after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 was absorbed in the Albanian national discourse and finally how the process of emigration toward the United States contributed to enhance the national movement. The choice of the title is twofold. It is basically motivated by the fact that migration was most often a dramatic process that

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<sup>1</sup> Kristaq Prifti (ed.), *Historia e Shqipërisë II*, Toena, Tiranë 2003; George W. Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2006; Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme Albanais: La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulman en Europe*, Karthala, Paris, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt Am Main, 1977, p. 487

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London, pp. 243-244

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, cit., p. 275

shook the lives of people and communities. At the same time the events were emphasized by activists in order to highlight the myth of sacrifice that they (migrants and activists) as part of the "Albanian" people endured for the sake of the national cause.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Nomadism and sedentariness: migration and the spatializing of the nation***

The early modern origins of national discourses are deeply embroiled with the phenomenon of migration. Renaissance historians asserted that nations were generated by the descendants of the sons of Noah (Cam, Jaffet and Sam) who populated Africa, Europe and Asia after the universal deluge. Following this tradition, the 18th century Neapolitan philosopher Gianbattista Vico argued that civilization began with the passage from nomadism to sedentariness. The origin of sedentary societies goes back to the institution of families and the practice of burial. According to Vico the term humanity (*humanitas*) comes from the Latin *humando* which means "to bury." The cult of the ancestors which required the construction of cemeteries brought to the separation of territories and therefore to the constitution of cities, peoples and nations. The first chiefs of sedentary societies were named *giganti* which according to Vico's Greek etymological studies meant "sons of the land," that is descendants of the buried.<sup>6</sup>

Sedentariness and the cult of the ancestors were major factors of nineteenth century national discourse.<sup>7</sup> There could be no nations without a national space. The condition of Jews and Gypsies which live scattered, as it will emerge in the next sections, were considered undesirable exceptions. Vico's thought had a substantial influence on the early Albanian national revival which developed in the kingdom of Naples between the 18th and the early 19th century through the works of exponents of Italian-Albanian or *arbëresh* community.<sup>8</sup> The latter were the descendants of the Albanian immigrants who fled the Balkans during the first centuries of the Ottoman conquest. Historians believe that the national revival of the *arbëresh* started because they aimed at explaining the diaspora of their forefathers and to mark the distinction between themselves and the Orthodox Greeks of the Kingdom of Naples to which they were associated because of the Eastern Christian liturgy that both groups practiced.<sup>9</sup>

In order to provide an identity for themselves as "exiles"<sup>10</sup> the early Albanian thinkers needed to determine the origin, the location and the extension of their lost motherland. The spatializing of the nation implied the construction of a historical discourse that included certain territories in the temporality of the Albanian nation. The *arbëresh* argued that Albanians descended from ancient Pelasgians (and/or Illyrians) who, like Vico's *giganti*, had been nomads before settling in the Balkan territories.<sup>11</sup> They asserted that Albanians were the "most" autochthonous nation of the peninsula because they had moved and settled in the areas that correspond to present day part of Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Greece, before the Hellenes and the Slavs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Isa Blumi, *Ottoman Refugees, 1878-1939: Migration in a post-imperial World*, Bloomsbury, London 2013, p. 2

<sup>6</sup> Gianbattista Vico, *La Nuova Scienza*, Laboratorio dell'ISPF XII, 2015 (digital copy), pp. 9-10

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Renan in *Qu'est - Ce Qu'Une Nation?* (Calmann Lévy Editeur, Paris, 1882) asserted that: "Le culte des ancêtres est de tous le plus légitime; les ancêtres nous ont faits ce que nous sommes. Un passé héroïque, des grands hommes, de la gloire (j'entends de la véritable), voilà le capital social sur lequel on assied une idée nationale. Avoir des gloires communes dans le passé, une volonté commune dans le présent (...)." p. 26

<sup>8</sup> Francesco Altimari, *Urat e Arbërit*, Naimi, Tirane 2015

<sup>9</sup> Matteo Mandalà, *Mundus vult decipi: i miti della storiografia arbëresh*, A.C. Mirror, Palermo 2009, p. 23

<sup>10</sup> The theme of nostalgia for the lost fatherland is constant in the work of the *arbëresh*. See: Domenico Mauro, *Alla memoria di Monsignore Domenico Bellusci, vescovo di Sinope in S. Adriano*, Napoli 1833. "Ma in questo tranquillo deserto, presso il sepolcro arcano d'un Vescovo virtuoso, ed avanti i giovinetti figli d'un popolo peregrino, io non trovo che la gloria della sofferenza, della fortezza e della fede (...)." p. 5

<sup>11</sup> Giuseppe Crispi, *Memoria sulla lingua albanese*, Lorenzo Dato, Palermo, 1831

<sup>12</sup> Vincenzo Dorsa, *Su gli Albanesi, ricerche e pensieri*, Edizioni Brenner, 1985 [1847]

The "Albanians" of Calabria and Sicily undertook the process of spatializing the nation that they claimed as their original homeland and to which they never planned to move back. The spatializing of a national space was instrumental to the *arbëresh* community in order to relate with their most proximate context as it gave them the possibility to obtain the status of a religious and cultural enclave. Only later this discourse turned useful to support claims for an Albanian state project. With the development of Indo-European linguistic theories, migration became a major topic of speculation in the study of the origin of European nations. The Constantinople based journal *Drita* declared that Albanians were the sons of Pelasgians who came from Asia in 4.000 B.C..<sup>13</sup> Sedentariness appears to have been the basic feature of civilization that Pelasgians brought to the Balkans along with, as national activists would stress, agriculture and architecture.<sup>14</sup> Some activists, like catholic priest Gaspër Jakova asserted that Pelasgians first arrived in Dodona (in present day Greece). He believed that the word Dodona came from the name of Jaffet's grandson Dodan whose descendants had moved from Asia to the region of Giannina.<sup>15</sup> The nomadic character of the ancient Pelasgians could be grasped by the name of the tribe *Lelegi* that according to Jakova meant *Lejlek* (stork) that is "migrators."<sup>16</sup>

