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Refik Kadija

American Studies in Albania in the Past and the Future

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"AMERICAN STUDIES IN ALBANIA IN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE"

Albania, the smallest Balkan country in Southeastern Europe, is eager to join Western Europe and the USA in the mainstream of progress.

After enduring extreme sufferings under the most tyrannical communist rule in all Eastern Europe, and after being isolated and self-isolated from the rest of the world for nearly fifty years, the Albanians feel an urgent need to forget the dreary past, to do away with it as with a nightmare.

The collapse of false doctrines and hollow dogmas met with general approval, particularly among the young generation. But it also inevitably brought about frustration and disillusion, among the older-generation intellectuals, who realized (some of them, unfortunately, a little too late) they had been misguided and driven into blind alleys. This feeling of frustration and disillusion is still lingering. It is not an easy and brief process to set up new creeds and values, and then apply them. Most of the Albanian intelligentsia feel this, as they are seriously committed to the revival of national economy, culture and social life. The sudden opening-up of the country, since 1990, created, at the same time, immense opportunities for many Albanian intellectuals to travel abroad, to pursue postgraduate studies, and to participate in international scientific conferences and other scholarly activities. This is something very common and a matter of routine for intellectuals IN ALL COUNTRIES. Whereas in Albania under communism it was something quite unusual and only a "privilege" of a handful of scholars (some of them with a doubtful scholarly reputation), who were considered as fully reliable. Reliable to what? Well, reliable to the Party (PLA), to Marxist-Leninist ideology, and, last but not least, to the organs of "Sigurimi" (secret police). In other words, the international scholarly activities of the Albanian intellectuals were extremely limited and strictly controlled and supervised by the Central Committee of the ruling Party.

The victory of democracy brought about tremendous opportunities for the Albanian intelligentsia. Today, in their free drift to the West, many Albanian intellectuals are trying to make most of this new and tremendous opportunity to travel and establish international scholarly contacts, in order to exchange views and ideas with their colleagues in other countries, to test their own knowledge and to reform it whenever possible. And by doing so, they not only reassess and improve their own scholarly work, but they also feel more competent in their goal to provide some sort of contribution, however modest, to science and culture in general.

The Albanians regard their national culture as an integral part of European culture. Therefore American Studies have been conceived within the reciprocal relations and interchange of American and European cultures.

Viewed within this context, American Studies in Albania have been limited so far to the study of American literature. In the future American Studies are still going to focus mainly, though not exclusively, upon American Literature, but by widening the spectrum on American culture as a whole.

With the removal of the stifling Communist censorship the Albanian scholars of American Culture, few as they are, are aware of their responsibility and the importance of the scholarly task they have to perform: first, in reassessing the value of American Studies achieved so far; and, second, in laying forth perspective programs and undertaking new scholarly tasks in order to promote studies of American Culture.

1. American Studies in Albania in the Past

In the broadest sense of the word, the beginnings of the contacts between Albanian and American cultures may be traced back to the second half of the 19th century, when Clement C. Moore, the author of the popular poem "The Night Before Christmas," published his book "George Castriot, Surnamed Scanderbeg, King of Albania" (1850), and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote his poem "Scanderbeg" in the third part of "Tales of a Wayside Inn" (1873). But we can speak of real contacts between the two cultures only in the 20th century, after the Albanian immigrants had established their permanent communities, first in Boston and other neighboring towns of Massachusetts, then in other states of the USA, and especially after Albania shed off the heavy Ottoman yoke which lasted for nearly five centuries and regained her independence in 1912.

Apart from the cultural activity of the Albanian-American community (founding cultural societies, issuing periodicals which were mostly bilingual,then publishing books both in English and in Albanian, in which they dealt with Albanian and American issues), in Albania proper cultural exchanges with America remained in infancy during the first two decades of the 20th century. This was mainly due to local problems (extreme backwardness, high illiteracy rate, economic hardships, lack of schools, esp. in the countryside, political turmoils and dissentions, the Balkan War, WW I, etc.).

But in the early 1920s the foundation of two American schools in Albania - the Vocational School of Tirana and the Kavaja Agricultural School, gave an impetus to Albanian-

American cultural relations. The excellent teaching staff of these two schools, composed chiefly of Americans and a few Albanians, and their two respective headmasters in particular - Harry T. Fultz and C. Talford Erickson, have given an invaluable contribution to the strengthening of cultural relations between Albania and the USA. They not only set an example for the structuring of the Albanian educational system and supplied the country's economy with the most efficient technicians that it has ever had, but also encouraged several cultural activities. Strongly supported by their teachers, the Albanian students of these two schools started the publication of two bilingual periodicals: "Laboremus" and "Shekulli XX" (The 20th Century). Time and again in these two periodicals there were published, in English, short stories and poems from American literature. But these periodicals also initiated the translation of American authors into Albanian. And C. Talford Erickson even published his own original poem "An Albanian Sunset."

During the 1930s, up to the outbreak of WW II, some Albanian periodicals started to publish a few translations from American literature - short stories by Mark Twain, O. Henry, Edgar Allan Poe and Sinclair Lewis. There were also translated a few books, such as Harriett Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, etc., apart from the translation of E.A. Poe's "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee," Longfellow's "Scanderbeg" (as a booklet) and one or two of Melville's stories, by the most notable, though contraversial, figure of the Albanian-Americans Fan S. Noli.

After WW II the communist government in Albania established the Russian school system on all levels, adopted Russian curriculi and programs, supplied schools and recommended for use only textbooks translated and adapted from Russian, and adopted and applied the Russian principles of censorship. The study of world culture was strictly supervised and controlled by the ruling PLA (through its special body of censors - the Sector for the Press and Propaganda at the Central Committee)! And the translation and study of foreign literature (including American literature, of course), were heavily tainted by Marxist (often pseudo-Marxist)-Leninist (more precisely Stalinist) ideology and by aesthetic dogmas of Socialist Realism.

