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From the village to the city

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2011

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Caro, E. (2011). *From the village to the city: the adjustment process of internal migrants in Albania*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. [s.n.].

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2

MIGRATION IN ALBANIA
BEFORE THE 1990s
A Historical and Political Perspective

2.1 Introduction

Migration, both international and internal, is a primordial phenomenon for Albanians. The historical background has created this context, with political and socioeconomic events, as well as regional conflicts, generally determining the large-scale migration of Albanians. Vullnetari (2007) states that “the history of Albanians was not only one of wars and battles, but also one of migrations” (p. 8) (see also Tachella, 2005; Bërxfholi and Doka, 1996). Indeed based on the literature on Albanian history, the country has gone through a history of wars, invasions and occupations. All these periods of political and social unrest has been continuously accompanied by flows of migration within and out of the country. The aim of this chapter is to document the Albanian migration, focusing on its characteristics and specificities, prior to the 1990s. It presents in a historical perspective the economic, sociocultural, political background and a brief account of migratory movements from the time of the Ottoman imperial occupation, and specifically the migration during the 45 years of the communist regime. This historical account is presented in order to construct an understanding of the extraordinary contemporary migration. The ban on international migration and the controlled internal migration during the 45 years of communism influenced the ways internal and international migration developed, especially in the post-communist years. In these post communist years the country embarked from a socialist society to a democratic one. This transition has created the most relevant background context for the mass migration of Albanians following the communist period, 1945-1990 (chapter three).

The paper starts with a brief background on migration characteristics before the start of communist period until the 1945. It then continues with discussing the political, socioeconomic and demographic characteristic during the communist regime 1945-1990.

2.2 Migration before 1945

Examining the historical information available, statistical data and relevant literature reveal several generally accepted waves of Albanian migration. For the most part these were related to periods of war and occupation by foreign invaders (Bërxfholi and Doka, 1995). Nevertheless, labour migration has been important for Albanians at different periods in history, (Vullnetari, 2007).

The first wave of mass migration from Albania was the result of the Ottoman occupation of Albania following the death of Skënderbeg, Albania’s national hero, in 1468. Albania became part of the Ottoman Empire, with the invasion leading to large flows of Albanians mainly towards Italy. Between 1468 and the early sixteenth century, approximately one-quarter of the total population of Albania fled their homes as a result of Ottoman occupation (Carleto et al. 2004: 2). It is estimated that around 200,000 people emigrated towards the south of Italy, setting up several towns where an ethnic Albanian community,

known as *arberesh*,³ is still present today (Bërxfholi, 2000; Trita, 1999: 97; Piperno, 2002; Tachella, 2005).

The five centuries under Ottoman rule were characterized by flows of international and internal migration, taking the form of both forced migration and voluntary migration by those seeking better living conditions and independence from Ottoman occupation (Tachella, 2005). However, the difficult economic and social conditions due to poverty particularly stimulated the internal movement of the population, given the economic difficulties of undertaking international migration (Biagini, 1999).

Triggered by the fast industrialisation and urbanisation processes in many European countries and North America, labour emigrations in Albania peaked at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth century (Vullnetari, 2007:13). Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century large numbers of Albanians migrated for both political and economic reasons (Carleto et al. 2004: 2). This type of migration was to destinations both near and far, including Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, the United States, Argentina and Australia (Trita, 1999). The prime destination was, however, Greece, where there were around 400,000 individuals of Albanian descent by the mid-1930s (Barjaba et al.1992). The same tendency in relation to international migration continues today, with Greece being the prime destination. Bërxfholi and Doka (2005: 36) report that between 1930–1944 around 152,000 Albanians immigrated to other countries.

Internal population movements before 1945, as well as the international movements, were determined by the socioeconomic and historical-political context in Albania. In this respect, the geographical position of the country, the dynamic landscape, with its mountainous northern and southern regions, the lowlands in the centre and the extended coastline to the west, has played an important role in directing migration mainly towards the lowlands and the coast (Bërxfholi et al. 2005). It should be noted that internal migration today exhibits the same characteristics (chapter 3).