Keeping historical track of the migration waves was necessary for separating the collective self from the neighbours and claim possession of contended territories. For the national activists the apparently simplest task was to differentiate from Turks since it was quite evident that they reached the Balkans in the late Middle Ages. However, this endeavour was actually difficult as Albanian-speaking Muslims would most likely define themselves as Turks. Activists tried to convince their "compatriots" to adopt a national term of identification by telling them: "we are Albanians the sons of Pelasgians, the oldest of the populations that came to Europe (...). Then, four hundred years ago another savage nation (*komp*) came to Europe which (...) defeated us and placed us under that slavery in which we find ourselves today."<sup>17</sup> The arrival of Bulgarians and Serbs was considered equally detrimental to the Albanians. Their penetration in the Balkans had presumably altered the national character of many areas that were now overwhelmed by Slavs.<sup>18</sup> Unlike Turks, which represented a military threat, Slavs and in particular Bulgarians (who were considered slavized Tatars) were described as a pervasive force that continued to trespass Albanian territories: "today Slavs (*Shqeh*t) are spreading like ants and are racing to settle and self-govern." Albanian journalist Shahin Kolonja even came to declare that Slavs in Kosovo and Macedonia were foreigners and that they were not entitled to claim national rights.<sup>19</sup>

From an epistemological perspective, the greatest issue of the Albanian activists was to prove their superiority toward Greeks. The uninterrupted presence of Greeks in the Balkans challenged the territorial as well as the ethnographical claims of the Albanians especially for what concerned the Orthodox population that they considered as Greek. National activists attempted to mark the difference between Albanians and Greece by asserting that they both shared Pelasgian origins but that Albanians were the purest descendants. Hellenes were instead generated by a mixture of Pelasgians and other populations who migrated in present day Greece in a later period.<sup>20</sup> Faik Konica adopted a more radical view that already circulated in the first half of the nineteenth century, claiming that the present day Greeks had no connection with those of antiquity since the latter had

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<sup>13</sup> *Drita*, 11 July 1883, pp. 181-182

<sup>14</sup> *Shpensa e Shqypnies*, 14 March, 1907, p. 3; *Drita*, 5/18 January, 1904, p. 4

<sup>15</sup> *Lajmtari i Shqypnies*, 14 September 1904, p. 1

<sup>16</sup> *Lajmtari i Shqypnies*, 16 October, 1904, p. 10

<sup>17</sup> *Albania*, 30 July 1897, p. 67

<sup>18</sup> *Drita*, 8/21 February 1904, p.1

<sup>19</sup> *Drita*, 18/31 March 1903, p. 1

<sup>20</sup> *Drita*, 11 July 1883, pp. 181-182; *Besa*, November 1904, p. 2

been thoroughly altered by the Barbarian invasions.<sup>21</sup> The disputes on national territories that characterised the late Balkan context and the ancient migrations were amalgamated in the overall national discourse. Ancient migrations and contemporary conflicts appeared to be a part of the same process that determined a permanent threat to the Albanian entity. This impression emerges in some verses published by the Sofia-based newspaper *Drita*:

*Anmiqt sot na kane rethue,  
Shqypeni thone, dona me shue  
Serb, Rum edhe Bullgare,  
Duen me tret Shqiptare.*<sup>22</sup>

### ***Discourses on territorial loss and migration after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878: the de-spatializing of the Ottoman Empire and the impact on the Albanian question***

The Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 and the Congress of Berlin led to long term political and social alteration of the Balkan region. Albanians and nationalist leaders denounced the settlements of the San Stefano and Berlin treaties. In June 1878 they formed the "League of Prizren" which organized military resistance against the territorial concessions that the Congress of Berlin made to Montenegro and Greece. After an initial success of the League, Montenegro annexed the coastal town of Ulqin whereas Greece obtained part of Thessaly and Arta.<sup>23</sup> The territorial expansion of the Balkan states, the Austrian-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and the constitution of an autonomous Bulgaria induced many Muslims to move from their original homelands toward Anatolia and/or to the part of the peninsula that was still under Turkish rule.<sup>24</sup> These migrants were known by the name of *muhadjir* (*muhaxhir* in Albanian) and most of them settled in the present day areas of Kosovo, Albania and Macedonia.<sup>25</sup> The objective of this paragraph is to analyse the way in which Albanian activists related to the *muhadjir* question and to other collateral population movements that characterised the region in that period.

Usually national leaders contemplated the "albanianess" of the territories annexed by Balkan countries and dedicated only small attention to the "Albanian" population expelled from those lands. This general trend shifted when by the end of the nineteenth century the tensions in Crete, Macedonia and Kosovo sparked the fear of a further repartition of Ottoman territories.<sup>26</sup> At that point national activists attempted to exploit the *muhadjir* question in order to generate political mobilization. Their opinion on how such refugees impacted on the national question was not univocal, but varied according to the propagandistic goals. The largest amount of 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war refugees came from the Serbian annexed districts of Niš, Vranje and Leskovac. The newspaper *Besa* reported that Albanians were forced by the Belgrade authorities to abandon their homeland and that their properties had been confiscated. They had settled in the regions of Ipek, Gjakova and Prizren and their experience had served as a lesson to local Albanians who now

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<sup>21</sup> Albania, March (?) 1897, p. 10; Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme Albanais: La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulman en Europe*, cit., p. 457

