

Violence and State-Building After the Great War: Italian, Yugoslav and Endemic Challenges to Albanian Projections

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This paper investigates the relation between violence and state-building in the aftermath of the Great War. In particular I analyse the way in which the experience of violence conditioned Albanians' positioning toward their national identity and their state-building endeavours. In analogy to many studies published on the topic of violence and state-building, the research shows that violence against Italians and Yugoslavs who threatened the integrity of Albanian territorial claims and Albanian individuals or groups who were considered a menace to the national cause, contributed to consolidate the feelings of national solidarity and to legitimate Albanian claims for self-determination. However, differently from most of current recent research, the analysis of the events displays that violence for state-building purposes had complex ethical and political implications which hindered the coherence of the Albanian national discourse and the state-building projections that it entailed. The employment of coercive means exposed Albanians' vulnerability to the violence of internal and external actors who instead exploited violence to delegitimise Albanian self-determination claims. State-building violence created dissonance between Albanian political circles, generated contestation against the authority of the government and led political actors to question the overall value and function of their nation-state-building endeavours.

Keywords: Albania, Yugoslavia, Italy, Kosovo, Violence

Parole chiave: Albania, Jugoslavia, Italia, Kosovo, Violenza

Introduction

This paper investigates the relation between violence and state-building. By the term “violence” I mean the use of coercive force and the means to make it effective. The Albanian case is interesting for the purpose of this study inasmuch as state-building efforts were carried out during a period of high political instability in which several actors strove to affirm their authority. Current literature on state-building considers the deployment of coercive means as a major tool for the formation of nation-states. I will engage with this assumption in order to challenge its potentials and limits. In particular I will investigate how Albanian actors positioned themselves toward the violence that characterised the early phases of Albanian state-building and how such violence conditioned their perception and allegiance to their reciprocal nation-state-building projections.

The research focuses on the period between 1920 and 1922. During this relatively short stretch of time, the political and territorial structure of the Albanian state emerged after several tensions that opposed Albanians against each other and against their neighbours. The autonomy of the Albanian state had been sanctioned

by the declaration of independence on November 28, 1912, and by the decision of the Conference of the Ambassadors in July 1913. However, the outbreak of World War I led to the signature of the London Pact in April 1915, which prearranged the partition of the Southern and Northern Albanian territories between Italy, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro¹. At the end of the Great War, the Albanian territories – as mapped out in 1913 – were almost entirely placed under foreign military control². This research will investigate the way in which violence enhanced and burdened the achievement of Albanian state-building goals according to the perspective of Albanian actors.

In the next section I will review some of the literature that has investigated the relation between violence and state-building in the post-World War I Balkans. I will then expose the theoretical and methodological approaches that I deploy to address the topic of this investigation. The second section is dedicated to the analysis of the positioning of Albanians toward the Italian-Albanian conflict in Vlora in 1920. In the third section I investigate the effects that the Albanian-Yugoslav conflicts generated in Albanian state-building projections. The fourth part of this paper is focused on the analysis of the use of coercive force deployed by state agents to consolidate the power of the government.

Rethinking Violence in the Post-World War I Albanian State-Building Context

Violence is relevant to the process of state-building because it is used by national agents to form a state or – and more frequently – by state agents to form a nation³. Modernist and postcolonial critique considered the advent of modern states, and in particular of nation-states, as a cataclysm for humanity⁴. Research on the post-World War I period has pointed out that state-building in the Balkans exposed local communities to all kinds of persecutions when they did not fit the type of society that was devised by the state-building elites⁵.

Unlike postcolonial studies, classic political thinking considers modern states as organizations that use coercive means parsimoniously rather than indiscriminately⁶.

¹ O. Pearson, *Albania and King Zog: Independence, Republic and Monarchy 1908-1939*, v. 1, Centre for Albanian studies, London 2004.

² A. Puto, *Historia Diplomatike e Çështjes Shqiptare*, Albin, Tiranë 2003.

³ E. Hobsbawm, *Nationalism Since 1789: Program, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990; E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1983.

⁴ J.C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, Nus Press, Singapore 2010.

⁵ P. Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe*, Berghahn Books, New York 2014; R. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, pp. 154-155; I. Blumi, *Ottoman Refugees 1878-1939. Migration in a Post-Imperial World*, Bloomsbury, London 2013, p. 149.

⁶ K.W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*, The MIT press, Cambridge, MA-London 1966, pp. 72-83.

In analogy to the modernist theories, authors leaning toward the “realist” tradition acknowledge that state-building is based on the use of coercive force and on the mystification of the legitimacy discourse. However, in compliance to Hobbesian thought, scholars have stressed that the advent of modern states led to the concentration of the means of violence which increased personal safety and engendered civic rights⁷. According to this perspective, coercive means in post-World War I Balkans were only deployed when the governments could not obtain the loyalty of the populations that they aimed to control⁸. Recent studies have portrayed the Albanian post-World War I state-building process following the pattern of the “civilizing process” since it aimed to establish a Western-type democracy and enhance the stability of the region⁹.

According to the research that I here considered, coercive policies – whether they constituted a normal or an exceptional practice of governance – appear as a fundamental tool of state-building. Violence seems to be a way that state agents used to obtain power and legitimacy vis-à-vis their competitors. In the context of post-Great War Albania, these competitors were the neighbouring states, the Great Powers, and “internal” actors such as local leaders and communities, and rival political circles that refused to recognise the authority of the government. These assumptions are mirrored in Balkan national historiographies which have emphasized the paligenetic function of violence¹⁰.

Most of the studies here considered, envision the relation between violence and state-building according to a dialectical structure constituted by the state and the other entities that challenge its authority. However, in post-Great War Albania, like in other European regions, there were no political constituencies similar to the Weberian ideal type of state¹¹. In the early 1920s, the Albanian government had little capacity for coercive action which was, in many cases, carried out by local and voluntary troops loosely connected to the central authority. It is therefore difficult to determine which coercive policies were enacted by state agents and which ones were not, given that the state’s sovereignty in many areas was contended and/or not recognized.

Moreover, in analogy with most political entities involved in post-World War I state-building endeavours, Albanians did not have clearly defined state-building

⁷ C. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and the European States, A.D. 990-1992*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1992; D.D. Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007; A. Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence*, Polity, Cambridge 1985.

⁸ H. Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees and Minorities*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2013.

⁹ R.C. Austin, *Founding a Balkan State: Albania’s Experiment with Democracy, 1920-1925*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2012; N. Guy, *The Birth of Albania: Ethnic Nationalism, the Great Powers of World War I and the Emergence of Albanian Independence*, I.B. Tauris in association with The Centre for Albanian Studies, London-New York 2012.

¹⁰ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar Vëllimi i Tretë (28 Nëntor 1912-7 Prill 1939)*, red. K. Priifti, G. Shpuza, Toena, Tiranë 2007; B. Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije 1918-1978*, Nolit, Beograd 1980.

¹¹ M. Weber, *Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, pp. 310-311

strategies. Many Albanian diplomats, politicians, journalists and local leaders shared the desire to form an autonomous Albanian entity, but they had different opinions concerning the territorial and political configuration of the state¹². Instead of thinking of the Albanian state-building agenda as a set of “programs” or “projects”, I propose to look at it as a set of “projections” which were constantly re-drawn according to personal feelings and contingent events.

Albanian state-building agents possessed very limited coercive power, yet they were engrained in a highly conflictual situation where violence was inflicted and endured by several actors contemporarily. In the context of Albanian state-building, violence was not merely an implement¹³, or a ready-to-hand tool that actors strategically and directly deployed in order to achieve their state-building goals¹⁴. Violence was rather a “present-at-hand” tool that actors “exploited” in order to legitimate their state-building projections.

According to Michael Staudigl, individuals experience violence on account of the vulnerability of their own and other people’s bodies. The sense of vulnerability is not limited to one’s body, but it is structured in the body’s inter-subjective and symbolical articulations which can take the form of a collective “political body”¹⁵. Staudigl points out that Western philosophy has placed violence at the core of the constitution of the modern subject, which like in Hegel’s master-slave relations, must affirm her/his freedom by subjugating the “other”¹⁶. In compliance with 19th century national discourses, the Albanian claims to form a state in the post-World War I period were founded on the idea of an Albanian collective subject that had the right to govern itself autonomously.

This research explores the way in which Albanians’ experience of violence affected the affirmation of their collective subjectivity and how the latter de/legitimated their reciprocal state-building projections. I argue that the political and ethical implications of coercive force – i.e. the abuse of one’s own body and of other people’s bodies and their symbolical articulations – produced contradictory effects on Albanian state-building. On the one hand, violence – whether inflicted or suffered – consolidated the Albanian subjectivity and appeared as a necessary tool to obtain legitimacy vis-à-vis the neighbouring states, the Great Powers and internal challenges. On the other hand, the use of coercive means laid bare the vulnerability of the collective subject toward the violence of the “others” which could exploit violence to delegitimize the Albanian state-building projections.

The next two sections of this paper show the manifold effects produced by the use of coercive force against non-Albanian “others” on the Albanian sense of belonging to a collective subject and the state-building projections that it entailed. The third and last section deals with the way in which coercive force shaped Albanians’

¹² J.N. Tallon, *Albania’s Long World War I (1912-1915)*, in «Studia Historyczne», n. 4, 2014, pp. 437-454.

¹³ H. Arendt, *On Violence*, Harvest Books, New York 1970.

¹⁴ S.N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006.

¹⁵ M. Staudigl, *Towards a Relational Phenomenology of Violence*, in «Human Studies», n. 1, 2013, pp. 43-66.

¹⁶ *Phenomenologies of Violence*, ed. M. Staudigl, Brill, Leiden 2014, pp. 22-23

positioning toward their common state-building endeavours. In view of outlining a detailed picture of how actors positioned themselves toward violence, I carried out this research on newspapers, epistolary communications and institutional documents. The combined use of these sources represents an optimal tool to investigate the topic and to appreciate the diverse political thought of post-World War I Albanian society. With the term “actors”, I refer to the various singular or collective entities that have produced the primary sources that I use. I also refer to these actors by more specific terms that describe peculiar spheres of interaction such as political circles, political activists, journalists, diplomats, local leaders and so on. I have discretionally used the terms since they are in many cases interchangeable and individuals could be ascribed to one or more of these categories simultaneously.