According to Tirta (1999: 78), until the beginning of the twentieth century, rural-urban migration was mainly towards urban centres such as Shkodra, Gjirokastra, Korça and Berat (for the locations of the main cities see Fig. 2). These urban centres experienced economic growth in this period. According to UNDP (2000: 46), during the period 1923–1945, the urban population grew by 84 percent while the rural one only by 28 percent. This period was marked by the large-scale migration of the population from the remote mountainous areas towards the lowlands, in particular to the coastline. The population of the districts situated in the coastline and lowlands, such as Durrës, Tirana and Vlora had grown by approximately 60–170 percent, (UNDP, 2000: 46). These migration trends coincided with the emergence of capitalism, the first steps towards the development of industry, communications, trade and services. It also corresponded with the first attempts to solve the agrarian problem and the

³ 'Arberesh' is a term used for the Albanian communities and their descendents who migrated to southern Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Tachella, 2005).

creation of a favourable climate for foreign investment (Bërxfholi et al. 2005) These factors encouraged the growth of cities, which in turn encouraged migration towards the urban areas (UNDP, 2000: 46).

Even though there was intensive urban growth during this period (1923–1945), yet about 80 percent of the population of Albania was living in rural areas (UNDP, 2000: 46). Urban growth would not continue with the same intensity after 1945, as internal migration was strictly controlled during the communist regime.

Figure 2.1 Administrative map of Albania



2.3 Migration in the communist era, 1945–1990

- *Political changes and economic developments*

Until the beginning of the 1990s, Albania had been the least known and least accessible country in the world for more than four decades (Blejer et al. 1992: 1; Tachella, 2005). Following the Second World War, Albania experienced 45 years of one of the world's most domineering communist regimes, marked by autocracy, repression and a unique level of isolation from the world community (O' Donnell 1999; Tozzoli, 1992). Established on 8 November 1941, and originally known as the Communist Party, the Albanian Party of Labour, headed by Enver Hoxha, was the only political party throughout the communist period (Tachella, 2005).

Hoxha's dictatorship was characterized by a political ideology of economic and political isolation and self-reliance (Tachella, 2005). A centralized economy, overwhelming militarization,⁴ the restriction of the freedom of the intellectual elite and an emphasis on heavy industry led the country towards fatal economic stagnation and collapse, which occurred at the beginning of 1990s (Bërxfholi et al. 2005)

Blejer et al. (1992) argue that the Albanian economic model was similar to other socialist economies, but in addition to the two main economic principles of central planning and complete nationalization, it introduced the national self-reliance principle. This political strategy applied by the State involved a total ban on all external economic help, including from the communist bloc (Martelli, 1998).⁵

The collectivization of land and the nationalization of industry were economic and political steps that were taken immediately by the government. Within a year, from 1945, all public utilities and foreign capital had been nationalized. By the beginning of 1947, the state had taken over all domestic industrial companies (Blejer et al. 1992: 6). In the agricultural sector in 1946, the share of land belonging to wealthy and middle-class landowners shrank from 52 percent to 16 percent (Borchert, 1975: 181). The agricultural collectivization started in 1946 and was completed in 1967 (Blejer et al. 1992; Morone, 1999). Agricultural cooperatives covering almost the entire country were created by 1967 (Bërxfholi et al. 2005). The 1976 Constitution eliminated all private ownership of land and immovable property and, finally, the size of the cooperatives was increased, thereby reducing their number from 1,800 in 1959 to 143 by 1983, making Albania one of the most collectivized countries in Europe (Bërxfholi et al. 2005).

During the communist regime, the economy was developed using five-year plans. The first was launched in 1951 and concentrated on the industrial sector. Achievements in the industrial sector were more successful than those in the agricultural sector during the first four five-year plans (Morone, 1999). Economic development, especially in the industrial sector, was

⁴ Around 750,000 bunkers were built across the country between 1974 and 1986 to protect Albania from a supposed invasion from the western countries (Wikipedia).

⁵ After breaking off all relations with the communist bloc, beginning in 1978 and completed in 1980, a strategy of total self-reliance and total isolation was implemented (Borchert, 1975; Martelli, 1988).

distributed regionally throughout the country, but was still mainly concentrated in the western part.⁶

For about five decades under communism, Albania experienced dramatic political, economic and social changes (Sandstrom and Sjöberg, 1991). The political ideology, developments in the economy, self-isolation and self-reliance of the country during this period led to important demographic changes.