<sup>22</sup> *Drita*, 8/21 September 1903, p. 1

<sup>23</sup> Kristo Frashëri, *Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenit (1878-1881)*, Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Tiranë, 2012

<sup>24</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population 1830-1914*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1985, pp. 70-75

<sup>25</sup> Sabit Uka, *Muhaxhoret dhe Lidhja Shqiptare e Prizrenti (1878-1881)*, in *Gjurmime Albanologjike* 18, 1988, Sabit Uka, *Asimilimi i një pjese të mbetur të shqiptarëve në sanxhakun e Nishit dhe kalimi i disa muhaxherëve këndeje kufirit serbo-turk in Gjurmime albanologjike*, 20, 1990

<sup>26</sup> Kristaq Prifti, *Lidhja Shqiptare e Pejës, Lëvizja Kombetare 1896 - 1900*, Toena, Tirane, 2002

supported the national program and distrusted any Slav activity in the area.<sup>27</sup> Jashar Erebara who published the newspaper *Albanija* in Belgrade had a different opinion. In the attempt to promote Albanian-Serbian cooperation in Kosovo, he claimed that refugees had not been expelled from Belgrade, but rather induced to abandon their homes by the Ottoman government that instilled fear of their neighbours.<sup>28</sup>

Some prominent activists like Faik Konica spread wearily negative opinions on the *muhadjir* defining them as the "the worst seeds in Albania." Konica explained that by that term he meant the Muslims who came to Albania from Bosnia, Serbia, Podgorica and Ulqin. In his opinion they had not come to Albania for patriotic reasons, but because they missed the "minarets". They sold Albania for nothing and did not want to live with the *kaur*. They should have been the most ardent nationalists, but they were spies of the government and betrayers. Konica thus advised Albanians not to speak to them but kick them out of the country and send them to Anatolia.<sup>29</sup> A letter from Shkodër published on the newspaper *Drita* made analogous statements. The writer affirmed that *muhadjir* were Muslim fanatics who did not care about the homeland that they had lost but played intrigues and made irrational speeches. Their presence was detrimental to the national cause and the author wondered whether they would have been better off in "Arabistan."<sup>30</sup> The stereotype of the *muhadjir* as Muslim fanatics who abused the local Christian population is a common feature of Balkan historiographies.<sup>31</sup> Similar views were shared by local Albanian leaders like the brothers Ferad and Ali bej Draga at the turn of the century. They affirmed that the *muhadjir* persecuted the Serbians of Kosovo and that they were widely known as criminals by the native Albanian population.<sup>32</sup>

The word *muhadjir*, besides the abovementioned negative qualities, evoked the sorrowful image of individuals who were detached from the native soil and forced to migrate. This symbolic asset was used by activists to draw the attention Albanian-speaking Muslims to the national cause. Shahin Kolonja criticized Muslims from the Kosovo *vilayet* who spoke the Turkish language and asked them whether by doing so they were planning to become *muhadjir*.<sup>33</sup> In order to encourage Muslim and Catholic cooperation in Shkodër, Nikolla Ivanaj asserted that the whole city population would have become *muhadjir* if they could not find an agreement for the sake of the national cause.<sup>34</sup> The newspaper *Drita* incited the Albanians to follow the example of Bulgarians and Armenians and rise up against the government. If they continued to support Turkey they would become *muhadjir* when Constantinople would have lost control of the Albanian territories. The article attempted to appeal to the affective attachment of Albanians to their ancestors. The editor stated that if Albanians left the country, they would be committing a great sin because "the smaller grain of dust on your *opinga* [traditional shoes] is nothing but a piece of the remains of your grandparents!"<sup>35</sup>

The idea of being overtaken by other nationalities and eventually expelled from the homeland was presented as a despatializing process of the Albanian nation. The *muhadjir* epitomised the figure of an erratic community which had been de-sedentaritised and therefore de-civilized. Their liminal being

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<sup>27</sup> Besa, 1 September, 1904, p.7

<sup>28</sup> Albanija, 29 June, 1901, p.1

<sup>29</sup> Albania, July 1901, p. 121

<sup>30</sup> Drita, 15 May, 1906, p. 2

<sup>31</sup> Dušan Batakovič, *Serbia's Kosovo Drama, a historical perspective*, Belgrade, Cigoja 2012, p. 59; Mihailo Apostolski, *Historia e Maqesonisë*, Flaka e Vllazërimet, Shkup, 1983, p. 123

<sup>32</sup> Ismet Dermaku, *Kuvendi i Lidhjes Sqiptare te Pejes "Besa- Bese" 1899 (dokumente)*, Prishtinë, 1997, pp. 121 - 123. Note from the secretary of the Prishtina Serbian consulate Ivan Ivanic to the consul Svetislav K. Simić. 24 december 1898, il 24 dicembre 1898 circa conversazione con alcuni albanesi avuta il 19 e il 20 dicembre

<sup>33</sup> Drita, 3/16 April, 1902, p. 1

<sup>34</sup> Dašamiri, 29 November, 1907, p. 1

<sup>35</sup> Drita, 12/25 October 1902, p. 1

endangered the other presumed "Albanians" who, by becoming *muhadjir*, would have determined the end of the Albanian nation and the failure of the State-building project which could not exist without a proper space. The last stop of the roaming refugee was Anatolia, a region that Albanian nationalists associated with backwardness and affliction since the time when the leader of the League of Prizren Abdul Frashëri and others after him were sent there in exile.<sup>36</sup> The nationalist press corroborated some allegations which accused the Ottoman government of planning a massive migration of the Albanian Muslims to Anatolia as it had been done for Bosnia and Crete.<sup>37</sup> One author stated that his compatriots in Kosovo were opposing such plan as they did not want to "go *muhadjir* in Anatolia." The Albanians instead wanted to preserve their country and struggle against Turkey's attempts to spread fanaticism among them.<sup>38</sup>

