

# EXPLOITING AND CONSERVING: FORESTS, NATION, AND STRATEGIES OF DEVELOPMENT IN 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ALBANIA<sup>1</sup>

## ISKORIŠTAVANJE I OČUVANJE: ŠUME, NACIJA I STRATEGIJE RAZVOJA U ALBANIJI U 20. STOLJEĆU

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### Summary

*Since the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, forests have been considered both a source for the economic development and a patrimony to be defended. This dualism between the economic gains and ecological imperatives have remained largely unbridged. The Albanian experience is not an exception to this trajectory. Although the different political and intellectual elites have considered forests a national patrimony, they have failed to defend and expand the forest-cover which have been shrinking. The territory of today's Albania, due to its geographical position, climatic influences, and topography has a very rich flora, including forests. Like everywhere else, human activity has historically played a critical role in the condition and distribution of forest cover in Albania. Until the establishment of the Albanian national state, both the rural population and the elite exploited the forests without paying attention to their regeneration. The Ottoman Empire started to implement policies for the central management of the forests, but in the Albanian provinces, their effects were limited. The Ottoman bureaucracy did not stop the rural communities and landlords to log the forests for fuel, export their timber, burn them for opening new pastures or rooting out the bandits hiding in them. Since its establishment, the Albanian state tried to control the access of the population to forests' resources. During the interwar era, Tirana's governments started the process of territorialization, whose goal was to control both forests and rural communities, especially in the highlands that had historically been outside central authorities' reach. Forests and the control over them became an arena of tensions between state and rural communities. In the end, in the 1920s-1930s territorialization remained a goal rather than become a reality because the state could neither enforce its laws nor exert full control over forests. Except for some small efforts, the forestation did not advance much, and the medium-altitude and low-altitude forests were gravely damaged. When the communists came in power, they promised to reverse this situation. However, with its project of industrialization and the policy of economic autarchy, the communist regime overharvested the forests and it was unable to stop the unauthorized logging of rural communities. Regardless of some significant forestations, the communists harvested more timber than the forests could naturally regenerate, impacting negatively the forest cover area. In the first decade after the fall of communism, due also to the political turmoil the country experienced, the forests kept being overused and Albania had the highest percentage of illegal logging in Eastern Europe.*

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**Keywords:** forests, territorialization, development, nationalism, illegal logging, communism, interwar era, post-socialist transition

**Ključne riječi:** šume, teritorijalizacija, razvoj, nacionalizam, ilegalna sječa stabala, komunizam, međuratno doba, postsocijalistička tranzicija

Every historian who desires to write a history about a topic that at first glance does not seem to relate to human activity but to objects or phenomena that stretch outside the humanities and social sciences faces some daunting challenges. The big question is whether or not it is possible to write a history of a 'thing' disregarding humans, decentering them from the story, looking at them as a secondary byproduct of historical writing. Is it even possible to write a history where humans are not present at all? And the next question is: how can one write such a history in the first place when all the tools the historian deploys for this purpose are created by humans? Even when writing a history of the universe, the set of tools the historian uses are all human artifacts. And let's not forget that historians do write history for an audience that is composed exclusively of humans—at least for now. Just this fact alone has a great effect on the way history is written. In other words, I do not think it is even possible to decenter humans from history.

One of the most important variables in the history of the environment and natural resources is the way people have used and competed for their control. I am not trying to give primacy to humans' agency in history or to write an anthropocentric type of history that subordinates Nature to Culture. Despite the fact that Nature is both a vague and culturally constructed concept, historians generally agree that the natural world has an autonomous place and does not play a subordinate role to culture in history.<sup>2</sup> Other historians have gone even further and have given more precision to the concept of Nature by contextualizing it and arguing that local ecology defines to a large measure the outcomes of men's actions.<sup>3</sup> Nature, creates a context in which humans must live, and often creates this context independently of humans' action on nature itself. Hence, nature is not a passive actor in history as soon as it determines many of the humans' actions. Forests, as part of the natural world, in fact play a critical role in the great human undertaking and this is why writing a history of the forests excluding the humans would give an incomplete picture.

In his book on the flora of the Mediterranean region, John D. Thompson argues that geology, climate, and human activity have been the sculptors that have molded the plant diversity of the area of the Middle Sea region.<sup>4</sup> Forests are not an exception. Their types, condition, and extension in a given territory depend on the interaction between these three elements. While the role of geology and climate stretches over relatively long periods of time, the intensity of human actions and their role in shaping forests' life over long and short periods of time is extraordinary. For man, forests have mainly represented a source of livelihood and of vital raw materials, but also served as a barrier that hindered opportunities for extensive agriculture, and pastures for the herds of cattle to graze. Nothing better represents the antagonism of the agriculturalist societies against the forests than the dictum of the Greek Cynic philosopher, Secundus the Silent »Quid est agricola, Silvae adversaries« – agriculture and pastoralism are enemies of the forest.

In the early 1980s Jack Thirgood effectively argued that the idea of the man using, exploiting, and transforming untamed nature is not a modern phenomenon but a very old one. Romans and Greeks, who did not see anything positive in untamed nature had fully embraced the instrumentalist approach to the environment. Actually, it is the conservative movement, which is recent, Thirgood concludes, marking

<sup>2</sup> On the role of nature in history, see for example the exchange of ideas between Donald Worster, William Cronon, Alfred Crosby, and others in *The Journal of American History* 76, 4 (1990): 1087-1147.

<sup>3</sup> Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan, »A Limited Forest Conservancy in Southwest Bengal, 1864-1912,« *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56, 1 (1997): 75-112.

<sup>4</sup> John D. Thompson, *Plant Evolution in the Mediterranean*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10-12.

a departure from a very old tradition.<sup>5</sup> The belief that traditional societies have a well-balanced relation with environment is a construction like the bulk of the traditions that are invented in modern times.<sup>6</sup> The romantic idea of the noble savage and of the modern man as the destroyer of the Natural world are instead part of the modern dichotomies that either glorified or vilified the past. In the spirit of his time and its antithetic vision of history, Carl Sauer stated in 1956 that the primitive man had turned fire loose on land whenever it was possible to do so. Only the civilized societies, he continued, have struggled to control fire and keep it in check.<sup>7</sup> The conservative movement of Sauer's civilized societies, which is a surrogate for the industrialized western societies, expresses the ambiguous attitude these societies have about forests and the natural world in general. The conservative movement expressed the dualism of the Western idea of Nature, which has been considered both a source of raw materials that are critical to the development, yet also as an object to be conserved. Such dualism became especially acute in the nationalist movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which sung the praises of the natural world but also called for conquering it. Forests have been on the frontline of this dualism.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to being viewed as object for either use or conservation, forests have also been powerful social and cultural symbols. With the emergence of the modern state and the huge increase of its power through the use of knowledge and its technologies of, forests emerge also as a kind of heterotopia—a term Foucault deployed for those muddy spaces that broke with transparency of routinized daily life and stood out of the reach of different forms of power.<sup>9</sup> Forests have historically been a symbol of the wild, untamed, mysterious space, associated with danger. For a long time, forests have been outside of the legible world, a niche of the forbidden, including love—an Albanian folk song tells the story of a couple that wants to go to the forest and make love, because there, in the middle of the forest the world could not see them, including the sun. Forests have not only been a place for lovers, but also a shelter for outlaws, bandits, and folk heroes like the many Robin Hoods that appear in folk tales around the world. In Albania and the other Balkan countries, the mythologies of nationalism transformed forests, together with the mountains, into havens of national heroes fighting against the Ottomans, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as hubs of antifascist and/or anticommunist resistance.

All the tensions between the different uses of the forests and their representations have become more acute in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the speed of social, economic, cultural, and political transformations accelerated. The pressure on forests and the need to regenerate and preserve them for the future became a central concern for both the industrialized Western countries and for the new states that were created after the collapse of the empires. This article will deal with the history of the way this challenge was administered in Albania during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A small digression is necessary here. Albania, as a geographic concept has been plastic, associated with either a given territory neglecting the ethnicity of the populations that lived there, or as the territory where the Albanian speaking populations live. Its meaning and territorial extension have changed over time, although after the establishment of the Albanian state in 1912 – 1913 its meaning has been fixed within the actual state boundaries. The contestations over what Albanian meant and how it was translated in political boundaries have long run wild in the nationalist circles of the Balkans, which, depending on perspective, try either to broaden or shrink it. The instability of the geographical extension of the nation is not exclusive to Albania, but indeed a characteristic of all the Balkan countries, whose national egos suffer from incongruities

<sup>5</sup> Jack Vincent Thirgood, *Man and the Mediterranean Forest: A history of resource depletion*, (London-New York: Academic Press, 1981), 29.

<sup>6</sup> On the invention of traditions see the collection of essays in *The Invention of Traditions*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Carl O. Sauer, »The Agency of Man on the Earth,« in *Man's Role in Changing the Face of the Earth*, ed. by William L. Thomas, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956), 55.

<sup>8</sup> Ari Aukusti Lehtinen, »Modernization and the Concept of Nature: On the Reproduction of Environmental Stereotypes,« in *Encountering the Past in Nature: Essays in Environmental History*, ed. by Timo Myllyntaus & Mikko Saikku, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001), 29-48.

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, »Different spaces,« in Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault (Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology)*, vol. 2, ed. by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley & al., (New York: The New York Press, 1998), 175-185.

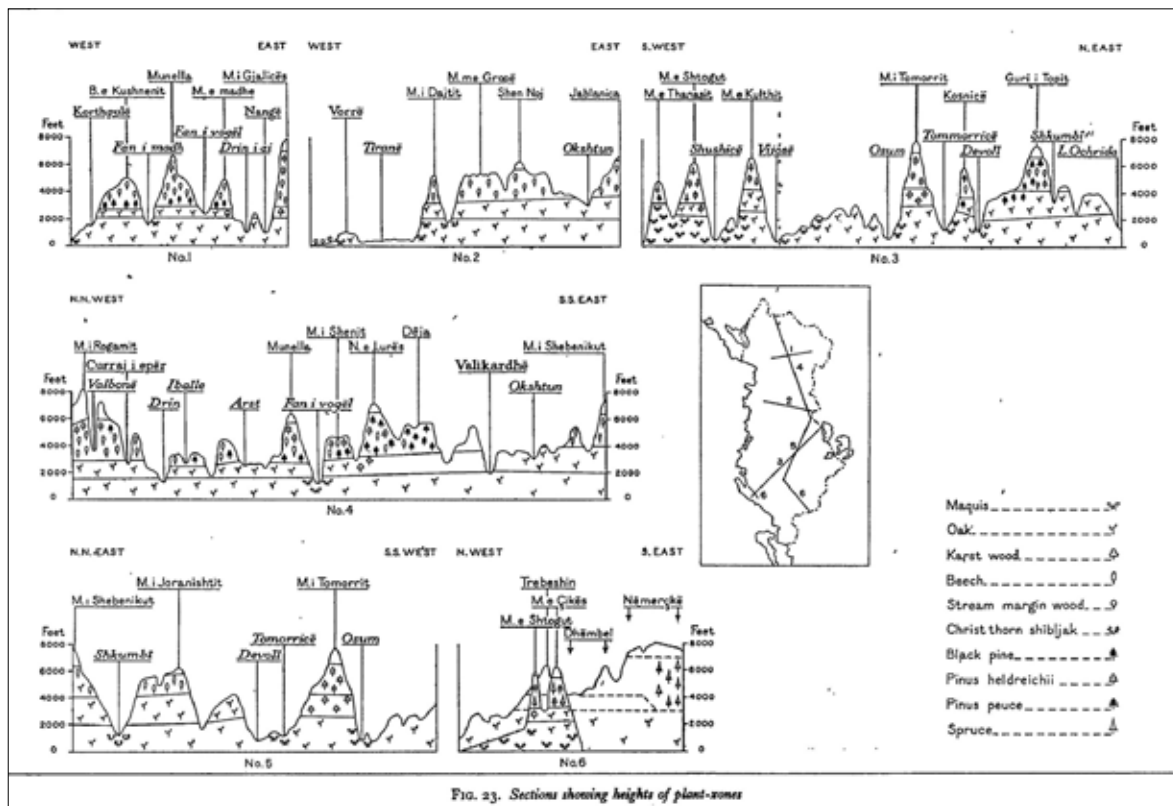


FIG. 23. Sections showing heights of plant-zones

between their nationalist projects and their actual political borders. Nature does not recognize man-made constructions like that of the nation, state, or borders. The territories of actual Albania do not constitute a geographical, geological, and climatic self-contained whole but are part of larger units and influences that transgress its borders and intersect in its space.