- *Demographic changes*

Following the Second World War the country experienced very high levels of population growth. This was mainly due to the country having the highest fertility rate in Europe, with an average of more than six births per woman (Gjonça et al. 1997: 310). This high fertility rate following the Second World War is believed to be a response to the losses during the war, in which 28,000 Albanians lost their lives. According to Gjonça et al. (1997: 310), subsequent to the increases in the fertility rate during the 1950s and 1960s (with a peak of seven children, per woman), a steady decline began in the 1970s, falling to a level below four children per woman in the 1980s and three children per woman in 1990. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1990s, Albania still had the highest fertility rate in Europe. As result of this, the population growth rate was 32.0 per thousand between 1950–1960, reaching its highest level in 1960 with 32.9 per thousand inhabitants, compared to an annual growth rate of only 17.0 per thousand before 1950 (Borchert, 1975: 178). In absolute terms, the total population of Albania increased from about one million in 1945 to more than three million in 1989 (Bërxfholi, 2000).

The high growth rates are attributed to improvements in the health sector resulting in the reduction of mortality rates and an increased life expectancy (rising from 51.2 years in 1950 to 71 years in 1989), as well as high fertility rates and improved living conditions in general (Caselli and Thoma, 2003). In addition, the high growth rates are also attributed to policies implemented by the State. While there were no policies specifically directed at population growth, other policies transforming the socioeconomic profile of the country implicitly affected the demographic changes occurring in Albania (Aassve et al. 2006). For example, the high fertility rates were affected by radical improvements in women's emancipation after 1945 (Bërxfholi and Qiriazzi, 1986). These policies were focused on improvements to the education of women⁷ and their full assimilation into the labour force (Caselli and Thoma, 2003). To facilitate the double burden of women (as mother/housekeeper and as worker) the State developed a wide network of preschools, day-care centres and kindergartens throughout the country as well as extended maternity leave (Bërxfholi and Qiriazzi, 1986: 61). Aassve et al. (2006) point out that the application of such measures in a traditional society, characterized by large families, was likely to reinforce

⁶ Oil is present in the area between Lushnje, Qyeten Stalin and Berat, the chemical industry is based in Fier and Vlora. Engineering and light industries were also highly concentrated in the western central areas of the country, while minerals are mainly mined and processed in the centre (Borchert, 1975: 182).

⁷ Female illiteracy dropped from 92% in 1945 to less than 8% in 1989 (Aassve et al. 2006: 4).

pronatalist attitudes. Such attitudes were also reinforced by some restrictive measures undertaken by the State, such as a ban on abortion and restrictions in relation to modern family planning methods and the use of contraceptives (Çaro, 2004: 294). These policies were considered to have been successfully implemented.