The figure of the *muhadjir* evoked the overall miserable conditions of the Ottoman subjects after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878. The Turkish armed forces were represented as other precarious and mobile elements who equally suffered from the thorough decay of the empire. The soldiers were described as a degenerated humanity who had been abandoned and humiliated by their own state which had left them without "wages, underwear and shoes."<sup>39</sup> These terms were frequently used to describe the poor condition of the Turkish soldiers who "have become worse than the gypsies."<sup>40</sup> This dire image was elaborated in order to convince Albanians not to serve in the army. Josif Bageri admonished his compatriots who spilled "precious blood for the benefit of your own enemy; and your wage is: [being] naked [and] barefoot (...)."<sup>41</sup> Other nationalist organs criticized the sultan who sent Albanian soldiers to repress the revolts of Yemen from where they hardly came back:

*O Jemen i Arabise*  
*Var i zi i Skhiprise.*<sup>42</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, considerable attention was dedicated to the attitude of Montenegro toward the Albanians living inside the principality and in the Ottoman Empire. According to journalistic sources Cetinje offered Albanians from Shkodër advantageous conditions for trade and it appears that from time to time there was a seasonal if not a more long-term emigration from the Ottoman Empire toward the neighbouring state. Albanian activists usually tried to convince their compatriots not to leave their land because the prospect to make profits in Montenegro was illusory.<sup>43</sup> In order to inhibit sympathies toward prince Nikola, journalists affirmed that the annexation of Albanian territories of Antivari and Ulqin disrupted the economic environment of the Shkodër region and reduced the development potential of all the national space.<sup>44</sup> Ndoc Nikaj attempted to stimulate the Albanian-Montenegrin animosity by appealing to the sense of honour engendered by the cult of ancestors: "a sombre voice screams and spreads all over Albania". It was the voice of the ancestors who suffered for the loss of Ulqin and Antivari in their graves and wanted the living to guard their land.<sup>45</sup> More seldom newspapers would report

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<sup>36</sup> Shpnesa e Shqypnies, 12 December 1905, p.2; Shpnesa e Shqypnies, 15 October 1906, p. 3

<sup>37</sup> Drita, 22 March 1904, p.2

<sup>38</sup> Drita, 1 March 1905, p. 4

<sup>39</sup> Albania, 25 June 1897, p. 55

<sup>40</sup> Shpnesa e Shqypnies, 15 July 1906, p.2

<sup>41</sup> Shpnesa e Shqypnies, 1 January 1907, p. 1

<sup>42</sup> Lega Albanese, 27 February 1907, p.2

<sup>43</sup> Albania, May 1900, p. 94

<sup>44</sup> La Nazione Albanese, 15 January 1900, p.4; Albania, 2 February 1902, p. 33;

<sup>45</sup> Albania, 15-30 March 1899, pp.38-41

opinions that promoted the Albanian-Montenegrin cooperation and which highlighted the supposedly important role that Albanians from Shkodër played in the economy of the principality.<sup>46</sup>

The economic activities of Albanians in Montenegro draw some criticism. A journal from Zagreb defined the Albanian traders as the "Jews of Montenegro" claiming that they were one of the causes of poverty in the principality. The Albanian activists defended the freedom of commerce and asserted that there were also many Montenegrins who traded undisturbed in the Ottoman Empire.<sup>47</sup> Prince Nikola enacted a discontinuous policy toward Albanians living in the principality and in the Ottoman Empire, and his attitude shifted from hostility to support.<sup>48</sup> National activists denounced a financial and civic legislation adopted by the Montenegrin government which in their opinion was purposefully conceived to force Muslims out of the country.<sup>49</sup> In an article by the title "The Turkish women with uncovered face" Nikolla Ivanaj reported that new laws imposed Muslim men to serve in the state army, the women not to cover their face in public and prohibited the burial before 24 hours from death. Since these norms violated the Coran and of the traditional customs, many Albanians had migrated to Shkodër and their properties had been sequestered by authorities.<sup>50</sup>

Policies implemented in the Balkans and in the Ottoman Empire generated contradictory effects, which produced a similar crisis in the relationship between individuals and their domestic environment. Muslim women were deserting their homeland because they were forced not to wear the veil, but other Muslim women were leaving their country for the opposite reason. With the intent to highlight this contradiction, *Shpnesa e Shqypnies* published an article by the title "A feminist exodus." The author reported that young women of the Ottoman elite, which in his opinion were inspired by French novels that encouraged them to "break their chains", had left the luxurious but secluded life in their palaces, in order to go to Paris and pursue emancipation. The editor complimented with the ladies, but ended his writing with an ambiguous comment asserting that the government had imported prostitutes from Shkodër to Constantinople in order to fill the lack women who had fled from the capital.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Reifying the national space: the constitution of an Albanian community in the United States***

If on the one hand national activists aimed at defending the presumed national space, on the other they were the first to transcend the boundaries of this entity. Until the Young Turk revolution, most of Albanian national movement took place in exile, outside the reach of the Sultan's control. This section does not aim at giving a detailed picture of the activities of Albanians abroad or analyse their political ideas and relations.<sup>52</sup> My goal is to explore the way in which the phenomenon of migration, as a process and as a discourse, created an Albanian space overseas. I will limit my

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<sup>46</sup> La Nazione Albanese, 15 April 1900, p.5-6

<sup>47</sup> Albanija, 7 January, 1906, p. 4

<sup>48</sup> Isa Blumi, *Reinstating the Ottomans: Alternative balkan modernities 1800-1912*, Palgrave Macmillan 2011, pp. 132-135

<sup>49</sup> Shpnesa e Shqypnies, 15 July 1906, p. 4; Kombi, 10 January, 1908, p. 1

