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*A Translator in Power:
Ernest Koliqi and his Role during the Fascist Occupation of Albania*

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1. Introduction

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary study that analyses the interrelation between two major areas of study, that of history (with a view on the period of Fascism) and translation. History of translation is a discipline that is but ‘a young branch in the large tree of translation studies’ (Bastin and Bandia 2006: 11) that aims at putting ‘the discipline [of translation] in a historical perspective’ (Bassnett 1980: 39) and that this new discipline should therefore be seen as ‘an essential field of study for the contemporary theorist’ (Bassnett 1980: 75). However, a globalized overview on the translation activity throughout the thousand years of history of mankind constitutes a difficult task to achieve. As Bastin and Bandia (2006: 13) suggest, history of translation is a ‘mosaic’ made of small pieces and larger, missing pieces. In the vast territory that universal history provides, what can be done is identify and investigate specific areas of research or precise historical moments where to investigate and research the translation phenomenon.

This dissertation aims at investigating the relation between a political movement and the reciprocal influence with the translation phenomena in a well-delimited political area. The political movement referred to is known as Fascism, a form of radical ultra-nationalism that started spreading in the beginning of the twentieth century. Prime Minister of Italy, Benito Mussolini, would proclaim himself dictator of Italy and start building a totalitarian regime. Mussolini’s politics would include the ‘formal occupation of Albania’ (Payne 1999: 243) in 1939, a country that was an Italian quasi-protectorate for years. The area of research for this dissertation is limited to the Albanian territory in 1939 and to the translation history in this particular area. In order to tackle the translation phenomenon in this given area and in this particular historical moment, that is the annexation of a country that would generate Fascist Albania (1939-1943), it is crucial to have as a starting point the translation phenomenon in Fascist Italy.

In a context where a nationalist entity enters in contact with a foreign entity, defining its relationship – or, its dominating, superior authority – with the foreign will inevitably require the process of mediation between cultures and languages. This process involves primarily a certain extent of acceptance or rejection towards the phenomenon of cultural exchange. Translation proves to be significantly important in mediating contexts. However, a regime – in particular, fascist regimes – has shown a certain degree of hostility towards translation. When a regime that proclaims its superiority, will have difficulties in accepting a cultural exchange, phenomenon that will be perceived as a “cultural penetration”. When analysing the translation statistics, Rundle (2010: 16) concludes that they showed a failure in Italy’s objective in expanding its cultural influence abroad, and at the same time they showed a new, growing interest from Italians into foreign literatures. This translation deficit was being seen as a sign that Fascist Italy being culturally dominated.

Translation in Fascist Albania is a reality that isn’t comparable to that of other Fascist regimes, not from a political standpoint, nor from a translational one. After the annexation of

Albania by Fascist Italy in 1939, translation mainly constituted a bureaucratic tool. With the Fascist political system/ being deployed to Albania, institutions and authorities had to translate their activity into Italian. Albanian state documents, reports, balance sheets etc. had always been published in Albanian, which was the official language of the state. Starting from 1939 they would be written and published in Italian or published in both languages. Some of the translated documents, as registered in the National Albanian Library's Bibliography were:

- Codice civile del Regno d' Albania
- Codice penale albanese
- Unione doganale italo-albanese
- Statuto (Banca Nazionale d'Albania)
- Statistica della produzione agricola dell'anno 1939
- Concessione per la pubblicità stradale
- Elenco degli utenti (pubblicazione mensile)
- Norme relative all'attività alberghiera
- Istituzione della Direzione Generale per la Stampa, Propaganda e Turismo

The above-mentioned documents were quickly translated in 1939, and in the bibliography, they are labelled as "*teksti ne shqip dhe ne italisht*", meaning "the text is in Albanian and Italian", which implies that they were contemporarily written and published in both languages. The ratio between Italian and Albanian wasn't consistent enough to create a pattern. Also, some of these documents were monthly or annually published, depending on their functions.

The initial assumption of the author of this dissertation about the translation processes that were conducted in Albania during the Fascist years, included the translation of literary works from Italian into Albanian so as to obtain and maintain cultural hegemony over Albania. However, after conducting this research, the results have been totally different. The bibliography of the publishing houses in Albania during the years of Fascist hegemony shows that the books that were being translated from Italian into Albanian were mainly translations of Italian political books that glorified the fascist regime and its absolute leader, Benito Mussolini. This selection of texts was a clear indicator of propaganda, considering that only exclusively political books or speeches were being translated into Albanian. No literature Italian books in 1940, some were translated but were mainly coming from English speaking countries. In the list of books translated from Italian into Albanian in 1940 (only the ones related to politics, according to the National Bibliography of Books) it can be found:

Trizzino, Antonio – "*Verità e menzogne sulla spedizione in Albania*", translated into Albanian (1940)
Berluti, Giorgio – "*La dottrina fascista*", translated into Albanian (1940)
Mussolini, Benito – "*La dottrina del fascismo*", translated by prof. Kolë Shiroka into Albanian (1940)
Nicotera, Alessandro – "*Fascismo*", translated into Albanian (1940)
Shapati, Bexhet – "*Islam e Fascismo*", written and published in Italian by an Albanian author (1940)
Kruja, Mustafa – "*L'Albania stato unito all'Italia nel quadro dell'Impero di Roma*", edito a cura della Direzione Generale per la Stampa, Propaganda e il Turismo, (1940)

Mussolini, Benito- “*Spezzeremo le reni alla Grecia*”, a speech published in Italian and Albanian (1940)
Mussolini, Benito- “*Perchè siamo in guerra con la Grecia*”, a speech published in Italian (1940)

During the following years, up until the end of the regime, the selection of texts that would be translated from Italian didn't vary much from their main area of interest, that is, praising Fascism and convincing the Albanian population that Fascist Italy had been the salvation of Albania. New editions of the previously translated books would be approved, new Italian grammar books would be published and so on until the capitulation of Italy. Literary works weren't prioritized neither by the Fascist authorities in Albania, neither by the Albanian publishing houses. When coming to this new understanding of the translation phenomenon in this period, the purpose of this paper evolved from stating that Fascist Albania was exclusively translating the already censored and filtered materials coming from Italy, into the investigation of the translation process as a tool in the hands of those who are given power.

1.1 Research topic and main areas of interest

This essay discusses the political events that took place in Albania in 1939 and the linguistic policies that were implemented in the newly reformed state as part of a well-organized plan that would lead to the ‘Italianization’ and ‘Fascist-ization’ of Albania. Following the unification of Albania with the Italian state the 7th of April 1939, the need for an efficient communication between the two countries was one of the most important matters in terms of the functioning of political and bureaucratic matters. Certainly, a communicative exchange between two countries that were relatively different from the linguistic and cultural point of view was of crucial importance both from the historical and the linguistic point of view (e.g. interpreting and translation).

The moment of collision between the two countries (with two different – if not completely radically opposite – language and cultural identities) generated the need for cultural mediators (such as interpreters and translators) to act as ambassadors and messengers in the new, critical political-military situation. The following political context – the annexation of the Albanian state by Fascist Italy – is a context where patriotism, loyalty and admiration for one's own country but also corruption, collaborationism and many more were key elements strictly correlated to the needs and interests of the Fascist Regime for the occupation of Albania and its political, social and cultural submission. The translation act represented a crucial, indispensable means of communication when performing institutional and bureaucratic acts. Translation, Rafael argues, provides the communicative infrastructure for establishing cultural hegemony. Without translation, there is no conversion, and without conversion, no colonization (Rundle & Rafael 2016: 25) He suggests that translation is another name for all the “processes of mediation, communication and linguistic politics” (*ibid.* 26) necessary for the annexation – in this historical context – of a country with a language (i.e. Albanian) unknown to the invader, thus creating the need for an effective communicative exchange through cultural mediators.