In other words, with the coming to power of the communists, liberalism and literary pluralism were rejected in Albania. Communist ideology affected culture, literature and the arts as thoroughly as it did home and foreign policy, economy, education and science, social and individual life. Just as the government was in the hands of one omnipotent party (PLA) allowing no alternatives and imposing isolation, literature and the arts fell within the narrow scope of one all-embracing and stifling doctrine which is largely known by the term Socialist Realism. In no other East European country was this doctrine applied more dogmatically than

in Albania, not even in the USSR where it was originally invented. Maybe in Mao Tse-tung's China, but China is not in Europe.

It is rather difficult for a Western mind not used to such dogmas to realize what Socialist Realism really stands for. It is neither a philosophical and aesthetic theory, nor a literary trend (or "method" as it is often called). It is nothing but a sheer ideological dogma imposed from above - from the ruling Communist party. Actually it was concocted by Stalin (in 1936) and imposed to be applied by all communist-ruled countries, esp. after WW II. In Albania it was heavily tainted with the fetishized sermons of the know-it-all ruler Enver Hoxha and the "directives" (=orders) of the PLA. In national literature and arts it stifled artistic inspiration and fantasy and froze dead spontaneous creativity and resourcefulness. The "proletarian party line" alias Marxist-Leninist "red streak" (or "red thread," as it was called in Albanian) had to permeate every artistic creation from top to bottom. This meant singing praises to the ruling party (PLA) for every achievement in social life, and extolling Socialism and proletarian dictatorship, and denouncing Capitalism and everything regarded as "alien to the proletariat..."

The application of the "principles" of Socialist Realism aimed at providing a polished, one-sided picture of socialist reality, and of creating an idealized, untrue optimistic atmosphere. In this respect it was just the opposite of what the word "realism" stands for - as an "artistic representation intended as an unidealized portrayal of objective reality."[1]

The positive hero, the protagonist - the torch-bearer, the upholder of proletarian partisanship in most cases came out as a flat, two-dimensional stereotype who successfully overcomes all difficulties and is always victorious over the antagonist who is conceived as an enemy to the proletariat or as bearer of "bourgeois traits" of character. If a protagonist ever died it was to magnify the glory of the proletarian cause.

If an Albanian author ever attempted to deal with "grey" (let alone "dark") aspects of socialist reality, he would be labelled right away as a liberal who has given in under the pressure of bourgeois and revisionist ideology. His work would meet with derogative, unprincipled harsh criticism and would be discarded and banned. And the author himself would be harassed in many ways.

While Socialist Realistic criticism expected and even demanded from an Albanian contemporary author to beautify socialist reality, it expected from an author of capitalist

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[1] *Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary.*

society to be critical of his reality, denounce as many aspects of it as possible - and the more critical he was, the greater and the more progressive would he be considered.

In the study and critical assessment of world literature, M-L theory of literature and literary critique applied the sociological theory, focusing mainly on the sociological analysis of an artistic work. Authors and literary works of all times were selected on the basis of "progressiveness." Priority was given to "realist" authors. For instance, the American authors that were selected for study and translation and were chiefly appreciated as "great realists" were those who dealt with big social issues and were critical of different aspects of American reality, such as Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, Upton Sinclair, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, Erskine Caldwell, Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, Carl Sandburg, Langston Hughes, O. Henry, Richard Wright and one or two other authors. The works that were translated until the end of the 1980s were: Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha," James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*; a flimsy collection of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*; Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *The Stolen White Elephant* (a collection of pamphlets and short stories); Jack London's *White Fang*, *The Call of the Wild*, *Love of Life*, and one or two other tales of the North, *Martin Eden* and *The Iron Heel*, O. Henry's *Roads of Destiny* and *A Service of Love* (selected short stories); Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*; Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and *The 'Genius'* which somehow escaped censorship (quite extraordinary!) and later was banned and condemned as a decadent book; Sinclair Lewis's *Arrowsmith* and *Babbit*; Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*; Richard Wright's *Native Son*; Erskine Caldwell's *Trouble in July*, *Gretta*, and several short stories published in various periodicals (the short stories dealing with the racial theme, such as "Kneel to the Rising Sun", etc.); a collection of Langston Hughes's anti-racial poems; John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* and *The Grapes of Wrath* (published only in 1991, though translated several years earlier); Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea," *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (published in the late 1980s), *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (a collection of short stories), *To Have and Have Not*, and a few short stories dealing with the Spanish Civil War theme; and two or three other books by lesser authors. Some short stories by Sherwood Anderson and William Faulkner (such as "The Rain") sneaked in and hid themselves among other stories in collections of world literature such as Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, William Saroyan, Henry James, etc., remained totally unknown to the general reading public, because their "realism" was regarded as being too soft to be suitable for communist education of the masses! Whereas many 20th century American authors were not only ignored, but even tabooed and forbidden in Albania once they were stigmatized and labelled as "decadent," "reactionary," "anti-realistic" and "modernistic." Such was the verdict upon T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Eugene O'Neill, Truman Capote, William Faulkner, John Updike, Gore Vidal, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Bernard Malamud, Norman Mailer, Ralph Ellison. Their works could have never had a chance

to be translated and studied in our country if democracy had not come and had not done away with the dogmas of Socialist Realism which were smothering Albanian culture. University textbooks only mentioned their names, some of them, in brief surveys of trends they represented. But no one had official access to their works. Marxist stylistics provided its own "original" classification of certain literary periods, trends and authors. Modernistic art and literature were exclusively stigmatized as "idealistic," "formalistic" and as permeated by bourgeois ideology. Though allegedly the Socialist Realistic "method" aimed at appreciating world ("progressive") art and literature, in fact it narrowed down the scope and even distorted the true picture of world art and literature extremely. With its one-sided, extremely biased, and narrow interpretation of Western culture, it aimed at creating a "proletarian" culture (= "prolet-cult") which discouraged the reading of modernist works, prohibited their translation and assessment, and omitted them from the curriculum of all levels.