Albanian Reactions to the Italian Evacuation of Vlorë in 1920

Between October and December 1914, Italian troops occupied Sazan Island, the city of Vlorë and its outskirts¹⁷. In April 1915, Italy signed the London secret Pact which granted her full sovereignty on the above-mentioned localities and the right to represent the Albanian state when dealing with the Great Powers¹⁸. The content of the agreement leaked long before being published by Lenin after the October Revolution¹⁹. Despite Italy's official promise to support the integrity of Albania²⁰, since the beginning of the Great War, an increasing number of Albanian activists maintained a diffident attitude towards Rome. Others believed that Italy represented a necessary support against Slavs and Greeks²¹. Some of the latter shared the idea that Albanians could not self-govern autonomously²², and they agreed that Italy would have a mandate to assist the early phase of state-building if she respected the state's sovereignty²³. On December 25, 1918, an Albanian government was formed in Durrës with Turhan Pasha Përmeti as Prime Minister, who accepted to be represented by Italy at the Paris Peace Conference²⁴. On February 12, 1920, Turhan Pasha spoke

¹⁷ M. Borgogni, *Tra continuità e incertezza. La strategia politico-militare dell'Italia in Albania fino all'Operazione «Oltre Mare Tirana»*, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2007, p. 21.

¹⁸ *Agreement Between France, Russia, Great Britain and Italy Signed in London, April 26, 1915*, Printed and Published by His Majesty's Stationary Office, London 1920.

¹⁹ M. Çami, *Lëvizja Kombëtare Shqiptare dhe Politika Italiane në Mbarim të Luftes së Parë Botërore*, in «Studime Historike», n. 3, 1967, pp. 87-98

²⁰ M. Montanari, *Le truppe italiane in Albania 1914-1920 e 1939*, Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Roma 1978, p. 110

²¹ F. Bego, *La fine della grande guerra nelle riflessioni degli albanesi: Il conflitto, i vicini, lo Stato e l'avvenire*, in *Il Sud-Est Europeo e l'Adriatico. Studi Italiani. Contributi al XII congresso Internazionale dell'Association International d'Etudes du Sud-Est European (Bucarest, 2-7 settembre 2019)*, a c. di F. Guida, Aracne, Canterano 2019, pp. 119-138.

²² P. Milo, *Politika e Jashtme e Shqipërisë Vëllim I (1912-1939)*, Toena, Tiranë 2013, p. 395.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

²⁴ M. Çami, *Kongresi i Durrësit dhe Formimi i Qeverisë së Përkoheshme (dhjetor 1918)*, in «Studime Historike», n. 2, 1965, pp. 20-30.

at the Conference and claimed the recognition of the 1913 borders and the annexation of the Albanian territories that had been taken by Serbia, Greece and Montenegro after the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 and the Balkan Wars²⁵.

The hope that Albanian claims would be supported by Italy was dashed by the adamant requests of the Italian delegation for the application of the London Pact. The Great Powers agreed on the concession of a mandate to Italy and the repartition of the 1913 Albanian territories between Italy, Greece and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (henceforth Yugoslavia)²⁶. Albanian political circles reacted to the events and rallied in Lushnje in January 1920²⁷. The Congress of Lushnje adopted a Statute which laid down the legal framework of the state²⁸, formed a new government, instituted a High Regency Council which covered the temporary position of the Head of State and which in turn elected a National Council. Tirana was made the capital of Albania²⁹.

The Congress of Lushnje accused the Great Powers, and indirectly Italy, for sentencing Albania to death in order to satisfy the «but impérialistes des gouvernements voisins»³⁰. In the beginning of June 1920, Albanian voluntary troops attacked Italian strongholds in the South³¹. Although the conflict was mainly caused by contingent factors rather than the diplomatic negotiations in Paris³², activists presented the Italian-Albanian clash as a collective sacrifice that determined not only the possession of the city of Vlorë, but also the overall national freedom³³.

To some Albanians, the use of coercive force appeared as the only way to reinstate the freedom of their collective subject. Political activist and founder of the Union and Progress Committee, Ibrahim Temo asserted that the events in Vlorë proved that «paradise is found beneath the sword» and that the positive outcome of the attack gave Albanians the possibility to find an advantageous agreement with the *makarunarët* (the pasta eaters/makers)³⁴. The Tirana newspaper «Zani i Ri» («The new voice»), claimed that the attack of the Vlorë people was justified because Ital-

²⁵ *Shqipëria përballë Konferencën së Paqes 1919: dokumenta zyrtare të paraqitura nga ana e Dërgatës shqiptare, qysh prej 12 shkurtit - 5 qershor 1919, e të botuara nga ana e Qeverisë së Përkohshme*, red. T. Përmeti, X. Lleshi, Uegen, Tiranë 2007, p. 18.

²⁶ I.J. Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference: A Study in Frontiermaking*, Yale University Press, New Haven, London 1963, p. 263.

²⁷ J. Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, University of Washington Press, Seattle 1974, p. 358

²⁸ G. Hysi, *Organizimi i Shtetit Shqiptar Sipas Vendimeve të Kongresit të Lushnjes*, in «Studime Historike», n. 2, 1971, pp. 3-19.

²⁹ A. Puto, *Shqipëria Politike 1912-1939*, Toena, Tiranë 2009, p. 256.

³⁰ A. Giannini, *L'Albania dall'Indipendenza all'unione con l'Italia*, Istituto Per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, Milano 1940, p. 236.

³¹ M. Montanari, *Le truppe italiane in Albania*, cit., pp. 211-230.

³² P. Alatri, *Nitti, D'Annunzio e la questione adriatica*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1976, pp. 475-476.

³³ F. Bego, *The Vlora Conflict from a Trans-Adriatic Perspective: History, Myth and Ideology*, in *Myths and Mythical Spaces: Conditions and Challenges for History Textbooks in Albania and South-Eastern Europe*, eds. C. Lichnofsky, E. Pandejmoni, D. Stojanov, V&R, Göttingen 2017, pp. 97-131.

³⁴ Arkivi Qëndror i Shtetit (Aqsh), fondi (f.) 35, dosja (d.) 35/2, 1920, pp. 569-571, letter from Ibrahim Temo to Mithat Frashëri, Bucharest, 10-7-1920.

ians treated them «worse than the black savages of Africa»³⁵. The experience of suffering was exploited to determine an affective connection between Albanians from different regions who had to feel the pain of the people of Vlorë and provide any help they could³⁶. Albanians' ability to suffer was a token of their collective subject in the world, and thereby a claim to self-determination rights. Italians were allegedly killing women and children and the civilized world needed to know about the heroism of the Vlorë population for their blood not to be spilled in vain³⁷.

The conflict officially ended on August 2, 1920, with an agreement signed in Tirana by Sulejman Delvina and Italian representative Gaetano Manzoni. The document recognized the Albanian sovereignty on Vlorë and authorized Italian troops to provisionally occupy Sazan³⁸. The *Lufta e Vlorës* (the War of Vlorë), as it was called by the press, turned into a major founding myth of the Albanian national discourse³⁹. Events contributed to increase Albanians' belief that coercive means were useful to reinforce the autonomy of their subject and the legitimacy of the state-building projections that it entailed. «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», a newspaper published in Vlorë, demanded that all Italian troops leave Albania, and that Italy should no longer carry out postal and telegraphic services for them⁴⁰. The newspaper stated that Albanians would not allow their neighbours to become rich on their back since Albanians were «in Europe and not in [Italy's] colonies»⁴¹. Italians were depicted as colonizers and became scapegoats for the internal turmoil that characterized the country⁴². An Italian was denounced because he refused to give an Albanian worker his wage and had allegedly told him «trattar bene voi [the Albanians] è come trattar bene i cani»⁴³. Incidents involved Albanians and Italians who lived in Vlorë⁴⁴.

Despite the apparently positive outcome of the conflict, some political activists believed that violence against Italians did not consolidate Albanian autonomy but made it more vulnerable. The newspaper «Besa Shqiptare» published in Shkodër by catholic priest and writer Dom Ndoc Nikaj, delegitimized the attack on the Italians in Vlorë and defined attackers as «bandits» («cuba»). The editor reminded his readers that Albanians were not strong enough to take over the world⁴⁵.

³⁵ «Zani i Ri», 2 August 1920, p. 1.

³⁶ S. Papuli, *Gazeta Drita E Gjirokastrës - Organ Demokratik Përparimtar në Vitet 1920-1924*, in «Studime Historike», n. 1, 1974, p. 55.

³⁷ Aqsh, f. 594, d. 2, 1920, pp. 27-28, letter from Tiranë, 16-6-1920.

³⁸ P. Pastorelli, *L'Albania nella politica estera italiana 1914-1920*, Jovene, Napoli 1970, pp. 371-376.

³⁹ H. Verteniku, *Jehona e Luftës së Armatosur të Vlorës në Lëvizjen Demokratike dhe Revolucionare në Shqipëri në Vitet 1921-1924*, in «Studime Historike», n. 4, 1970, pp. 69-75.

⁴⁰ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 22 January 1922, p. 1; Italy signed a convention with Albania for providing postal and telegraphic services on December 4, 1922: V. Toçi, *Konçesionet e Punimeve Botore e të Transportit në Shqipëri në Vitet 1920-1924 dhe Karakteri i Tyre Imperialist*, in «Studime Historike», n. 4, 1970, p. 62.

⁴¹ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 23 May 1921, p. 2.

⁴² «Drita», 12 March 1922, p. 2; «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 14 January 1922, p. 1.

⁴³ «Besa Shqiptare», 17 March, 1921, p. 3

⁴⁴ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, p. 247, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 12-12-1920.

⁴⁵ «Besa Shqiptare», 17 June 1920, p. 1.

The Tirana government feared that the attack on Vlorë could push Rome to make a large-scale invasion of Albania. Political circles in Tirana maintained an ambiguous attitude toward the attack⁴⁶. Prime Minister Sulejman Delvina acted as a neutral intermediary between the attackers – who wanted to annex the city to Albania – and the Italian representative⁴⁷. Apparently, the Southern Albanian voluntary troops did not trust the government because they feared that it could make excessive concessions to Italy⁴⁸. Albanian historiography claims that the final decisions in the negotiations did not depend on Tirana but on the Committee of Drashkovica which was the local political organization of the voluntary troops⁴⁹.