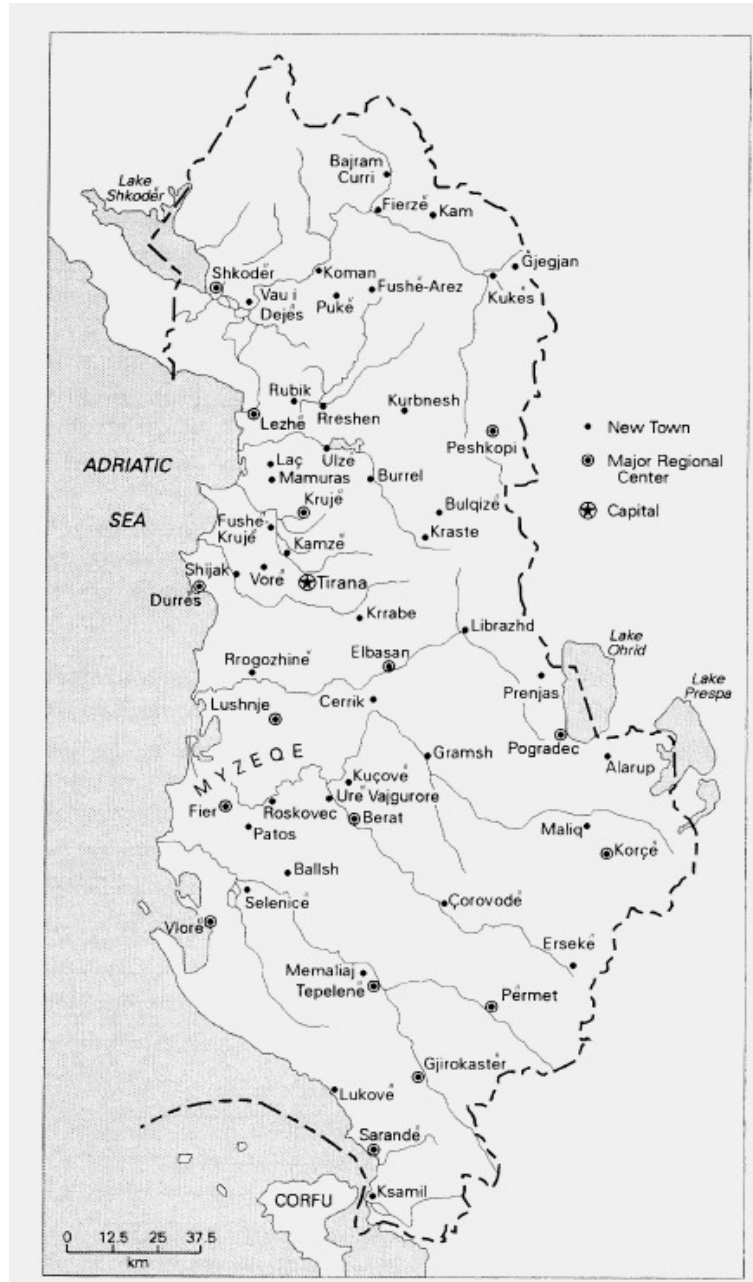
According to Philipov (2001), the people accepted positive policy instruments such as child maintenance allowances and extended maternity leave. This resulted in an increase in fertility rates, the highest population growth in Europe and an increase of the total population. According to Sjöberg (1992: 41), the changes in birth and mortality rates characterized the nature of the demographic transition during the communist period in Albania. An important contribution to the high growth rate experienced by communist Albania can also be found in the complete prohibition of emigration, which was regarded an act of treason punishable by imprisonment and even death penalty.

The economic developments, especially in industry during the communist period, affected the regional redistribution of the population, following an increased demand by the industrial sector for labour. During the communist period, 41 new urban centres were established as new axis of economic development (Rugg, 1994: 63; Bërxfholi, 2000: 32–33). According to Rugg (1994: 63), this number is greater than the total number of new centres in all other Eastern European countries combined. The new urban centres had different purposes and were distributed mainly in the northern and mountainous parts of the country (34 out of 41) (Bërxfholi, 2000: 33) (see figure 2.1). The choice of location was related to the presence of natural resources such as minerals and energy, but these centres also had administrative and educational purposes. Moreover, the concentration of new urban centres in the mountainous areas of the country was related to the attempt by the government to utilize the resources and the population in these regions providing also an example of implementation of self-reliance policy (Rugg, 1994: 63). The urban population growth, especially during the first decades of the communist regime, was attributable in grand part to the creation of these new urban-economic settlements (Bërxfholi, 2000)

Nevertheless, after rapid urban growth in the first decade of communism, rural-urban migration was controlled and directed by the state. As a result, urban growth for the following decades was very steady. Administrative, environmental and economic policies were pursued to contain the rural population and to eliminate possible unplanned rural to urban migration as much as possible (Hall, 1996: 187).

While during the socialist era in Eastern Europe (1948–1989), the internal migration rates were high and mainly directed towards urban areas (Kok, 1999) in Albania internal migration was limited and centrally controlled by the state. In the following sub-section we will examine the various state policies used to control population movements over different periods of the communist regime.

Figure 2.2 New urban centers and settlements



Source: Bërxfholi and Qiriaz, 1990

2.3.1 The 1950s and 1960s: internal migration directed towards industrial urban areas

Research on migration during the communist period is scarce and has mainly been undertaken by Albanian scholars. During the communist era, statistical data are unreliable due to the ideological and political influence of the regime (Tachella, 2005; Vullnetari, 2007). Moreover, any attempt to acquire the data from the state archives was regarded as being equivalent to espionage (Falkingham and Gjonça, 2001: 309). Statistical demographic and economic data

were sealed in what is referred to as the General State Archive and was not available even for research purposes (Falkingham and Gjonça, 2001). Nonetheless, during this period several census were carried out,⁸ and there was also a functioning population registration system.