Nevertheless, there is no censorship, even under the most tyrannical regimes, that can totally isolate world culture and refrain it from reaching the masses. All cultures are part of a common whole - the heritage of mankind. Diffusion and interchange of cultures is a natural process that can never be stopped. And American culture, as part of world culture, found its way through the dense iron net to reach little, isolated Albania.

After WW II a good amount of American culture had to flow through Western Europe first before it reached East European countries, including Albania, where it was received as Western culture in general.

During the period 1945-1990 only a very small portion (let us say 1/32) of American culture reached Albania directly from the US first-hand source. It consisted chiefly of a few books and of radio programs (music and news and other broadcasts in English and Albanian - through the Voice of America). It was strictly a non-official source, almost like a "forbidden fruit." By the way, there are records of people being persecuted and jailed, under the charge of "agitation and propaganda," for listening to the *Voice of America*. A little more of American culture (let us say 3/32) reached Albania through West European sources. It consisted of books, music programs and other radio and TV broadcasts, and movies, lots of American movies (mainly through the Italian radio and TV stations "RAI UNO" and "RAI DUE," but also through the former Yugoslavian "JRT-1" and "JRT-2"). This source was also private, non-official, except for a few films that the Albanian TV and Film Studios bought "second hand" from Italy or France. But the greater portion of American culture (nearly 7/8 of it) reached Albania, particularly until 1961, after it had been filtered through Soviet cultural propaganda, which was strictly communist vs. stalinist and largely panslavic. This was the official reception of American culture as part of Western culture. (See the diagram.) It encompassed the study of American literature (at high schools and the university), the list of

the American authors and literary works carefully selected for translation, radio and TV broadcasts, and critical assessment in the mass media. The same censorship controlled a few American films that were shown in Albania, such as "Zapata" (starring Marlon Brando and Anthony Quinn), "Duel in the Jungle" (with Elizabeth Taylor), "Captain Horatio Hornblower" (with Gregory Peck), Charlie Chaplin's films and a few others.

Besides the stifling censorship, the spread of American culture in Albania was handicapped by an extreme lack of up-to-date information, lack of books on American history, education, political science, natural sciences, sociology, technology, art, etc., a total lack of American journals and periodicals (there was not a single literary magazine available), and, likewise, the total absence of an exchange of ideas and, even more important, an exchange of people. Until the end of the 1950s it was forbidden to learn a foreign (Western) language, English in particular, and only Russian was taught at school. Learning of the English language was legalized only in 1960, when the English department was opened at Tirana University. The opening of the English department was of great importance for the spread of American culture. It was like the opening of a window which enabled us Albanians to have an open view of American (and British) culture, to have direct access to it. The opening of that "window" created a new atmosphere, and in spite of all the handicaps, though often narrowed down to a vestibule, it was going to let in a permanent current of fresh air from the other side of the Atlantic. British and American history and literature were introduced and taught in English, along with other subjects in English. The English language started to be taught at school from the fifth to the twelfth grade. In a few years more and more people, esp. from the younger generation, were able to read works by British and American authors in the original. The spread of the English language inevitably brought about the spread of British and American civilization.

This was a new and strong challenge for the official anti-American policy of the communist regime, though in fact it had been challenged since the very beginning in many ways. Most of the Albanians have always regarded America as a "dreamland," as a legend, and not as a taboo. Everything "American" tended to be worshipped, idealized, even fetishized, but never underrated. The systematic communist propaganda against everything western, particularly against "American imperialism" as the "most dangerous warmonger and aggressor" and the U.S.A. as a country of "racial discrimination," "anti-democracy," "decadence," "immorality," "mass unemployment" and "poverty," was so exaggerated and naive that it sounded hollow in most ears and had an opposite effect not only on the adults but also on the greater part of the younger generation. The allround communist brainwashing, which started in the cradle and continued throughout one's lifetime, in fact remained only skin-deep. There was a general discrepancy between what people said in public and what they thought and really believed. Even those intellectuals of the ideological sector who were directly involved in anti-

American propaganda, only pretended to believe in what they said or wrote. Communism is the utopian ideal of idealists, and genuine communist idealists in Albania have been very few. And in their lifetime most of those communist idealists met with many frustrations and disillusions. The tyrannical communist dictatorship in Albania cultivated the split personality: officially, in public (at work, at school, at meetings) everybody had to parrot the hackeneyed slogans and clichés of Marxist-Leninist ideology, and whatever was spoken or written was only make-believe; whereas at home everybody cultivated quite different tastes and developed quite different ideas. For instance, although religion was formally banned since 1967 and official propaganda boastfully declared that "Albania was the only atheistic country in the world," many people continued to worship God and celebrate religious feasts and practice religious rites in secret. At home people read the books they liked best and listened (though in a low voice) to the music they preferred. Many young people had their own favorite authors and musical idols. For instance, although Bernstein and Gershwin were allowed to be performed in public for the first time only after the downfall of communism, in 1991, they have been widely known in Albania. At home people have never stopped listening, on the radio or on tape, to American jazz, blues, rock, pop, and country music, and American singers have always enjoyed wide popularity. Every generation had their idols: in the 60s and 70s many young people knew the songs of Elvis Presley, Ray Charles, Louis Armstrong, Aretha Franklin, Frank Sinatra, Connie Francis, etc.; whereas the present young generation have been great fans of Michael Jackson, Tina Turner, Kennie Rogers, New Kids on the Block, Stevie Wonder, Madonna, Prince, Whitney Houston, Bon Jovi, The Scorpions, Metallica, Heavy Metal, etc., long before the collapse of Communism. American literature, ranking among the most popular literatures of the world, is highly appreciated and widely known in Albania. Sales of the translated works of American authors, such as James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, etc., have always been very good. Many themes treated in American novels, plays and short stories had an immediate appeal to the general reading public. Apart from the stereotypical official critique, many adult readers developed their own appreciation of the books they read either at school or at leisure. Those who knew English or other foreign languages, at random had access to books of "forbidden" authors which had "sneaked in" through customs, attaining in this way a broader cultural background.