The retreat of the Italian army from Vlorë also generated anxiety about the impact of such an event on the regional position of the state. The director of the newspaper «Kuvëndi» (published in Rome), Sotir Gjika, disapproved the pompous ceremony organized by the Albanian forces to enter Vlorë because it could displease the Italians⁵⁰. Gjika believed that Albania's economy could profit from the Italian financial investments that had been discussed between Rome and the Durrës government⁵¹. He thought that Albanians needed Italians' help in their controversy against Serbs, and considered the idea that Italy wanted to colonize Albania as a «prejudice»⁵². After the withdrawal of the Italian troops from Vlorë, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – the Consulta⁵³ – initially suspended⁵⁴ and then permanently revoked the financial assistance and the permission that was formerly granted to the publication of «Kuvëndi»⁵⁵. Gjika was displeased by what he saw as Italian «incoherence», but he also blamed the Albanian government that was not fulfilling the obligations of the Tirana agreement⁵⁶.

In the spring of 1920, an Albanian delegation was about to go to Rome to discuss the details of Italian-Albanian relations that were not included in the agreement of August. Gjika was worried that «certain [Albanian] patriots of the Far-Left», who were driven by «chauvinist blindness» and who could become part of this delegation would spoil Albanian-Italian relations⁵⁷. The above-mentioned delegation included Spiro Koleka and the prefect of Vlorë Qazim Koculi who had been actively

⁴⁶ A. Agaj, *Lufta e Vlorës*, Harmony, Toronto 1971.

⁴⁷ M. Çami, *Lëvizja Kombëtare Shqiptare dhe Politika Italiane në Mbarim të Luftes së Parë Botërore*, in «Studime Historike», n. 3, 1967, p. 96.

⁴⁸ G.I. Abazi, *Përgatitja dhe Zhvillimi i Luftës së Vlorës me 1920 (Kujtime)*, in «Studime Historike», n. 2, 1970, p. 135.

⁴⁹ P. Dhimitri, *Lufta për Apsjesimin e Ushtrisë Italiane të Rrethuar në Qytetin e Vlorës dhe për Çlirimin e Qytetit*, in «Studime Historike», n. 3, 1979, p. 108.

⁵⁰ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, p. 205, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 8-9-1920.

⁵¹ V. Toçi, *Projektet dhe Orvatjet Imperialiste per Zoterimin e Tregut Shqiptar të Monedhës e të kreditit dhe Lufta Kunder Tyre (1920-1924)*, in «Studime Historike», n. 2, 1968, p. 158.

⁵² Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 206-209, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 15-9-1920.

⁵³ It was so called because of the name of the building that hosted the institution at that time.

⁵⁴ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 196-202, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 27-8-1920.

⁵⁵ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 210-211, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 2-10-1920.

⁵⁶ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 216-219, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 11-10-1920.

⁵⁷ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 212-215, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 7-10-1920.

engaged in the conflict with Italians. In analogy to Gjika, the member of the High Regency Council Monsignor Bumçi, thought that Albanians had little chances to make a convenient deal because of their presence⁵⁸. Bumçi's and Gjika's predictions came true. The chief of the Consulta Carlo Sforza gave Albanians a note that the Italian High Commissioner in Albania Fortunato Castoldi commented as «acre» and «violentemente offensiv[a]»⁵⁹.

The deterioration of Albanian-Italian relations led political activists to believe that Albanians' international position had become weaker since they were left without any foreign support. These fears grew after the signature of the Rapallo Treaty which did not consider the Albanian question⁶⁰. Diplomat and law student in Rome Dhimiter Beratti (or Berati) thought that the Italian-Yugoslav agreement contained clauses that would harm the border question⁶¹. Others suspected that Albanians' position toward Belgrade would become weaker because their border issue was most probably going to be treated by the Conference of the Ambassadors⁶².

Albanians became increasingly diffident toward the Italian government because it did not support their plain admission at the League of Nations⁶³. Nonetheless, on December 18, 1920, Albania was admitted at the League of Nations after the endorsement of the British Empire which was probably allured by the prospect of obtaining concessions for the exploitation of Albanian oil⁶⁴. The intervention of British diplomacy in favour of Albania, produced the impression that Albanian state-building endeavours had found the support of a strong actor which, unlike Italy, was not burdened by «narrow-minded politics»⁶⁵. According to Gjika the Consulta was «biting her own lips» for letting the British take the initiative of admitting Albania at the League of Nations⁶⁶. However, London did not become a reliable friend. After the admission into the League of Nations, the Albanian government was not recognized by the Great Powers, nor by the neighbouring states⁶⁷. The Albanian government was thus once again forced to rely on Italy in order to consolidate its regional position⁶⁸.

The evacuation of the Italian troops from Vlorë in September 1920, showed that violence reinforced the sense of belonging to an autonomous collective subject which in turn legitimised Albanians' state-building projections. Being able to

⁵⁸ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, p. 127, letter from Luigj Bumçi to Gurakuqi, Tiranë, 3-11-1920.

⁵⁹ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, p. 228, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Trieste, 18-11-1920.

⁶⁰ I.J. Lederer, *Yugoslavia at the Paris Peace Conference*, cit., p. 305.

⁶¹ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 115-116, letter from Beratti to Gurakuqi, Rome, 29-12-1920.

⁶² Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, p. 105, letter from Dhimitër Beratti to Gurakuqi, Rome, 15-11-1920.

⁶³ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, p. 232, letter from Sotir Gjika to Luigj Gurakuqi, Rome, 4-12-1912.

⁶⁴ P. Milo, *Politika e Jashtme*, cit., pp. 512-514.

⁶⁵ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, p. 244, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 25-12-1920.

⁶⁶ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, p. 240-243, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 23-12-1920.

⁶⁷ A. Puto, *Problemi i Statusit te Shqipërisë në Lidhjen e Kombeve dhe në Konferencen e Ambasadoreve në Vitet 1920-1921*, in «Studime Historike», n. 3, 1965, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Aqsh, f. 263, d. 3, 1921, p. 17, note by the Italian representative in Albania to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, 4-5-1921.

fight and suffer proved to the world that Albanians existed and that they deserved self-determination rights. However, the violence had generated tensions between Albanian political circles. Moreover, the lack of a “patron” state exposed Albania’s vulnerability to the violence of the other states. Ironically, the Italy’s departure from Vlorë contributed to the growth of the Fascist movement which promoted an expansionist policy in the Mediterranean. When the Fascists came into power, the newspaper «Drita», published in Gjirokastër by Veli Hashorva, remarked that Albanians needed to keep an eye on their neighbour, hoping that the Italian government would take the course of a friendly policy in defence of Albania⁶⁹. Albanians’ concerns toward Italy were, in part, appeased by an interview of Mussolini, who asserted that he wanted to preserve the stability of the country and that he wished to make bilateral agreements in order to bring Italian investments in Albania. «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», after warning against Italy’s attempts to colonise Albania, now imagined a bright future of win-win relations and expressed admiration for Mussolini⁷⁰. It was – obviously – a self-induced illusion that the editors would quickly have to reconsider⁷¹.

The Impact of the Albanian-Yugoslav conflicts on the Albanian state-building projections

At the end of the Great War, the Serbian troops occupied a wide strip of the Albanian territory along the frontier line that separated Albania from Serbia and Montenegro. Since December 1, 1918, Serbia and Montenegro merged into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The Albanian borderland territory occupied by Belgrade forces was known as the “demarcation zone”⁷².

Despite the Serbian-Albanian conflict in Kosovo and the Yugoslav occupation of Albanian territories, Albanian political circles had different attitudes toward their Balkan neighbour. At the Paris Peace Conference, the Yugoslav delegation declared that it could recognize the integrity of Albania’s 1913 borders, with few, relatively minor modifications, if Italian troops left the country⁷³. The Yugoslav stand against Italy’s expansionism in the Adriatic area, led some Albanians to believe that a co-operation with Belgrade was a viable alternative to Italian threats. The Paris representative of the Albanian organization in the United States Partia Politike, asserted that «not only to Yugoslavia, but even if the bottom of hell extended a hand to us we would take it, but not the Italian [hand]»⁷⁴. Serbia’s main Albanian ally was

⁶⁹ «Drita», 15 May 1922, p. 2.

⁷⁰ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 22 November 1922, p. 1.

⁷¹ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 15 February 1923, p. 2.

⁷² P. Milo, *Dështimi i Përprjekjeve për Pushtim e Viseve Verilindore të Shqipërisë Nga Forcat Jugosllave (1918-1921)*, in «Studime historike», n. 2, 1988, p. 101.

⁷³ Id., *Pretendimet dhe Synimet e Mbretërisë Serbo-Kroato-Sllavene Ndaj Shqipërisë në Konferencën e Paqes në Paris (1919-1920)*, in «Studime historike», n. 4, 1987, pp. 121-138.

⁷⁴ Aqsh, f. 30, d. 16, 1920, p. 47, letter from Nikolla Ivanaj to Kristo Dako, Paris, 1920. Underlined in the original.

former Albanian Prime Minister Essad Pasha Toptani with whom Nikola Pašić had signed an agreement for customs and defence union in September 1914⁷⁵. After the Great War, Essad Toptani moved to Paris and was marginalised from internal politics⁷⁶. Since the end of 1918, Yugoslavs organized an Albanian military contingent led by Toptani's followers to police the "demarcation zone". Many "essadists" remained under Belgrade's payroll after the murder of their leader on June 13, 1920⁷⁷. Belgrade also attracted the sympathies of local Albanian leaders when conflicts emerged between the latter and the Tirana government⁷⁸.

Despite the formal declarations in favour of Albanian sovereignty, in the beginning of 1920, Belgrade refused to leave the demarcation zone and advanced its army to the proximities of Shkodër⁷⁹. Following the tense situation in the borderlands, at the end of July and the middle of August 1920, Albanian forces attacked the Yugoslav army respectively in the Northern areas of Shkodër and in Dibër⁸⁰. Both conflicts were carried out by Albanian voluntary troops with the support of the local gendarmerie and were not devised by Tirana⁸¹.