The available data and research, undertaken mainly following the demise of the communist regime in 1990, suggest that the percentage of the urban population was low at the beginning of the communist period, with only 21.3 percent concentrated in urban areas (Bërxfholi et al. 2003). If we compare the census data from 1945 and 1950, we can see that the predominant form of internal migration was rural-rural migration, with a slight decrease in the urban population due to the faster growth of the rural population (Sjöberg, 1991: 52). From 1945, a reconstruction of the economy occurred throughout the country, with the nationalization of industrial, commercial and financial enterprises (Borchert, 1975: 181). According to Sjöberg (1992), it is presumed that the agrarian reform of 1946,⁹ and quite possibly measures associated with restructuring the economy, played a role in the increase in the rural population until 1950.

As mentioned in the previous section, after the 1950s Albania experienced rapid population increase due to a peak in birth rates combined with decreasing mortality rates. Moreover, this period was also one of political, social and economic development throughout the country. According to Borchert (1975: 181), the three five-year plans concentrated on industrial development rather than agriculture and at the end of 1965, the industrial sector was more successful than the agricultural sector. This process of rapid industrialization was the result of a political ideology which aimed to make the country as self-supporting as possible (Borchert, 1975: 182). In summary, the first decades of communist rule were characterized by rapid industrialization, the development of the secondary sector (construction) and the services sector (transport). The development of industry, transport and construction led to the creation of new industrial urban centres, while existing centres also expanded (UNDP, 2000:47), resulting in an increased demand for labour in urban centres.

According to Borchert (1975), during the 1950s and 1960s (especially the first five years), internal migration rates towards urban areas were relatively high. This led to the highest urban growth of the communist era, with the urban population rising from 20.5 percent of the total in 1944 to 27.5 percent in 1955 and 30.9 percent in 1960 (Borchert, 1975). The average annual rates of increase in the urban population during this ten-year period were over 6 percent (INSTAT, 1989).

Borchert (1975: 178) states that 80 percent of the increase in urban population during this period was due to immigration from rural areas. According to Bërxfholi (2000), however, the intensive urban growth during this period was not only the consequence of rural-urban

⁸ Censuses were carried out in 1945, 1950, 1955, 1960, 1969, 1979 and 1989 (Falkingham and Gjonça, 2001: 309). The first census after the demise of the communist system was carried out in 2001.

⁹ Under the Agrarian Reform Act of 1945, all forests and pasture lands and 60 percent of all cultivated land was confiscated (Borchert, 1975: 178), resulting in more extended private land tenure, as small-holders and landless peasants received plots of land confiscated from the large landowners, foreign companies and religious institutions (Vullnetari, 2007: 22).

migration but also of administrative changes, resulting in an increase in urban centres, from 24 in 1945 to 37 in 1955 and 41 in 1960 (see figure 2.2). Internal migration was directed towards these new industrial areas (mainly in peripheral urban areas) to fulfil the requirement for labour (Bërxfholi, 2000).

Another factor contributing to the increase in rural-urban migration was the collectivization of arable land and the creation of state cooperatives. According to Borchert (1975: 182), by the end of 1960, 79 percent of the available land had been collectivized without compensation being paid to the people.

The process of urbanization accompanied the rapid economic and political transformation of Albania, from a traditional agricultural country towards a socialist state with accelerated industrial development. However, rural-urban migration started to cause serious problems in rural areas, contributing to poor agricultural production during the second five-year plan (Borchert, 1975: 183). Faced with this situation, the Albanian Party of Labour took several steps, applying restrictive measures and development policies aimed at decreasing the level of rural-urban migration (Vullnetari, 2007). The development policies aimed to improve life in the rural and mountainous areas, in order to attract people, while several administrative restrictions aimed to control the rural-urban flow. However, the situation did not change rapidly and the urban population continued to increase. Until the 1960s, 80 percent of the increase in urban population was caused by rural-urban migration; however, in 1971, rural-urban migration only contributed 30 percent to the urban population increase (Borchert, 1975: 183).

According to Borchert (1975), internal migration between 1965–1971 can be attributed to economic development, industrialization, reforms in agriculture and population pressure due to high natural growth rates. There were significant movements from the northern and southern mountainous areas towards the plains along the coast, mainly to the TËrana-DurrËs-Elbasan triangle. These tendencies are very similar to the pattern of internal migration observed after the 1990s, though with greatly lower rates.