A significant contribution to the spread and maintenance of American culture in Albania has been made by the teachers of English, the teachers of World and American literature, and the literary translators of American authors. They grasped every opportunity, especially during certain liberal "intermezzos," to introduce new elements of American culture, new authors and new literary works. They published articles and essays and broadcast radio-programs on American literature. They often became vulnerable to harrassment and persecution as soon as a liberal "intermezzo" was over. Thus, for instance, during one of these liberal "intermezzos," in the early 1970s, they introduced to the Albanian readers and students of literature the works of

William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos, Eugene O'Neill, Edward Albee, along with the works of other "decadents" and "modernists" of European literature. But soon afterwards, in 1973, this ideological "thaw" was followed by a deep frost, the liberal "intermezzo" was swept over by one of the most hardline conventions of the PLA - the notorious Fourth Plenum of May 1973. This Party Plenum was a serious setback in the history of Albanian culture. In an all-embracing campaign the communist hardliners lashed out against every liberal manifestation in culture, education, arts, literature, music, philosophy, sociology, fashion, etc. Many talented writers, theater and movie actors and producers, composers and musicians, scholars and critics, etc., became subject to fierce persecution: some of them were interned and even imprisoned under the absurd charge of liberalism - they had given in under the pressure of bourgeois ideology (!). Many novels, poems, dramas, films, songs, paintings and sculptures, social, philosophical, and cultural studies - all fell under the ban of strict censorship and were stigmatized as "harmful for the education of the masses," as "permeated by bourgeois ideology" or "affected by bourgeois traits, idealist philosophy, and formalistic and anti-realistic '-isms.'" Likewise, school textbooks of the humanities, particularly the world literature textbooks of all levels, underwent a radical "purge." For instance, the 1971 edition of the University textbook "A history of English and American Literature" was banned for circulation and was turned into cardbord simply because it contained chapters dealing with authors that were regarded as "decadent." Many writers who were labelled as "decadent" or "regressive" were totally excluded from the university programs: Oscar Wilde - for cultivating aestheticism, "art for art's sake," James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner - for their anti-realistic "stream-of-consciousness" technique; Eugene O'Neill - for experimenting with expressionism and Freudianism; D.H. Lawrence - for his "naturalism" and "sensualism," Edward Albee - for applying Beckett's technique of the "Theater of the 'Absurd,'" and so on. Even the works of Theodore Dreiser, Clifford Odets, John Steinbeck, and Arthur Miller, though regarded as "realistic" (and formerly even as "progressive"), were banned for circulation and omitted from the curriculum: Dreiser's novels - for their naturalistic influences, Odet's plays - for the author's defection during the McCarthy campaign, Steinbeck's works - for his friendship with President Johnson and his "Journal on Vietnam," and Miller's plays - for influences of Freudianism.

Such dramatic events, unique in modern European history and similar to the notorious Chinese Cultural Revolution of 1968, were a serious handicap in the interchange of cultures and in the development of American Studies in Albania.

2. The Contribution of Albanian-Americans in Promoting American Studies

European immigrants in the United States have always been an important factor in the transatlantic dialogue of cultures. And the Albanian-American ethnic group, small as it is, has its share in maintaining this dialogue. Of particular interest is the contribution that Albanian-American immigrants have given to American Studies.

Soon after their arrival to the United States the Albanian immigrants founded cultural and patriotic societies and started the publication of bilingual newspapers and magazines. "From the earliest days of the Albanian-American community, the press has played an informative and educational role. Coming from a Turkish-ruled province where the teaching of Albanian was forbidden, many immigrants learned their native language only in the United States."[2]

The migration chain of the Albanians to the United States has its first link in the late 1980s, when poor and illiterate peasants from the region of Korça (south-east Albania) settled in Boston, working mainly as laborers and peddlers. Coincidentally, beginning around 1880, many Italian-Albanians (Arbereshis) also started to migrate to the United States, but they settled in Italian-American neighborhoods (in New York, Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Bayonne, Elizabeth, Jersey City, Newark, etc.) rather than in Albanian-American neighborhoods. The oldest Albanian-American neighborhoods are those of Boston and its surrounding towns - Cambridge, Worcester, Natick and Southbridge, Mass. The largest Albanian-American neighborhood today is to be found in New York City (particularly in the Bronx and Brooklyn, and in Mulberry Street when we include the Italian-Albanians). Other important Albanian-American settlements are to be found in Manchester, N.H.; Biddeford-Saco, ME; Bridgeport, Waterbury, Hartford, Conn.; Jamestown, Rochester, N.Y.; Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Buffalo, St. Louis, Los Angeles, etc. Since the beginning of the 20th century the Albanian-American immigrants gathered in their clubs, such as the Kafene Vatra (Hearth Coffeehouse), the Hotel Skenderbeu, etc. to form their cultural and patriotic societies which culminated in the foundation of the Pan-Albanian Federation of America VATRA (The Hearth), in April 1912, spreading from Boston gradually throughout New England. VATRA played a major role in the Albanian nationalist movement for independence from the Ottoman yoke, and in other crucial moments of Albanian history. Its official organ was the newspaper "Dielli" (The Sun), originally founded by the "Besa-Besen" Society (The Pledge), in 1906, and though irregularly published, it has survived up to the present day. But the first Albanian newspaper was "Kombi" (The Nation), founded in Boston (1906-1909). Another important newspaper which has survived for more than fifty years is "Liria/Liberty," the organ of the Free

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[2] *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, (1980), p.27.