The man-made world, on the other hand, cannot be avoided. The analysis of the relations between man and forests cannot eschew from the political framework from its horizons, which is arbitrary but is still a crucial component that defines the relation between man and nature. The impact of human activity on forests is not simply the aggregate of the actions of free agents. Actually, the use of forests is a field of power relations and it is a major object of state policies. Hence, the political framework created by the establishment of the Albanian state is a major variable in the analysis of the history of the forests in Albania. The demarcation of the political borders of Albania was, besides economic and geostrategic factors, strongly related to ecological imperatives and competition with its neighbors for resources, including forests. That is why, with the emergence of the Albanian state, the territory within its political borders was transformed, regardless of its great diversity, into a single, though not monolithic, unit.

The importance of political borders and the marking of a given territory as an arena of power relations between state and non-state actors does not mean that the phenomena that take place there are isolated from what happens beyond the borders of that territory. Although the national state is envisioned as a hermetic entity, in reality it is a conduit of transnational ideas, practices, and interests in a given social entity. The nation-state is a form of power relations that mediates and integrates a society, that the nation-state creates, within the larger world. Hence, the forest policy of the Albanian state has been heavily influenced by larger discourses and ideologies that by no means were generated in Albania, but the Albanian state became an instrument for their application, according to the diverse local contexts, in the country. Actually, the nation, either as a field of power relations or as a medium of communication with the wider world, are two sides of the same coin.

Forests provide historians with a lens for tracing the very process of modern state building, its strategies, limits, and broader political and ecological repercussions of its policies and claims. To start

with, forests are not a neutral category, or a simple natural object that stands apart from power relations and culture, and their history cannot be detached from the uses and meanings humans have ascribed to them. This why forests are a very good object of study that helps to reconstruct both continuities and breaks in strategies of different political regimes toward the management of both natural and human resources. The work of Michel Foucault has inspired many social scientists to analyze how the management of natural resources intersects with broader social, cultural, political, and economic issues. His concept of governmentality has been especially useful in this respect. According to the French philosopher, governmentality stands for the complex forms of powers that targeted the population, used as a form of knowledge the political economy, and have as technical means for exercising the power an apparatus of security.<sup>10</sup>

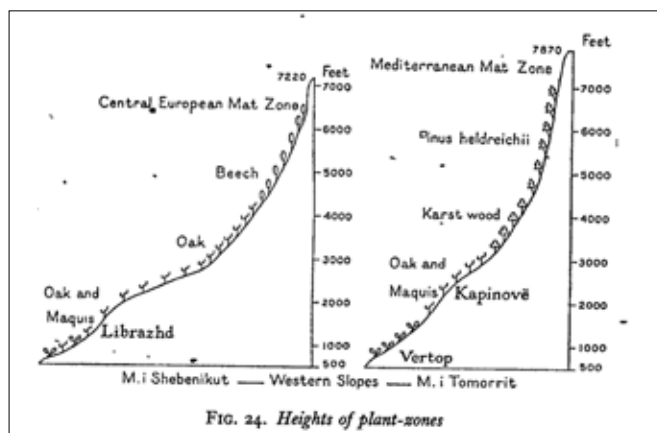


FIG. 24. Heights of plant-zones

Based on new venues that the Foucauldian framework opened up, in the mid-1990s, Peter Vandergeest and Nancy Peluso coined a series of important keywords that help to unpack the complex relations between political power, society, and natural resources. These two authors focused their attention on the importance that the control of the natural resources have on the modern state also to control also the population. The most important concept they came up with was that of ‘internal territorialization,’ which stands for the specific technologies of the rule that the center uses for exerting its power over the peripheries. They argue that most of the modern states »attempt to control people’s actions by surveying and registering landed property and by mapping and guarding forests and other natural resources.«<sup>11</sup> Part of the process of territorialization is also the creation of the category of ‘natural resources.’ The need to administer them created a new map of state-controlled territories and new forms of governing the resources and access to them.<sup>12</sup> In other words, territorialization created the basis for a whole process of exclusion and inclusion from the access of the ‘natural resources.’ In this respect, forests are not simply products of ecological processes, nor are they natural categories but, as all the other units of analysis, forests are also constructed. Forests are a category that has been shaped also by political processes, whose goal is to create new forms of discipline and reshape the view of the population about natural resources. For this reason, Vandergeest and Peluso coined the important concept of »political forest.«<sup>13</sup> The territorialization of the forests, their legal framing, and the institutionalization of their management as a technology of power was a crucial part of the building of the national state.<sup>14</sup> Part of the »tool set« the modern state uses to implement its control over the forests are technologies like mapping, legislation, demarcation of boundaries that both include and exclude, and state agencies.<sup>15</sup> Arun Agrawal has added to this list also numbers, statistics, and scientific classifications of the forests, soil, climate, vegetation etc. These new forms of representation of forests within a territory created a history of the past of the

<sup>10</sup> For more on this concept and the way Foucault used it see Michel Foucault, »Governmentality,« in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, & Peter Miller, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 87-104.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Vandergeest & Nancy Lee Peluso, »Territorialization and State Power in Thailand,« *Theory and Society* 24, 3 (1995): 415.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Lee Peluso & Christian Lund, »New Frontiers of Land Control: An Introduction,« *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, 4 (2011): 668.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Vandergeest & Nancy Lee Peluso, »Genealogies of the Political Forest and Customary Rights in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand,« *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, 3 (2001): 761-812.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Vandergeest & Nancy Lee Peluso, »Empires of Forestry: Professional Forestry and State Power in Southeast Asia, Part 1,« *Environment and History* 12, 1 (2006), 33.

<sup>15</sup> Phuc Xuan To, »State Territorialization and Illegal Logging: The Dynamic Relationships Between Practices and Images of the State in Vietnam,« *Critical Asian Studies* 47, 2 (2015): 233.

forests and plans for their future that increased the efficiency of forest use by the government. Agrawal calls this process environmentalism: a form of the governmentality of the environment, which was wielded by power and that in turn generated more power. It allowed the governments to draw policies of access and exclusion of external influences based on a clear set of data and methods of analysis.<sup>16</sup>

Although the bulk of the work on territorialization and the following debates are mainly focused on the colonial era in the South and Southeast Asia, Jennifer Sowerwine has argued that it is applicable also to the socialist period because the state ultimately claimed its right to control and administer all the natural resources, including the forests. The state demarcated the forests, patrolled, and guarded them to enforce its policy of control over nature and people, although, she continues, with limited success because of the scarcity of the resources and personnel.<sup>17</sup> At this point, Sowerwine touches a crucial point that is not related only to the applicability of the term in different historical periods and political and economic regimes, but also to the limits of state power to implement its vision. Forests and their history do not only show how the modern state has been built and its power reinforced and expanded, but also how it has failed to totalize its power and homogenize its space of rule. As mentioned earlier, the state is not a monolithic entity that acts over a malleable flat space filled with plastic individuals that it can shape at its will.

Different authors have criticized the Foucauldian approach, which focuses mainly on the projects and eschews their application on the ground. They have called attention to the importance of the practices and inconsistencies within the ensemble of the state institutions that hamper the uniform implementation of the state policies. Moreover, state actors are forced to compromise and adapt to local actors, contexts, or unanticipated problems that have emerged in the course of implementation. The final result is the alteration of the original project.<sup>18</sup> Even Vandergeest and Peluso have been obliged in a way to emphasize in their work that the process of state formation has been shaped by local economics, ecology, and politics.<sup>19</sup> They have argued that the intensity of state-induced transformation, and the impact of its practices of power and control has been uneven across space and time.<sup>20</sup>

The above 'toolset' of concepts that has been deployed for making sense of how politics, culture, and nature are spatially constituted and expressed, are also very useful for analyzing the same processes in the Balkans during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since their establishment, the national states in the Balkans made particular claims to territories, their resources, and populations. They issued new laws and implemented new forms of governmentality practices—institutions that were in use in Western Europe. However, these policies did not represent a stark departure from their Ottoman past. In the Ottoman Empire, before the reforms of Tanzimat the forests were divided into five categories: armory and shipyard forests that belonged to the state, community forests, those that belonged to the religious communities, private forests and finally those for public use. But forests were considered God-given and the communities used them freely.

Within the context of the top-down Westernization of the empire, in 1870 the state issued 'The Forestry Regulation' that created four legal categories of ownership in relation to forests: those that belonged to the state, to religious endowments, to private citizens, and to the village or town communities. During the Tanzimat era, especially after the Hatt-i-Humayun reforms of 1856, the Ottoman state

<sup>16</sup> For more see the second chapter »Forests and Statistics: Colonial Environmental Knowledges.« in Arun Agrawal, *Environmentalism: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005), 32-64.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer C. Sowerwine, »Territorialization and the politics of highland landscapes in Vietnam,« *Conservation and Society* 2, 1 (2004): 103.

<sup>18</sup> Sivaramakrishnan, »A Limited Forest Conservancy,« 75-112; Phuc Xuan To, »State Territorialization and Illegal Logging,« 229-252; Tania Murray Li, »Compromising Power: Development, Culture, and Rule in Indonesia,« *Cultural Anthropology* 14, 3 (1999): 295-232; Tania Murray Li, »Practices of assemblage and community forest management,« *Economy and Society* 36, 2 (2007): 263-293.