The political conflict that occurred in 1939 in Albania was meant to be a real annexation, as was eventually confirmed. However, communicating the true intentions of the fascist regime towards the Albanian people was a matter of political importance which inevitably depended on the act of translation. The translation act served first and foremost communicative tool at an international level and it will be the tempted obstruction of this truth by the Fascist authorities – and their collaborators – that will constitute the creation of the translation conflict in itself. At the base of the conflict that concerns these two protagonists – Fascist Italy and the Kingdom of Albania – lies the translation process as the primary means of communication, along with language and culture.

The union between the two kingdoms was achieved through a military action. (Koka *et al.*) Even though Albania submitted quickly to the Fascist regime – after an initial opposition and attempted resistance that was quickly suppressed (Koka *et al.*) – during the first hours of the invasion day, the Albanian territory constituted, to all intents and purposes, a war zone which would soon become an occupied territory. This new reality generated the creation of a multilingual and multicultural context. Stalin once argued that “whoever occupies a territory imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army has power to do so” (Footitt & Simmonds 1988: ix).

1.2 Overview on the translating and mediating phenomena within the Albanian borders

Albanian translators and interpreters during the Fascist Regime in Albania were faced with the delicate task of translating mainly politically relevant information, State documents but also literary works. With regard to the importance of investigating the translation phenomenon in a given historic moment, Venuti has argued that ‘every stage in the production, circulation and reception of a translation is profoundly marked by its historical moment, tracing a history that is distinct from the history of the foreign text.’ (2005: 800) It was – as will be discussed later on – their decision on whether or not to become a translational tool in an era when translating – which mainly involved spreading Fascist ideology and propaganda – was the most profitable (in social and economic terms) activity, also of political and social importance. Translators were challenged with the key role of legitimizing the invasion throughout the entire duration of the Fascist Regime in Albania (1939-1943), faced with the task of dissuading the Albanian population from opposing to the regime and, thereby, normalizing to the greatest extent possible the Fascist reality in the Albanian territory.

The collision of two cultures with one of the two deliberately trying to prevail and dominate the other – this case study will explore how the Fascist Regime by means of the introduction and the integration of the Italian culture was aiming for a “substitution” of the Albanian culture – goes far beyond the mere acceptance and submission to the invader. Palmer (2015: 358) has argued that translation in colonial contexts didn’t simply ‘operate under the sign of violence’ or simply carry the signature of the invader. With reference to the linguistic colonization in Ireland, Palmer defines translation as ‘an essential accessory to violence’ thus

becoming a crucial element for ‘intelligence gathering’ and the cultivating of the ‘art of war’. (Palmer *ibid.*) Translation constituted an essential communicative tool which – as in many historical contexts throughout the years – has received little recognition, both when being put into practice and afterwards. Translation wasn’t recognized as the main useful practice for the purposes of the regime, even though it was the first necessity emerged when the two countries came to face a new reality. With regard to this, Kujamaki and Footitt argue:

“[...] It would be true to say that translation is largely absent from traditional Military History. [M]ilitary action is undertaken in the language of the dominant force, or at least in that of the military academics themselves – that any form of “translation” is thus unnecessary.” (2016: 55)

Military history studies have shown that ‘an army is able to focus its resources and apply its in-built authority to language as well as its other goals’ (Spolsky 2009, 143) The military themselves acknowledged the importance of a cultural understanding as part of a “sophisticated counterinsurgency” and therefore began “to place language and translation concerns within their weaponized cultural understanding” (Kujamaki & Footitt 2016: 56). The counterinsurgency that took place in Albania on April 7th gave rise to many particular linguistic and cultural phenomena. The general acceptance of the Albanian people with regard to the attempted cultural and linguistic domination mainly concerns two factors. The first factor is closely linked to the Albanian historical-political profile and to the new political situation to which it was subjected, hence an inevitable obedience to the new rules to which they were about to be forced to submit to. The second factor concerns a much more intricate and subjective matter which, for historical reasons, cannot be simply ignored or underestimated given that this particular subjective reason has deeper political roots than expected. Rafael has argued that “translation is political to the extent that it betrays its ideological context in both senses of that word. [...] In its very imperfection and errancy, translation can take on a political significance.” (2015: 86)

The prevailing concept in Translation History studies could easily be “military translation culture”. Translation culture refers to a set of socially determined norms, conventions, expectations and values of all those involved in translation and interpreting activities in the given social entity [...] (Prunč 1997) Also, Prunč argued that the notion of “translation culture” is a “social construct incorporating discourse on translation and interpreting as well as the actual translational practice, hence reflecting the social agreement and disagreement over acceptable, recommended and obligatory forms of translation and interpreting in a given time and space.” (2007a: 331) Military conflicts generate the creation of these translational spaces where translators serve as cultural mediators and “essential communicative players” (Kujamaki & Footitt 2016: 59) Albanian translators during the Fascist regime might have had to come to terms with the conflict of knowing the Italian language and having an Albanian identity. This could be the main reason why the regime followed the policy of employing Italian speaking workers in the Albanian State apparatus, or Albanian workers

who had Italian language knowledge and a strong sympathy for the Italian culture. Concerning the sympathy for the language of the invader, Rafael provides an interesting point of view, where he claims that “idealizing the colonizer’s speech, empire employs translation as a means for appropriating and reorganizing native languages and their speakers in view of an overarching official language. Translation bound to empire thus imbues a second, foreign language with a social power surpassing any of the local idioms.” (Rafael 2007: 241) Albanian individuals who had knowledge of Italian language and had pledged allegiance to the Fascist regime, were precious and useful for the purposes of the Fascist regime. Why the regime preferred these individuals doesn’t seem hard to understand, given that “[...] translation and interpreting as social, cultural and political acts are intrinsically connected to local and global relations of power and control.” (Cronin 2003)

Kujamaki and Footitt (2016) argue that one of the risks encountered when doing research in military history is “the understanding of translation and interpreting as a socially important profession that is associated with economic or other benefits for those who end up doing it.” Military historians limit to associating translation practices with economic benefits, for a translator it is important to understand if the translator/s in question (who assumed the role of historical actor/s) were professionals or “just somebody who was available to do the interpreting”, making them ‘incidental’ interpreters or translators (2016: 62). It is of fundamental importance to analyze the reasons behind such choice, considering that in military conflicts – for instance, the military action against Albania – language skills and interpreting services are vital for the communication between the cultures involved in the conflict. During the years of the monarchy, the Albanian press had a crucial role in educating the Albanian population with democratic ideas. There was a sort of censorship on the press, but this didn’t stop the divulgation of every kind of information, as well as the developing of different ideas. The censorship would “prohibit the critics on the King and his kingdom, as well as the negative comments against Italy.”¹ (Koka et al. 2007: 421)

Another key element were the translations/importations of literature. Literary translations published in fascist Albania rarely provoked Italian dissatisfaction. The content of the publications that managed to fulfil the necessities of the regime and succeeded into getting published, may be a clear indicator of how effective Italian authority was when concerning the controlling and filtering the books and newspapers from anti-fascist ideas. According to Merino & Rabadan, this phenomenon might be the result of a ‘subtle form of covert self-censorship’, where authors ‘were aware of unwritten rules and they knew what had to be done to comply with or subvert the values of the [regime].’ When writing, rewriting, modifying their texts ‘authors, translators, pseudo-translators and adapters made heavy use of self-censorship, for they knew that the text they submitted to the authorities would be judged according to certain criteria and their aim was to reach the public.’ (Merino & Rabadan 2002: 127) The self-censored nature of the contents published in Spain also apply to the nature of the writings of

¹ All translations are made by the author.

