


<p>THE MIGRATION OF ALBANIANS TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA - CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS DURING THE FIRST TWO DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY</p>		<p style="text-align: center;">History</p> <p>Keywords: Migration, United States, Albanians, Vatra, Fan Noli, Boston, etc.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p>Economic, social and political conditions forced Albanians throughout the centuries to move abroad in search of a better life. Depending on time and circumstances Albanians migrated to Italy, Egypt, Turkey, Romania, etc., where they formed their communities. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a new opportunity opened to Albanians - migration to the distant continent of America, previously unknown to Albanians. Many Albanians moved and settled in the USA. Initially, they faced numerous challenges, but later adapted to their new life. In order to preserve their culture and identity, they established an Albanian community in order to maintain their ties to their homeland. The article "The migration of Albanians to the United States of America - challenges and achievements during the first two decades of the twentieth century", aims to elaborate on the circumstances that led to the migration of Albanians, the organization of the Albanian community in the US, challenges and achievements in the field of education and culture, as well as political activity in favor of the national issue during the first two decades of the twentieth century.</p>		

Migration throughout the Years

The history of the Albanian diaspora is too early. Geographical position and social-economic conditions influenced Albanians to move in different directions. Following the end of the Middle Ages, Greece and Italy became the first locations where Albanians settled and organized their diaspora. Over time, similar Albanian immigration communities in Egypt, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, some European countries, and even in distant America, were formed.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century marked the initial move of Albanians towards America. Although far away from Albania, the United States presented many opportunities for new immigrants. Rapid economic and industrial development during the late nineteenth century was followed by many job openings, where Albanians and people of other nations found their fortunes. The move of Albanians to the US was entirely economical in nature. Economic conditions in Albania during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were extremely difficult (*Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 2002).

The periodization of immigration of Albanians to the US may be divided into four stages: (1) years 1900-1920 – arrival to the US, economic consolidation, national organization and emancipation; (2) years 1921-1944 – Albanian immigrants were keen on to acquire the American culture, but also contributed to their native culture; (3) years 1945-1989 – Albanian diaspora in US was refreshed by new elements that escaped due to communist regime in Albania and anti-Albanian policy in Yugoslavia; and (4) years from fall of the communist regime in Albania in 1991 and onwards (Meta Beqir, 2002; Meta Beqir et al., 2022).

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A man from Korca was the first Albanian to move to America in 1876. However, he later settled in Argentina. The other Albanian, named Koli Kristoforidhi, arrived in America in 1884 or 1886; he was considered the first Albanian that settled in the US. Several years later, he made several trips to Albania and back, taking along with him some of the villagers from his neighborhood. Thus, by the year 1895 around 17 Albanians lived in the US; by the year 1900 this number was increased to 42 Albanians living in Massachusetts.

By the year 1900 and onwards the move to the US progressed rapidly. Albanians settled mainly in Boston, Massachusetts, and in other states such as Pennsylvania, New York, Saint Louis, Minnesota, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Utah, Washington and California (Meta Beqir, 2002). Many Albanians moved to the US even after the declaration of Albania's independence, due to awkward economic conditions in Albania. Additionally, the Albanians that remained outside of Albania's borders in 1913, driven by violence and cruelty caused by Serbian, Montenegrin and Greek armies during the Balkan Wars, were forced to leave their homes. The Albanians living in northern regions of Albania moved mostly to Turkey, whereas a large number of Albanians living in southern areas of Albania, mainly from regions of Korca and Gjirokastra, where the Greek army had destroyed 2 cities, 190 villages and burned 6831 houses, were forced to move in the direction of America (*Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 2002). Thus, the number of Albanian immigrants to the United States increased greatly. During the first two decades of the twentieth century around 40,000 Albanians lived in the US, around 1000 in Canada and 1000 others in Latin America (Çekrezi Kostë, 2012), while according to some other sources, there were around 50,000 Albanian immigrants in the US alone (Tirta Mark, 1987).