In analogy to the Vlorë conflict, Albanian political circles perceived events in contradictory ways. On the one hand violence served to fuel the narrative on the strength of the Albanian collective subject and to legitimize the state-building projections that it entailed. On the other hand, the use of coercive means revealed the weakness of the Albanian military and organizational capacities vis-à-vis their neighbours and led Albanians to thoroughly redraw their state-building projections.

The press portrayed the fighting against the Yugoslavs as a heroic war that showed Albanians' determination to preserve the autonomy and the integrity of their territories⁸². The delegation in Paris asserted that the attacks were provoked by the violence of Belgrade authorities on the Albanian borderland territories that they refused to abandon⁸³.

However, the difficulties that Albanians encountered in facing Yugoslav forces and the fact that the deployment of coercive means against them had not initially been coordinated by the government, led some observers to criticize the attackers.

⁷⁵ P. Milo, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1918-1927*, Shtëpia Botuese Enciklopedike, Tiranë 1992, pp. 5-48.

⁷⁶ He did present his claims to the Peace Conference. See P. Milo, *Politika e Jashtme*, cit., pp. 403-404.

⁷⁷ H. Purellku, *Zona e Pushtimit Jugosllav në Shqipëri (1918-1921)*, Botime Albanologjike, Tiranë 2012, pp. 107-112.

⁷⁸ D. Borozan, *Velika Albanija: Porijeklo, Ideje, Praksa*, Vojnoistorijski Institut Vojske Jugoslavije, Beograd 1995, p. 87.

⁷⁹ X. Shala, *Kongresi i Lushnjës the Mbretëria Sërbo-Kroato-Slllovene*, in «Gjurmime Albanologjike», n. 9, 1979, p. 172.

⁸⁰ P. Milo, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1918-1927*, cit., pp. 59-60.

⁸¹ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 66, 1920, p. 9, letter from vice-prefect Sylço beg Bushati to Ahmet Zogolli, Shkodër, 25-7-1920; f. 14, d. 114, 1921, p. 14, note by Mihal Turtulli to Fan Noli, Tirana, 2-2-1921; M. Çami, *Lufta e popullit shqiptar për çlirim kombëtar, 1918-1929: përmbledhje dokumentash*, Akademia e Shkencave e RPSH, Instituti i Historisë, Tiranë 1976, p. 394.

⁸² «Zani i Ri», 19 August 1920, p. 1-2; 2 September 1920, p. 2; 21 September 1920, p. 1.

⁸³ Aqsh, f. 151, d. 42, 1920, p. 1, note «a sujet te l'invasion des trupes Serbes en Albanie», Paris, 14-8-1920.

Few days after the fighting in the Northern borderland of Shkodër had broken out, the editors of «Zani i Ri» stated that the local communities (*malësore*) who had carried out the attack had been ill-advised. Their actions harmed the government because what had happened showed that it had no control on its subjects⁸⁴. «Mbrojtja Kombëtare» argued that the conflict against Yugoslavs exposed Albanians to an unnecessary danger⁸⁵. According to the member of the High Regency Council Mihal Turtulli the attack was triggered by Albanians' "inebriation" for the military success in Vlorë which led the Geg (Northern Albanians), perhaps pushed by foreign propaganda, to emulate Tosks (Southern Albanians)⁸⁶.

In order to mitigate the conflict with the neighbours, the Albanian government presented official apologies to Belgrade for «the hostile acts against the Yugoslav state occurred in the frontier zone between Hoti and Gruda»⁸⁷. Tirana tried to improve relations with Belgrade by sending a delegation to Shkodër to discuss with the Yugoslav representative. According to Mihal Turtulli, a member of the delegation, Yugoslavs were disposed to leave the Albanian 1913 territories that they were occupying. However, the negotiations were spoiled by the Foreign Minister Mehmet Konica who had been influenced by Castoldi. The idea that the state's political agenda was manipulated by Italians delegitimised the Albanian government which seemed not to be able to act autonomously. In order to prevent further harm to Albania's image, Turtulli told Mit'hat Frashëri to convince the Great Powers that Albanians would follow a Balkan policy and would never turn into a tool that "foreigners" could use against Yugoslav interests⁸⁸.

The Albanian-Yugoslav armed confrontations slowly faded in September. After the initial Albanian successes, the Yugoslav army regained control of the "demarcation zone" and threatened to march on Tirana⁸⁹. These events had disastrous consequences for Albanians, especially in Dibra, where Belgrade's army enacted a ruthless retaliation against the local population which was forced to migrate⁹⁰. Beside its immediate impact, the conflict also produced major long-term shifts in the way in which Albanians envisioned their state-building projections. After the Great War, the annexation of Kosovo and of the other "Albanian" areas constituted a basic policy of the state-building agenda. In late 1918, the Committee for the National Defence of Kosovo (Komiteti Mbrojtja Kombëtare e Kosoves, henceforth Kosovo Committee) was founded in Shkodër. The Kosovo Committee was principally composed of Kosovo immigrants but it also included activists from other regions⁹¹. The

⁸⁴ «Zani i Ri», 2 August 1920, p. 2.

⁸⁵ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 11 November 1920, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Aqsh, f. 35, d. 36/4, pp. 913-914, letter sent from Mihal Turtulli to Mit'hat Frashëri, probably in the beginning of September 1920.

⁸⁷ Aqsh, f. 251, d. 41, 1920, p. unreadable, letter by Mehmet Konica to Millerand, no date.

⁸⁸ Aqsh, f. 35, d. 36/4, pp. 913-914, letter from Mihal Turtulli to Mit'hat Frashëri, no place, no date.

⁸⁹ D. Borozan, *Velika Albanija*, cit., p. 87.

⁹⁰ Aqsh, f. 251, d. 41, 1920, p. 538, report of the Red Cross, 4-9-1920 and 14-9-1920; Aqsh, f. 35, d. 36/2, 1920, pp. 598-599, letter from Iliaz Vrioni to Mit'hat Frashëri, Tiranë, 30-12-1920.

⁹¹ S. Vllamasi, *Ballafaqime Politike në Shqipëri*, Gervis, Tiranë 2002.

president of the organization was Hoxha Kadri Prishtina who became Minister of Justice in the government elected in Lushnje⁹². The main goal of Kosovo-Albanian activists was to promote their national rights in Yugoslavia and annex territories populated by a majority of Albanian-speaking communities. Albanian historiography does not clearly point out whether the Kosovo Committee formally pursued its goals only through legal, diplomatic means⁹³, or also by violent actions⁹⁴. However, some of its members like Bajram Curri and Hasan Prishtina supported the organization of armed insurrections in Kosovo and Macedonia⁹⁵.

Albanian-Serb relations in Kosovo had worsened before the outbreak of the conflict in the Albanian-Yugoslav borderlands. After the reoccupation of Kosovo at the end of World War I, the Belgrade government undertook a policy of colonization in the region to counterbalance the demographic inferiority of Serbs⁹⁶. The colonization was part of an “agrarian reform”, that according to Albanian historiography, grabbed lands from (Muslim) Albanians and gave them to Serbian and Montenegrin settlers⁹⁷. Yugoslav authorities ignored the increasing Albanian demands for national political rights⁹⁸. Belgrade reluctantly signed the minority protection agreement after World War I, which however was not implemented for Albanians⁹⁹. In order to oppose Yugoslav authorities, Albanians in Kosovo formed insurgent groups known as *kaçak*. Some historians believe that the *kaçak* movement was the armed agency of the Kosovo Committee¹⁰⁰. In July 1920, the band of Azem Bejta and his wife (Shote Galica), killed many Serbs in a gunfight. Their action provoked the indiscriminate retaliation of Yugoslav authorities on Albanians. An Albanian delegation from Kosovo reported the violence to Belgrade authorities, but the Yugoslav Prime Minister declared that Albanians deserved it because they were not able to live in peace¹⁰¹.

Newspapers published in Albania exploited violence in Kosovo to stimulate a sense of national unity and solidarity. Articles contained graphic details about harmless women, men and children who were killed in the crudest of manners¹⁰². In May 1921, the Tirana government complained to London about the persecutions

⁹² D. Borozan, *Velika Albanija*, cit., pp. 84-85.

⁹³ G. Shpuza, *Pikëpamjet Politike e Shoqërore të Gazetës Populli (1919-1920)*, in «Studime Historike», n. 1, 1970, pp. 175-192.

⁹⁴ L. Culaj, *Programet, Rregullorja dhe Organizimi i Komitetit Mbrojtja Kombëtare e Kosovës*, in «Gjurmime Albanologjike», n. 25, 1925, pp.161-178.

⁹⁵ K. Prifti, Z. Shtylla, *Komiteti “Mbrojtja Kombëtare e Kosovës” dhe Veprimtaria e tij për Çlirimin dhe Unitetin Kombëtar*, in «Studime Historike», n. 4, 1988, pp. 137- 149.

⁹⁶ A. Hadri, *Pozita dhe Gjendja e Kosovës në Mbretërinë e Jugosllavisë (1918-1941)*, in «Studime Historike», n. 2, 1986, p. 81.

⁹⁷ M. Verli, *Pikëpamjet e Përfaqë suesve të Borgjezisë Serbe Rreth Reformës Agrare Kolonizuese në Trevat Shqiptare (1918-1941)*, in «Studime Historike», n. 3, 1989, pp. 65-76.

⁹⁸ N. Malcolm, *Kosovo. Dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, Bompiani, Milano 1999, pp. 304-305.

⁹⁹ D. Todorović, *Jugoslavija i Balkanske Deržave 1918-1923*, Narodna Knjiga Institut za Savremenu Istoriju, Beograd 1979, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰ N. Malcolm, *Kosovo*, cit., pp. 310-312; D. Borozan, *Velika Albanij*, cit., p. 76.

¹⁰¹ Aqsh, f. 35, d. 137, pp. 201-202, letter to Mit’hat Frashëri, 29-7-1920.

¹⁰² «Besa Shqyptare», 24 February 1921, p. 2.

inflicted upon Albanians. The British government did not believe that women and children had been killed because the source that had spread the information – a Bosnian newspaper – was considered unreliable. London justified the confinement of women and children because they had been taken from the families of alleged bandits and *komitadji*¹⁰³.