Albanian authors, who – when gaining consciousness on the heavy censorship that applied to their literary artworks – would fall into a lack of productivity that would lead to a literary ‘drought’ that reached its peak in 1943. During this year, literary publications originally written in Albanian would register their lowest publishing levels. Original artworks were ‘substituted’: while Albanian creativity was lacking in originals, it was succeeding in translations. There is a direct correlation with the extent in which Albania was largely a translating country rather than a publishing one – also with a high density of importation of books in their original language from abroad – showing how the degree of loyalty to fascism and the openness to foreign cultures influenced the degree of acceptability towards translations of foreign materials. Most importantly, Fascism was bringing the Italian language and culture to people that had an admiration for everything that was Italian and saw in it the possibility for progress and development in all social and economic levels.

If the translation index in Italy during the years of the Fascist regime had shown a clear and ‘embarrassing’ deficit that was seen by the regime as a *cultural weakness*, the translation phenomenon in the Albanian territory was seen by the Albanian intellectuals as a *cultural strength*. This could represent a key element towards the understanding of the general acceptance of the Italian language and culture in Albanian territory following the invasion. When arguing about the different ways in which translation has been ‘recruited to serve the needs of the empire’, Rafael (2015) mentions how the desires and the interests of the colonized have to coincide with those of the colonizer, a process that requires an effective communication between the two. In this case study, the interests of both parties coincided perfectly, with only one element – Fascism – that conceptually doesn’t belong to any of these parties, but factually was this particular element what caused the contact of the two cultures. Also, this process unveils how the coinciding of the interests of both parties – the interest to invade and the interest to grow culturally – can turn into a political tool. With reference to the colonization as a system where there is a dominating power and a migration of the dominating forces to the colonized land, in this sense there are many analogies between the new reality that was created in Albania following the unification with the Italian Kingdom. From a linguistic point of view, there was a dominating language and culture and a dominated, subordinate one. However, it is important to specify that along with the analogies, there are many differences between Albania as an occupied country and a colonized settlement. While colonialism refers to a territory where its main inhabitants are indigenous people who are dominated by advanced weaponry, Albania resembles more a country with potential in economic and social progress where investments would be made throughout the whole duration of the Fascist Regime in Albania. Also, the unification of two thrones is different to most colonizing situations, given that a unification implies equal status. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to address this scenario as an invasion and forced annexation rather than colonization. On the other hand, it does make sense to talk of empire, and to see the annexation of Albania as part of an empire-building project. In the newly created context, language and cultural mediation were needed in Fascist Albania – before and during the occupation – in the same way they were needed when a colonizer

operated in indigenous lands. Rafael argues on the importance of translation as a “mediation power” (2015) and how significant is the role of translation in consolidating an empire. In order for an efficient communication to work, it has to be operated in a language that is both understandable by colonizer and colonized. Communication and translation are inseparable in imperial or colonized contexts considering that every moment of the encounter between and among occupiers and occupied entails the non-negotiable involvement of mediation for signs, intentions and meanings. By responding to the need of mediation among sudden and recurring emergences of cultural and linguistic differences, “translation seeks to parry the shocks of strange signs and unintelligible speech [...] thus assuming the power of mediation that is vital to the commerce between rulers and ruled.” (Rafael 2015: 85)

The Italian authorities attempted – and achieved, to a great extent, as it will be discussed – to impose their language as the only imperial language in the Albanian territory. However, given the presence of linguistic pluralism, it has to be considered the Fascist tolerance towards the introduction of oral and written materials in other foreign languages at the same time. This phenomenon was most likely tolerated insofar the Italian language supremacy wasn’t threatened, placing the Albanian language in a subordinate and inferior position to Italian and all the other languages that were being introduced. The implicit message being sent to the Albanian population was that the Albanian language wasn’t worthy of being the official language of the empire – therefore was to be replaced. When discussing translation as an act of resistance by the receiving culture, Rafael argued that “[t]here is always resistance. There is the permanent possibility of a war of meaning against those who seek to use translation to prop up structures of power.” (Rafael & Rundle 2016: 33) This reaction is to be distinguished in that of translators/interpreters who were recruited to work for particular historical context where ‘occupying forces’ and ‘allied forces’ have shown different results in studies about the translators/interpreters’ performance. These two contexts can generate dramatically different outcomes, which goes to show how the context influences the decisional strategies and interests of these cultural mediators. With regard to this particular issue, Rafael poses the question: ‘Can translation be faithful to empire, or does it betray empire in the double sense of that word: revealing its workings but also frustrating its ends?’ (Rafael 2015: 92)

Rafael has largely discussed the relationship of translation with political powers and the ways it has constituted a tool for dominating and maintaining dominance. Knowledge of languages has proven to be an advantage and a precious mean for achieving war privileges. Translation, Rafael says, has historically ‘served as an instrument of domination under colonial rule.’ (2007: 241) In historical contexts where the occupier is imposing its own language, this second language will become official and in order to ‘speak authoritatively and to address state authorities, one must be able to speak up, using this second language in place of one’s native speech. Indeed, knowledge of the colonizer’s language has often endowed speakers with considerable privileges.’ (Rafael *ibid.*) Being granted privileges and authoritativeness,

translation/interpretation own the luxury of betraying their oppressor and escape its control. Rafael argued:

“[T]he relationship between translation and empire is always fraught and never secure. [...] translative acts can bring forth new social formations resistant to colonial rule. Translators in these cases play a highly ambivalent, often subversive, role in bringing across, but also stranding and overturning imperial meanings. Indeed, working with the examples they provide, we can see how translation is nothing less than a kind of war. It pits languages and their users against one another. It entails not only the exchange of meaning, but also tactics of evasion and confrontation, deflecting intentions and loosening the grip of epistemic authority. In doing so, translation lets loose the play of words beyond imperial control, underwriting the emergence of other expressive possibilities.” (Rafael 2015: 363-364)

Along with the political and territorial occupation, Fascist Italy achieved a cultural domination that was mainly a result of the linguistic and cultural politics followed over the years prior to 1939 in Albania. Footitt (2012a: 7) provides an example of a similar occupation strategy adopted by the Italian army during WWI in the Slovenian territories where many analogies with the strategy followed for the occupation of Albania emerge more than 20 years after the Slovenian case. The Italian strategies show the functioning of a dominating system constituted by a prior cultural domination during the pre-deployment phase following the total annexation of a country.