<sup>19</sup> Vandergeest & Peluso, »Empires of Forestry, Part 1« 31.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Vandergeest & Nancy Lee Peluso, »Empires of Forestry: Professional Forestry and State Power in Southeast Asia, Part 2,« *Environment and History* 12, 4 (2006): 359-393.

approach to forests took a definite economic orientation. In the forests, Istanbul's reformers saw source of revenues that would serve their goal of modernizing the empire.<sup>21</sup> The Ottomans were not alone on this path. Actually, they were mimicking a trend that was already in place by the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the West. As Joachim Radkau explains, in both Germany and France, the state forestry management of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was largely based on economic imperatives.<sup>22</sup> The Ottoman top administration also started to centralize forests' control and administration and enforce the new legal framework of ownership and access to forests by the populations of the empire. By the early 1880s, in different provinces of the empire, the state took over the control of the forests, which up to that point had been under village administration.<sup>23</sup> However, these efforts remained mainly on paper because large swaths of the empire remained unaffected. As a contemporary Ottoman educated Albanian lawyer quipped, the Ottomans created laws without having the specialists to implement the law. The Ottomans embraced the leitmotif of modernity, but they lacked the capacity to modernize. The same lawyer, who later on became Minister of Agriculture and Forests and also Prime Minister of Albania, admitted that during the interwar era the country repeated the same experience. It issued laws, created an institutional framework but it had no personnel to enforce them.<sup>24</sup> The gap between goals and capacities for implementing them was one of the main Ottoman legacies in Albania, including the scientific management of the forests.

### Before Independence

The forests in Albania typically contain elms, pines, fir, oaks, and beech trees and are divided into five types of forests: the Mediterranean maqui, oak woodlands, beech forests, Mediterranean fir forests, and alpine pine forests.<sup>25</sup> The extent of their coverage and conditions have changed over time as a result of the interplay of geological, climatic, topographic, geographical, and human factors. The geographic position of Albania and its uneven topography have exposed the country to the influence of many natural factors that have produced a very diverse and rich flora that shares similarities with Dalmatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and northwestern Greece. Its structure that changes in the West-East direction is influenced by the Mediterranean climate along the coasts and in the southwestern part of the country and by Central European climate, whose influence is strong along the borders with Macedonia and Kosovo. These two major influences have also defined the typology of forests of the country, which are divided in two major groups that fit also with their geographic distribution: the southwestern Mediterranean zone, with sparse groves and generally shorter trees, and the northeastern zone characterized by tall forests, similar to those of Central Europe.<sup>26</sup> These geographical divisions also overlap with the topographic distinction between lowlands and highlands, with hilly areas in between that represent also a transitional region. Before the reclamation, the western lowlands had marsh-woodlands, oak, and maqui—the latter especially in the coastal and steep limestone mountains of southwestern Albania. In the highlands, there are two types of tree families: the coniferous and deciduous. The highlands of North and Central Albania have forests composed of white-barked pine and beech trees. Below this evergreen crown lies a belt of oak forests, which, in Central Albania, descends down into deep valleys. In the

<sup>21</sup> Sezgin Özden & Üstüner Birben, »Ottoman forestry: socio-economic aspect and its influence today,« *Ciência Rural* 42, 3 (2012): 459-466.

<sup>22</sup> Joachim Radkau, »Wood and Forestry in German History: In Quest of an Environmental Approach,« *Environment and History* 2, 1 (1996): 70.

<sup>23</sup> Martha Mundy & Richard Saumarez Smith, *Governing Property, Making the Modern State: Law, Administration and Production in Ottoman Syria*, (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 113.

<sup>24</sup> Mehdi Frashëri, *Problemet shqiptare*, (Tirana: Plejad, 2006), 151-152.

<sup>25</sup> Maxhun Dida, »State of Forest Tree Genetic Resources in Albania,« *Forest Genetic Resources Working Paper*, FAO, Rome, 2003, 1-4.

<sup>26</sup> Filip Schipani, *Kurs mësimesh ekonomije shqiptare (Për kursin special të kryetarve dhe të sekretarve të Komuneve)*, (Tirana: Tirana, 1931), 56-57.

highlands of South Albania, the evergreen forests are rarer and are predominantly composed of fir and beech, and in some cases also maqui in the low-lying river valleys.<sup>27</sup>

The human factor has been as well an important force in determining the condition of forests in the country. Albanian economic and social organization created a south-north divide, which was particularly strong until the end of World War II. The bulk of the contiguous forests was located in Central and North Albania, while until 1945 South Albania did not have real forests. The causes of this differences in the distribution of forests were the very large number of goat herds, the burning of the forests to create pastures, and the indiscriminate logging practices, especially for charcoal.<sup>28</sup> A contemporary Albanian politician complained about the predominance of the pastoralist economy in the south whom he identified as responsible for the ugly spectacle of the bare mountains of Toskëria—the common name for South Albania.<sup>29</sup>

Pastoralist economy was widespread in Central and North Albania as well and as a well-known Albanian ethnographer noted, shepherds and peasants were repeatedly depleting the forests well into the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> The real reason for the regional differences lay in the lower population density in the central and northern highlands,<sup>31</sup> which decreased the pressure on the natural resources, including forests. The distribution of human population density converged with that of goats across the territory: the bulk of the goat herds was concentrated in the uplands of South Albania.<sup>32</sup> During the interwar era, Albania had the highest number of small livestock per 1000 inhabitants in the entire Balkans. In the late 1930s, Albania, whose population was slightly higher than one million,<sup>33</sup> had 945,000 goats and more than 1,5 million sheep.<sup>34</sup>

The huge number of livestock needed large pastures that shepherds obtained by clearing and burning the forest cover, especially that of the low and middle-altitudes. A good portion of Albania's limestone hills and mountain were left bare and geological composition made them prone to erosion and landslides. The rainy seasons deposited huge amounts of inert matter in the plains and rivers' estuaries. The consequences were the regular floods and the large marshes that infested the western plains. As a result, on the eve of the political independence, in the territories that now form the Albanian state took shape along a vertical divide: the plains and the accessible areas were deforested or, at the maximum, had woodlands; while forests were located in the high altitudes difficult to reach except by the local Highlanders.

Forest use by the local population and political autonomy were two sides of the same coin because the bulk of the forests were in the autonomous regions of north and central Albania. State administrative control over the high-altitude forests also meant controlling the population of the highlands. Control of timber resources was part of what Braudel identified as one of the critical features of Mediterranean socio-political life: the old tension between lowlands, where state authority resided, and the uplands that refused to bow to it.<sup>35</sup> As long as the state authorities did not enforce their control over the Highlanders or did not build a road network to reach them, no one, except the local communities, could exploit Albania's high-altitude forests.

Livestock husbandry was the main activity of the uplands, while in the lowlands the main economic activity of the rural population was agriculture. Here it was neither the goat, fire of the shepherd,

<sup>27</sup> *Albania*, HM Naval Intelligence Division, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), 98-117.

<sup>28</sup> Stavro Skëndi, *Albania*, (New York: Praeger, 1958), 42-43.

<sup>29</sup> Frashëri, *Problemet shqiptare*, 152.

<sup>30</sup> Rok Zojzi, »Pyjet shqiptare,« *Hylli i dritës*, 2-3 (1938):110-111.

<sup>31</sup> Skëndi, *Albania*, 52-53.

<sup>32</sup> AQSh, F. 498, Ministria e Bujqësisë, 1952, d. 88, fl. 58.

<sup>33</sup> Iljaz Fishta & Veniamin Toçi, *Gjendja ekonomike e Shqipërisë në vitet 1912-1944, prapambetja e saj, shkaqet dhe pasojat*, (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1983), 166.

<sup>34</sup> Deko Rusi & Zyhdë Pepa, *Mbi zgjidhjen komplekse të ndërtimit të socializmit në fshat në RPS të Shqipërisë*, (Tirana: Universiteti i Tiranës »Enver Hoxha,« 1986), 23-24.

<sup>35</sup> Braudel has exposed this tension in his work on the Mediterranean during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For more see Fernand Braudel, *Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, vol. 1, translated from French Siân Reynolds, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1966), 25-102.



nor the ax of the Highlander, but rather the plow of the farmer and the sawmills of the local lords that shrunk and extinguished the forests. The Sublime Porte had delegated the right to administer the state's forests in the Albanian vilayets to the local lords who used them as they liked.<sup>36</sup> Many times the local lords entered into relations with European states who wanted the timber of the Albanian lands. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century the local Ottoman lords of what is today Southwestern Albania agreed to allow Venice and Ragusa to use the timber of the western lowlands of the country to build their sailing ships. The final result was the deforestation of the coastal plains. Even late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Italians, themselves with a shortage of indigenous forests, routinely built their boats with timber from the southeastern shores of the Adriatic.<sup>37</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ali Pasha of Janina, the powerful lord of Lower Albania supplied the French and British arsenals with oak in exchange for bountiful rewards paid in gold.<sup>38</sup> The Western maritime powers were not the only clients hungry for timber from the southeastern shores of the Adriatic. After the conflict with Mehmet Ali of Egypt in the late 1820s, the Sublime Porte cut off the rebellious khedive from access to the forests of Greater Syria that had historically supplied the country of the Nile with timber.<sup>39</sup> The lord of Egypt, who was looking for other alternatives of the coveted forests' raw material entered in 1830 into an agreement with Mustafa Pasha of Shkodra who committed to supplying Mehmet Ali with timber.<sup>40</sup>

The powerful pashas of the country depleted the forests not only by selling timber to the great maritime powers but also through fire—the shepherds were not the only ones who used the torch to clear the forests. The highlands of South Albania had been for centuries notorious for their brigandage. Forests were their nest. Ali Pasha of Janina, who fashioned himself also as the Lion of Janina, an ex-brigand turned pasha, that ruled for decades over South Albania in virtual independence from the Sublime Porte, decided to eradicate brigandage from his realm. To achieve his goal, he devoured their hideout—the forests of South Albania—with fire.<sup>41</sup> The Lion of Janina was not the only pasha that showed a propensity in using fire against the outlaws. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the authorities set fire to the large forests of Mali i Gjerë (Wide Mountain) over the city of Gjirokastra, close to the modern Albanian-Greek border, to root out a band of brigands that hid there.<sup>42</sup> This practice was used also in North Albania, as the case of Beqir Pasha proves it. In 1807 he burned entire forests in Kosovo to catch the brigands hiding in them.<sup>43</sup>

After Albania started its new independent life, the new authorities tried to reverse the current situation regarding the access and use of the natural resources. For this purpose, they established new hierarchies that juxtaposed the fresh category of national interests to against private interests. The latter were perceived as a threat to the general national interests. The Albanian nationalist elites were alarmed at the conditions of the forests and the threat that the rural population and private individuals represented to them. The government of Valona that proclaimed Albania's independence on November 28<sup>th</sup>, 1912, issued in May of 1913 a law where it made it clear that the new authorities would not permit the peasants, especially the shepherds, to allow their livestock to graze in state-owned forests.<sup>44</sup> The competition between the national state, communities, and local lords over the use of the forests was just beginning.

In 1914, the journal *Përparimi* (Progress) published an article, which touched on the central problem of the importance of the forests and the right and ways of using them. Its author, whose name remains unknown, considered the forests as an important source of revenue for the development of industry, and

<sup>36</sup> Frederic Gilbert, »Gjeografia ekonomike e Shqipërisë,« *Illyria*, 3 (2016): 15.

<sup>37</sup> Skëndi, *Albania*, 42.

<sup>38</sup> Robert G. Albion, *Forests and Sea Power: The Timber Problem of the Royal Navy, 1652-1862*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 332-33.

<sup>39</sup> Alan Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 165.