The news about violence in Kosovo led Albanians to sympathise with their compatriots but also pushed them to believe that the deployment of coercive means against Yugoslavs produced detrimental effects on the Albanians living on both sides of the borders. The newspaper «Koha», directed by Mihal Grameno in Korçë, pleaded for peace and affirmed that Kosovo was «a bridge» where bonds of friendship between Serbs and Albanians had to be tied¹⁰⁴. Dhimiter Beratti saw irredentism as a lost cause which was carried out by delusional persons who believed that Serbia was a «sheepfold without dogs»¹⁰⁵. The use of violence by Kosovo-Albanians was perceived as a negative factor for the consolidation of the legitimacy of the Albanian state because it contributed to portray Albanians as a troublesome people that destabilized the region. «Mbrojtja Kombëtare» invited Kosovars not to compromise efforts made by the Albanian government to achieve the recognition of their 1913 frontiers, because circumstances showed that it would have been impossible to go farther¹⁰⁶. The contacts that the Kosovo Committee had established with Italians and with D'Annunzio in particular¹⁰⁷, contributed to create resentments between political circles. The suspect that the Albanian national question in Kosovo relied on Italian support damaged the image of the Albanian subject. The latter appeared not to be acting autonomously and therefore it delegitimized Albanian state-building projections. «Mbrojtja Kombëtare» held Kadri Prishtina directly responsible for the extermination of Albanians in Kosovo because, according to the editors, the Kosovo Committee provoked Serbia by carrying out attacks against her¹⁰⁸.

The Tirana government was influenced by these views and was thinking of banishing Hasan Prishtina and Bajram Curri¹⁰⁹. The violence inflicted by Kosovo-Albanians on Yugoslav authorities made Albanian state-building projections vulnerable to the military and diplomatic superiority of their neighbours who exploited such violence in order to justify repressive measures in Kosovo and to delegitimise the Albanian state-building projections by accusing Tirana of supporting Kosovo-Albanian violence. In order to consolidate their position, the political circles of Tirana needed to dissociate themselves from Kosovo-Albanian violence and give up their irredentist claims¹¹⁰. In January 1921, Mihal Turtulli thought that the Kosovars should have been the ones to demand the annexation of Kosovo territories to

¹⁰³ Aqsh, f. 35, d. 36/4, 1921, pp. 797-798, letter from Mehmet Konica to Mit'hat Frashëri, London, 7-4-1921.

¹⁰⁴ «Koha», 14 April 1922, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, p. unreadable, letter from Beratti to Gurakuqi. Rome, 10-9-1920.

¹⁰⁶ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 21 October 1921, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 206-209, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi, Rome, 15-9-1920.

¹⁰⁸ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 31 January 1922, p. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 212-215, letter from Gjika to Gurakuqi. Rome, 7-10-1920.

¹¹⁰ N.C. Guy, *The Birth of Albania*, cit., p. 232.

Albania, not the Albanian government¹¹¹. In compliance to this major political turn, the Kosovo Committee asked the League of Nations to approve the annexation of Gjakova and Hoti to Albania in exchange of other borderland territories¹¹².

On June 25, 1921, the League of Nations conferred to the Conference of the Ambassadors the task of settling the question of the Albanian borders¹¹³. In order to comply with the diplomatic framework, the Tirana government tried to manipulate the international public opinion by subverting “internal” political trends. The Tirana political circles knew that the masses represented the paramount expression of the national subject and they attempted to exploit the power of their spectacle in a way that was congenial to their state-building projections. The Minister of Interior Ahmet Zogolli ordered to stop a manifestation planned by a group of Kosovars who advocated national rights for Kosovo-Albanians¹¹⁴. However, the government patronised manifestations in which the participants reclaimed the recognition of the sole 1913 Albanian territory¹¹⁵. The plan initially succeeded and meetings were held in different cities, where the participants declared to be ready for one last sacrifice to protect Albania’s territorial integrity¹¹⁶. But in Durrës the situation got out of hand as the crowd made anti-Serbian statements and a group of demonstrators, allegedly from Vlorë, made appeals for unity with Kosovo, Ioannina, Thessaly and Sazan¹¹⁷.

The resignation of Albania’s claims on Kosovo (and Macedonia) did not produce an immediate positive outcome, and Belgrade still refused to leave the “demarcation zone”. Between July and November 1921, Yugoslav troops made further incursions in Albanian territories in order to support the leader of Mirditë Marka Gjoni. The latter had broken off relations with Tirana and had fled to Prizren where he founded the Republic of Mirditë¹¹⁸. The escalation of the conflict was partially prevented by the intervention of the Great Powers. On November 9, 1921, the Conference of the Ambassadors confirmed the Albanian 1913 borders with some modifications and officially recognised the Tirana government¹¹⁹. Belgrade was forced to withdraw its troops after the intimation of Lloyd George who declared that their presence in

¹¹¹ Aqsh, f. 35, d. 36/4, 1921, p. unreadable, letter from Turtulli to Frashëri. Tiranë, 21-5-1921.

¹¹² Aqsh, f. 35, d. 17, 1921, pp. 233-234, letter from Bedri Pejani (signed with the initials B. P.) to Frashëri. Ginevra, 11-11-1921.

¹¹³ Aqsh, f. 251, d. 41, 1921, p. 288. Note from the Albanian delegation at the League of Nations, no date.

¹¹⁴ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 278, 1921, p. unreadable, telegram by the Minister of Interior to Albanian prefectures, army and police commanders, Tiranë, 27-6-1921.

¹¹⁵ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 278, 1921, p. unreadable, note by Iliaz Vrioni to Minister of Interior Ahmet Zogolli, Tiranë, 11-7-1921.

¹¹⁶ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 278, 1921, p. unreadable, note by Iliaz Vrioni to Minister of Interior Ahmet Zogolli, Tiranë, 29-9-1921.

¹¹⁷ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 278, 1921, p. unreadable, note from the prefect of Durrës to the Minister of Interior, 6-10-1921.

¹¹⁸ *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar Vëllimi i Tretë (28 Nëntor 1912-7 Prill 1939)*, red. K. Prifti, G. Shpuza, cit., p. 174; X. Shala, *Ndërhyrja e Mbretërisë Serbo-Kroato-Slllovene në Çështjen e “Republikës Së Mirditës” dhe Rrethanat Gjatë Intervencionit më 1921*, in «Gjurmime Albanologjike», n. 10, 1980, pp.149-172; «Shkumini», 11 November 1921, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Aqsh, f. 251, d. 41/1, 1921, p. 370, memorandum of the Conference of the Ambassadors.

Albanian territories «disturb[ed] international peace»¹²⁰. The Yugoslav government recognized the Tirana government in March 1922¹²¹.

The Struggle Against “Anarchy” and “Betrayal”

Albanian political circles tried to convince the Great Powers and the neighbouring states that they were united and would have fought to death rather than accepting foreign domination. But this was not what some of them truly thought about themselves. The internal turmoil and the support that Albanian local communities often provided to “foreign” agents, pushed some political activists to believe that their state-building projections were more vulnerable to national insensitivity than to “foreign” aggressions.

Political activists analysed the reasons for which, in their opinion, their compatriots did not feel devoted to their national cause. Catholic priest and poet Gjergj Fishta argued that the idea of forming a “fatherland” – a term that he used to describe the nation-state – was not determined by Albanians’ psychological features, but by external circumstances. The foreigners were aware of this and believed that Albanians were not able to self-govern¹²². «Zani i Ri» claimed that Albanians were incapable of perceiving feelings of solidarity because they were «individualist». «This psychic disease [...] has made [them] live like savages»¹²³. An article in «Koha» by the title *Can we govern ourselves?* asserted that Albanians were ambitious and selfish, and that these «two vices» had allowed foreign propaganda to divide patriots¹²⁴.

In order to consolidate the sense of national unity, Gjergj Fishta believe that it was necessary to support the government notwithstanding personal opinions¹²⁵. The former member of the dethroned Durrës government Luigj Gurakuqi shared this view and claimed that whoever opposed the Tirana government was an enemy of the nation¹²⁶. Primary sources suggest that the reflection on the endemic causes that hindered the affirmation of the Albanian collective subject evolved around two concepts: “anarchy” and “betrayal”. Both words were used to designate individuals and communities that jeopardised the affirmation of the collective subject and delegitimised the state-building projections that it entailed through their selfish and anti-national behaviour. A closer look at the documents, shows that the categories of “anarchy” and “betrayal” implied a series of sub-categories such as the Albanian inclination to fall prey of “foreign” propaganda, “insubordination”, “violence”, “selfishness”, “primitiveness”.

¹²⁰ Aqsh, f. 251, d. 222, 1921, p. 2, message of British Prime Minister Lloyd George to the League of Nations.

¹²¹ P. Milo, *Shqipëria dhe Jugosllavia 1918-1927*, cit., p. 373.

¹²² Aqsh, f. 17, d. 35, 1920, pp. 126-127, letter from Gjergj Fishta to Vincenzo Prenushi, Paris, 15-4-1920.

¹²³ «Zani i Ri», 2 September 1920, p. 1.

¹²⁴ «Koha», 16 October 1920, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Aqsh, f. 17, d. 35, 1920, pp. 126-127, letter from Gjergj Fishta to Vincenzo Prenushi, Paris, 15-4-1920.

¹²⁶ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 34, 1920, p. 148, letter from Luigj Gurakuqi to unknown person, Napoli, 7-10-1920.

“Anarchy” and “betrayal”, as well as their semantical articulations, were the expression of the interiorized gaze of the agents of the Great Powers and of the neighbouring states who described Albanians as a primitive people that was not sufficiently developed to self-govern¹²⁷. This argument was an excuse that Great Powers and neighbouring states had been using since the 19th century to subjugate territories populated by Albanian-speaking communities¹²⁸. The stereotyped image of post-World War I Albania is found in recent studies which claim that Albania’s state-building endeavours were burdened by the «tribal» structure of society¹²⁹ or by «turbulent tribes» that struggled against each other¹³⁰.