2.3.2 The 1970s and 1980s: restricted urbanization and the case of TËrana

Following the 1960s, urbanization in Albania was rigorously controlled by the state. According to Bërxfholi (2000), urban growth after the 1960s was minuscule despite the increased number of urban centres.¹⁰ Sjöberg (1989: 6) points out that while in 1960 urban dwellers made up 30.9 percent of the Albanian population, by 1980 this share had increased by only 2.7 percent, while between 1965 and 1979 the level increased by only 0.4 percent, to 33.4 percent.

According to the UN (2002: 5), migration to the cities after the 1960s was discouraged through policies promoting the development of smaller towns and by forbidding people to settle nearby to established city boundaries. Urban growth during the last three decades of the

¹⁰ In 1989, 67 centres were categorized as urban (Bërxfholi, 2000).

communist period is indeed very modest; with Sjöberg (1992) pointing out that Albania seems to represent a successful case of zero urban growth.

However, the efforts of the government to homogenize living conditions across the country were not very successful. Urban residents enjoyed much better welfare provisions than their rural counterparts in relation to housing, health services, social and cultural facilities (Albania Urban Sector Review, 2007: 5). Hence, the State had to introduce different measures and impose restrictions to keep people in the countryside. Part of the new policy related to administrative and enforced employment restrictions, such as the issuing of domestic passports, an urban residence permit, the requirement for permission to change a place of residence, along with labour force planning (Sjöberg, 1992: 11; Albania Urban Sector Review, 2007: 5). The new wave of restrictions aimed at rural-urban movements was quite successful in restricting urbanization. Nevertheless, Sjöberg (1992) argues that despite these policies, internal migration was still taking place, with approximately one-third of the population growth in urban areas between 1960–1987 being due to rural-urban migration. Sjöberg (1992; 11) further suggests that rural-rural migration during the same period was equally important as rural-urban migration, with a significant shift of the population from the northern and southern rural areas to rural areas adjacent to the main cities in the west and along the coast.

Moreover, Sjöberg (1989) maintains that at times migration took place outside the planned parameters, with people settling without official authorization or registration, whether in the cities or villages. In fact, the restrictive policy was more severe and the control greater in relation to the more important urban centres. The population could move within the same region and between neighbouring districts with a certain degree of freedom (Sjöberg, 1992). In this context, an important role was played by the establishment of new towns throughout the country.

Borchert (1975: 183) argues that urban growth before the 1960s occurred in cities of all sizes, while after this time the growth of large and medium-sized cities lagged behind average urban growth, while population growth in the smaller towns continued at the same rates. These findings help us understand the different levels at which migration was restricted. The regulation of rural-urban migration became less strict as the size and importance of a city decreased. As a result, after the 1960s small to medium-sized cities experienced quite high levels of population growth.

However, the big cities, especially in the urban centre of gravity, which according to Borchert (1975) lay in the zone bounded by Durrës, Tirana, Elbasan, Berat and Vlora, have always been the most attractive for internal migrants. The fact is that economic developments, social and cultural life, the opportunity for a better education and employment have always been concentrated in these urban centres, determining the direction of internal movements. Led by a desire to move to these centres, suburbanization in Albania was also occurring in the form of rural-rural migration, with the intra-rural change compensating to a certain extent for the refusal of permission to settle in the desired location (Sjöberg, 1992: 11). During this

period of restrictions and controlled rural-urban migration, rural-rural migration appears to have become very significant (Bërxfholi et al. 2003, 2005; Sjöberg, 1992). Rural-rural migration for the period 1979–1989 constituted more than 60 percent of all internal migration,¹¹ with the main directions of these movements being from the mountains to the lowlands (Bërxfholi et al. 2003, 2005; Sjöberg, 1992).

On the one hand, it was easier to undertake rural-rural migration, but on the other, there was a desire to settle in the important urban areas. As a solution, and combining a number of factors and possibilities, people chose to migrate to areas that were in the vicinity of their favoured urban locations. Arguably, the growth of the suburban areas adjacent to important urban centres was the result of a fair degree of such ‘unofficial’ migration (Sjöberg, 1992). For Sjöberg (1992: 11), what was occurring can be clearly explained by what he calls ‘*diverted migration*’ to urban areas. In his view, it would be interesting to examine the case of Tirana, as the most desirable city, both then and also today. Tirana, being the capital of the country, has always been characterized by the great range of opportunities that it offers.