<sup>50</sup> Shpnesa e Shqypnies, 1 September 1906, p. 3

<sup>51</sup> Shpnesa e Shqypnies, 1 September 1906, p. 3

<sup>52</sup> Ismet Dërmaku, *Rilindja Kombetare Shqiptare dhe Kolonite Shqiptare te Mergimit ne Rumani dhe ne Bullgari*, Enti i Teksteve dhe i Mjeteve Shkollore, Enti i teksteve dhe i mjeteve mesimore i krahines socialiste autonome te kosoves, Prishtine, 1982; Francesco Guida, *Ricciotti Garibaldi e il movimento nazionale albanese* in *Archivio Storico Italiano*, anno CXXXIX (1981); Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme Albanaise: La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulman en Europe*, cit., pp.241-331; 355-370; Dhimitër Dishinica, *Kristo Dako, Jeta dhe Vepra, Përballë Vërtetës*, Erik, Tiranë, 2004

analysis to the experience of migration in the United States which has so far only been partially treated.

Albanian national activism in the United States started in the beginning of the twentieth century. Albanians were concentrated especially in Boston, Buffalo, New York and other smaller towns in the vicinity of these localities.<sup>53</sup> They formed several organizations in order to support the national cause and in 1906 the newspaper *Kombi* started to be published in Boston under the direction of Sotir Peci.<sup>54</sup> In general terms, it is possible to divide Albanian nationalists abroad (not only in America) into two main categories: economic immigrants who were also engaged in nationalist activities and "professionals of the albanianism"<sup>55</sup> who lived only by the means of their propagandistic activities. In the United States this distinction was more important than elsewhere because professionals of albanianism like Sotir Peci, did not only stimulate the national feelings of Albanians, but also aimed at creating and leading a structure of "Albanian" society in the United States. Some activists like the aforementioned Peci, Shahin Kolonja, Faik Konica and others obtained financial support from Austria-Hungary. However, their economic reliance on Vienna did not turn them into mere tools of the Habsburg Empire.<sup>56</sup>

In the beginning of the twentieth century Albanian activists tried to convince their compatriots that emigration to America represented a great benefit for their own economic conditions as well as for the national cause.<sup>57</sup> The newspaper *Drita* made an ironic comment on the propensity of Albanians to flee their lands in search of earnings: his compatriots would have gone to hell (*xhehenem*) if they knew that the wage there was good. Nonetheless, the editors encouraged emigration in America.<sup>58</sup> National activists claimed that Albanians were leaving the country in order to flee from the decaying structure of the Ottoman Empire where they could not develop their national culture and economy.<sup>59</sup> Actual conditions in Turkey were described as unbearable since the abuses of the government authorities on the one hand and the violence perpetuated by Bulgarian, Greek and Romanian bands on the other, endangered the life of individuals and hindered rural activities. It was not only Christians who suffered, but also Muslims and the latter perhaps even more.<sup>60</sup>

Other activists expressed more sceptical views. Nikola Ivanaj criticized emigration asserting that Albania potentially possessed all the wealth that his compatriots were looking for in America. Instead of working in their homeland, Albanians sought for high wages in the United States where they endured tough living conditions.<sup>61</sup> Josif Bageri (who lived in Bulgaria) presented emigration (*gyrbet*) as a painful experience characterised by the trauma of separation from the homeland and beloved ones which could last more than a decade or forever. He affirmed that in *gyrbet* one could eventually die and leave his remains in a foreign place where his name and his grave would be forgotten. Migration in his perspective endangered the existence of the national space because the distance between the buried and the living ones would not allow practicing the cult of the ancestors. The author turned to all Albanian emigrants, who were "dislocated (*chperngul*)" in the whole world "like the Jews for the safety of their life" in order to tell them that their forefathers left them a

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<sup>53</sup> Kristaq Prifti (ed.), *Historia e Shqipërisë II*, cit., p. 334

<sup>54</sup> Robert Elsie, *Historical dictionary of Albania, second edition*, The Scarecrow Press, Lanham, 2010, p. 350

<sup>55</sup> Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme Albanais: La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulman en Europe*, cit., p. 424

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> *Drita*, 15 October 1905, p. 3

<sup>58</sup> Sofia, 1 June 1906, p. 2

<sup>59</sup> *Shpnesa e Shqypnies*, 1 February 1907, pp.1-2; *Kombi*, 30 June 1906, p.1

<sup>60</sup> *Kombi*, 11 August 1906, p. 1

<sup>61</sup> Dašamiri, 29 November 1907, p.2

beautiful and rich country not to abandon it, but to guard it from foreign invaders.<sup>62</sup> A similar reference to migration as a sorrowful experience of detachment from native soil and ancestors' graves is impressed in some verses:

*N' mërgim  
(për Lek Grudën)  
Lamtumire ti vent i bukur!  
Lamtumire moj nan Shcypni  
(...)  
Lamtumrie ju t'dashtna vorre  
Ch'barni eshtnat t'parve mij;  
Se mjeft mire po dii i ngrati,  
Trupi jem n'jue s'ban cetii!*<sup>63</sup>

The newspaper *Kombi* counteracted these views. The editors recognised that migration could indeed be detrimental to some countries. However, this was not the case of Albanians who had "one thousand reasons" to go to America.<sup>64</sup> *Kombi* and *Drita* also offered practical advice to those who were intentioned to emigrate. They needed to be among 15 and 40 years of age, that is "not too old and not too young".<sup>65</sup> Experienced travellers gave tips on how to pass the border examination. It was important to know the destination in the United States where one was directed. The more inside the hinterland one was going, the more chances he had to be admitted in the country. The toughest question was the one concerning who paid for the ticket. It was necessary to answered that he himself had paid, otherwise he would have been sent back.<sup>66</sup> Authorities feared that migrants could have been enslaved by those who had paid for the trip if they were not close family members. Anarchists, socialists, polygamists, former convicts were not allowed to step in the United States. Restrictions were applied also to persons with disabilities or the physically ill.<sup>67</sup>