<sup>40</sup> Gjon Fierza, »Pyjet, kullotat, dhe Shërbimi Pyjor i Shqipërisë në vështrimin historik,« in *Pyjet dhe Shërbimi Pyjor Shqiptar në vite (Shënime historike)*, ed. by Kol Malaj, Gjon Fierza, and Janaq Male, (Tirana: Graphic Line-01, 2013), 25.

<sup>41</sup> Mehdi Frashëri, »Natyra ne gjobon kur e përbuzim,« *Gazeta e Re*, February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1929, (88), 1.

<sup>42</sup> Skëndi, *Albania*, 42.

<sup>43</sup> Fierza, »Pyjet, kullotat,« 25.

<sup>44</sup> *Kanoni i dëmëve 1913*, (Valona: Shtypshkroja e Shtetit Shqiptar, 1913).

of the country in general and expressed deep perturbation over their existing condition and future. He was concerned about the uncontrolled cutting of trees for timber by people who pursued selfish interests, huge damages that goats caused to the forests, and a possible abuse of power regarding the potential concessions of the forests to foreign firms. The lack of roads, which were considered as a barrier to development, seemed to have saved the high-forests in the remote highlands, while those more accessible were vulnerable from logging and pasture.<sup>45</sup> To the author of this article, the forests were an instrument of national construction, which he articulated and understood mainly in economic terms. Forests were a source of wealth that would shore up Albania's economic development. For this reason, forests belonged to the abstract national collective and would serve the latter's interests.

With the independence of Albania, a legal and conceptual artifice emerged that juxtaposed the national to the individual, as well as public and private interests. The article clearly subordinated the private to the public. This tension disclosed something else, tied to the agenda of the national state and Albanian educated elites, which was strongly linked to the process of governmentality. The nationalist elites considered the simple Albanians as narrowminded, who did not see the whole national picture and did not care about it. For this reason, they believed it was state's duty to control the natural resources, whose use was critical for the development of the country. Lack of consciousness from the individuals entitled the state to transfer the management of national resources under its control on the behalf of the nation, a perceived collective, which the elites thought of as irresponsible. These tensions over the use of the forests, that surfaced at the moment Albania became an independent state, have accompanied the history of forests and the power politics that surround them. They also reflected the tensions between past and future, inherited legacies, and the goals to be achieved by the state. World War I interrupted the process. It restarted in 1920 after the Paris Conference recognized Albanian independence.

### **Green vs. Yellow: Civilization, Barbarity, and Forests, 1920 – 1944**

Jovan Adami, one of the most important Albanian engineers of the interwar era, equated deforestation with the destruction of the country and forestation with its salvation.<sup>46</sup> Deforestation, he argued, was a disease for the nation.<sup>47</sup> The use of medical nomenclature has been common for all modernizers. One of the major principles of pathology is that the healing of an organism suffering from a disease can be achieved through medical intervention. The use of this nomenclature gave room to intervention by a subject, doctors, onto an object, the body of the patient that is malleable and curable. Jovan Adami deployed medical terminology to address the »diseases« Albania was suffering from and it asked for almost total intervention because it includes both people and nature.

Adami, an engineer educated in Salzburg during the time it was part of the Habsburg empire, considered both people and territory as plastic elements that could be transformed, shaped, and cured; while he himself stood on the other end of the continuum: he belonged to the group of doctors, in this case the educated elites that through the use of science and rationality could act upon and heal nature and people from the evil of ignorance and darkness of historical legacies. Adami represented the enlightened minority that struggled throughout the interwar era to cure the 'diseases' Albania had inherited from the Ottoman rule. In the spirit of nationalist 'awakenings' of the Balkans, foresting the country meant, to Adami and other likeminded men and women, both establishing a foundation for the future and returning the lost glories of the pre-Ottoman past.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the issue of the forests in Albania was part of larger debates that were related to the problem of nation-building, understood either as the establishment of a modern state apparatus that aimed to become arbiter of social activities, or as the process of the national-community building. At the center of these debates was the conflict between individual interests and those of an imagined

<sup>45</sup> »Bëgatit e Shqypniis (Pyllat),« *Përparimi*, 1 (1914): 10-11.

<sup>46</sup> Jovan Adami, »Për pyllëzimin e vendit,« *Gazeta e Korçës*, December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1932, (1560), 1.

<sup>47</sup> »Rendesia e pyjeve,« *Gazeta e Korçës*, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1933, (1715), 1.

national community.<sup>48</sup> The use of the natural resources was one of the major venues where this tension took place. Nationalism in Southeastern Europe was also an ideology of development. The small contingents of nationalist elites considered the use of natural resources as critical to their top-down projects that aimed at transforming both culture and socio-economic life of the majority of the population—the soon-to-be nations.

But to whom did these natural resources belong? Were they a national property, or did they simply belong to the communities that had always used them? Would the rural communities give up to their rights of control over these resources and delegate them to a state that now was acting as a representative of an abstract community called ‘nation’? Forests were one of the arenas where these questions were debated in the public discourse and produced practical answers. As explained earlier, forest management has been an important instrument of the modern state for the population control. The process, though, was not smooth. It has been rife with tension but also compromises, between state representatives and local communities, as well as individuals. The historical dynamics of forest management in Albania shows the limits and successes of Tirana’s authorities to meet their goals and project their vision onto the peripheries.

In the interwar era, the major goal of Albanian state authorities was to modernize agriculture. The political elites considered this the best way to regenerate the country’s economy and use Albania’s geographic and climatic advantages for the development of the primary sector. Forests had a crucial part in this project. The revenues from timber exploitation, which could be invested in the improvement of infrastructure, were not the only factor that appealed to the new nationalist elites of Albania committed to the development of the country. The value of the forests went beyond the market value of their timber and was strongly related to their general state during the period under scrutiny.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Albanian government did not have accurate figures and statistics of the total area covered by forests. The term »forest,« was very fluid and many times was used also for the shrublands and forest lands, whose inclusion increased the area of land considered as forest. Thus, according to the statistics in the late 1930s, the country had 1,308,700 hectares of forests,<sup>49</sup> but a recent study breaks this figure down to 800,000 hectares of dense forests, 250,000 hectares of woodlands, and another 250,000 of forest lands.<sup>50</sup> In the category of the dense forests though, this author includes also coppices and other areas of shrubland. Roughly speaking Albania had 500,000 hectares of forests, which made 17 – 18% of the total area of the country. Of them, 314,000 hectares were located in the uplands of North and central Albania, although these forests were not always in good conditions.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of the claims of the Albanian authorities, the ratio between the total area of the country and that of forest cover was lower than that of Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Romania and higher only than Greece, whose forest cover occupied 15.6% of total area of the country.<sup>52</sup>

According to Mario Michelangeli, an Italian forest specialist who wrote a study on the conditions of the Albanian forests in 1940, the irrational loggings and increasing demand for timber had destroyed the forests below an altitude of 900 meters. In the accessible areas close to the cities, villages, and roads, the forests had disappeared, while they survived in mostly inaccessible areas far from the inhabited centers and human activity.<sup>53</sup> The lack of infrastructure and the unsustainable logging had created a situation that the country imported timber because the domestic reserves could not supply the domestic demand.<sup>54</sup> The scarcity of state and private capital did not permit the building of the necessary road network for

<sup>48</sup> I deploy Benedict Anderson’s concept of nations as imagined communities. For more see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London-New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Deko Rusi & Zyhdj Pepa, *Mbi zgjidhjen komplekse të ndërtimit të socializmit në fshat në RPS të Shqipërisë*, (Tirana: Universiteti i Tiranës »Enver Hoxha,« 1986), 16.

<sup>50</sup> Gjon Fierza, »Pyjet, kullotat, dhe Shërbimi Pyjor i Shqipërisë në vështrimin historik,« in *Pyjet dhe Shërbimi Pyjor Shqiptar në vite (Shënime historike)*, ed. by Kol Malaj, Gjon Fierza, and Janaq Male, (Tirana: Graphic Line-01, 2013), 38.

<sup>51</sup> Ilia Mitrush, »Pyjet t’anë,« *Ekonomisti shqiptar*, 1 (1932): 19-24.

<sup>52</sup> »Pyjet t’ona dhe rëndësia e tyre në ekonomin t’onë,« *Besa*, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1931, (23), 3.

<sup>53</sup> Mario Michelangeli, *Il problema forestale Albanese*, (Roma: Reale Accademia d’Italia, 1940), 28-29.

<sup>54</sup> »Pyjet t’ona dhe industria e lëndës,« *Besa*, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1931, (121), 2-3.

accessing the high-altitude forests. Some circles considered the foreign investments as the solution to exploit the forests, shrink the imports, and increase the exports.<sup>55</sup> In the spirit of the interwar era's autarchy, the major goal of the supporters of the increase of the foreign investments was the elimination of timber imports.<sup>56</sup>

The depletion of the low and middle-altitude forests had large repercussions. The modernizers of Albania firmly believed that the deforestation of the mountains was the cause of the miserable situation of country's lowlands that were filled with marshes. According to them, afforestation of the bare slopes of mountains and hills would prevent landslides and the depositing in the plains of inert matter that caused floods, created marshlands, and brought with them the byproduct of malaria.<sup>57</sup> In the plans of the Albanian modernizers, forests were going to safeguard country's few precious plains from transforming into swamps filled with *Anopheles* during the rainy season.<sup>58</sup> The reclamation of the lowlands and the application of intensive and extensive agriculture depended in large measure from the reclamation of the mountains.

Nationalism wanted not only the construction of a monolithic social body but also to integrate alleged antithetic elements like uplands and lowlands, timber and water into a single coherent entity. In this context, during the 1930s the state, through the personal intervention of King Zog, designated 400,000 hectares for future forestations—by the end of WWII, of this area were forested 150,000 hectares.<sup>59</sup> As part of the double reclamation of plains and uplands, in 1937 the government drew a program for the forestation of those areas that needed it most. The goal was to create defensive forests that would prevent landslides and floods of the plains, as it was, for example, the case in the region of Korça.<sup>60</sup>

Jovan Adami and other intellectuals of the interwar era wrote many articles on forests in the daily press. Through an elaborated set of symbols and concepts, they weaved a loaded ideological language, hoping to place forests within the broader nationalist discourse. In a similar fashion to the contemporary colonial discourses, a clerk from the Directory of Forests argued in the press that all great civilizations are doomed once they lose their forests. Deploying the correlation between forests and civilization as a strategy demanded a more resolute intervention by the state to protecting the forests, and used a dramatic language to achieve this desired effect. The clerk came to the conclusion that Albania would meet the same fate if nobody was going to keep the destruction of the forests in check.<sup>61</sup> Adami also made a similar claim when he stated that forests were the main source of civilization.<sup>62</sup> Using a series of powerful images he merged civilization, forests, and Orientalism<sup>63</sup> into one single narrative. Taking the countries of North Africa and the Middle East as an example, he argued that countries without forests had deserts, and no civilization, while the civilized countries, like Germany and Austria had large forests. According to him, the cause of the precarious situation of the forests in the Albania was Ottoman rule. To convince his audiences, he contrasted Albania's forests with those of Transylvania, which Romania, the Balkan country with the largest forests, inherited from the Habsburgs.<sup>64</sup>

The Albanian interwar era modernizers deployed the East vs. West dichotomy to elaborate their modernist vision, merging power and aesthetics into a single powerful discourse that targeted both nature and people. Although the economic rubric had a central place in the overarching debate about the

<sup>55</sup> »Pyjet t'ona dhe kapitali i huaj,« *Besa*, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1931, (24), 3.