In a certain sense, during the communist period a myth of the capital was created.¹² Tirana was regarded as a modern city, with street lights, concerts, theatre, opera, a modern life-style and even some influence from the West, such that everybody wished to live there (see also Vullnetari 2007).

Looking at the attraction of Tirana as a major industrial, administrative and cultural centre, Sjöberg investigates ‘*diverted migration*’ to Tirana (1992:11). According to his work, migratory flows heading for a particular destination, such as Tirana, are diverted to nearby destinations, in this case Tirana’s rural areas, as the desired destination is very difficult to enter at the same time as being so attractive. It was administratively easier for Albanians to move into rural areas than to the urban centres themselves (especially the capital). These ‘diverted in-migrants’ in turn contributed to the formation of densely populated ‘extra-urban settlements’ (Sjöberg, 1992: 13). In Figure 2.3, a map of Tirana and the surrounding villages clearly shows that the density of the population is higher in settlements closer to Tirana. The ‘*diverted migrants*’ moved as close as possible to the desired destination and in the case of Tirana settled in surrounding higher density areas such as Selitë, Mëzez, Paskuqan and Sharrë (Sjöberg, 1992).

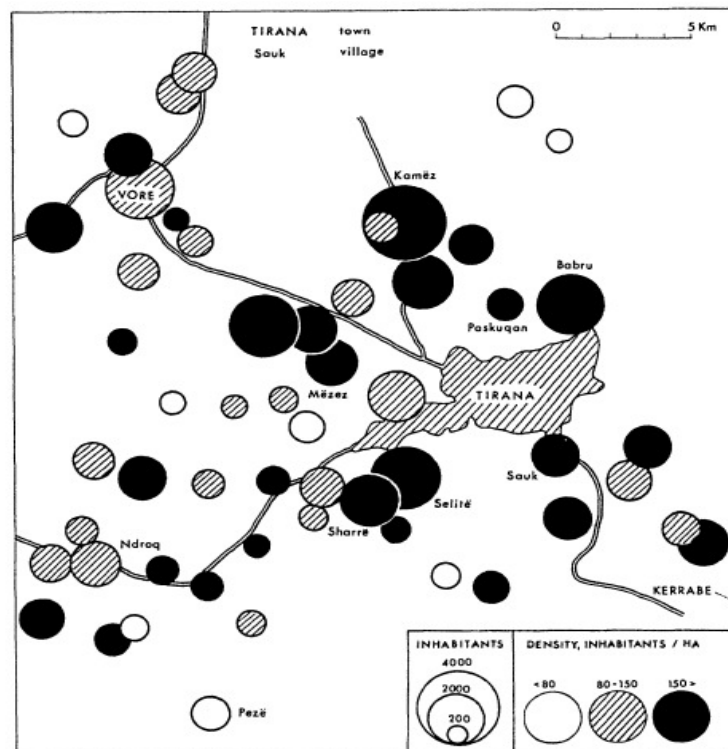
This interpretation of the internal migration before the 1990s, to some extent explains the recent overflow of internal migration into the Tirana region. Obviously there is a link between the ‘*diverted migration*’ into the suburbs of Tirana during the communist period and the massive

11 According to Bërxfholi (2005), during the period 1960–1970, there were 98,000 internal migrants, while between 1970–1980 the number decreased to 78,000 and between 1980–1990 declined further to 77,000. Of these, two-thirds moved to rural areas and it is presumed that they originated in other rural areas.