Daily Life

First immigrants faced significant difficulties. At first, the trip was very expensive; the cost of the ship was 50\$ and you had to work for years in Albania to save this amount. Later, maritime agencies and brokers were involved because transportation to the US brought them a lot of money. The ones that decided to migrate borrowed some money from brokers and in turn deposited their land or other immovable properties as a mortgage. This was one of the reasons the ticket was so expensive, and paying back the debt was a priority for all immigrants (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999).

Albanian immigration to the US was characterized by a pronounced gender imbalance. According to some data, there were only around 1000 women out of 30,000 Albanian males in 1920. It can be explained by three factors: first, the general nature of Albanian immigration in the US; second, they could not bring their families due to persecution; and third, the backward state of Albanian society, which denied women's rights (Meta Beqir, 2002).

Most of the Albanian immigrants worked in textile factories, shoe factories and metal enterprises that did not need skilled workers. The salary was \$30 a month. But life was very difficult. At first, they took shelter in the basements of houses unsuitable for habitation, but with time common life began in an apartment of 10-15 men (*Historia e Popullit Shqiptar*, 2002).

The Beginnings of the Organization

It was Petro Nini Luarasi who established the first Albanian society in Buffalo Jamestown in 1905, called “Malli memedheut” [Motherland Craving]. The following societies were formed upon the arrival of some Albanian intellectuals: Fan Noli, Kristo Dako, Faik Konica, Sotir Peci, etc. Fan Noli and Sotir Peci founded “*Besa-Bese*” [Pledge for pledge] in Boston in 1907, aiming to gather all Albanians living in New England. At the same time, two other societies were established: “*Koha*” [Times] in New York and “*Lidhja*” [League] in Saint Louis (Meta Beqir, 2002).

As the number of immigrants increased, there was a need for unions or better organization of societies in order to accomplish certain goals in educational, social, and political life. This was an old idea that failed despite numerous attempts. But, serious attempts were renewed in 1911 when Kristo Flloqi, redactor of “*Dielli*” [The Sun] newspaper and Faik Konica, reached an agreement in April 1912 to form the federation “*Vatra*” [Hearth], whose first assembly was gathered in July 1912. Faik Konica was appointed the first Secretary General, and the newspaper “*Dielli*” became the main organ of the Federation (Fan Noli, 1918).

Before its first assembly, during the period May-June 1912 the federation “*Vatra*” set up its structure and organization in villages and towns; around 80 branches of “*Vatra*” were formed in the US and Canada, and the federation was officially recognized by the state of Massachusetts in June 1912 (Fan Noli, 1918).

Educational, cultural and religious aspects

Unlike the Albanian diaspora of Egypt, Turkey and Romania that consisted of Albanian intellectuals who left Albania due to political reasons, the Albanian immigration to the US was purely economic. At first, the Albanians went to the US to work and collect some money aiming to improve their living conditions when they return to Albania. But very soon these people faced economic, social and political emancipation, but anyway, their spirit was driven towards national feelings and the fight for independence and the preservation of the territorial integrity of Albania (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999). Sotir Peci published in the year 1906 the first newspaper in the Albanian language “*Kombi*” [The Nation] in the US.

In addition to his daily work in his primitive printing factory, he sorted, printed, distributed and then read his newspaper to others. We must bear in mind that at this time there were about 5,000 Albanians in the US, of which nearly twenty of them could read (Noli Fan, 1919; Silajxhiç Haris, 1999).

Kristo Dako was among the notable immigrants. In 1908, he opened an Albanian school in Natick, Massachusetts, where he taught Albanian and English to Albanians. His wife, Sevasti, together with her sister Parashqevi, opened a small educational site in their home in Boston. They prepared “Elementary Grammar” and “Practical Arithmetic”. In 1917, they published the

educational magazine “Morning Star” in Albanian and English. Kristo Dako’s book “Albania, the Master Key to the East”, published in Boston in 1919, has been recognized in America as a scientific manual for the problem of Albanian nationalism (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999).