National activists informed their compatriots of the kind of jobs that they could do in the United States. They recommended to learn English, possibly before departure and necessarily after the arrival because it incremented the chances of getting better working positions.<sup>68</sup> Albanians who reached America for the first time could work in a factory or anywhere.<sup>69</sup> Working in the factories was hard and consuming but most of Albanians were employed in that sector.<sup>70</sup> *Kombi* asserted that those who had money to invest could work in the commerce sector, but should not expect to deal with American customers since it required advanced language skill.<sup>71</sup> Albanians could open restaurants, barber shops bakeries and grocery stores for other Albanians. In alternative they could sell vegetables, ice creams or open shoe shiner shops for American customers.<sup>72</sup> Many Albanians living in Boston worked as ambulant fruit sellers, a work that was apparently remunerating.<sup>73</sup> Others

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<sup>62</sup> Shpnesa e Shqypnies, 1 January 1907, pp.1-2

<sup>63</sup> Shpnesa e Shqypnies, 16 January, 1907. Poem signed by pseudonymous author Xog Dushmani. Translation: In Migration. Goodbye beautiful country/ goodbye mother Albania/ goodbye beloved graves/ that keep the bones of my ancestors/ (unclear meaning)/(unclear meaning)

<sup>64</sup> *Kombi*, 28 March 1907, p. 3

<sup>65</sup> *Kombi*, 8 March 1907, p. 2

<sup>66</sup> *Drita*, 1 June 1906, p. 2;

<sup>67</sup> *Kombi*, 30 June 1906, p. 4; *Kombi*, 20 March 1907, p. 2

<sup>68</sup> *Kombi*, 26 August 1906, p.1

<sup>69</sup> *Drita*, 1 June 1906, p.2

<sup>70</sup> *Drita*, 1 February 1906, p.1

<sup>71</sup> *Kombi*, 16 February 1907, p. 3

<sup>72</sup> *Kombi*, 23 February 1907, p. 3

<sup>73</sup> *Kombi*, 22 November 1907, p. 2; *Drita*, 1 June 1906, p.2

owned small businesses such as tobacco shops, bakeries, shoeshines, hotels and restaurants frequented only by Albanians. It was impossible for Albanians and foreigners to open other businesses because all economic activities were monopolized by big capitalists except for those that they were not interested in.<sup>74</sup>

For the Albanians who went to America to find fortune without financial means, there was no alternative but hard work in factories and hotels as dish washers. Those who did not have strong arms would have done better not to move from their houses. In factories people worked 10 hours a day with one day off, in hotels they worked 12 hours, without days off.<sup>75</sup> The American environment brought Albanians with political and social issues that were until then uncommon in the part of the Ottoman Empire where they lived such as the working class struggle. A strike was organized in a factory in Framingham where fifty Albanians were employed, but only thirty of them joined the initiative. The editors of *Kombi* reprehended their compatriots and stated that strikes were meant to protect the interests of all the workers and not participating was a betrayal.<sup>76</sup> The newspaper also gave workers lifestyle advice to follow in order to stay healthy. Since the weather was variable, they recommended to always wear warm clothes and eat sufficiently.<sup>77</sup> If one took care of his self by staying away from bad habits, the experience of *kurbet* would be positive and even amusing.<sup>78</sup>

Albanians, or at least some of them, strove to integrate within the structure of the American society in the way that was more congenial to their necessities. They were aware of their political and social status as migrants and continuously checked how the phenomenon was perceived by the American society. *Kombi* often reported official statistics on the numbers of individuals that entered in the United States.<sup>79</sup> The journalists emphasized that not only Albanians came to the United States from the Ottoman Empire but also Bulgarians, Cutzo-Vlachs, Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Turks.<sup>80</sup> In July 1906 in Ellis island 935.915 arrivals were registered in one year. The greatest part of immigrants were Italians that counted 254.238 individuals, then Russians 163.316, Hungarians 128.247, Austrians 96.625, Irish 71.000, Germans 30.808 and Scandinavians 33.000.<sup>81</sup> The response of the American society to the phenomenon was contradictory. The Secretary of Commerce Oskar Strauss had declared that Italians and others would have been integrated in the American society.<sup>82</sup> The authorities were still prompt to accept people from Europe, but another attitude prevailed toward the "Immigration from the East". *Drita* asserted that a norm prevented Chinese from entering the United States because they worked for small wages, brought all commodities from China and did not spend money in the country.<sup>83</sup> In reporting the news of the social tensions that spread in San Francisco in the end of 1907, the editors of *Kombi* affirmed that immigrants from the East were disliked in almost all the countries of the "white race". The British Minister of the colonies had lately authorized the white population of Transvaal to limit the entrepreneurship of Indians in South Africa. The article ended with a contort Marxist statement: "One of the greatest diseases of the century is the immigration from the East. Europeans go to subjugate their countries with wars

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<sup>74</sup> *Kombi*, 22 November 1907, p. 2

<sup>75</sup> *Kombi*, 23 February 1907, p. 3

<sup>76</sup> *Kombi*, 19 July 1907, p.2

<sup>77</sup> *Kombi*, 28 March 1907, p. 3; *Drita*, 1 February 1906, p.1

<sup>78</sup> *Drita*, 1 June 1906, p.2

<sup>79</sup> *Kombi*, 23 June 1906, p. 3

<sup>80</sup> *Kombi*, 11 August 1906, p. 1

<sup>81</sup> *Kombi*, 11 August 1906, p. 4

<sup>82</sup> *Kombi*, 23 May 1908, p. 1

<sup>83</sup> *Drita*, 1 June 1906, p.2

and misery and they [Asians] try to conquer and overwhelm Europe and America with their numbers and their working force."<sup>84</sup>