12 Tirana was the dream of many Albanians. It was modern, attractive the dream place to be. A famous saying among the youth at the time was ‘3 T që kërkon çdo vajzë e bukur: Tirana, TV me ngjyra dhe një Tullac që i ka këto’, ‘every beautiful girl is in search of the 3 Ts: Tirana, colour TV, and a bold man that can offer the first two’. There are three aspects to this saying: Tirana as a dream; colour TV demonstrating the level of poverty; the bold man meaning that only when becoming old somebody can afford to buy a colour TV and move to Tirana, or that it does not really matter who you marry as long as you make it to Tirana.

internal migration towards Tirana that is occurring today (see also Vullnetari, 2007). Following the 1990s, Kamza¹³ represents an interesting case. Before the 1990s, Kamza was not classified among the higher density areas surrounding Tirana. It was one of the most successful agricultural farms in the country, with 6,000 inhabitants (INSTAT, 1998). After the 1990s, an explosion of uncontrolled internal migration occurred in this area, turning it into a typical case of extremely rapid, massive and disordered urbanization (chapter 5). Given the historical precedent, the explosion in urbanization after the 1990s, especially in Tirana and its surroundings, should have been expected.

Figure. 2.3 Population densities in the villages of Tirana



Source: Alihmeti, 1986 cited by Sjöberg, 1992: 13

Nevertheless, the growth of Tirana during the communist era was not spectacular and after the 1960s the capital lost ground to other urban areas, with its share of the total population decreasing from 8.36 percent in 1960 to 7.26 percent in 1980 (Carter, 1986: 277). In fact, through most of the communist period Tirana accounted for a decreasing share of the total population of Albania (Carter, 1986).

However, Vejsiu and Bërxfholi (1987) argue that internal migration is a significant aspect of the population growth in Tirana, given the fact that the natural increase in its population was lower than that of the population as a whole. In addition, according to Sjöberg

¹³ Kamza's current population is estimated to be around 100.000 inhabitants (MoK, 2009) from 6,000 in 1989 (MoK, 2002).

(1992: 12), during the 1969–1979 intercensal period, two-fifths of the increase in the capital's population (15,000 out of 36,300) was due to internal migration. During the 1979–1989 intercensal period, internal migration accounted for 44 percent of the growth of Tirana (Misja and Vejsiu 1990, cited by Sjöberg 1992: 12).

Until the 1960s the trends were in the same direction, with impressive urban growth for the country as a whole, as well as Tirana. After the 1960s, at the national level the urban share increased very slowly for years, while in Tirana there was a decrease in urban population which was only reversed after the 1980s (Bërxfholi, 2000, Bërxfholi et al 2005; Sjöberg, 1992). In other words, the restrictive measures used to control rural-urban movements of the population were more severely applied to the capital.

After 1970, a strategy of limiting internal migration from rural to urban areas was implemented. During this period, strategies were applied to attract people to rural areas to supply labour for collective agriculture (Bërxfholi et al 2005). The population was mainly directed towards rural and particularly remote and mountainous areas. During the period of what Vullnetari (2007: 27) calls the 'Cultural Revolution', especially after the 1970s, many intellectuals, artists, teachers, doctors and nurses, etc. were obliged to move to remote rural areas under the slogan 'Go where the Party needs you'.¹⁴ Under this slogan, many graduate students were assigned work in different areas of the country without the right to choose. Often these 'forced' migrations were followed by family reunion.

The ideology used to control and direct internal movements and to completely ban emigration constitutes one of the main forces shaping developments which followed the collapse of communism in 1990 – in particular an explosion in internal and international migration.

2.4 Conclusions

The primary aim of this paper was to document and give detailed background information and account of the migration process in Albania before the 1990s. Through a careful review of most of the existing body of literature on Albanian migration, this paper provides a greater insight into the central role of migration in the contemporary developmental issues in Albania. Exploring migration from a historical perspective not only sets the basis for a better understanding of current Albanian migration but also adds to the body of knowledge available, especially with regard to internal migration, regarding which there is limited data and research.

This paper focuses on the specificities of migration in Albania prior to the 1990s, specifically during the 45 years of the communist regime. This historical account is presented in order to construct an understanding of contemporary Albanian migration. The ban on international migration and the control of internal migration during the 45 years of

¹⁴ It is interesting to see how the Party 'played' with the place of origin and controlled destinations. It was common and premeditated that intellectuals from the south and southeast or central parts of the country were sent into the remote north to 'spread' their knowledge. Often this situation was a source of major stress and even led to suicide among many young intellectuals, who were obliged to live their entire lives in the isolated villages of the mountainous north.

communism influenced the various ways internal and international migration developed, especially in the post-communist years. The outgoing transformation from a socialist society to a democratic one implies parallel transformations, which create the most relevant background context for the mass migration of Albanians following the 1990s (chapter 3).

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