Another outstanding figure in the cultural-propagandistic plan was Konstantin Çekrezi. For a while, he was editor of “The Sun”. From March to September 1916, he published the newspaper “Illyria” in New York. He also published the book “Albania, Past and Present” in New York (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999). It is worth mentioning that in America only for 12 years, 14 daily, weekly and monthly newspaper titles have been published (Noli Fan, 1919):

No.	Title	Year of publication	Bases	Language	Place of publication
1.	Kombi	1906	Weekly	Albanian	Boston
2.	Dielli	1909	Weekly/Daily	Albanian	Boston
3.	Trumpeta e Krujës	1910	Weekly	Albanian	St. Luis
4.	ZëriiPopullit	1912	Weekly	Albanian	New York
5.	Koha	1915	Weekly	Albanian	Jamestown
6.	Albanian Era	1915	Weekly	English	Denver/Chicago
7.	Mprojtjashiptare	1916	Weekly	Albanian	St. Luis
8.	Illyria	1916	Weekly	Alb.-English	Boston
9.	Perlindja	1916	Weekly	Albanian	Framingham
10.	Perparimi	1917	Monthly	Albanian	New York
11.	YlliiMëngjezit	1917	Monthly	Alb.-English	Boston
12.	Albania	1918	Monthly	Albanian	Waterbury
13.	Albania	1918	Weekly	Albanian	New York
14.	The Adriatic Review	1918	Monthly	Alb.-English	Boston

Progress was also made in the religious sphere. Most Albanian immigrants were of the Orthodox Christian faith, but there were also Muslims. In their relations, ethnicity predominated religion. Fan Noli was ordained a priest and held the first Albanian mass in Boston in March 1908. After the mass, the church of St. George was founded (Gurrazezi Refat, 2006). This was the first Albanian church in America, which became the nucleus of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania. At the beginning, the Albanians did not have their own churches and listened to the liturgy in foreign churches or different rented halls. Then the construction of Albanian churches began. Several churches were built: St. Colly’s in Southbridge, Massachusetts, which opened in October 1912, St. Mitra's Church in 1917, etc (Gurrazezi Refat, 2006).

The independence of the Albanian Orthodox Church in America was solemnly announced by the representatives of all the Albanian colonies, with Fan Noli as chairperson on July 26th, 1919. The movement for the Albanian church in America gave new impetus to the efforts made in Albania for the rights of the Orthodox population in this area. The Albanian Orthodox Church in America, with the financial help of immigrants, became a site for national propaganda. F. Noli helped the new Albanian church, translating into Albanian a series of basic religious works such as “Little Triad” (1913), “The Prayer” (1914), “Pesdjetorja” (1914). The religious tolerance of Albanians in America was an argument against propaganda that divided Albanians by faith (Meta Beqir et al., 2022).

Five large and small Orthodox churches had already been built at the time. In addition, there were four Albanian musical societies and clubs in the largest cities (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999).

The Political Organization

The political opinion of Albanian immigration at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century consisted of a union of Albanian provinces in an autonomous state under the Ottoman Empire (Meta Beqir, 2002). This opinion relied on the belief that an independent weak state could not resist the influences of powers or could not protect its territorial integrity. Nevertheless, this stance changed on November 28, 1912 when the Independence of Albania was proclaimed. In response to this event, “Vatra” sent Fan Noli and Faik Konica to Europe to work in support of the national issue at the London Peace Conference (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999).

Albanian immigrants helped those fighting in Albania during *World War I*. In addition to financial support, some armed troops were formed. A “volunteer unit” commanded by Aqif Permeti was formed in Boston. But, the US government did not approve their move to Europe (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999).

By the end of the War, Albanians viewed President Wilson as the long-awaited justice, hoping that his influence and strength would cement Albania’s independence and territorial integrity. Thus, on July 4th 1918 the representatives of all ethnic groups in America lined up with President Wilson for a flower ceremony at the grave of President George Washington. At this event, President Wilson delivered a famous speech expressing his determination to fight for the rights of his government in international relations. He also emphasized intrigues and conspiracies against small nations and liberty for all people. At the reception held at the “*Mayflower Yacht*”, Fan Noli had the opportunity to meet President Wilson in person. The President “listened to him kindly and assured him of his sympathy and unwavering determination to help Albania in those difficult times” (Noli Fan, 1918).