“The Italian Army based in the Slovenian territories between 1915 and 1917 employed languages as the basic instrument of their occupation regime, Italianizing Slovenian place names or adjusting them to Italian orthography. The previous school system was uprooted and replaced with an Italian one, based on the Italian language and school curriculum, with the Slovene language removed from public space and ghettoized in churches and private homes. This linguistic occupation paved the way for the subsequent annexation of Slovenian territories into the Italian state.” (Footitt 2012a: 7)

These strategies are closely related to the Italian understanding of its own identity and power, both within its territory and abroad. In this regard, Rundle (2016: 37) has argued that ‘translation can be so revealing in imperialist situations, in which one culture is trying to dominate another, or where a regime seeks to shape its people also by means of language.’ Rundle adds that a regime that aims at exercising rigid control over the overall cultural environment makes sure to resize its compatibility with its ideological agenda. Therefore, the regime will need to decide what policies to follow with regard to the interaction with other cultures that are beyond its control. As a result, “the level of alarm engendered by translation will be proportional to cultural insecurity of the regime.” (Rafael & Rundle 2016: 37)

2. Political overview – Preparations for the invasion

2.1. King Zog and Italy, “The Great Ally”

The economic and political influence of the Italian state on Albania has much deeper roots than those placed with the invasion of Albania on the 7th April 1939. The political action taken against Albania was not unexpected, quite the contrary, considering that Italy had undertaken over a long period of time, long before the invasion, various policies that led to the political, economic and social control over Albania.

During the mid-thirties, Italian foreign policy over the control of the Albanian territory took a decisive stance. Contrary to a policy of cultural penetration, it quickly took on the appearance of a preparation for an aggression to all intents and purposes. The aim of this aggression was the further expansion of the fascist supremacy, and to fulfil this objective, the regime had followed a well-defined strategy: isolating the Albanian state from the economic and geopolitical point of view.

In 1935, King Zog, after operating drastic changes in the government that aimed at resolving the deep financial crisis the country was dealing with, claimed “the strengthening of the relations with the *great ally*, Italy.” This new government, despite being constituted mainly by Albanian components, didn’t represent a concern for the Italians, who considered the new government *pro-Italian*. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 328-329) The King promised democracy and freedom for the people, without, of course, threatening the two main important pillars of the Albanian regime; King’s authority and role of the “great ally”, Italy. Albanian foreign policies also relied heavily on the alliance with Italy. This alliance compromised Albania’s independency in foreign policies, given that foreign forces, such as London or Paris, showed no interest in Albanian matters, as they had left Albania in Italy’s hands. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 334)

2.2. March Agreements (1936)

The relationships between the Italian State and the Albanian State took a definite turn in March 1936, with the so-called March agreements. The thirteen agreements had economic and financial nature and were signed by a representative for the Italian side, as well as a representative for the Albanian side. According to these agreements, many loans given to the Albanian State during those last years (1931-1932) were given away and Rome’s government took charge of the interruption of the loan by implementing a new one, thus ensuring the continuation of the works interrupted due to the interruption of the loan. These interrupted works included the construction of roads, piers and military objects that were crucial for the quick penetration into Albania and subsequently, to the Balkans. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 333) These loans would soon transform the Albanian state into a financial monopoly of Italy, considering the continuous failure of Albanian authorities in paying the debt.

Another agreement implied an obligation on the Tirana government in employing exclusively Italian civil servants and organizers for the government system. As a result of the

agreement, the number of Italian military and civil servants grew rapidly and their main task was to keep under control the whole state apparatus. Also, they functioned as an “agenda”, meaning they informed Rome’s headquarters about important political, economic and military-strategic questions occurring in Albanian territory. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 332–333)

On 1st March 1940 Albanian customs employees, and in particular those who didn’t know the empire’s language, were facing a serious issue, given that from that day forward all customs acts would be compiled in the Italian language. The Italian representatives handed over to the Albanian employees registers and forms they were obligated to fill in in Italian. That was when Albanian employees had to witness a growth in unfavorable work conditions. Albanian employees, many of whom, not knowing the Italian language or not knowing it well enough had to choose whether to resign or to wait anticipating redundancy by the so-called Italian inspectors. (*Bashkimi doganor me Italine*, DOG., *Bashkimi i Kombit*, 1943) Italian employees (and that doesn’t necessarily mean *all* of them) in the Albanian state apparatus were assigned the task of handling papers they often didn’t understand. (*Nepunesi Shqiptar ne Banken Kombetare te Shqipnis*, M. N., *Bashkimi i Kombit*, 1943)

An important agreement signed in March 1936 was the reopening of private schools maintained by the Catholic clergy of Shkodër. This Catholic clergy had the exclusive right of opening as many schools they wished to, a right that was soon to be leveraged by Rome and the Vatican, who sent instructions for the revival and the invigoration of all Catholic activities in Albania. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 333) Albania would quickly turn into a fascist resource, considering the new decisions that concerned the press and education. Fascist ideas and propaganda started spreading widely in the Albanian population through newspapers and magazines. Italy was sold as the great ally who was sacrificing its own resources for Albania’s economy and progress, while Albania was considered “Italy’s satellite”.

2.3 King Zog’s Politics and Italy’s preparations for Albania’s invasion

In the light of the pro-Italian politics followed and supported by the Albanian King himself, Albanian patriotic circles considered these politics as a threat to Albanian independence, the much longed-for independence achieved with great effort in 1912. In many Albanian cities, it was believed that it was the King who was depriving Albania of its sovereignty, and many were “whispering that Italy, with its loans, was managing to hoard Albania and it was all Zog’s fault.” (Koka *et al.* 2007: 335) Foreign newspapers that were aware of the political situation in Albania, commented that “the Mussolini imperialism managed to buy Albania’s Independence for a small price, making him the true lord of Tirana.” (*Le droit du peuple*, May 5th 1936) That situation would soon become fatal to the Albanian people and to the peace in the Balkans. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 335)

The promised financial support was not delivered promptly, thus forcing the Albanian government to beg for economic help from the Italian government, while the latter was deliberately delaying the economic support. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 336) The extreme economic

conditions in Albania provoked many anti-Italian and anti-government demonstrations from the working class. The King sent to Rome the Albanian Minister of Economy, to ask for further explanations of the economic aid delay. Mussolini had expressed his dissatisfaction with how the economic aid had been used by the Albanian government. Duce's discontent would have served as further pressure on the Albanian monarchy to force it into doing what Rome wanted. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 342)

The Albanian government applied, with the King's consent, a censorship on all foreign newspapers and their circulation on Albanian soil, that would prohibit communist, socialist and anti-fascist ideas. The existing Albanian newspapers were forced to popularize Fascist Italy as "Albania's greatest ally" and Mussolini as "Albanian people's biggest friend". (Koka *et al.* 2007: 341)

The economic aid that had been promised but which did not arrive, greatly disturbed the King. Count Ciano², through his correspondence with the king, tried to reassure him by guaranteeing that the alliance between Italy and Albania was stronger than ever and that Albania's independence would remain intact despite the latest events between Italy and Yugoslavia. The government of Tirana, foretelling the danger that was approaching, tried to evade from its own political isolation, secretly proposed a "friendship" treaty to Greece that was categorically denied, considering that Greece feared a complication in its relations with Italy. Tirana's government also turned to Belgrade for an improvement of their relationships (despite the Albanian ethnic cleansing that the Yugoslavian government had started in 1912 and was still in progress) who also denied any kind of alliance with Albania and remained open to a potential support from Italy in continuing what it had begun. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 344)