According to Albanian perspectives, their state-building projections were not hindered by the basic structure of their society. On the contrary, it was peculiar social, cultural and psychological patterns that led individuals and communities toward “anarchy” and “betrayal”. But political activists had different views on who “anarchists” and “betrayers” were and how the deployment of coercive means against them affected the affirmation of the collective subject and the legitimisation of the state-building projections. Coercive means were especially justified when they were used against autonomist/independent movements. The newspaper «Koha» praised the repression of the Mirditë «rebels» and prefigured that national history would have written the names of these «betrayers» with the tar¹³¹. After the signature of the Albanian-Greek agreement in Kapshticë (on May 27, 1920)¹³², «Mbrojtja Kombëtare» criticised the government for allowing the «grecophiles» of Himara to enjoy self-administration rights. The newspaper argued that Himara was a snake that could poison the whole body of Mother Albania. If the government did not take any action, it was up to the «patriots» to unite the region to the rest of the country whether through peaceful or coercive means¹³³.

Violence seemed to strengthen the autonomy of the collective subject because it was considered an effective tool to eradicate treachery that instead exposed the subject to the disintegratory effects of anarchy and foreign agency. The quintessential “betrayers” of the Albanian nation was Essad Toptani¹³⁴ who was accused of sacrificing common interests for his personal benefit and for Serbian gains¹³⁵. His assassin, Avni Rustemi, was glorified as a hero who had accomplished the will of the gods¹³⁶.

¹²⁷ One of the most emblematic descriptions of Albanians as an underdeveloped people that could not self-govern is found in the speech that Venizelos made at the Paris Peace Conference. E. Venizelos, *Greece Before the Peace Conference of 1919*, Oxford University Press, New York 1919, pp. 2-5.

¹²⁸ R.C. Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, cit., p. 14

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹³⁰ M. Borgogni, *Tra continuità e incertezza*, cit., p. 82.

¹³¹ «Koha», 6 August 1921, p. 2.

¹³² M. Çami, *Protokolli Shqiptaro-Grek i Kapshticës. (Rrethanat e nënshkrimit dhe karakteri)*, in «Studime Historike», n. 4, 1975, pp. 75-92.

¹³³ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 12 May 1921, p. 1.

¹³⁴ «Populli», 11 June 1920, p.1.

¹³⁵ S. Papuli, *Gazeta Drita*, cit., p. 48.

¹³⁶ «Zani i Ri», 26 August 1920, p. 2.

When the “essadist” troops threatened to occupy Tirana in September 1920, «Zani i Ri» advocated the use of extreme measures, not against the “essadist” in particular, but as a standard tool to deal with Albanians. The editor asserted that Albanians had a savage spirit and that only the strict use of the «rope» and the «bullet» could improve them. There was no other way to govern the «strange psychology» of the «dull peasant» and of the «fierce *malësorë* (inhabitant of the Northern regions)». It was necessary to crash the heads of betrayers. Albania was not a place for «the fancy ideas of civilization»¹³⁷.

The deployment of coercive means was meant to reinforce the image of the autonomy of the collective subject not only vis-à-vis “internal” enemies, but primarily toward the “external” world. By punishing betrayers and anarchist, the government showed that Albanians were united, that they opposed foreign influences, and that either the government or the “people” were able to effectively deal with any threat.

However, to some political activists, excessive zeal in the repression of “rebel” movements was ethically and politically wrong because it multiplied grievances and turned the state’s power into an evil power¹³⁸. So the state compromised Albanians’ sense of belonging because state-building violence alienated them from their national cause. Another article on «Zani i Ri» asserted that instead of draconian measures, Albanians needed educational policies that would implant culture and civilization in the areas where rebels lived¹³⁹. According to «Shkumini», published in Elbasan by Filip Papajani the use of coercive means generated adverse effects on Albanians since they would refuse to do something if someone compelled them to act in a certain way¹⁴⁰.

Some activists believed that the low ethical and political standards that were associated to “anarchy” and “betrayal” such as “selfishness” and “ambition”, characterised ruling elites more than common people. During the conflict against Yugoslavs, the photographer Kel Marubi observed that “poor” ordinary people were doing everything they could to defend their country and honour (*gajret*). But he was disappointed with high rank state officials who did not «care about anything else, but the interests of their pockets»¹⁴¹. Sotir Gjika had come to the conclusion that Albanian Ministers and Parliament members were careerist people who had turned Tirana into a place «full of intrigues, hypocrisy, lies and fanaticism»¹⁴².

At the end of the Great War, Albania faced a difficult economic situation and the costs of the state-building endeavours fell especially on the poor¹⁴³. Attempts to obtain a foreign loan failed¹⁴⁴. The government then opted to exploit the working force

¹³⁷ «Zani i Ri», 1 October 1920, p. 1.

¹³⁸ «Besa Shqyptare», 1 July 1920, p. 2.

¹³⁹ «Zani i Ri», 16 October 1920, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ «Shkumini», 15 April 1921, p.1.

¹⁴¹ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 34, 1920, p. 12, letter from Kel Marubi to Luigj Gurakuqi, Shkodër, 10-10-1920.

¹⁴² Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 212-215, letter from Sotir Gjika to Gurakuqi. Rome, 7-10-1920.

¹⁴³ V. Toçi, *Projektet dhe Orvatjet Imperialiste per Zoterimin e Tregut Shqiptar të Monedhës e të kreditit dhe Lufta Kunder Tyre (1920-1924)*, in «Studime Historike», n. 2, 1968, pp. 147-170.

¹⁴⁴ R.C. Austin, *Founding a Balkan State*, cit., p. 16.

of the population, compelled to work for the improvement of public infrastructure¹⁴⁵. Accusations of insubordination and betrayal became the standard argument that central authorities used not only to obtain the formal loyalty of the local communities, but also to legitimise unpopular fiscal and conscription policies. Local communities often returned such accusations to the government¹⁴⁶. For instance, the leaders of Zadrime replied to the vice-prefect of Shkodër who had accused them of being rebels, that instead of building schools, roads and an effective gendarmerie, the prefecture wasted public money to employ incompetent persons who were hired because of their personal connections¹⁴⁷.

Besides the usual taxes, the government resorted to “internal loans” which were forcefully taken from the population in times of emergency. In the spring 1922, Minister of Interior Ahmet Zogolli tried to raise money in the Southern regions to suppress “rebels” in the North. The Minister threatened to fire all the employees that did not act energetically¹⁴⁸. Zogolli’s endeavors to raise extra money, were opposed not only from the population but also from the prefects. The latter protested because the financial situation in the region was desperate and honest people were put to jail because they could not pay¹⁴⁹. In 1922, the government’s fiscal policies in the North generated public protests that demanded the partial or complete abolition of the taxes¹⁵⁰.

To some political activists, like Terenc Toçi, the use of coercive means to take money, showed the ethical limits of state power. In a rather Augustinian undertone, Toçi claimed that the government should not have acted like a bandit¹⁵¹. An anonymous article stated that any sum of money that the state took from citizens without giving them any public services in return was a robbery. The author argued that when a minority of powerful and rich men rob the weak who are not in the position to organize and rob them in return, the principle of the state fails and the state turns into anarchy. According to his perspective, “anarchy” was a situation of unethical social relationships which was determined by the exploitative relationship between the ruled and the rulers. In analogy to recent postcolonial accounts¹⁵², the author justified rebellions against the state and claimed that when Albanians realised that the state exploited their work without taking care of their needs, they took their guns and lived like savages, but free, on the mountains¹⁵³.

¹⁴⁵ V. Toçi, *Konçesionet e Punimeve Botore*, cit., p. 50.

¹⁴⁶ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 66, 1920, p. 6, letter from the leaders Bushati to the vice-prefect of Shkodër, 13-7-1920.

¹⁴⁷ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 66, 1920, p. 3, letter from Zadrime to the vice-prefect of Shkodër Sylço beg Bushati, 4-7-1920.

¹⁴⁸ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 111, 1920, p. 5-6, note from the Minister of the Interior Ahmet Zogolli to the prefects, Tiranë, 18-5-1922.

¹⁴⁹ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 111, 1920, p. 29, letter from the prefect of Berat to the Minister of Interior, no date; p. 40, letter from the prefect of Korçë to the Minister of Interior, 8-6-1922; p. 2, letter from the prefect of Vlorë to the Minister of Interior, no date.

¹⁵⁰ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 105, 1922, p. 15-16, telegram from the prefect of Shkodër to the Minister of Interior, no date.

¹⁵¹ «Besa Shqyptare», 24 February 1921, p. 2.

¹⁵² J.C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, cit.

¹⁵³ «Besa Shqyptare», 14 April 1921, p. 1.

To Albanian journalists, tax collection was justifiable only if it led to social and cultural development¹⁵⁴ such as the improvement of mobility infrastructures¹⁵⁵. The government was never going to cultivate the sense of nationality and to legitimise the state-building endeavours that it entailed, if state policies did not lead to economic development. According to «Shkumini» the slogan “Albania to Albanians” made sense to demagogues, but not to peasants. The latter perceived only a change of persons from the (Ottoman) past to the present day (independent state)¹⁵⁶. The editors of the newspaper believed that after five centuries of “anarchist” (Ottoman) regime, peasants looked at state’s officials as enemies who kept them in hostage and not like persons who took care of their interests¹⁵⁷.

Beside their anti-Ottoman bias, the newspapers show that nationalist propaganda that was carried out by state-building agents, did not contribute to encourage the spontaneous adhesion of the rural population – the *opinga* as they were called by journalists – to the structures of the state. The failure of state-building policies to create a sense of identification between the state and individuals was proven by the difficulties that the Tirana government encountered when it tried to form a regular army. Like in the Ottoman period, the population avoided conscription by any possible means such as giving fake names, going abroad or declaring non-Albanian nationalities¹⁵⁸. Political activists generally supported the introduction and the enforcement of the law on the conscription¹⁵⁹. But aside mainstream opinions, there was an anti-militarist current which claimed that it would have been better to sharpen the weapons of diplomacy instead of spending money for the army¹⁶⁰.