Finding themselves in a social context in which, according to statistics, everyone appeared a "foreigner," Albanian activists analysed the national character of the American people. From a historical and linguistic perspective, the majority of them appeared to be English. However, statistics would prove that the greatest part of the country was populated not only by Europeans, but also by Asians and Africans. For a generation of individuals who had grown up believing that nationality is determined by links to ancient populations who had been living on the same land for several centuries, Americans did not seem to possess the qualities of a nation. Activists in America claimed that despite all the greatness and civilization that one could find in the United States, there was no such thing as an American "people" (*komb* also "nation"). In their opinion the government was trying to understand how to create a new - American - nation by the mixture of many different ones that lived in the country.<sup>85</sup>

In analogy to the other migrant communities, Albanians tried to be part of the American society by consolidating the bonds among each other, distinguishing themselves from other migrant communities, and relating with the English speaking Americans. *Kombi* urged compatriots to take the American citizenship if they stayed five years in the country or if they turned twenty.<sup>86</sup> The Albanian community of Jamestown had established friendly relations with the local population and was advertised as a model for the others. Americans taught English and had even started to learn Albanian in order to facilitate the teaching.<sup>87</sup> The Albanian association *Malli i Mëmëdheut* held the meeting in a room of the local church and events were also attended by Americans.<sup>88</sup> *Kombi* encouraged Albanians to go to American churches on Sunday. There was no danger of conversion, and the only thing they had to do was to listen to American girls sing. According to the editors, it could be useful to establish close relations with priests because in America they had more power than everywhere else.<sup>89</sup>

In order to remark the difference from other migrant groups with whom they were associated, national activists instructed their compatriots to declare that they were Albanians and not Greeks or Italians. Italians had a bad name because many of them were socialists, anarchists or belonged to secret organizations such as the Mafia and the "Black Hand."<sup>90</sup> In order not to be confused with Italians and Greeks who were labelled "Dago" (or Daygo) because of their accent, Albanians were advised to learn the language appropriately.<sup>91</sup> The attempts to draw a clear line between migrant communities reveal that Albanians, Greeks and Italians shared social and urban spaces where they were forced to interact. At times proofs of these relations appear on Albanian journals. The Italian-American newspaper "Progresso" interviewed an Albanian activist who was temporarily in the United States.<sup>92</sup> In New York there was a conspicuous presence of *arbëresh* which had founded various cultural associations.<sup>93</sup> A collaboration was established between Albanians and *arbëresh* which led *Kombi* to publish articles in Italian.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *Kombi*, 31 January 1908, p.1

<sup>85</sup> *Kombi*, June 20, 1906, p. 1

<sup>86</sup> *Kombi*, 28 March 1907, p. 3

<sup>87</sup> *Kombi*, 27 December 1907, p. 2

<sup>88</sup> *Kombi*, 29 November 1906, p.1;

<sup>89</sup> *Kombi*, 28 March 1907, p. 3

<sup>90</sup> *Kombi*, 20 March 1907, p. 2

<sup>91</sup> *Kombi*, 29 August 1906, p. 2; *Kombi*, 28 September 1907, p. 1

<sup>92</sup> *La Nazione Albanese*, 15 June 1907, p.2

<sup>93</sup> *Kombi*, 13 March 1908, p. 2

<sup>94</sup> *Kombi*, 9 November 1907, p. 1

The relations with Greeks appear to have created far greater problems than those with Italians. The Albanian-Greek tensions were enhanced by events that occurred in the Ottoman Empire between 1905 and 1906. Papa Kristo Negovani and Spiro Kosturi were killed by Greek bands and the bishop of Korça Fotis was assassinated by the first Albanian politicised band.<sup>95</sup> The overall national propaganda disseminated by *Kombi* assumed a strong anti-Greek character.<sup>96</sup> The editors reported news of fist fights and clashes between Albanians and Greeks that happened in factories and public places.<sup>97</sup>

The national propaganda was perhaps more successful in the United States than in the Ottoman Empire because national identity was a more necessary tool to deal with the surrounding environment. Several patriotic clubs were formed in many American cities and towns such as Boston, New York, Buffalo, Jamestown, Biddeford, and Natick. The activities of these associations were regularly reported on the newspapers.<sup>98</sup> The editors of *Kombi* appreciated the results of their work, but were not fully satisfied with the attitude of their compatriots encouraging them to show more support.<sup>99</sup> National activists also organized cultural events such as the concert of the Italian-Albanian tenor Gioacchino Stassi who was already touring in the United States. He played in Boston on November 2, 1907 at Steinert Hall accompanied by local singers and musicians. The program included patriotic as well as classical repertoire.<sup>100</sup> The participation was not very large because, according to the editors of *Kombi*, only few Albanians in Boston had interest in these kind of activities. Nonetheless, "enough" persons were present and the concert was considered a success.<sup>101</sup>

Attempts were made to stimulate the formation of an "economic community". *Kombi* tried to convince Albanians that they needed to follow the example of Greeks and other migrants and be more solidary toward each other. Albanians had only few restaurants, bakeries and not even a grocery store in the United States. Even these businesses were surviving in precarious conditions because of the lack of customers. Albanians were thus encouraged to open shops where they could buy the goods from one of their own.<sup>102</sup> Restaurants would have been useful for factory workers to gather and eat.<sup>103</sup> Ambulant fruit sellers in Boston were persuaded to buy their banana stocks only from Albanians and not from other traders.<sup>104</sup>