In 1937, Mussolini's government sent in Albania three important Fascist representatives who would take on important roles in the Albanian politics; Francesco Iacomoni, a new minister, Sestilio Montanelli, active Fascist organizer and new minister of education and lastly, Giovanni Giro, responsible for recruiting and organizing intelligence services. In a short time, many fortifications and a series of military constructions were finished, so as to initiate the attack as soon as possible. (Koka *et al.* 2007: 345)

In his diaries, the Foreign Affairs Minister and also the man directly responsible for the Albanian invasion, Ciano describes the relations between Albania and Italy as questionable and furtive, and this was all due to the King's character as Ciano and the Italians knew him:

² Gian Galeazzo Ciano (1903 – 1944) was Foreign Minister of Fascist Italy from 1936 until 1943 and Benito Mussolini's son-in-law. Ciano was named Honorary Citizen of Tirana, Albania, prior to the Italian annexation in 1939. Ciano was the prime figure behind the Italian invasion of Albania in 1939, which he had worked hard to persuade the Duce to undertake. Italian forces capitulated in Albania on 8 September 1943. By this time, Ciano, having supported the ousting of Mussolini at a meeting of the Fascist Grand Council on 24 July 1943, had fled to Nazi Germany. The Nazis returned him to Italy, where he was arrested, tried in Verona for betraying Mussolini, now head of a puppet government in northern Italy, and shot in the back at the latter's behest on 11 January 1944.

“Jacomoni referred to the Albanian situation: the King and his men have declared formally that they wish to re-establish the most cordial relations with us, but Jacomoni fears that this may be a maneuver to gain time to permit the success of the King's many attempts to draw up pacts and understandings with third powers.” (Ciano 2001: 31)

In the following pages of his diary, Ciano proceeds on taking notes on Albanian King's reactions to the imminent, foreseeable attack, who: “[...] after having had the greatest fear of his life, goes to extremes in showing signs of friendship for us [and] has sent me his "fraternal" greetings.” (Ciano 2001: 37–38) Ciano had a very clear view when concerning the Albanian question. The personal union with Italy was to be accomplished in a peaceful manner, given that he didn't want his country to be the first one to start a war in Europe and he considered it “rather dangerous to fire the first shot in this disturbed and inflammable Europe.” (Ciano 2001: 56) Nevertheless, the action would take place with or without King Zog's consensus, and if necessary, weapons were to be used as well. (Ciano 2001: 54)

Towards the end of March and the approaching faster and faster to the moment of the attack, Ciano reports the last important events before the actual invasion, such as King Zog's decision “to refuse to sign a treaty which formally and substantially violates the integrity and sovereignty of Albania.” (Ciano 2001: 56) Ciano expected him to capitulate voluntarily, considering the delicate conditions in which the royal family was about to enter – the Albanian Queen would soon deliver King's first heir – but, contrary to his expectations, the King didn't capitulate before the *de facto* invasion, even though he did accept to negotiate and to get an agreement before the invasion was fulfilled.

On the eve of the invasion, the anti-fascist movement in Albania began to expand considerably. The anti-fascist contempt of the Albanian population had grown during the years of the colonial and fascist politics of Italy. The strongest anti-fascist propaganda was taking place in France, Austria, Switzerland and more by the Albanian democrats who had full freedom into openly unmasking Mussolini's politics about Albania. (Koka et al. 2007: 350)

Mussolini's plans about the invasion of Albania became known to the European press. Italian and foreign radios warned about the imminent invasion. These news had been circulating since autumn of 1938, and intensified in March 1939. For this aggression, Albanian people were warned through the radios of foreign media, while the Albanian government was covering up this massive danger that was threatening the country and wasn't allowing any news of that kind to circulate on Albanian soil. The censorship had considerably strengthened, it wasn't allowing the spreading of foreign media in Albania. Nevertheless, it didn't manage to isolate the truth about the invasion any longer. (Koka et al. 2007: 361)

The King and his people tried to keep the imminent risk a secret, along with the ultimatums imposed by the Italian representatives and the secret negotiations with Rome. They denied – through The Albanian Telegraphic Agency – the news of foreign radios and press that

were openly talking about the fascist aggression and declared – in the “Drita” newspaper – that the news were false and that the relations between Albania and Italy were normal. Mirash Ivanaj, Albanian politician, wrote in his diary the details of those days. On April 6th and 7th he wrote “People are extremely concerned... there are several rumors being spread and, on the other side, no denials or confirmations are being made. I don't think that's normal. A country that is about to face death, deserves to be told the reason why.” (Koka et al. 2007: 363)

2.4. The reaction to the invasion of Albania on April 7th, 1939

April 1939 was when the first rumors of an imminent invasion started spreading among the Albanian population. What was coming was inevitable. As soon as Duce’s approval was granted, Conte Ciano headed to Albania to end the tensions between the two countries for good. On the 7th of April 1939, Ciano headed by plane to Tirana to make the “unification” official. The Albanian ports and harbours such as Durrësi, Vlora, Shëngjini and Saranda were attacked by an army of 40.000 people, 400 airplanes and 12 warships. The invasion was supposed to be accomplished that same day, but the Albanian resistance slowed down the process. (Koka et al. 2007: 366) King Zog of Albania had predicted this move and had tried multiple times to prevent it by pledging allegiance and total collaboration with the fascist state in the past years prior to the invasion. Having failed to stop the attack, King Zog escaped to Greece where the Queen³ and their newborn had already arrived. With this act, he ensured the Italian invading troops and the Minister Ciano about their consensus into entering the Albanian territory. Conte Ciano was confident that the Albanian king would capitulate, for an important reason: the attack was scheduled for when the queen was 9-month pregnant. There was no way the Albanian king would put his heir in danger to even try and protect his country.

On April 6th, Italian warships started appearing in the ports of Durres and Vlora. Italian planes were dropping leaflets in Tirana, instructing the Albanian people to deny their king and to not resist the Italian forces. The Albanian people started massive demonstrations all over the country. The next day, the country was under attack. Italian forces faced resistance all over the country, as Albanians were causing losses to the Italian army. This slowed down the process, which made Ciano worry about how it made Italian military look weak, but it didn’t stop its violent wave. Ciano's chief assistant, Filippo Anfuso⁴, who accompanied the count on his flight over the battle zone put it, "If only the Albanians had possessed a well-armed fire brigade, they could have driven us back into the Adriatic." (Fischer 1999) Meanwhile, the Albanian king was retiring into exile with his wife and his two-days-old son. While he was flying to Greece, the fascist regime took over its new territory. Independent Albania stopped existing.

³ Queen Geraldine of Albania (1915 – 2002) was the consort of King Zog of Albania. Geraldine was born in Budapest, Austria-Hungary. She was introduced to King Zog I in December 1937, who had seen a photograph of her. She visited Albania and within days the couple were engaged to be married. Known as the "White Rose of Hungary", Geraldine was raised to royal status as Princess Geraldine of Albania prior to her wedding. On 27 April 1938, in Tirana, Albania, Geraldine married the King in a ceremony witnessed by Galeazzo Ciano.

⁴ Filippo Anfuso (1901 - 1963) was an Italian diplomat and Fascist politician. In 1938, after Ciano was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, Anfuso became Ministry head of staff.