<sup>56</sup> »Mbi përparimin e çfrytëzimin e pyjeve,« *Besa*, May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1933, (548), 3.

<sup>57</sup> Stilian Gaxho, »Pylizimi në Shqipëri,« *Illyria*, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1934, (16), 7 & July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1934, (17), 7.

<sup>58</sup> »Pylëzimi i maleve dhe i kodrave të Shqipërisë,« *Besa*, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1933, (446), 2.

<sup>59</sup> Fierza, »Pyjet, kullotat,« 38.

<sup>60</sup> Zoi Xoxa, »Ripylëzimi dhe shfrytëzimi i pyjeve,« *Drita*, October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1937, (262), 2.

<sup>61</sup> J. Pali, »Mirëmbajtja e pyjeve,« *Zëri i Korçës*, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 1926, (147), 2. On the colonial discourses see Vandergeest & Peluso, »Empires of Forestry,« Part 1,« 41; Vandergeest & Peluso, »Empires of Forestry: Part 2,« 374.

<sup>62</sup> Jovan Adami, »Pyjet dhe qytetërimi,« *Gazeta e Korçës*, 1927, nr.399, June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1927, f.2.

<sup>63</sup> I use Orientalism in the way Edward W. Said defined it: »a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between »the Orient« and (most of the time) »the Occident.« See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 2.

<sup>64</sup> »Rendesia e pyjeve,« *Gazeta e Korçës*, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1933, (1715), 1.

forests, the aesthetic considerations were very important as well. Forests made Albania look beautiful, without them she looked ugly—someone said as a »hairless lady.«<sup>65</sup> The modernizers imagined Albania as a young lady whose beauty, or the lack of it, was the measuring stick for identifying her whether or not she was a developed, civilized country. Adami equated civilization with Europe and its greenery and identified a lack of civilization with the yellowish desert of the Orient. On one hand, stood the desolate landscape of the Ottoman legacy, on the other the beauty of the green gardens the Habsburg rule left behind. The Ottoman experience was that of lack of Nature's management—barbarity and ugliness—while the European experience was that of the beauty, of a gardener state that knew how to manage people and territory. The latter was the model the Albanians had to pursue. Its implementation asked for the intervention of the state, as the gardener, to prevent the shrinking of forest cover in the country.

I am not deploying the concept of the gardener state here in the same way as Zygmunt Bauman and Amir Weiner, to explain the violence and genocide of the modern nation-states.<sup>66</sup> I give to this concept a larger meaning and I do not limit it only the elimination of the minorities that undermined the imagined homogeneity of the hegemonic group. After all, the gardener's duty is not only to cut the undesired weeds, but also to shape and plant. The national states have tried to shape both landscape and populations, so they could appear beautiful, i.e. Western. The way the country looked to the gaze of the 'others',<sup>67</sup> especially to that of the powerful West, whose model the modernizing elites wanted to pursue, was a powerful drive for the social, cultural, urban, and environmental policies of a poor state like Albania. The modernizing elites were very concerned with those most visible elements of their countries that were also considered as markers of civilization, like nature, the urban landscape and its cleanliness, or even style of dresses, especially that of women. The war against the veil and Oriental dresses in Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Iran were all part of the aesthetic policy of these gardener states that wanted to transform the image of their countries.<sup>68</sup> In the same way, the transformation of landscape following what James Scott has called »high modernism,« were part of the same transformative project.<sup>69</sup>

Forest played a critical role in embellishing landscape, making it more beautiful, showing how industrious and civilized the people of a country were. The treeless, rocky, and bare mountains represented the antithetic model of what the high modernist visions stood for. Transforming landscape could not take place without the shaping the people, who, according to the intellectuals, were mainly responsible for the condition of the forests. Adami asked for a resolute intervention of the government to play its role as a gardener of the forests but also of people. The state had to defend the forests from the narrowmindedness of the peasants whose ax and fire were destroying the future by pursuing their immediate gains.<sup>70</sup> In face of human irresponsibility state intervention was necessary. In order to shape the future and transform both nature and people, the state had to become a teacher, and a doctor, whose goal was to heal the diseases Albania suffered from.

Many intellectuals of the interwar era identified the peasants, especially the Highlanders as the main threat to the forests. They deployed the concept of 'desert' not simply as a metaphor, but something that

<sup>65</sup> »Rëndësia dhe dobia e pyjeve,« *Telegraf*, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1927, 3-4; »Djalëria në punë,« *Demokratia*, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1927, (129), 4; »Pyjet dhe dobit e tyre,« *Gazeta e Korçës*, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 1928, (521), 2; Zisi Kërkhalli, »Përse na duhen pyjet,« *Laboremus*, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1929, (12), 2; »Pyllëzimet dhe rolet e tyre,« *Shtypi*, February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1939, (524), 2.

<sup>66</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Holocaust*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Amir Weiner, »Introduction: Landscaping the Human Garden,« in *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework*, ed. by Amir Weiner, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1-18.

<sup>67</sup> Foucault has discussed about the way 'gaze,' power, and internalization are interrelated. See Michel Foucault, »The Eye of Power,« in Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, edited and translated by Colin Gordon, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1980), 134-145. Although Foucault was mainly focused on the punitive system, the concept of gaze can be very useful for understanding how the gaze of the representatives of the hegemonic model is critical for the latter dissemination, internalization and mimicking.

<sup>68</sup> For more on this subject see the collections of articles *Anti-veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World: Gender, modernism and the politics of dress*, ed. by Stephanie Cronin, (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 231-251.

<sup>69</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Heaven & London: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>70</sup> Jovan Adami, »Pyjet dhe qytetërimi,« *Gazeta e Korçës*, 1927, nr.399, June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1927, f.2.

would certainly become reality if the peasants kept burning and destroying the forests.<sup>71</sup> These voices asked the authorities of Tirana to police the forests and not let them perish at the mercy of peasant's ax,<sup>72</sup> or as others put it less nicely, »defend them from peasants' vandalism.«<sup>73</sup> The intellectual elites in Albania identified the peasants, especially those in the highlands, as Albania's undisciplined, »barbarian other.« Defending the forests and disciplining the peasants was necessary for the future of the country. It is interesting that the same prescriptions that considered forests as a fuel to the economic development and the peasants as a threat to this resource so necessary for the accumulation circulated in post-colonial states in Asia after WWII.<sup>74</sup>

Whatever name or label the educated and managerial elites assigned for the peasants, the truth was that to the latter, forests were a source of food and energy. In Germany, whose example inspired Adami the aesthetic considerations of romanticism emerged only when timber lost its value and other fuels replaced it.<sup>75</sup> In Albania the peasants did not have alternative fuels and they still largely depended on forests' timber. In the late 1930s some discussions started about introducing coal to replace timber,<sup>76</sup> but nothing concrete happened. After the Italians invaded Albania in 1939 they also started thinking of increasing the use of lignite as a fuel.<sup>77</sup> The Fascist authorities considered the use of alternative fuel as crucial for 'saving' the forests, but they controlled the country for a very short time and were unable to achieve tangible results.

Fuel was not the only link between peasant household and forest, though. The huge herds of goats that the Albanian highlanders possessed were maybe the most powerful element that determined the ecological relationship between them and forests. Goats were stigmatized as forest killers and without fixing the goat problem nothing would fix the forests. Some proposed an increase of taxes for goats as a financial mechanism to foster the decrease of their number,<sup>78</sup> while others went further and asked for more extreme measures, even suggesting the banning of goats.<sup>79</sup> Another one even proposed the slaughtering of all goats because they were not economically profitable: their milk, wool, meat were of a poor quality while the damages they did to the forests were immense.<sup>80</sup> More moderate voices reminded that the state could not deprive the Highlanders of their source of food and pointed to the experience of Montenegro, where during the reign of king Nikola, the state helped the peasants to replace the goats with sheep.<sup>81</sup>

By eating the buds, goats often prevented the regeneration of the forests, but at the heart of the problem lay the conflict between the short-term advantages of pastoral husbandry and the long-term plan of the modern state. This conflict was manifested between the individual interests of the shepherds and that of the nation to whom the forests technically belonged. It was part of the tension between the pastoral life that did not conform modern state's rule and latter's goal of controlling, mapping, organizing people, territory, and natural resources. The goat problem was not simply of ecological nature, but of governmentality as well. It was about a new form of government that was committed to including all sections of populace and territory that until then were left out of state's reach. Not everybody, though, was enthusiastic about the draconian strategies of spreading civilization into the barbarity of the mountains. There were also voices that caught the important dimension the laws the government were issuing on the behalf of administration of the forests, and criticized it as an unfair effort of the »cities and lowlan-

<sup>71</sup> Ilija Mitrushi, »Vlefta e pyjeve për bujk e bujqësi,« *Ekonomia kombëtare*, 11 (1938): f.27-29.

<sup>72</sup> »Për zhvillimin e eksploatimit të pyjeve,« *Besa*, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1933, (461), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Zoi Xoxa, »Një pasuri e madhe kombëtare: pyjet,« *Drita*, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1937, (218), 2.

<sup>74</sup> Nancy Lee Peluso, Peter Vandergeest, Lesley Potter, »Social Aspects of Forestry in Southeast Asia: A Review of Postwar Trends in the Scholarly Literature,« *Journal of Asian Studies* 26, 1 (1995): 198-199.

<sup>75</sup> Radkau, »Wood and Forestry in German History,« 70.

<sup>76</sup> Rrok Zojzi, »Pyjet shqiptare,« *Hylli i dritës*, 2-3 (1938):107-108.

<sup>77</sup> Michelangeli, *Il problema forestale Albanese*, 39.

<sup>78</sup> »Dhitë dhe pyjet,« *Zëri i Korçës*, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1928, (290), 2.

<sup>79</sup> »Një rrezik që po i ture vendit tenë,« *Gazeta e Korçës*, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1928, (462), 2.

<sup>80</sup> »Pyllet dhe dhitë,« *Zëri i Korçës*, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 1926, (69), 2.