The lack of coercive means obliged the Albanian government to rely on local traditional authorities in order to control marginal areas. According to «Besa Shqyp-tare», in March 1920 the government emanated a decree that sanctioned the use of the traditional laws known as *kanun* (or *xhibal*) in the areas where it was customarily used¹⁶¹. The code of laws organized social relations according to a complex system of assemblies between family, village and larger community leaders (*krerë/krenët*)¹⁶². The choice of the government appears quite anachronistic since *kanun* laws were one of the reasons why Albanians were considered as primitive and violent by the Great Powers and neighbouring states. By authorizing the use of *kanun*, the Albanian government intended to obtain sovereignty on areas that were outside of the state’s formal control and perhaps hoped that local communities would police borderlands and defend them from Yugoslav incursions. «Besa Shqyp-tare» argued

¹⁵⁴ «Besa Shqyp-tare», 28 April 1921, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ «Besa Shqyp-tare», 14 April 1921, p.1.

¹⁵⁶ «Shkumini», 28 January 1921, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ «Shkumini», 11 February 1921, p. 1.

¹⁵⁸ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 168, p. unreadable, telegram from the prefecture of Korçë to the Minister of Interior, 8-3-1922.

¹⁵⁹ «Zani i Ri», 2 September 1920, p. 2.

¹⁶⁰ «Koha», 11 December 1920, p. 1; «Mbrojta Kombëtare», 6 January 1921, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ «Besa Shqyp-tare», 10 June 1920, p. 2.

¹⁶² P. Doçi, *Te Dhena Rreth Vetëqeverisjes Dokësore te Mirditës në Fund të Shek. XIX dhe në Fillim të Shek. XX*, in «Studime Historike», n. 3, 1974, pp. 101-120.

that until unitary laws were emanated, the traditional law would be useful for maintaining tranquillity at low costs¹⁶³.

However, the *kanun* significantly limited the coercive power of the state because it entitled citizens to own guns and sanctioned the autonomy of local authorities. The norm that authorized its use was arbitrarily applied and created frictions between Tirana and local authorities. In the spring of 1920, a controversy broke out between the leaders of Mirditë¹⁶⁴ and the Tirana government that ignored their requests for autonomy¹⁶⁵. The conflict evolved into the declaration of the Mirditë Republic by Marka Gjoni in 1921. That same year, the Albanian parliament undertook a campaign for the end of the vendettas that were caused by the *kanun*¹⁶⁶ and the press strongly advocated a gun collection initiative¹⁶⁷.

If on the one hand the government needed to consolidate its coercive capacities by disempowering traditional authorities, on the other it needed to increase its coercive implements through the mobilization of alternative subjects. In 1921 Margaret Moseley-Williams founded the Albanian scout movement for boys in Tirana¹⁶⁸. Newspapers warmly encouraged the participation in the organization and considered scouting as an experience which would provide young Albanians with discipline, patriotism and basic military preparation before reaching the age of recruitment¹⁶⁹.

In Albania, in analogy with other post-World War I European countries the necessity to strengthen the capacity of the state, led the traditionally patriarchal society to allow and encourage the participation of women in public life. Women formed several organizations such as Përlindja (Rebirth) in Korçë, Gruaja Shqiptare (the Albanian Woman) in Shkodër, and Shpresa Shqiptare (Albanian Hope) in Vlorë¹⁷⁰. Women activists drew more attention from the newspapers¹⁷¹. Ferëniqi Posio required resources for the education of women, but also pointed out that the latter did not aim at substituting men. Rather, the acculturation of women served to help them educate their children which in the future would become disciplined men¹⁷².

The struggle for the inclusion of non-men categories into public life represented a political endeavour meant to reinforce the sense of national belonging and to bring Albania closer to the progressive trends of Western Europe. Other cultural patterns,

¹⁶³ «Besa Shqiptare», 10 June 1920, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 66, 1920, p. 12, letter from Marka Gjoni to the Minister of Interior Ahmet Zogolli, Shkodër, 10-5-1920.

¹⁶⁵ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 66, 1920, p. 2, letter from Dom Ndoc Nikaj to Ahmet Zogolli, Orosh, 26-6-1920.

¹⁶⁶ «Shkumini», 3 June, 1921, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ «Drita», 2 February 1922, p. 2.

¹⁶⁸ J. Lee, *War Girls: The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry in the First World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2005, p. 254.

¹⁶⁹ «Mbrojtjat Kombëtare», 4 May 1921, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ B. Sinani, *Lëvizja për Emancipimin dhe Arsimimin e Gruas në Vitet 1920-1924*, in «Studime Historike», n. 1, 1986, pp. 69-85.

¹⁷¹ «Koha», 5 February 1921, p. 1.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

such as those inherited from the Ottoman period, seemed instead to push society toward the opposite direction. The Turkish/Ottoman legacy, although not specifically called in this way, appeared to hinder the affirmation of the collective subject because it gave the impression that Albania was exposed to internal reactionary trends. Sotir Gjika accused Albanian statesmen for having a Turkish and Oriental mentality, which in his opinion hampered the future development of the country¹⁷³. Journalists denounced individuals who used the Turkish language in public offices¹⁷⁴ and in schools¹⁷⁵. In compliance with the endeavours to homologate the school programs¹⁷⁶, books written in Albanian with the Turkish (Ottoman) alphabet were confiscated¹⁷⁷. The international image of the Albanian government was damaged by accusations of the neighbouring states who claimed that Tirana collaborated with Turkey in order to destabilise the Balkans¹⁷⁸. A Kemalist delegation visited Albania in the beginning of March 1921¹⁷⁹. However, the Tirana government rejected any allegation concerning military cooperation between the two countries¹⁸⁰.

Muslims were the largest “legacy” that the Ottoman empire had left in Albania and consequently, the biggest threat for the constitution of an Albanian collective subject and the legitimisation of the state-building projections by the European powers. Gjergj Fishta felt uncanny in Tirana which in his opinion had a «purely and grotesquely Islamic spirit». He reported that the most execrable emblems for Muslims were the lace of the Franciscan and the hat of the European because they were considered as the symbols of the penetration of Western culture¹⁸¹. The Muslim majority was considered the most retrograde element of Albanian society. In a rather cynical way, political activists warned that if they did not get rid of their ignorance, they would be subjugated like all the other Muslims of the world¹⁸². Journalists criticized the government for the repressive policies that it undertook against the press¹⁸³, but they encouraged violence against newspapers that allegedly made anti-national (Muslim) propaganda¹⁸⁴. The question of the Muslim Albanian integration within the nations’ political body also involved women movements that encouraged Muslim women not to cover their faces in public¹⁸⁵.

¹⁷³ Aqsh, f. 34, d. 35, 1920, pp. 193-195, letter from Sotir Gjika to Luigi Gurakuqi, Rome, 21-8-1920.

¹⁷⁴ «Koha», 2 October 1920, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ «Koha», 15 January, 1921, p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ X. Repishti, *Kongreset Arsimore të Viteve 1920-1924*, in «Studime Historike», n. 2, 1987, pp. 61-82.

¹⁷⁷ Aqsh, f. 251, d. 273, 1922, p. 1, exchange of notes between the Minister of Instruction and the Minister of Interior, Tiranë, 1-1-1922.

¹⁷⁸ D. Borozan, *Velika Albanija*, cit., pp. 90-97.

¹⁷⁹ K. Kycyku, *Aspekte në Marrëdhëniet Shqiptaro-Turke Gjate Viteve 20-30 të Shekullit Tonë*, in «Studime Historike», n. 2, 1986, p. 60.

¹⁸⁰ Aqsh, f. 152, d. 41, 1921, p. 253, note from the Albanian representative in Paris, 27-5-1921.

¹⁸¹ Aqsh, f. 17, d. 62, 1920, pp. 40-45, letter from Gjergj Fishta to Paolo (probably Pal/Paolo Dodaj), Tiranë, 17-10-1921.

¹⁸² «Drita», 24 January 1922, p. 2.

¹⁸³ «Shkumini», 22 September 1921, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ «Koha», 2 April 1921, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ «Koha», 26 April 1921, p. 1.

Beside the language question, the anti-Muslim propaganda and the formal distance that the government maintained from Turkey, the struggle against the Ottoman “legacy” only concerned trivial aspects of social and political life such as the abolition of the “old” titles¹⁸⁶. Several laws of the Ottoman period were used in Albania¹⁸⁷. The government did not carry out agrarian reforms and the social structure of the country remained quite similar to what it was during the late Ottoman period¹⁸⁸.

Accusations of “anarchy” and “betrayal” were used by Albanian government’s circles in order to de/legitimate their reciprocal state-building projections. After the first Albanian parliamentary elections of March 1921, a conflict emerged between different political tendencies, which were loosely represented by the People’s Party and the Progressive Party. Tensions grew in December 1921, after the High Regency Council discharged the government of Pandeli Evangjeli¹⁸⁹. On December 6, a cabinet was formed by Qazim Koculi. It only lasted a few hours. The next day Hasan Prishtina formed a cabinet that was forced to resign after six days. A provisional government was then formed by Idhomeno Kosturi. Ahmet Zogolli contested the discharge of Evangjeli and a conflict broke out between his clique and the supporters of High Regency Council, which almost ended in a bloodshed. Zogolli managed to win the dispute. On December 24, a new cabinet was formed with Xhafer Ypi as Prime Minister and Ahmet Zogolli as Minister of Interior. The members of the High Regency Council were changed¹⁹⁰.

In March 1922, the crisis took a violent form. The troops of Bajram Curri, Hasan Prishtina and Elez Jusufi attacked the government¹⁹¹. Zogolli repelled the attack and forced Curri and Prishtina to flee¹⁹². He then retaliated against their supporters and promised to deliver exemplary punishments to whoever protected them¹⁹³. The events contributed to reinforce the image of Ahmet Zogolli as a strong leader and a personality cult started to take shape around him¹⁹⁴. Hasan Prishtina and his supporters were instead portrayed as selfish individuals who were animated by foreign interests¹⁹⁵. They were defined «bullies» because they had tried to overthrow the government with guns. The political instability that they had created could provoke a foreign invasion¹⁹⁶. Violence was then seen as a mandatory tool to

¹⁸⁶ «Zani i Ri», 8 November 1920, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ G. Hysi, *Organizimi i Shteti Shqiptar Sipas Vendimeve të Kongresit të Lushnjës*, in «Studime Historike», n. 2, 1971, p. 15.

¹⁸⁸ Z. Avramovski, *Prilog Pitanju Istorije, Albanije u Periodu Izmedju Dva Svetska Rata*, in «Gjurmime Albanologjike», n. 3, 1966, pp. 113-150.