2.5 International and Albanian response to the invasion

In the years leading up to the invasion, many studies on Albania were published in Italy, emphasizing the ‘racial’ and ‘cultural’ affinities between the two populations, as well as the difference of the Albanian people from the predominantly Slav character of Yugoslavia. (Kallis 2002) Following the attack in the Albanian territory, the headlines that were being published in Italy were announcing a ‘pacific merging of the Italian crown with that of the Albanian Kingdom’. The news that was being published within Italy and the false news that was being spread in other foreign countries at an international level was aimed at making Italy’s authority look persuasive, almost paternal, by not needing to use violence for this unification – as Albania was considered a friendly, partner nation in which the Italian state had generously invested economically and socially over decades. In this regard, Rundle argues that the purposes of the regime reflected the dictator’s desire to win the hearts of people with nice ways, as ‘Mussolini wanted to be popular, he wanted to win the hearts and minds of the people, and he knew that he could not achieve this by violent means.’ (Rundle 2010: 13) As Rundle (2012) argues, the control and the pressure the fascist propaganda put to the press – to formalize it as a ‘pacific union’ – was actually a sign of a lack of self-esteem. The regime cared enormously of its appearance at an international scale. This is when translations became a political tool; the invasion of Albania had to look like a two-sided agreement. This peaceful exchange of power was in both their interests and it had to be known worldwide. Rundle argues that:

“The regime wanted favorable opinions from abroad reported, and the translators of the Press Office were employed to scour the foreign press and translate articles of interest concerning Italy or Mussolini. Critics of the regime were to be ridiculed and [...] denigrated. The regime did not want anything that might in some way contradict or be in contrast with these aims.” (Rundle 2010)

The attack on Albania echoed internationally. The foreign press, in particular the Western European press, the American press, the Balkan countries’ press and the international press harshly condemned this invasion, that despised the freedom and the independence of a small, peaceful country. Every progressive journal in the world warned the Balkan countries that the same risk that threatened Albania was knocking on their door as well. The fascist aggression was condemned by the Italian people as well as by the progressive groups of intellectuals that considered this imperialist act on Albania as a crime against humanity. (Koka et al. 2007: 372)

In these circumstances a well-respected, Albanian statesman decided to resist the fascist threat and attempted to spread the voice of the people through the microphones of an Albanian radio station, right before the Fascist authorities gained control over it. The former prime minister of Albania, Mehdi Frasheri⁵, had formed a delegation and had prepared speeches that

⁵ Mehdi Frashëri (1872 – 1963) served as Prime Minister of Albania twice. He first became Prime Minister from 1935 to 1936, in the kingdom of Ahmet Zogu, and subsequently would become Prime Minister for the puppet government under Nazi Germany.

were essentially against the fascist aggression. He made sure the speeches were translated – quickly and in multiple languages – by ‘groups of ordinary men and women, who incidentally ended up in contexts where mediation was needed’ (Kujamaki & Footitt 2016: 60) and transmitted them through *Radio Tirana*⁶’s radio waves:

“Mehdi Frashëri had installed himself in the municipal offices, where the transmitting-station of Radio Tirana was housed, surrounded by a crowd of secretaries and hastily appointed translators. It was to be feared that, while the guns of the Italian warships were pouring their shells on Albanian towns, fascist propaganda would surpass itself in lies and falsity to convince the world outside that the Albanians were welcoming the fascist hordes with open arms. It was essential that the free world should hear the true voice of the Albanian people struggling for their freedom against overwhelming odds. It was not a mere coincidence that a man not belonging to the government undertook this vital task.” (Zavalani 2015)

The establishment of the union between the two monarchies would constitute a valid solution for many reasons. Firstly, a profitable agreement from an economic viewpoint for Italy and secondly, the necessity to restrain the German expansionism in the Balkan peninsula. The favorable geographical position of Albania constitutes a key entrance to the Balkans, and the unification would ensure Mussolini of a further expansionism of the Fascist Empire.

What happened during the first moments of Italy’s invasion of Albania, when from Radio Tirana’s studio were being transmitted clear statements about their position against the military invasion would no longer be tolerated. Journalist Arben Muka⁷ refers to this historical moment by labeling it as the moment when the ‘pathetic speeches’ of former prime minister Mehdi Bey Frashëri and a group of intellectuals were ‘translated into foreign languages condemning the arrival of Italian troops in Albania’ at the dawn of Friday, April 7th. These ‘pathetic speeches’ were a lesson to reflect on for the invaders, Muka argues, but remained, however, ‘pathetic’ in their desperate and pointless attempt to obtain fairness from a context where they were facing a force that was far greater than them. Later that day, from the same microphone where the official decisions of Rome were being exposed, those same decisions were being praised by describing the invasion act as a need for saving of the country. (Muka 2013: 27) The way in which Muka chooses to narrate these events, from a highly subjective narrative viewpoint, and in particular by labeling them with the adjective ‘pathetic’, is not to be confused with the act of translation as such considering that it refers to the author’s point of view regarding firstly, the content of the speeches and secondly, the purpose for which they were written and their attempt to reach their intended audience. Kujamaki & Footitt argue that language mediation is closely linked to the hostilities of war and political conflicts. For the

⁶ National Albanian Radio Station “Radio Tirana” is the public broadcaster of Albania, founded in 1938 in Tirana.

⁷ Arben Muka from 1993 to 1997 was editor-in-chief of the news department of Radio Tirana. He started his career as a journalist in 1988 as the editor-in-chief of the journal “Studenti” (The student).

dominant force in a conflict it is crucial to progress in the political and territorial settlement strategies, where linguistic mediation is required, often passing through the ‘traumatized figures of interpreters and translators.’ (Footitt 2012a: 8) Kujamaki & Footitt refer to the people that took an active role in political-historical contexts as “groups of ordinary men and women, who incidentally ended up in contexts where mediation was needed. (Kujamaki & Footitt 2016: 60) Mehdi Bej Frasheri and the numerous intellectuals that protested through Radio Tirana had also included and translated Mussolini’s own words in their speeches:

“Mehdi Frashëri drafted his famous protest, defiantly addressed to Mussolini, in which he pointed out that the Albanians, who had fought against so many invasions throughout history, would do the same against the mechanized hordes of the twentieth century. On a previous occasion Mussolini had declared that a nation which was not ready to die for its freedom had no right to enjoy it. Mehdi Frashëri threw that in his face, and added that he could not expect the Albanians, who cherish their liberty above all in life, to receive his Blackshirts with flowers and cheers. This courageous protest, breathing an unshakeable faith in the destiny of the fatherland, was immediately translated into the chief European languages and read at the microphone by improvised speakers.” (Zavalani 2015)

Their improvised translations had huge impact on the international press who immediately reported the betrayal towards the Albanian people, both by the Fascist regime and their own king. In such a critical situation, Albanians used their voice, in this case using improvised translations. Their call for the truth was collected by the most important foreign journals. Their voice echoed in Paris, London, Berlin and in Rome itself. Only the majority of the Albanian and the Italian press kept their denial. Radio Tirana was soon going to submit to the fascist propaganda. The first days following the invasion, Albanian journals were publishing translated articles and headlines coming from the Italian press, the ones particularly emphasizing the economic and social assistance that Rome was planning to offer to Albania. (Muka 2010) This was due to the “investment” the Italian government had made in “persuading” the media’s most important representatives to keep silence or indifference regarding the invasion.