<sup>81</sup> Rrok Zojzi, »Pyjet shqiptare,« *Hylli i dritës*, 2-3 (1938):113

ds« to impose their rule over the highlands.<sup>82</sup>

The reason why so many intellectuals complained about the peasants and mountain dwellers was that the Albanian state of the interwar era could not enforce its will over the rural areas, especially in the communities that lived in the remote uplands. In 1923 the state promulgated a law on forests, which was largely based in the Ottoman law. It divided them into three categories: privately owned, forests that belonged to communes, which meant villages, cities, or groups of villages, and state forests. Regardless of the amount of land a community was able to prove it possessed, the state allowed it to have only an area that would give enough timber to meet its needs, the remaining area went under state management. The state committed to giving to the communities without forests some of its own forests in case the settlements were not more than two hours far from the forests.<sup>83</sup> In the 1930s the government issued also another law that forced the peasants and landowners to plant a number of trees for the local offices of agriculture.<sup>84</sup>



The laws remained largely on paper because the Albanian state issued decrees without having the basic instruments and resources to implement them. The bulk of the rural population did not know the laws and many times was not aware that was breaking the law when logged,<sup>85</sup> something that tells a lot the very large gap between aims and reality. The process of mapping did not take place and the representation and measurement of the forests to create a homogenous empty space in the map remained a goal and never become a reality. Without accurate maps, the state could not understand the situation. Enforcing the state's laws required also a competent and trained workforce, which Albania did not have, and the financial hardships did not allow the government to create one.<sup>86</sup> For example, in 1935, the Directory of Forestry, which was subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture, had only 50 guards in the whole country.<sup>87</sup> As a result, the peasants kept freely burning the forests for pasture.<sup>88</sup>

After Italy invaded Albania, the Fascist authorities continued the projects of afforestation. During the Second World War, the Italians elaborated plans for the forestation of 157,500 hectares of forests-51,300 in North, 39,863 in Central Albania and 66,364 hectares in South Albania, which was also the most affected area from the anthropic deforestation. By the end of 1944 the Fascist authorities planned to forest 9,774 hectares.<sup>89</sup> The Italians also pursued the project of the double reclamation of plains and mountains and planned the forestation of the most important basins of rivers and torrents of Albania.<sup>90</sup> To prevent the further depletion of the forests, the Albanian government that operated under Italian supervision forbade the exportation of timber and charcoal.<sup>91</sup> Besides these measures, the Fascist au-

<sup>82</sup> Sotir Treska, »Një padrejtësi e ligjit pyjeve dhe kullosave. (Qytetet dhe katundet),« *Gazeta e Korçës*, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1926, (326), 2.

<sup>83</sup> AQSh, F. 149, Kryeministria, 1923, d. III-486, fl. 8. Ligja për Pyjet e Kullosave.

<sup>84</sup> AQSh, F. 171, Ministria e Ekonomisë, 1937, d. I-129, fl. 10.

<sup>85</sup> Michelangeli, *Il problema forestale Albanese*, 34.

<sup>86</sup> »Veprimtari e zvjilluar gjatë dhjet vjetëve Monarki. Organizimi para dhe mbas vjetit 1928,« *Ekonomia kombëtare*, 19 (1938): 21.

<sup>87</sup> »Të ardhurat prej pyjeve të shtetit,« *Besa*, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1935, (1162), 1.

<sup>88</sup> »Në ç'gjendje janë pyjet (Humb një i madh për një të vogël. Digjet pylli për bar e masa s'meren),« *Gazeta e Korçës*, October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1936, (2622), 3.

<sup>89</sup> Mario Michelangeli, *Il problema forestale Albanese*, (Roma: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1940), 51-56.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 64-66.

<sup>91</sup> *Ligjë e rregullore mbi pyje e kullosa*, (Tirana: Gurakuqi, 1943), 57.

horities did not neglect their civilizing mission and tried to »forestall conscience« among the Albanians peasants, in order to protect the forests.<sup>92</sup> The Italians, though, left the country too soon, without having the chance to transform the conscience of the Albanian peasants.

### Forests Between the Past and Socialism

On August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1945, exactly nine months after the last German troops had left Albania, the communist-led government issued the law on the Agrarian Reform. The Albanian Communist Party (ACP), whose leading position in the political arena was based on triumph against the Nazi armies, wanted to legitimize its rule over the country through general elections. To achieve this goal, the communists wanted to win over the hearts of the overwhelming part of the population, the peasants. The Agrarian Reform was instrumental for the ACP to secure support before the elections that took place in December of the same year. Among other things, the Agrarian Reform declared forests state property.<sup>93</sup> There was not much to nationalize though. Before the communist takeover, 94% of the forests were already national property, 1% belonged to the communes and 5% was owned by private subjects.<sup>94</sup> The value of this act of the new regime did not lie in the areas it nationalized but in highlighting the importance forests had for the ACP and its project.

In the immediate postwar years, the communist authorities had mainly a utilitarian perspective on the forests. After the war, the new authorities embarked on what they called the socialist reconstruction, which was the beginning of industrialization in Albania, or at least this was the goal. Timber was critical to the whole project and massive loggings took place to supply the increasing demand of state enterprises and the many infrastructural projects undertaken throughout the country. However, it was not indifferent to ecological constraints and did not neglect the limits of timber reserves and the long-term planning that the regeneration of the forests required. The preservation and augmentation of forests remained a constant concern of the new regime, whose plans and approach were similar to that of the modernizers of the interwar era. The major points of the forest policy were: To stop the undisciplined logging and burning, build roads to access the high-altitude forests, create a large and professional forestry service that worked with »conscience,« and forest the course of rivers and creeks that flooded the plains.<sup>95</sup>

As the Vice Minister of Agriculture put it, forests were fundamental for the development of agriculture because they prevented the flooding of »bread lands.«<sup>96</sup> The Minister of Industry, Spiro Koleka, shared the belief in a meeting of the Politburo held in October of 1949, where he highlighted the importance forestation of the mountains and hills had for the development of agriculture in the lowlands.<sup>97</sup> There were also other continuities with the interwar period. Among them, the goal of the new communist regime was to use the timber reserves of the country to meet the domestic demands and make Albania independent from the imports. The regeneration of the forests was tightly linked to a drive to autarchy whose roots lay in the 1930s. Tirana's government kept creating and expanding the necessary structure that would allow it to control the forests and their exploitation. By 1949 the communist authorities had created 13 nurseries and increased the number of forests guards to 120.<sup>98</sup> While the forestry services expanded, they did not suffice to control the entire territory. Moreover, this increase did not equal professionalism, and the lack of a qualified technical staff remained a pressing issue until the 1970s.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Michelangeli, *Il problema forestale Albanese*, 36-37.

<sup>93</sup> *Ekonomia Politike (Socializmi)*, (Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, 1981), 29.

<sup>94</sup> *The History of the Socialist Construction of Albania*, (Tirana: Academy of Sciences of the PSR of Albania), 64.

<sup>95</sup> AQSh, F. 14/AP, (STR), Komiteti i PPSH (Struktura), 1949, d. 632, fl. 3-4. Relacion mbi bujqësinë dhe pyjet.

<sup>96</sup> »Rendesia ekonomike e pyjeve dhe e pemeve,« *Bashkimi*, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1947, 2.

<sup>97</sup> AQSh, F. 14/AP, (OU), Komiteti i PPSH (Organet Udhëheqëse), 1949, d. 2, fl. 5-6. Mbi realizimin e Planit prej janari në shtator 1949.

<sup>98</sup> AQSh, F. 14/AP, (STR), Komiteti i PPSH (Struktura), 1947, d. 330/10, fl. 41. Relacion mbi bujqësinë shqiptare.

<sup>99</sup> AQSh, F. 490, Këshilli i Ministrave, 1973, d. 316, fl. 39. Studim mbi zhvillimin 20 vjeçar të ekonomisë pyjore duke patur parasysh bilnacin midis prerjes dhe rritjes natyrale vjetore të pyjeve.



The regime took steps to regulate access to the forests' resources by the population so to prevent their further depletion. The Ministry of Agriculture ordered the local authorities to not allow any request for without careful inspection, with the goal of transforming forests into arable land.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the law on forests in 1952, forbade the logging between September 30<sup>th</sup> and April 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>101</sup> The regime also took other steps to defend the forests. By the 1950s it started introducing new type fuels for heating, like kerosene and lignite coal, to decrease the pressure on forests.<sup>102</sup> Tirana's authorities explored new technological solutions to afford the growing demand of the population with alternative materials that would allow the replacement of timber, like fiber, plastic, glass and other material for industrial use.<sup>103</sup> They also took steps to diminish the number of goats, which according to Hoxha, were the greatest enemy of the forests.<sup>104</sup>

The upper echelons of the regime, regardless of the Marxist-Leninist ideology and its extreme anthropocentric bias that considered nature an object to conquer, were not insensitive to environmental issues and to the problem of the protection of the forests. These concerns were by no means limited to the Albanian communist leadership alone. Stephen Brain has argued that even Stalin, who considered nature as an object to be subjugated according to man's needs, became an environmentalist in the late 1930s, although in a very special way. The Soviet leader realized the damages industrialization had caused to the Soviet Union and the importance of the forests, and accordingly started the largest reforestation project in the world.<sup>105</sup> Enver Hoxha's attitude toward forests was also not rigidly dogmatic, but not for the same reasons. On the contrary, his stance was very complex and not dominated by one factor alone. The economic considerations tied to industrialization were extremely important to the communist strongman, whose main goal was to use and manage all the natural resources, timber included, for his building an autarchic economy. Forests, though, were to Hoxha not only a source of revenues or a function to his project of industrialization, but also critical for the climate and the progress of agriculture.<sup>106</sup>

The protection of biodiversity is absent from his writings and speeches on forests, while aesthetic considerations played an important role.<sup>107</sup> Stephen Brain has explained the power that the ideas of the pre-communist era have played in the ideas and projects that circulated in the Soviet Union. The same phenomenon played out in Albania as well and Hoxha was not the only one in the communist leadership to have internalized the interwar era's visions that linked forests with a country's appearance. Since 1947 Iljaz Reka, the Vice Minister of Agriculture stated the importance the forests had for embellishing the country, especially those parts that remained unexploited for other purposes, or that looked disordered.<sup>108</sup> The aesthetic role of the forests was enshrined also in The Law on Forests of 1952.<sup>109</sup> The communist regime declared that its goal was to transform Albania into a beautiful garden and forests were an important component of the décor. The utopian modernity and the dystopian effect of its productivism is not

<sup>100</sup> AQSh, F. 498, Ministria e Bujqësisë dhe Pyjeve, 1946, d. 38, fl. 21. Mbi kërkesa për hapje tokash nder vende të pyllëzuar.

<sup>101</sup> *Dekrete, vendime e rregullore mbi pyjet dhe beshkimin në ujrat malore*, ed. by Vasil Xhaxh, (Tirana: Ministria e Bujqësisë, 1958), 5-6.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 93-95.

<sup>103</sup> AQSh, F. 490, Këshilli i Ministrave, 1973, d. 316, fl. 55. Studim mbi zhvillimin 20 vjeçar të ekonomisë pyjore duke patur parasysh bilnacin midis prerjes dhe rritjes natyrale vjetore të pyjeve.

<sup>104</sup> Enver Hoxha, »Fjala në aktivin e Partisë të rrethit të Elbasanit me rastin e punimit të materialeve të Plenumit XIV të KQ të PPSH,« in Enver Hoxha, *Vepra*, vol. 17, (Tirana: Nëntori, 1974), 548; Enver Hoxha, »Fjala e mbylles në Plenumin XIV të KQ të PPSH,« *Ibid*, 380. Interestingly, the Fascist regime in Italy and Tito's Yugoslavia took similar steps against the goats to protect the forests. Thirgood, *Man and the Mediterranean Forest*, 79 & 84.

<sup>105</sup> Stephen Brain, *Song of the Forest: Russian Forestry and Stalin Environmentalism, 1905-1953*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014).

<sup>106</sup> Enver Hoxha, »Raport në Kongresin I të PKSh 'Mbi punën e Komitetit Qendror dhe detyrat e reja të Partisë,« *Vepra*, vol. 5, (Tirana: Naim Frashëri, 1970), 384-386.