Albania Organization, published in South Boston since 1941, and recently revitalized. But the most professional and probably the most important Albanian-American periodical to date is ILLYRIA, founded in 1990 and published twice weekly, half in English and half in Albanian. Among other Albanian-American periodicals we could mention the English language monthly "Adriatic Review" (Boston, 1918-1919); the other monthly "Albanian Era" (Denver, Colo., 1915-1916); "YLl' i Mengjezit" (The Morning Star), another monthly, Boston 1917-1919; the biweekly "Lajmetari Shqipetar" (The Albanian Messenger; Worcester, MA, 1934-1937); the "Sherbestari" (The Serviceman; New York, 1950-1961); "Shqiptari i Lire" (The Free Albanian; New York, since 1957); "Perpjekja jone" (Our Effort; New York, since 1974; "Jeta Katholike Shqiptare" (Catholic Albanian Life; Bronx, New York, since 1966), etc.

The Albanian-American newspapers and magazines have been not only important means in promoting the Albanian national cause and in dealing with major national issues (political, religious, etc.); but they have also been useful and invaluable vehicles in the exchange of cultures. Besides, their contribution to American journalism, however modest, cannot be denied, because they are a part of it. They often treated Albanian and American cultural issues. Their pages were often filled with articles and literary works by immigrant authors. And it was in these periodicals that American literature was introduced for the first time to the Albanian readers. One of the most renowned Albanian-American translators and poets, Harvard-educated writer, composer, founder of the Albanian Orthodox Church of America, Fan S. Noli first published his translations of Longfellow, Poe and Melville, along with translations from Shakespeare, Cervantes, Khajam, etc., in the Albanian-American periodicals of the time. And Faik Konitza, the first significant Albanian-American writer, one of the most cultured Albanian intellectuals of all times, a brilliant wit, a distinguished diplomat, an ardent nationalist, and the best stylist of Albanian literature, published many of his articles and essays as well as a satirical novel in the pages of the Albanian-American periodicals. Konitza, who also founded the magazine "Albania" (Brussels and London, 1897-1909), which stimulated nationalist fervor and served as a repository of Albanian folklore, history, and literature, wrote in English the book "Albania: The Rock Garden of Southeastern Europe," which was published in Boston in 1957. Noli also published in English his books "History of Scanderbeg" and "Beethoven and the French Revolution," with the help of the VARTA. Whereas the "Dielli" at one time also published school textbooks that were used in the Albanian homeland as well as in the United States.

Albanian-American scholars of different generations have felt the need to acquaint the American public with that little "Rock Garden" of the Balkans. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are several books bearing the substantial title "...ALBANIA...," written between 1919 and 1991, by different authors such as C. Dako, K.A. Chekrezi, N. Drizari, S. Skendi, A. Pipa, P. Prifti, N. Pano, E. Biberaj, besides Konitza's book. Though they deal mainly with the

Albanian modern history of their own time, they all treat Albanian ancient history, the origin of the Albanians, their struggles with foreign invaders, particularly Scanderbeg's 25-year resistance against the Ottoman yoke in the 15th century. They also deal with cultural aspects of Albanian life, with Albanian character, national customs and traditions, Albanian idioms and folklore. Some are more political in character, such as the books of Biberaj and Pipa, other focus more on historical and cultural problems, such as Chekrezi's amd Konitza's, and common issues are treated from different perspectives. But they all have hit common targets: to make Albania better known among the American people, to provide information on Albania, to awaken and increase the interest of the American public for the long-suffering Albanians, to appeal to the heart and mind of the Albanian-American immigrants about their ancestral homeland. At the same time, they are an invaluable contribution to Albanian and American Studies.

Most of the Albanian-American authors of "...ALBANIA..." have written other books in English, such as Stavro Skendi, Arshi Pipa, Nelo Drizari, etc. Nexhmie Zaimi is the first Albanian-American woman to publish an autobiographical novel, "Daughter of the Eagle: The Story of an Albanian Girl" (1937). There are a few other autobiographical novels written by Albanian-Americans, such as "Cell No. 31" by Z. Qira, "Song of Irena" by N. Drizari, etc. Of special interest are the scholarly materials which investigate the Albanian-American experience, though they are very few, such as C.A. Demo's "the Albanians in America: The First Arrivals" - a brief overview in both English and Albanian published in 1960, and Dennis L. Nagi's "The Albanian-American Odyssey, A Pilot Study" (1989). Other Albanian-American authors who have published books in English are Peter Lucas, a distinguished journalist and veteran State House reporter of Massachusetts, Gjon Sinishta, Safete S. Juka, etc. The publications of the Albanian-American intellectuals are a modest contribution to American culture, but they are also a precious source which enriches the Albanian cultural heritage.

However, it is a sad fact that from 1945 until 1990 the cultural and literary activity of the Albanian-Americans, with the single exception of Noli's works, remained totally unknown to the public in Albania. Hardly anybody knew that the world-famous film star John Belushi and the film producer Stan Dragoti were of Albanian origin. Albanian-American newspapers and magazines were not allowed to enter into, let alone to circulate, in Albania. Until the beginning of the 1990s no one in Albania had ever heard about the Albanian-American Harvard Student Club, the Boston Albanian Mandolin Club, The Albanian String Orchestra, the amateur performances of plays by Albanian authors like Sami Frasheri, Foqion Postoli, Kristo Floqi, and Mihal Grameno; the folk festivals, fashion shows and "Miss Albania" competitions organized by the "Daughters of St. George" at world-famous "Anthony's Pier Four" Restaurant; the communal celebrations of national and religious holidays with Albanian songs and dances, native costumes and old-country dishes ("lakror," "brushtull," "kurabie," etc.).