The occupation lasted two days, 7 and 8 April. On the 12th of April a Constituent Assembly agreed on offering the Albanian crown to the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III, who would formally receive it on April 16th from an Albanian delegation. Leader of the delegation was Shefqet Verlaci⁸, opposer of Zog and newly elected prime minister of Albania.

⁸ Shefqet bej Vërlaci (1877 – 1946) was the biggest landowner of Albania in 1922. He was the leader of the Progressive Party, the biggest conservative party in Albania. In late 1922, Ahmed Zogu became engaged to Vërlaci's daughter, winning his support and the position of Prime Minister. In early 1924, Zogu was forced to cede his position of Prime Minister to Vërlaci, because of a financial scandal and an attempt of assassination in which Zogu was injured. When Zogu was crowned in 1928, he immediately broke his engagement with Vërlaci's daughter. Vërlaci thus became King Zog's mortal enemy. On 12 April 1939, after the Italian invasion of Albania, Vërlaci became the prime minister of the government of Albania formed under the Italian occupation. From 12 April through 16 April (until Italy's King Victor Emmanuel III accepted the Albanian crown), Vërlaci was the acting head of state. Vërlaci was also named by King Victor Emmanuel III senator of the kingdom of Italy.

On the same day, a new statute established that the legislative and executive power in Albania belonged from that moment to the King of Italy. Albania was a key part of Italians plans to build a Fascist Empire, where – according to the Fascist representatives – Albania would have “a special and privileged place” (Akademia e Shkencave të Shqipërisë 2009: 27) Relations between the two newly unified states remained international in law. Diplomatic and consular services were established, the armed forces were unified by a decree, the customs union completed within the first month of the unification. Through the Fascist policies, Albania would quickly become a Fascist country. Formally, this new bond established between the two countries was considered a ‘union of realms’ (Rosselli 2006: 100) i.e. an event regulated by specific legal regulations where two people are simultaneously chosen for the same throne, that of the dominating country. This situation would cause a certain confusion from a formal point of view, considering that an Italian representative in Albania would, at the same time, constituted an Albanian representative. For instance, Francesco Jacomoni⁹, would sign in the name of King Emmanuel III, with the Albanian government, meaning, with his own government. He was Italy’s representative and was acting, at the same time, as an Albanian head of state. (Rosselli 2006: 100) An interesting detail could be the way in which Conte Ciano considered Albania as some sort of ‘family property’ (Rosselli 2006: 109), and that is particularly shown on the fact that he christened cities with names of his relatives.

Along with the bureaucratic formalities of the new annexed country, Italy initiated and implemented new press policies and revolutionized the educational system. These strategies contributed in the settling of the new Italian reality in Albania. This ‘new breath’ was somehow rejected, but at the same time welcomed: the contrasting feelings of the Albanian population and their damage or contribution to the Fascist regime in Albania play a key role in unveiling motives and factors that lead each individual or institution into supporting or opposing to the regime. For instance, *Radio Tirana*, only one week after the invasion, started transmitting a daily block of news translated in different languages such as Turkish, Romanian, Bulgarian, Greek and other Slav languages. They would last 30 minutes each and the contents were the same, translated in their respective language. There were news editions in Italian and French as well, while the audio lessons of Italian language were already routinized. A stronger telegraphic and telephonic connection was being planned to be installed between Albania and Italy, to “connect with the Italian radio stations and be able to exchange their programs in a higher and stronger frequency.” These measures strengthened the Italian influence in Radio Tirana’s transmissions. (Muka 2010) An ulterior modernization of the radio was planned, along

⁹ Francesco Jacomoni di San Savino (1893 - 1973) was an Italian diplomat, governor of Albania during the Italian Protectorate of Albania. He was appointed Minister to the Kingdom of Albania from 9 September 1936 until shortly after the Italian invasion of Albania in April 1939. On 17 April he was promoted to ambassadorial rank and on 22 April he became the country's Viceroy (*Luogotenente del Re*, "Lieutenant-General of the King"). Jacomoni retained this post, which made him the country's effective governor, during much of the Italian occupation.

with the “improvement” of the languages that were being translated: “*from the technical and artistic point of view*”.

Ernest Koliqi, newly appointed professor at ‘La Sapienza’ University of Rome, would be offered the highest position in the new Ministry of Education that was soon going to be built by the Fascist authorities in Albania. His political background included his involvement in Fan Noli’s failed revolution, former prime minister of Albania whose government was overthrown by groups loyal to Ahmet Zogu. After the failure of Noli’s politics and Zog’s crowning, Koliqi would be forced to political exile in Bosnia, subsequently to be forgiven by Zog on 1930 and be able to return to Albania as an academic. The Fascist regime gave him the choice of becoming a key player in the educational future of Albania. Ernest Koliqi would thus become Minister of Education in the Albanian protectorate on April 12th, 1939.

3. Translators and politics – “the blurring of loyalties and identities” (Footitt 2012)

3.1. Ernest Koliqi: the translator promoted to minister.

Born in Shkodër (Albania) in 1903, Ernest Koliqi would become the Albanian Minister of Education during the Fascist regime period in the Albanian territory. Koliqi was a distinguished Albanian academic who had received a Western education in Italy, at the Sapienza University of Rome, author and translator, great sympathizer of the Italian language and culture. In this historical context, Ernest Koliqi, having received a solid classical and modern Western education abroad, returns to his country to invest all his talent, his youth and his creative abilities to its country's interests for cultural and social progress. (Hoxha 2008: 114) The profile of the perfect academic for the role the regime needed him to play. The perfect mediator for a cultural flow between two countries that was wanted by both sides – although executed for different reasons, in different quantities and with different receptions – and was achieved only under the strict guidance of the Fascist authorities. With his western education, from his beginnings he would exercise his literary thought in his homeland, confirming himself as a well-known personality in this area, and would later intensively continue in Italy, with great success with getting to know and publishing not only Arberesh literature, but also the Albanian literature in Italy and in Europe. (Hoxha 2008: 137) With regard to foreign literature, he showed creative skills as a translator interested mainly in classical authors, but part of his focus was foreign modern literature as well. (Hoxha 2008: 138)

He became Minister of Education in Albania in 1939 and remained in this position until 1942. From 1942 to 1943, Koliqi became the president of the newly formed Institute of Albanian Studies (Istituti i Studimevet Shqiptare) in Tirana, a forerunner of the Academy of Sciences. 1942 al 1943 – President of the Royal Albanian Studies Institute. Koliqi was also professor of Albanian literature in Rome for more than 30 years. (Hoxha 2008: 120) He entered the Albanian literary life and became part of Albania's brightest intellectuals – with a new completed concept and with such dedication that it would appear forcefully in various creative fields, such as literary creations, translations and Albanian literary thinking. (Hoxha 2008: 114) Koliqi has expressed in one of his writings that ‘life and literature must be the continuation and completion of each other.’ With regard to the importation and implementation of foreign artworks in Albania he claims that ‘preserving your identity as an artist [...] often means having to inhale even the smell of a foreign culture [...]’ (Hoxha 2008: 118)

In 1939 he founded the “*Shkendija*” (The spark) periodical, which gathered many new writers from all Albanian territories. In 1940 he organized a congress in Tirana, which would generate the Institute of Albanian Studies and starts publishing a series “*Studies and texts*”, with the participation of Albanian and foreign experts in Albanology¹⁰. Because of his direct influence, “*Visaret e Kombit*” would grow from 3 to 14 volumes. After the political

¹⁰ Albanology is an interdisciplinary science that addresses the language, costume, literature, art, culture and history of Albanians. Within the studies the scientific methods of literature, linguistics, archaeology, history and culture are used. However, the Albanian language is the main point of research of the studies.

vicissitudes, he continues his activity as holder of the chair of Albanian language and literature in Rome even after its transformation into the Institute of Albanian Studies. In 1947, after a short break, he published in Florence the bilingual book “*Poezia popullore shqiptare*” (Popular Albanian Poems) with contents in Albanian and Italian. Also, he published “*Kangjelet e Rilindjes*” (The Awakening Songs) in 1959 in the Italian translation, “*Antologji te lirikes shqipe*” in Italian (1936) while continuing to translate “*Lahuta e Malcis*”.