A meeting with President Wilson was followed by an event that happened upon the US entry into *World War I* (Stavrianos L. S, 2000), when “Vatra” activists began preparations for the Peace Conference. “Vatra” proclaimed “Albanian Rescue Day” on June 3rd 1917. All Albanians gathered in Boston had to contribute financially to the collection of a certain amount of money. Ultimately, the goal was to liberate Albania and create a free Albania within its ethnographic boundaries (Meta Beqir & Bello Hasan, 2022; Fan Noli, 1918). Thus, \$250,000 was collected for the needs of the Albanian delegation at the Peace Conference. A portion of this amount was allocated for the publication of the magazine “*The Adriatic Review*”, with the purpose of informing the American public about issues related to Albania and Albanians (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999).

On the eve of the Peace Conference, several activities of a political nature were organized. On December 6th 1917, “Vatra” sent a telegram to Britain’s Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour,

requesting the independence of Albania within its ethnographic borders. At the beginning of the year 1919, a similar request was addressed to the Great Powers. A Resolution that came out of an extraordinary conference of the “Vatra” Federation demanded the Peace Conference restoration of Albania’s independence and inclusion within its borders of all lands inhabited by Albanians, which were unjustly separated from Albania in 1913 by the London Conference. The Resolution proposed a plebiscite to be organized in these lands, where the American army would initially be stationed. This would reflect the free will of all residents (Meta Beqir & Bello Hasan, 2022).

The resolution expresses even more clearly the vision of “Vatra” for a free Albania and its ethnographic borders, including the cities that remained outside Albania in 1913 such as Prizren, Gjakova, Plava, Skopje, Tetova, Manastir, Dibra, the province of Chameria (Meta Beqir & Bello Hasan, 2022), while in the American army they saw the ideal of freedom and equality.

At the Paris Peace Conference “Vatra” was represented by Mehmet Konica, who was its main representative for Europe since 1916. Its honorary representative was Charles Telford Erickson (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999).

In addition to the “Vatra” delegation, the Albanians of America were also represented by another delegation, that of the National Party, which was formed by Kristo Dako in 1918, in Worcester, Massachusetts. Ismail Qemali and Parashqevi Qiriazi were among the members of this delegation (Silajxhiç Haris, 1999).

At the end of December 1918 delegates of “Vatra” established contacts with the US Military attaché in Rome, General George Percival Scriven, and had obtained the latter’s consent for the engagement of US instructors in the formation of the Albanian Gendarmerie. They addressed this issue with Luigj Bumci, the head of the Albanian delegation at the Peace Conference. However, it appears the idea of collaborating with General Scriven has not been realized (Meta Beqir & Bello Hasan, 2022).

At the time when the Conference was being held, the activists of “Vatra” organized a series of efforts concerning the Albanian national issue. Of special interest were efforts to establish contacts with influential figures in American politics. In August 1919, a meeting was held with Senators engaged in US Foreign Policy (Meta Beqir & Bello Hasan, 2022).

The recognition of Albania’s independence and borders by the Peace Conference did not stop the political activity of Albanian immigration in the US. Vatra’s efforts were focused on supporting the consolidation and stabilization of the Albanian state, according to new circumstances.

CONCLUSION

The economic and industrial development of the United States of America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, coupled with the need for labour, opened new opportunities for many nations of the world. Pushed by the difficult financial and social situation, many Albanians moved to America in search of a better life. Immigration to the USA had a purely economic-social character. Albanians who moved to the USA did not break ties with their homeland, and after a slight consolidation they began to organize themselves in the form of societies. The goal was to preserve the language and national identity. The organization influenced the opening of schools, churches, the development of cultural activities, the printing of newspapers and books in the Albanian language. Educational emancipation was accompanied by political emancipation. The Albanian immigration in the USA was transformed into a political factor of international importance, being involved in all developments related to the preservation of the independence and territorial integrity of Albania, its economic and political consolidation, and the protection of the rights of Albanians who lived outside the Albanian state throughout the twentieth century.

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