Cultural relations, as well as all the other relations, between Albania and the Albanian-Americans were brought practically to a standstill by the inhuman communist regime which took great pains to seal off the country from the rest of the world. Even the correspondence by mail of the Albanian-Americans with their compatriots, relatives or friends in Albania was strictly censored. During the span of about 45 years only a handful of Albanian-American immigrants were able to get permission from the Albanian UN mission to cross the Albanian border and visit their relatives and the homeland of their ancestors, meanwhile being tailed all the time wherever they went. The communist government of the paranoic tyrant Enver Hoxha was highly distrustful of everybody coming from abroad in general and from the United States in particular. In 1990 this nightmarish atmosphere finally came to an end. The Albanians were able to say "Good riddance!" to the "iron curtain." And the irreversible democratic processes, which are in full swing now in Albania, created great perspectives for free contacts and free exchange of ideas and of people, and for a more effective dialogue of cultures.

3. New Perspectives for American Studies in Democratic Albania

Political pluralism and the triumph of democracy opened the gates of cultural pluralism in Albania. The process of Free Market brought about the founding of many new publishing houses and various new magazines and newspapers. Modern philosophical and aesthetic trends now flow freely into Albanian culture, art and literature. At last the Albanians are publishing and reading freely religious books (from the Biblical stories to the Kuranic teachings), erotic periodicals, the works of Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Camus, Sartre, Freud, etc. and other "taboos" of the "communist era." And it became feasible, at long last, for the Albanians to have free access to American culture as well as to the cultural, religious and social life of the Albanian-American immigration.

Great perspectives are opened for the development of American Studies in Albania. And the year 1990 marks not only the collapse of communism in our country, but also the beginning of a new phase in American Studies. The main immediate objectives of these studies are:

1. To point out the Albanians' search for new ideals - the ideals of democracy and freedom, which they are naturally inclined to find in the American models and standards;

2. to point out their quest for new moral values, the substitution of communist worn-out slogans and clichés of "common interest" ("Let us work, struggle, and live like revolutionaries," "The struggle for bread is the struggle for Socialism," "The people do what

the Party says, and the Party does what the people want," etc.) with American standards of individual freedom, individual opportunities and values;

3. and to show the process of the Albanians' escape from imposed materialist philosophy, from sterile, stereotype Marxist-Leninist dogmas towards free thinking, towards a diversity of political creeds and philosophical concepts.

American Studies are an important means of acquainting the Albanian people with American culture, its values and tradition. In this way they will help to cultivate proper concepts and values of democracy by following the American example. The United States are the best symbol and reality of the co-existence of diverse cultures, and of different political and religious creeds. The American nation is a wonderful multi-cultural mosaic of different races and ethnic groups that, while retaining their identity, their ancestral languages and traditions, take legitimate pride in singing in unison their common national anthem "STAR SPANGLED BANNER" throughout America, from North to South and from coast to coast. By joined efforts and tolerance and mutual respect, by perseverance and hard work they have made the United States of America, the country of great opportunities for hard-working people. In this respect they set a good example to many nations, in general, and to the Albanian people, in particular, now more than ever. Due to historical factors, such as the five hundred-year Ottoman yoke, regional conflicts and the Balkan wars, the two World Wars and internal turmoil in-between, and the fifty-year communist dictatorship, the Albanian people comes to the threshold of the 21st century without experience in democracy. In order to make up for this lack of tradition, they need to follow a good example. American Studies will help them to find it in American tradition. This will enable them to overcome social tensions, to disconnect themselves from the "ghosts" of the past such as "regionalism," "bayraktarism" (=tribalism), and sluggishness (a peculiar kind of sluggishness which consisted in spending more time in talking politics than in doing effective work).

The distinguished American journalist and author Rose Wilder Lane, the daughter of Laura Ingall Wilder, was a true and lifelong friend of the Albanian people. In characterizing the Albanians in her book "PEAKS OF SHALA," in 1923, she wrote: "The Albanian people, fighting among themselves, ought to have sense enough to settle down and go to work." In 1922 she interviewed Ahmet Zog as newly-elected Prime Minister of Albania. In quoting him she wrote: "Ahmet said: 'The people are starving and ragged; they walk with bare feet over the earth that covers their fortunes. We need capitalistic development, not a hundred years from now, but today. I am no good for that... Oil, mines, forests, waterpower, land - what can Albania do with them, without trained men?'" But the situation now is totally different. After overthrowing communist dictatorship and doing away with "planned" and centralized socialist economy, the establishment of democracy has created vast opportunities for trained

professionals to unfold their proficiency and use it for the creation of a solid free market economy, for the capitalist development "not a hundred years from now, but today." Now there are already many trained men in Albania, many of them intellectuals of good proficiency in a wide spectrum of disciplines who "are good for that." The "Animal Farm" with its pigs and donkeys and goats and cows has been demolished once and for ever. Now, more and more Albanian "trained men" are learning from American experience in economy, finance, business administration, agriculture, medicine, education, defense etc. And American Studies should record such an experience.