Working, eating, sleeping and buying had social functions and took place in physical locations where the spatializing of the Albanian community took shape. The migrant, who wanted to be Albanian and remain Albanian, needed to overcome the nomadic character that his traveller status carried and conduct a sedentary existence. The environment could be truly domesticated not only if one could live there, but also if one could die there as an Albanian. A conflict arose at a funeral of a young man between Albanians and the Greek priest as the brother of the defunct did not want to register him on the death certificate as Albanian.<sup>105</sup> *Kombi* suggested not to call Greek priests

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<sup>95</sup> Kristaq Prifti (ed.), *Historia e Shqipërisë II*, cit., pp. 316-322

<sup>96</sup> Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme Albanais: La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulman en Europe*, cit., p. 512-514

<sup>97</sup> *Kombi*, 18 January 1907, p. 2; *Kombi*, 15 June 1907, p. 3; *Drita*, 1 February 1906, p. 3

<sup>98</sup> For instance see "Letter nga Bufalo" on *Drita*, 1 March 1906, p. 3; "Na shkruajn nga New York" on *Kombi*, 18 January 1907, p. 3;

<sup>99</sup> *Kombi*, 11 August 1906, p. 1

<sup>100</sup> *Kombi*, 1 November 1907, p. 4

<sup>101</sup> *Kombi*, 9 November 1907, p. 3

<sup>102</sup> *Kombi*, 15 February 1907, p. 3

<sup>103</sup> *Kombi*, 28 February 1907, p. 3

<sup>104</sup> *Kombi*, 22 November 1907, p. 2

<sup>105</sup> Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme Albanais: La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulman en Europe*, cit., p. 514

anymore but rather a Syrian or a Russian one for these kind of functions.<sup>106</sup> But in another occasion it became impossible to find a priest and the prayers for the defunct were said days after the burial.<sup>107</sup> These exploits generated resentment among the Orthodox Albanian community which believed that it was necessary to find a priest that could serve them in the United States. As a result of their endeavours, on March 1908 the Russian bishop of New York Platonis ordained national activist Fan Noli priest.<sup>108</sup> In analogy with Vico's philosophical speculations, the so to speak social life of death was the cause of one of the most important achievements of the national movement after the League of Prizren, that is the basis of the institution of an Albanian Orthodox Church in the United States.

### **Conclusions:**

The objective of this paper was to investigate the way migration, intended as a population movement and as a discourse, conditioned the formation of Albanian identity and early projects of Albanian State-building. It has been stated that the concept of nation and migration are related to that of space. According to the phenomenological perspective, space is not a void container of things but rather the result of the of the interconnected functions of things according to how they appear to a subject. The national territory and all the natural and cultural objects that are found over it may be considered as such things.

The history of nations begins with a migration, or better, with the end of migration and the beginning of sedentariness. The latter state represented the passage from the almost animal state to civilization. National historiographies spatialize the nation by including certain territories in the national temporality. The term migration always refers to a movement of persons going outside or inside a certain centre. Such movement is in most cases considered as a threat because it may bring to a possible alteration of the nation. The presumed Slavic propensity to invade Albanian lands, the Turkish penetration in the late Middle Ages, and the population displacement caused by the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 were equally dangerous events because they threatened and harmed in different ways the continuity and the integrity of the Albanian nation. External invaders, like Slavs, Turks and Greeks, risked to overwhelm the Albanian space and turn them into *muhadjir*, that is destroy their domestic environment and force them to become nomads.

But the national discourse also admitted some exceptions. Albanians were authorised to emigrate when they faced economic problems or life threatening dangers. This had been the case of the *arbëresh* community during the Ottoman conquest, of the Albanians who went to Montenegro for trading opportunities, of national activists who conducted their work abroad and of United States immigrants. In these cases, the voice of the ancestors had little or no appeal on the collective conscience. The departure from the homeland was portrayed as a painful decision that however, was unavoidable and beneficial for the national cause.

It can be stated that the necessity to flee for merely material or carnal exigencies represented a leak in the totalitarianism of nationalism and proved that nomadism and by extension "primitivism" are still part of human society. However, migration did not necessarily mean disconnecting oneself from a homely environment. On the contrary, Albanian activists abroad recreated a national Albanian spatiality that did not even exist in the Ottoman Empire. The homeland was tested abroad. The spatializing of the Albanian nation started in the Kingdom of Naples as a result of the efforts of the *arbëresh* community to mark their difference from Orthodox Greeks. Albanian activists in the Balkans and Western Europe related to each other and to other actors as part of a country the

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<sup>106</sup> Kombi, 1 February 1907, p. 2

<sup>107</sup> Kombi, 7 September 1907, p.3

<sup>108</sup> Kombi, 31 January 1908, p. 2

centre of which was not in the Ottoman Empire where there was no such thing as Albania, but rather in their own offices, rooms and bodies. Albanians in the United States attempted and in part succeeded to erect a national space far removed from the acclaimed national frontiers. A micro-Albanian nation with its shops, newspapers, working places, restaurants, hotels and even its priest took shape in the United States only few years after Albanians had emigrated there.

The question might arise concerning the analogies that can link the story of the Albanian emigration to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century and the narrative of the Pelasgians who moved from India to the Balkans in 4.000 B. C. The similarity might be that they both brought to the lands where they settled something that they took from the lands from which they came. But there was also an important difference. Space is the togetherness of interconnected functions of things which constitute an environment. Migration can be considered a movement across this environment only if the latter is punctuated by things that have the function of delimiting. In the early twentieth century, the world possessed clear-cut political frontiers and therefore, there could be not doubts that Albanians migrated from one clustered space to another. But if Pelasgians arrived in the Balkans in a period when there were no such things as delimited national territories and when mobility rather than stationarity was the norm, they probably were not aware that they had migrated or moved.