¹⁸⁹ A. Puto, *Shqipëria Politike*, cit., p. 321.

¹⁹⁰ H. Kordha, *Ngjarjet e Dhjetorit 1921*, in «Studime Historike», n. 1, 1974, pp. 41-67.

¹⁹¹ A. Puto, *Shqipëria Politike*, cit., p. 322.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 15 April 1922, p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ «Koha», 3 June 1922, p. 1.

¹⁹⁵ «Koha», 31 December 1921, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 16 December 1921, p. 1.

govern Albanians¹⁹⁷, although it would successively need to be put aside when the situation would change¹⁹⁸.

Zogolli's retaliation also generated strong criticism that reversed the narrative elaborated by most of the newspapers. Former member of the High Regency Council Mihal Turtulli asserted that the reaction of the government against rebels was excessive. Zogolli had putatively relied on coercive means to save the country from "betrayers", but according to Turtulli his actions had not brought tranquillity because «below the ashes there [was] fire»¹⁹⁹. Albania would have never seen any sort of development as long as there was no justice²⁰⁰. His interlocutor, Mit'hat Frashëri, replied that the adoption of harsh measures had become indispensable because if the population did not keep quiet, it would have been necessary to choose between an illiberal regime and anarchy, which would have led to a foreign invasion²⁰¹. Turtulli did not agree. In his opinion it was not anarchy that had led Albania into a dictatorial regime but the opposite. Zogolli was acting as a dictator before the rebellions had started. Turtulli delegitimized Albanian state-building because the government did not act for the common good but to pay an army made of individuals gathered from Northern regions (*malësore*) and for maintaining employees who had the only virtue of belonging to the same *taraf* (clique) as the government's members²⁰².

Turtulli's disappointment with Zogolli and his supporters mirrored a general sense of disillusion toward the state-building process in the overall post-World War I Europe. Speaking of the Albanian political situation, Mihal Grameno observed that the time of the "old", that is the national movement that occurred in the pre-independence period, was devoted to the enlightenment of the people whereas the time of the "young", that is the present state-building period, to the accumulation of Ministerial seats²⁰³. Since corruption and arbitrary violence had not disappeared, nation-state seemed to have inherited from empire those evils that it had promised to eradicate. The failure of the nation-state created the conditions for the elaboration of new state-building imaginaries and for the dissolution and the re-foundation of the collective subjects that legitimised them. The spectre of Communism began to wander in Albania after the Great War and demanded the overthrowing of the European socio-political structure by coercive means. Too much blood was being spilled by nations to satisfy the insatiable thirst of imperialist bloodsuckers. Lenin and Trotsky promised to liberate people not only from the actual situation of exploitation, but from the international system that subjugated the legitimisation of their freedom to the decisions of the Great Powers²⁰⁴. Through communism, like in an Oriental fairy-tale, "humanity" could ideally supersede the subjectivities that had

¹⁹⁷ «Mbrojtja Kombëtare», 23 December 1921, p. 1.

¹⁹⁸ «Drita», 26 June 1922, p. 2.

¹⁹⁹ Aqsh, f. 25, d. 36/4, 1922, p. 923, letter from Turtulli to Frashëri, Lausanne, 20-6-1922.

²⁰⁰ Aqsh, f. 25, d. 36/4, 1922, p. 925, Oberstdorf, 12-6-1922.

²⁰¹ Aqsh, f. 25, d. 36/4, 1922, pp. 926-927, letter from Frashëri to «Mon cher Docteur» (Turtulli), Paris, 16-8-1922.

²⁰² Aqsh, f. 25, d. 36/4, 1922, pp. 928-930, letter from Turtulli to Frashëri, Oberstdorf, 20-8-1921.

²⁰³ «Koha», 5 March 1921, p. 1.

²⁰⁴ «Koha», 9 July 1921, p. 1.

generated the disastrous pre- and post-war state-building projections and put an end to the eternal condition of violence²⁰⁵.

Conclusions

Current literature has considered violence as a major tool for state-building in the aftermath of the Great War. This paper has engaged with this argument by investigating the way in which Albanians positioned toward state-building violence and how in turn violence conditioned their allegiance to their reciprocal state-building projections. In the introductory section I argued that differently from what most of the current scholarship suggests, in the Albanian context the state-violence relationship was not characterised by a hierarchical structure that clearly distinguished political actors between state agents who had the legitimacy and the means to inflict violence and all the others who instead challenged such legitimacy. The post-World War I Albanian governments had little authority and lesser capacity for deploying coercive means, especially against other states. Albanian state-building agents did not deploy violence in the modality of the ready-to-hand tool as much as they instead “exploited” it in the modality of the present-at-hand tool.

Drawing on recent works of Michael Staudigl, I considered violence as a phenomenon that individuals experience on account of the vulnerability of their bodies. The vulnerability mediates the symbolical articulations of the body and allows individuals to experience a sense of collective subjectivity. Western philosophy – from which national ideologies stem from – has placed violence at the core of the affirmation of the subject which, in order to affirm its freedom, must subjugate the “other”. In the context of the nation-state-building, the dialectic between the “self” and the “other”, has taken the form of the struggle for national self-determination which is accomplished when the collective subject, namely the nation, projects its destiny autonomously within the boundaries of a nation-state. This preliminary reflection on the state-violence relation, led to the elaboration of the question through which I addressed the topic: in what way the Albanian experience of violence affected the affirmation of their collective subject and how the latter de/legitimised their reciprocal state-building projections? The theoretical premise also allowed the elaboration of a double hypothesis. Violence – inflicted or suffered – enhanced the affirmation of the Albanians’ collective subject and legitimated their state-building projections vis-à-vis neighbouring states, Great Powers and internal competitors – namely, the “other”. The use of coercive means also laid bare the vulnerability of the collective subject toward the violence of the “other” which could exploit violence to de/legitimate Albanians’ state-building endeavours.

The empirical investigation has confirmed that state-building violence produced a double effect on the way in which Albanians positioned toward their reciprocal state-building projections. On the one hand, violence – whether inflicted or suffered

²⁰⁵ «Drita», 15 May 1922, p. 2.

– was perceived as a necessary tool to consolidate the sense of national unity and to claim self-determination rights. The military success in Vlorë gave some political activists the impression that they had escaped a condition of subjugation since their collective subject was not – anymore – in the Italian “colonies”, but in Europe. Being in Europe meant that violence had gifted Albanians equal negotiation rights with Italians and that their state-building projections had been legitimised by the symmetrical positioning. In an analogous way, the conflict against Yugoslavs fuelled the narrative of the strength of the Albanian nation and consolidated the sense of unity and solidarity between Albanians living on both sides of the borders (and in the murky areas of the contended borderlands). Albanians exploited coercive means in order to consolidate their collective subject and thereby to legitimise the authority of the government within the 1913 territories. Violence was considered as a useful tool to deal with actors who showed signs of “anarchy” and “betrayal” and the various semantic variants of these two terms.

The research has shown that the deployment of coercive means for state-building purposes exposed the Albanian collective subject to the vulnerability of the violence of the other which in turn delegitimised Albanians’ claims for autonomy and led to a thorough reformulation of their state-building projections. In the case of the conflict in Vlorë, some political activists believed that the attack against Italians, independently of its conclusion, weakened the international position of the country, exposed Albanians to the violence of regional actors – including Italy, and did not allow the government to undertake necessary measures for economic development. The deployment of coercive means against Yugoslavs had more profound consequences on Albanian state-building projections. The attack revealed the organizational and military weaknesses of Albanians in comparison to their neighbours. Violence harmed Albanians’ claims for self-determination because it appeared not to be the expression of the Albanian collective subject, but rather the product of “local” insubordinate groups that the Tirana government was not able to control. The Albanian attack on Yugoslavs hindered the affirmation of the Albanian collective subject and of the state-building projections that it entailed. The attack did not seem to be the expression of a genuine struggle for self-determination, but rather the result of Italian influence and Albanian incapacity to act unitarily. In an analogous way, violence of Albanians in Kosovo against the Belgrade authorities, contributed to portray Albanians as a troublesome element that destabilised the region. Since many Kosovar leaders resided in Albania, the deployment of coercive means against Yugoslavs by Kosovo-Albanians, made the Albanian state-building projection vulnerable to Belgrade’s diplomatic and military aggression. The conflict with Yugoslavs generated personal and regional resentments between political circles and led them to recalibrate the priorities of the state-building projections. The necessity to obtain international recognition led the Tirana political circles to exclude Kosovo from its state-building projections.

The deployment of coercive means against “endemic” threats exposed Albanian state-building projections to various criticisms. Some political activists emphasized that the state had to act in an ethical way toward its subjects and criticized exces-

sive use of violence because it was counterproductive. Unjust state violence, such as coercive extraction of resources or dictatorial rule, legitimised individuals to take their guns and fight against the government. According to this perspective, it was the state and the ruling elite that hindered the affirmation of the collective subject because it did not pursue state-building policies in an ethical and legitimate manner. The negative qualities associated to “anarchy” and “betrayal” seemed to fit not much to the population of the rural areas, but rather the ruling elites that acted selfishly and against the common good. The state vs. non-state dialectic shows similarities to the accounts provided by postcolonial and modernist studies on state-building. However, it is important to keep in mind that although the governments’ elites tried to portray the state-building-violence relationship according to a hierarchical and dialectical structure, their authority was limited and contended, and in many cases violence was “exploited” rather than directly inflicted or suffered. Moreover, state-building violence generated anti-state movements not only from outside the governments’ political circles, but also from the inside. Anti-state violence was not necessarily “anarchic” in the conventional sense. Albanian political activists criticised the government because it failed to bring economic development, to liberate the state from corruption, oppression and violence that it dispensed itself. Under these circumstances, the struggle for the affirmation of the collective subject, was not only hindered by state-building policies, but also became useless because it did not lead to an economic and political improvement of the population. The coercive means that had been deployed in order to accomplish the advent of the post-World War I nation-state, exposed the latter to the vulnerability of the violence of the “other” to come. In analogy to 19th century national state-building projections, the “other” to come – namely communism – promised to liberate peoples from violence and exploitation and therefore introduced new state-building imaginaries and demanded the dissolution and the re-foundation of the collective subjectivities that legitimated them.