A lot is to be undertaken and accomplished by the scholars of American Studies in the field of literature. First, they have to reassess those American authors who have already been introduced to the Albanian readers and students, such as Mark Twain, Jack London, Ernest Hemingway, etc., but have been misrepresented and unilaterally and superficially treated. Second, they should undertake studies on authors who had been banned by communist censorship, such as Melville, Frost, Dickinson, Faulkner, Oates, Mailer, Thomas Wolfe, Updike, etc. This process of introducing new authors and undertaking new literary studies is a long and neverending one. Third, they should make a reassessment of the Albanian-American authors who have been either distorted, such as F. Noli, or neglected and denied, such as F. Konitza, S. Skendi, A Pipa, etc. For instance, the Albanian scholars of Noli in the past tended to idealize Noli's achievements as a translator, poet, literary critic and politician. Several facts of his life were misinterpreted, such as his clerical duties, his activity in Europe from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s, his relations with the communist regime of E. Hoxha, etc. Hardly anyone in Albania knew about his religious translations and adaptations - an important contribution to Albanian liturgy. Fourth, the Albanian theme in the works of American authors is an interesting field of study almost unexplored. Until recently, besides Longfellow's poem on Scanderbeg and James M. Luddlow's novel "The Captain of the Janizaries" (translated into Albanian), nothing else was known in Albania of authors dealing with the Albanian theme. There are several American authors - historians, linguists, ethnographers, poets, folklorists, travellers - whose works deal with Albania and the Albanians of the past and the present.

Another very important field of exploration for the scholars of American Studies in Albania is Albanian-American immigration which is almost "virgin land." Very little scholarly materials exist which investigate the Albanian-American Experience."[3] Besides two brief surveys on the first arrivals, written by C.A. Demo and D. Nagi, a book compiled by the Federal Writers' Project, "The Albanian Struggle in the Old World and New" (1939), and a chapter on Albanian early immigrants in C.A. Chekrezi's "Albania, Past and Present" (1919),

[3] Wayne Charles Miller, "A Comprehensive Bibliography for the Study of American Minorities" (1976). Ch. Albanian-Americans: A Guide to the Albanian-American Experience," p. 683.

little else exists on this theme. And those which exist are only brief surveys, only about the first arrivals, and only about the immigrants of the Boston area.

An important contribution to American Studies would be a comprehensive survey of Albanian immigration in the United States. This should include not only the Albanian-American immigration in the past, but also in the present - the new wave of immigration in the last decade of the 20th century. It should focus on other important Albanian-American communities besides Boston, such as Worcester, Hartford, New York, Chicago, Hudson, Detroit, Los Angeles, etc. It has to deal with immigrants coming from different parts of Albania, besides the district of Korca; with the Arbereshis (Italian-Albanians) coming in big waves of exodus from Kalabria, Sicily and other Arbereshi communities of Southern Italy; with the Albanian immigrants coming from Kosova and other parts of former Yugoslavia, particularly since 1981. There are immigrants of Albanian origin coming also from Greece and Turkey. And the new waves of exodus from Albania since 1991 have brought many young people to the United States. In addition to this there are the descendants of deceased Albanian-American citizens who are seeking repatriation in the United States. It is interesting to study the specific conditions of the Albanian immigrants in the United States in comparison with immigrants coming from Western Europe (Ireland, Italy, etc.), immigrants coming from Eastern Europe (Poland, Russia, etc.), and those coming from Albania's neighboring countries (Greece, Turkey, Croatia, etc.). Within the context of ethnicity in the United States it is interesting to study how assimilation works with the Albanian-American immigrants, how it worked in the past and how it appears in the present; how the adjustment processes functioned in the early settlements, and how they are functioning now; which demographic aspects were more prominent in the past, and which have become more prominent today. New social, political, cultural and psychological factors are influencing the ethnic attitude and ethnic behavior of the Albanian-American immigrants today. The change in the political situation in Albania brought about an immediate and extensive exchange of people and mass media means. Many Albanians crossed the Atlantic and came to the United States (like tourists, visitors, specialists, scholars, legal and illegal refugees, etc.), everybody with interesting tales from their homeland. Many newspapers, journals, audio-cassettes, video-cassettes and books circulate freely now on both sides. Among the old-generation Albanian-American immigrants and their families there is a renewed interest to learn more about and visit Albania. The victory of democracy in Albania rekindled the need for ethnic identity even in those old-generation Albanian-Americans who, being hostile to the Communist rule in Albania, somehow were ashamed and reluctant to admit in public their Albanian origin. Now, while being loyal to America, they feel proud of their ancestral origin, proudly identify themselves as Albanians. The process of privatization, the creation of a Free Market economy, and other economic changes that are taking place in Albania also influence the increase of ethnic interest among all generations of the Albanian-American immigrants. The Albanian government has created great

facilities for investors of Albanian origin. And Albanian-American businessmen are seeing good opportunities for investments in the homeland of their ancestors. Some of them are also entitled to real estate property as part of the will of their forefathers, which is being returned to their relatives. The new flux of immigrants is bringing about new features. For instance, the immigrants coming from Kosova are broadly characterized by a mentality which is similar to that of the early immigrants: to stay in America only for some time, to work hard, to earn some money, then to go back to their homeland, when the political and economic situation improves there; they keep their families, many of them, in the old country; their body is in America, but their heart is in the old country. Whereas most of the immigrants coming from Albania probably intend to become permanent residents in America. By legal and illegal immigration they try to take their families with them or arrange for them to come later. Unlike the first arrivals, the newcomers are more skilled, more cultured, many of them are University graduates though forced to take jobs below their education (working mostly as blue-collars). Their children attend American schools. New off-springs are born. There is a mixture of generations in the existing communities which inevitably brings about their restructuring. Besides, new communities are created. This is a dynamic process with complex problems in its train: occupational and residential mobility, educational problems, labor problems, legal problems (all kinds of violation of American law, such as illegal entry, illegal stay, smuggling, crime), etc. In spite of the permanent process of acculturation, ethnic cohesiveness remains distinct among Albanian-American immigrants for many reasons, of first priority being the renewal of strong links with the old country since 1990.