<sup>107</sup> Enver Hoxha, »Lënda e drurit është si buka për industrinë dhe për nevojat e tjera të popullit,« *Vepra*, vol. 40, (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1983), 87-100.

<sup>108</sup> »Rendesia ekonomike e pyjeve,« 2.

<sup>109</sup> *Dekrete, vendime e rregullore*, 7.



the only scenario that played out in communist countries.<sup>110</sup> While development and its focus on industry were crucial to the identity of the communist regimes, it did not always mean that they disregarded nature's protection and preservation from their plans.

Aiming for something and achieving it are two different things. In the process of building socialism, a lot of abuses took place that hampered forests' regeneration. Damaging the forests, as a specialist argued, meant to undermine country's reconstruction. Once again, the preferred target of this critique was the uncontrolled logging by the rural the population, which destroyed the regenerative potential of the forests.<sup>111</sup> It is interesting how an engineer considered the use of timber for the reconstruction as a contribution of the forests for the rebuilding of the country, while he branded the private use of the peasants as irresponsible abuse.<sup>112</sup> The problem was not only with the peasants who, it was true, kept disregarding the laws and logged everywhere the liked, but also with state's sawmills. According to some estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture, half of the timber these state enterprises logged was never used and decayed up in the mountains, while the local state organs did not take care of the saplings.<sup>113</sup> As a result, there was a negative balance between loggings—2.1 million cubic meters—and regeneration—1.5 million cubic meters per year.<sup>114</sup> These issues of the waste of timber and abuses associated with logging by the state enterprises remained a problem even in the 1950s<sup>115</sup> when the regime acknowledged that forests were logged beyond their regenerative capacity.<sup>116</sup> Enver Hoxha admitted in 1959

that the regime had damaged the forests with its projects of industrialization and post-war reconstruction and that it had failed to meet the quota of forestation because many trees had not taken root.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>110</sup> On the dystopian potential of the utopian communist project see Eagle Glassheim, *Cleansing the Czechoslovak Borderlands: Migration, Environment, and Health in the Former Sudetenland*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

<sup>111</sup> Ramadan Meça, »T'i mbrojmë pyjet t'ona,« *Bujku i ri*, 16 (1946): 17-19.

<sup>112</sup> Llazar Treska, »T'i mbrojmë pyjet t'ona,« *Bujku i ri*, 17 (1946): 14-17.

<sup>113</sup> AQSh, F. 14/AP, (STR), Komiteti i PPSH (Struktura), 1949, d. 632, fl. 3-4. Relacion mbi bujqësinë dhe pyjet.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, fl. 26. Analiza e punës në Ministrinë e Bujqësinë dhe Pyjeve.

<sup>115</sup> AQSh, F. 490, Ministria e Drejtësisë, 1954, d. 6, fl. 1-3. Relacion mbi mbi krimet në fushën e ekonomisë pyjore, të gjykuara në gjyqtëmujorin e I-rë 1954; »Të centralizojmë shfrytëzimin e pyjeve,« *Zëri i Popullit*, September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1957, 3.

<sup>116</sup> *Dekrete, vendime e rregullore*, 93-95.

<sup>117</sup> Enver Hoxha, »Fjala e mbylles në Plenumin XIV të KQ të PPSH,« in Enver Hoxha, *Vepra*, vol. 17, (Tirana: 8 Nëntori, 1974), 372-373.

In the meantime, the state failed to curb the peasants' illegal logging. Controlling the entire territory proved to be a daunting challenge and the regime was forced to make concessions to the peasants. In 1952 the state allowed them to log for their own needs or to sell in their timber on the market, but only after the Executive Committee granted them permission and in conformity with the state plan for the supply of timber to the population.<sup>118</sup> In 1955, in the context of collectivization, the regime gave the peasants the right to administer collective forests, which was a surrogate of the communal forests of the interwar era. The state preserved its ownership over the forests and the right to withdraw the permission of the communities to log when they did not respect the instructions of the forestry service.<sup>119</sup> Still, the peasants ignored states authorities and kept logging without permission. In only in the first half of 1954, the courts ruled on 72 cases and punished 89 persons for illegal logging. According to the Ministry of Justice, the total number of illegal logging was much higher, but state local offices did not report all the abuses.<sup>120</sup> The illegal logging did not disappear—in 1989 the peasants illegally cut 157,000 cubic meters of timber<sup>121</sup>

As a legal specialist in the Ministry of Agriculture argued, the laws were not enough for the prevention of the illegal logging, and to achieve the education of the peasantry with »love for the forests« was required.<sup>122</sup> The communist regime had undertaken efforts to imbue people with this kind of love since 1947, when the authorities restarted the »week of the forest,« a tradition that was formerly in vogue in Albania in the 1930s. During this week dedicated to forestation, the authorities mobilized the population to plant saplings. The goal of the communist authorities was to imbue the people with a forest-loving »conscience.«<sup>123</sup> For the communist regime, as was also the case also with its predecessor, defending the forests meant also transforming the people. The problem was that the political regimes of both interwar and socialist Albania sought to manipulate the behavior of the peasants toward forests via education and interventions of the psychological type, without transformations of material and technological character.

The communist regime was slow in introducing new fuels for heating, which above all were limited only to the urban centers, and left out the rural areas where the bulk of the population lived.<sup>124</sup> As far as it could not introduce new fuels to replace timber, the regime could do little to curb peasant logging. Without this technological transformation, the regime could not achieve any feasible success in preventing the use of forests by the peasants, and it did not indeed, because for the peasants, timber meant survival. In this respect, the situation in Albania remained more similar to the countries of the southern fringe of the Mediterranean where forests depletion is still alarming, than in the northern fringe where forests have recovered by increasing the use of fossil fuels that have largely replaced timber.<sup>125</sup>

The outcome of the forest's policy of the communist regime is ambiguous. In some areas, it was successful in expanding forest cover. In 1972 the regime finished the forestation of the entire coastline of the Western lowlands along the Adriatic coast, which had actually started in the 1930s.<sup>126</sup> Despite the projects and efforts of the regime to preserve and expand the forests, it also faced the reality of a growing population that increased pressure on forests for both construction material and fuel. One of the main points of the social contract of the Soviet-type regimes was the provision of work for all adults, and the growing population required continuous investments in the industrial sector, which kept increasing the

<sup>118</sup> *Dekrete, vendime e rregullore*, 32-33.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

<sup>120</sup> AQSh, F. 490, Ministria e Drejtësisë, 1954, d. 6, fl. 1-3. Relacion mbi mbi krimet në fushën e ekonomisë pyjore, të gjykuara në gjastëmujorin e I-rë 1954.

<sup>121</sup> Fierza, »Pyjet, kullotat,« 49.

<sup>122</sup> Vasil Xhaxhi, »Pyjet tona dhe ligja për mbrojtjen e tyre,« *Bujqësia socialiste*, 4 (1955): 26.

<sup>123</sup> »Rendesia ekonomike e pyjeve,« 2.

<sup>124</sup> AQSh, F. 490, Këshilli i Ministrave, 1973, d. 316, fl. 58. Studim mbi zhvillimin 20 vjeçar të ekonomisë pyjore duke patur parasysh bilnacin midis prerjes dhe rritjes natyrale vjetore të pyjeve.

<sup>125</sup> Jacques Blondel, James Aronson, Jean-Yves Bodiou & Gilles Beouf, *The Mediterranean Region: Biological Diversity in Space and Time*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 217-218.

<sup>126</sup> AQSh, F. 490, Këshilli i Ministrave, 1973, d. 316, fl. 78. Studim mbi zhvillimin 20 vjeçar të ekonomisë pyjore duke patur parasysh bilnacin midis prerjes dhe rritjes natyrale vjetore të pyjeve.

timber consumption. The final result was that forests kept shrinking. Hoxha expressed his grave concern with the problem of the forests, which, in his words, had a vital national importance.<sup>127</sup> He argued that the lack of timber inhibited also the further urbanization of the country and the rural-urban migration.<sup>128</sup>

In 1948 the total forest area the authorities declared was 1,070,000 hectares,<sup>129</sup> but only half of them was considered productive forests.<sup>130</sup> By 1972 the forested area, including the shrubs, was 1,015,818 hectares. These spaces were further classified as 263,000 hectares of thickets, and 364,434 hectares of high-alpine forests, 75,724 of medium-altitude forests, and 312,418 hectares of low forests. However, the numbers of these statistics are problematic. Their vagueness and lack of precision do not tell the whole story because the increase of hectares did not mean increase of the total timber volume, and the balance between consumption and forest growth remained negative. In 1972 total consumption was almost 2.4 million cubic meters and forest natural growth measured slightly more than 1.9 million cubic meters. The real problem was that despite some successes in forestation, their annual growth could not keep the pace with population growth and the constant increase of timber demand.<sup>131</sup> The communist regime did not and could not solve the conundrum of growing demand and the need to expand the forest-cover. Political isolation and an emphasis on autarchy as a strategy of development only increased the pressure on domestic forests. The technological backwardness and socialist Albania's financial scarcity did not provide an alternative to timber. The weaknesses and inability of Tirana's central institutions to control the whole territory forced them to compromise with the rural population, whose access to the forest it never fully blocked. The regime failed also to expand the forest cover, which after 45 years of rule had, at its best remained the same, at least regarding the high-altitude forests and the problem of overlogging and abuse did not disappear.

### Epilogue: Post-1990s

In one of his last great books, Eric Hobsbawm positioned the short twentieth century between 1914 and 1991. According to the British historian, this period of roughly 76 years was an age of extremes, an age when liberal democracy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was attacked on the left and right by extreme ideologies whose followers believed they represented the future.<sup>132</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century started with two shots in Sarajevo and finished in Berlin with thousands of pickaxes' blows to the wall that represented the division of Europe. The great euphoria that followed led many people to believe that debunking of the extreme alternatives marked the beginning of a new era, with no divisions or fault lines across Europe, and even the entire world. Reality resulted to be more complicated. For the countries that used to be part of Soviet bloc a period of hopes and bitter disillusion, political instability, and economic hardships began.

I have already argued above that forests are also political artifacts and they are affected by political upheavals. Stephen Brain even claims that forests and the political and social revolutions are implacable enemies.<sup>133</sup> The history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has given us many examples in which logging has been a prominent part of rural protest in many revolutions.<sup>134</sup> Such attacks on forests have been the result of the collapse of regimes that had restricted or monopolized access to forests resources, always to the detriment of local communities. Once the political structure that had enforced the laws regarding access crumbled, peasants did in full light what they had done in hiding all the while, yet now, the difference

<sup>127</sup> Enver Hoxha, »Fjala në aktivin e Partisë të rrethit të Elbasanit me rastin e punimit të materialeve të Plenumit XIV të KQ të PPSH,« in Enver Hoxha, *Vepra*, vol. 17, (Tirana: Nëntori, 1974), 540-541.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 548-549.

<sup>129</sup> AQSh, F. 14/AP, (STR), Komiteti i PPSH (Struktura), 1947, d. 330/10, fl. 41. Relacion mbi bujqësinë shqiptare.

<sup>130</sup> Hoxha, »Raport në Kongresin I të PKSh,« 384.

<sup>131</sup> AQSh, F. 490, Këshilli i Ministrave, 1973, d. 316, fl. 26-27. Studim mbi zhvillimin 20 vjeçar të ekonomisë pyjore duke patur parasysh bilnacin midis prerjes dhe rritjes natyrale vjetore të pyjeve.

<sup>132</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, (London: Abacus, 1995).

<sup>133</sup> Brain, *Song of the Forest*, 54-55.

<sup>134</sup> For more on rural protest and logging see Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 40-42.

was in the quantity of trees they fell. The same takeover of the forests also took place with the collapse of the socialist regimes that also marked the beginning of radical structural transformations in the ex-socialist countries.

In the 1990s, with the collapse of the communist regime, Albania experienced massive illegal logging. In 1998 40% of logging in the country was illegal and it decreased to 23% by 1999,<sup>135</sup> a very high figure if compared to the other countries of Eastern Europe, where illegal logging varied between 0.5 to 5%.<sup>136</sup> The bulk of deforestation has generally taken place in the high and middle elevations, steep slopes, and in the areas far from the inhabited areas, although those close to the populated centers and the protected forests have also been affected by deforestation as well, especially those close to the roads. There is not a fixed national pattern for the change of forest cover in the country. The simultaneous presence of many local patterns has created a highly heterogeneous situation, which in rough lines change in east-west and south-north direction.<sup>137</sup> The transformations in forest cover have been dramatic. There are no accurate figures on the area of the forest cover in Albania. The category of 'forest' is still not well defined by those who produce the data, who many times manipulate this data as need to make their argument. Some of the most credible figures tell a painful story. In 1985 there were 470,000 hectares of high-altitude forests, but in 2003 the area shrunk to 295,000 hectares, while the mid-altitude forests have vanished, a trend that had started during the communist era.<sup>138</sup>

Laura Bouriaud identifies the causes of illegal logging in the bulk of the countries of Eastern Europe as part of the general conditions created after the fall of the communist regimes. Bouriaud's list of causes includes state inefficiency, rampant corruption, blurred lines of ownership, lack of appropriate legal framework, poverty, largely rural population, abundant forests etc.<sup>139</sup> Louisa Jansen<sup>140</sup> and Johannes Stahl share the same opinion. The latter argues that with the collapse of socialism the introduction of market forces and a new institutional and legal framework devalued agricultural land and increased the value of the forest, which became an economic scapegoat for the rural population of Eastern Europe.<sup>141</sup> He and other authors consider the emergence of customary rights over forests' use as a reflection of Albania's the rocky and violent transition and the weakening of state authority that reinforced the weaknesses of state ownership.<sup>142</sup> Clarissa DeWaal also considers the collapse of the communist regime and the paralysis that seized the state administration as the Anno Domini for the uncontrolled logging of private citizens.<sup>143</sup>

It is true that the radical political transformations and the integration of the country into the wider network of a globalized economy associated with the endemic corruption and poverty, are powerful factors that help to explain the massive harvesting of forests in the years that followed the collapse of the communist regime. However, these factors exacerbated a phenomenon that was already there. The problem with the abovementioned works is that they assume that the illegal logging took place only after the collapse of the communist state. As I have argued here, this was not the case in Albania, where the

<sup>135</sup> *Pyjet dhe tranzicioni: Vlerësimi i gjendjes së pyjeve në Shqipëri, për periudhën 1990-2014*, (Tirana: REC, 2014), 64-65.

<sup>136</sup> Laura Bouriaud, »Causes of Illegal Logging in Central and Eastern Europe,« *Small-Scale Forests Economics. Management and Policy* 4, no. 3 (2005): 271.

<sup>137</sup> Kuenda Laze, *Identifying and understanding the patterns and processes of forest cover change in Albania and Kosovo*, (Leibniz: IAMO, 2014), 54-69.

<sup>138</sup> Fierza, »Pyjet, kullotat,« 62-64.

<sup>139</sup> Bouriaud, »Causes of Illegal Logging in Central and Eastern Europe,« 269-292.

<sup>140</sup> Louisa J. M. Jansen et. al. »Analysis of the Spatio-Temporal and Semantic Aspects of land Cover/Use Change Dynamics 1991-2001 in Albania at National and District Level,« *Environmental Monitoring and Assessment* 119, 1-3 (2006): 107-136.

<sup>141</sup> Johannes Stahl, »The Rent of Illegal Logging: The Mechanism Behind the Rush on Forest Resources in South Albania,« *Conservation and Society* 8, 2 (2010): 140-150.

<sup>142</sup> Thomas Sikor, Johannes Stahl, Stefan Dorondel, »Negotiating Post-Socialist Property and State: Struggles over Fires in Albania and Romania,« *Development and Change* 40, 1 (2009): 189; Daniel Müller & Darla K. Munroe, »Changing Rural Landscapes in Albania: Cropland Abandonment and Forest Clearing in the Postsocialist Transition,« *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98, 4 (2008): 855-876.

<sup>143</sup> Clarissa de Waal, »Post-socialist Propriety Rights and Wrongs in Albania: An Ethnography of Agrarian Change,« *Conservation and Society* 2, 1 (2004): 34.

illegal logging was a normal, although hidden, phenomenon even during the communist era and before it. The rural population constantly challenged the regime's monopoly on access to forests and forced the central authorities to make concessions because they were not able to control the entire territory and enforce their will over the entire mass of people. Therefore, there is a longer history of illegal logging in Albania, and it not exclusively a phenomenon of the post-socialist period. Jennifer Sowerwine has rightly concluded that the best way to understand today's economy of legal and illegal logging is by intertwining pre-socialist, socialist, and post-socialist factors.<sup>144</sup>

State and peasants have competed on the issues of control and use of forest resources since the establishment of the Albanian state. The concept of illegal logging is created by the set of rules and a legal framework that the modern state has imposed on the population/s of a given territory. By acting on the behalf of the nation, state authorities introduced new forms of centralized management and outlawed the independent access communities had enjoyed to the local timber resources. So, when talking about the illegal logging in the post-socialist period the whole problem starts with the concept of »illegal«, which remains blind to older customs of forest use that did clash with the modern forms of environmental administration and management of natural resources within the context of nation-states. Actually, it is a critical component of the 'internal territorialization' whose goal has been the control of people and natural resources. In its last instance, the Albanian state has failed to control either one or the other. There is more to the story though. Monopolizing the representation of the nation and acting on its behalf, the national state has used and overharvested the forests while alleging that the forests' real enemies were the peasants, locked in the small shell of their narrow interests. On the other hand, it is true that customary logging was not environmentally-friendly as well. Another important point is that it is not only the rural population that it is responsible for illegal logging but also politicians at both the local and central levels. Hence, the fault lines between state and society are very blurred and illegality permeates both these entities. After all, the main point is not who harvests the forests, but rather at what point society and power structures pressure and exploit forests for their economic goals and gains.

The famous Italian intellectual, Indro Montanelli, labeled Albania »one and one thousand.«<sup>145</sup> Every political regime that has ruled the country has struggled to sew these pieces together into one single clothe. The totalizing language and homogenizing policies of national political structures have not produced the effects that national political elites had hoped for. Social, economic, historical, and ecological factors in the peripheries have created a constellation of local dynamics that have coexisted within the national framework. The same is true for the forests of the country. Rather than the history of one thing, there is the history of many forests, many communities, and differentiated state responses to the multitude of local contexts, which could not be reduced to one single model and history. The history of the forests of Albania, tells the history of Albania, the efforts of her political elites to make the young, poor, and vulnerable state a viable project. The failure of these efforts brought a sense of continuous disappointments, which is also reflected in the history of Albania's forests: their conditions were not good at the moment of the establishment of the Albanian state and they still are not after 100 years of independent national life. The thousands tree stumps scattered across the country mark the continuity of exploitation by domestic and foreign actors; they also mark the break with the aesthetic function of the forests and the accession in another historical period, where the international institutions stress biodiversity.

<sup>144</sup> Sowerwine, »Territorialization and the politics of highland landscapes,« 126-127.

<sup>145</sup> Indro Montanelli, *Shqipëria një dhe një mijë*, translated in Albanian from Italian Adrian Beshaj & Artan Fida, (Tirana: Uegen, 2006).

**SAŽETAK**

Od 19. stoljeća su šume smatrane izvorom gospodarskog razvoja, ali i baštine koju treba čuvati i braniti. Ovaj je dualizam između ekonomskih probitaka i ekoloških imperativa u velikoj mjeri ostao nepremostiv. Albansko iskustvo nije iznimka od ovog slučaja. Iako su različite političke i intelektualne elite smatrale da šume predstavljaju nacionalnu baštinu, nisu ih uspjeli obraniti niti širiti, već se šumski predjeli i dalje smanjuju. Zbog geografskog položaja, klimatskih utjecaja i topografije teritorij današnje Albanije ima vrlo bogatu floru, uključujući i šume. Kao i svugdje drugdje, ljudska je djelatnost povijesno odigrala ključnu ulogu u stanju i raspodjeli šumskog pokrova u Albaniji. Do uspostave albanske nacionalne države, ruralna populacija i društvene elite su iskorištavali šume bez obraćanja pozornosti na potrebu šumske regeneracije. Osmansko carstvo počelo je provoditi politiku centralizacije upravljanja šumama, ali su u albanskim pokrajinama ti učinci bili ograničeni. Osmanska birokracija nije spriječila ruralne zajednice i zemljoposjednike u sječi šume za grijanje, u izvozu trupaca, spaljivanju šume radi stvaranja novih pašnjaka, niti je iskorijenila hajduke i razbojнике koji su se krili po šumama. Od svog je osnutka albanska država pokušala kontrolirati pristup stanovništva šumskim resursima. Tijekom međuratnog razdoblja, vlade u Tirani su započele proces teritorijalizacije, čiji je cilj bio kontrolirati i šume i ruralne zajednice, osobito u planinskim područjima koja su povijesno bila izvan dosega središnjih vlasti. Šume i nadzor nad njima postali su izvor sukoba i napetosti između države i ruralnih zajednica. U konačnici je teritorijalizacija, u periodu dvadesetih i tridesetih godina prošloga stoljeća, ostala tek postavljeni cilj, a ne stvarnost, jer država nije mogla provoditi svoje zakone, niti uspostaviti potpunu kontrolu nad šumama. Osim nekih manjih pokušaja, šumarstvo nije mnogo napredovalo, a šume srednjih i nižih nadmorskih visina bile su ozbiljno oštećene. Kad su komunisti došli na vlast, obećali su preokrenuti tu situaciju. No, sa svojim projektom industrijalizacije i politikom ekonomske autarkije komunistički režim je posjekao previše šuma i nije mogao zaustaviti ruralne zajednice u neovlaštenoj sječi trupaca. Bez obzira na neka značajna pošumljavanja, komunisti su ipak posjekli više stabala nego se šuma mogla prirodno regenerirati, što je negativno utjecalo na veličinu šumskog pokrova. U prvom desetljeću nakon pada komunizma, zbog političkih previranja koje je zemlja doživljavala, nastavljeno je s pretjeranim iskorištavanjem šuma i Albanija ima najveći postotak ilegalne sječe stabala u istočnoj Europi.

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