All these new important phenomena not only provide great opportunities for the advancement of American Studies, but also call for a coordination of such studies on both sides, in Albania and in America. It is time to found a Center for American Studies in Tirana, like those which exist in other European countries. But the creation of a Center for Albanian-American Studies at some American University (probably in New York, Detroit, Hartford or elsewhere) would also be of great importance.

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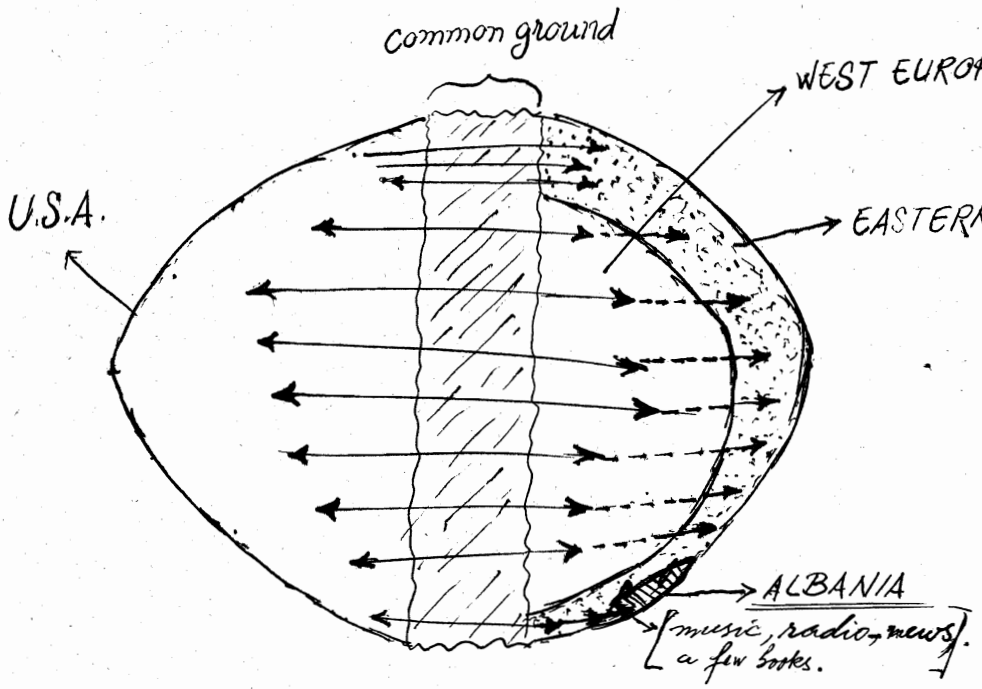
INTERCHANGE OF CULTURES: EUROPE-AMERICA

(1945-1990)



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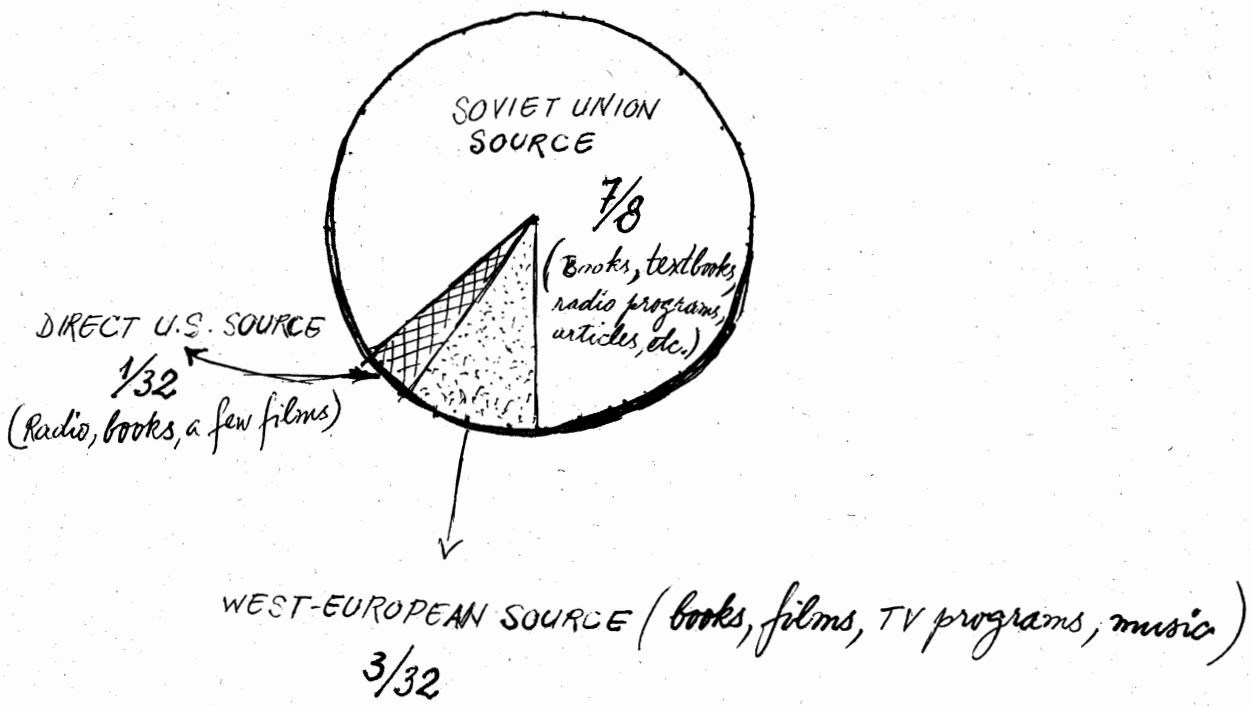
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