The work he mostly dedicated himself to as a writer, a translator, a critic and an academic is related to the social, artistic, cultural periodical “*Shejzat*” (The Pleiades) 1957-1975, which he founded and directed for 18 years without interruptions. This journal is a testimony of a writer’s oath to his country and culture. The magazine, besides the Albanian material, contains writings in Italian, French, German and English, phenomenon which makes it a multilingual magazine. There are dozens of Koliqi’s articles and papers. In the pages of the magazine are documented – apart from the literary productions – the translations of classics from Italian such as D’Annunzio, Carducci, Pascoli and Quasimodo, the translations in Italian of works from Albanian authors such as Fishta, Naim, Çajupi etc., the wide contribution in the field of literary thought. Koliqi discovers himself not only as a man of letters and a translator, but also as a good connoisseur of history, literature, ethno-psychology and Albanian psychology. (Hoxha 2008: 119) In the pages of his magazine he would often translate in Italian works of popular lyrical and folk epic so as to introduce it to a new audience. (Hoxha 2008: 120) Ernest Koliqi, Lazër Shantoja and other sympathizers of the Italian language and culture, people who were hoping at the same time for cultural and economic progress for Albania, laid their hopes on Fascist Italy, when the promised commonwealth turned out to be an occupation to all intents and purposes. It can be argued that these intellectuals accepted exploiting the new empire for the benefit of their country, while on the other side that empire was indirectly benefitting their image, their work and their love for Italy for their propaganda purposes.

In 1938 he extended his interest in literature with the translation and publication of great poets of Italy. (Hoxha 2008: 115) One of the highlights of his career is the translation into Albanian of an anthology of Italian poetry in 1963. His second volume of “*Italy’s greatest poets*” would be published in 1934, where he included four authors: Parini, Monti, Foscolo and Manzoni. In the meantime, he started a collaboration with the cultural and literary newspaper “*Ilyria*”, becoming its editor from the beginning. He translated famous critics like Diego Valer, Enrico Grass, Emil Verhaeren and Charles Baudelaire, representatives of the modern European critique, followers of symbolism. (Hoxha 2008: 117) The frequent translations of D’Annunzio, Carducci and Pascoli were accompanied with remarks for the individuality that characterizes the classic Italian poets. He believed that these poets influenced the writings of many Albanian poets, in particular, D’Annunzio and Carducci, for instance Carducci influenced Fishta’s poetry, Skiroi’s, as well as in Gurakuqi’s thoughts when putting Albanian language in verses. Koliqi’s interest in the literary thought is shown in particular in the considerations he made with regard to the translation into Albanian of a tragedy of Alfieri translated by Zef Valentini.

Koliqi points out that it's important to 'bring into Albanian foreign authors' works [...]'. With the experience of a skilled translator, he observes that 'in recent years, translations from all literatures have taken off in both Albania and Kosovo, some of which deserve more recognition.' (Hoxha 2008: 127) When describing the evolution of Albanian literature in the 30's, he observes that 'the most modern literary trends of Europe entered successfully our literature' (Hoxha 2008: 128) which is a clear indicator of the Albanian culture as a receptive culture/literature.

One of his favorite topics, documented in an article for the journal "Shejzat" titled "The autochthonous soul and the foreign influences into Albanian literature", was the interest in Albanian folk epic. In this article, Koliqi claims that even if foreign influences – because of the multiple invasions throughout history – might have left an outer layer of influence, inside the popular, poetic richness shines through the crystal-clear autochthonous soul. (Hoxha 2008: 129-130) In many of his writings, this topic always returns as it constitutes a domain which he is very familiar with: Albanians who took root thousands of years ago in a territory were they

'were faced and clashed with different cultures throughout centuries, succeeded in saving the main peculiarities of their ethnic and national individuality. At the basis of their resistance and their survival when facing foreign threats lies the ancient pagan substratum as well as the Albanian mentality based on the **Kanun** (known as the law of the mountains – this terrible law is what succeeded in keeping together Albanians that were divided into living in different Albanian territories at a time when Albania didn't have any official borders, authorities or laws to obey to. It was written by Lek Dukagjini¹¹ and would be used to regulate the relationships between each-other, and that at the same time was used to put them against each-other, was what united them when facing their common enemies. Blood was the law that made them kill each-other, blood was the law that brought them together to kill others and protect their own) The influences coming from different cultures collided and broke down when hitting the autochthonous substratum that conserved intact the unique characteristics of Albanians.'" (Hoxha 2008: 138)

In another one of his articles, "*Islam and Christianity in Albanian literature*", Koliqi emphasizes exactly what to many foreigners is known as "the Albanian phenomenon", the amazing conviviality between Albanians belonging to different religions. Albanians chose this solution because of their difficult historical background. Another reason for this, according to him, it's the law of the mountains. "In front of the *Kanun*," says Koliqi "all men are equal". The idea of brotherhood of all Albanians without any religious distinction became possible because of the myths of blood and language. (Hoxha 2008: 130)

One of the main qualities that characterize Albanians is the 'besa', cultural precept that refers to an unbreakable pledge of honor that can be fully understood in the Albanian

¹¹ Lekë Dukagjini (1410 – 1481) was a contemporary of Skanderbeg, Albanian national hero. Dukagjini is known for the "*Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit*" (The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini), a code of law instituted among the tribes of northern Albania.

geographical and historical context. Addressing the phenomenon of 'besa', Koliqi refers to it as a 'divine tradition that can only blossom in the generous civilization of Albanians.' (Shiroka 2009: 79) This word of honor that Albanians call 'besa' is a concept of brotherhood and hospitality towards a stranger who demands shelter – the stranger can even be the enemy – and guarantees the integrity of the guest for as long as he resides under the roof of the guarantor of their given 'besa'. Koliqi argues that "a population that withholds the "besa" as a sacred tradition cannot fail to reach the full national awareness of 'brotherhood' among their own people" (Shiroka 2009: 79) The notion of 'besa' is a key element in the "*Kanun*" by Lek Dukagjini, a set of laws that was written as a regulation of the practices of the Albanian society in the 1400. However, the concept of 'besa' appears in much older Albanian documents, songs and legends.

Koliqi makes an interesting comparison between Dante's *Inferno* and Dukagjin, mountainous region in the Shkodër District, where the society was firmly following the laws of the '*Kanun*' written by Lek Dukagjini and the 'besa' rejoiced the status of a divine law. There, in Dukagjin, you could stumble upon a scenario that very much resembles Dante's *Inferno*. In Dukagjin, those who kill to steal would get punished, those who had abandoned the corpse of their dead enemy – when the *Kanun* required to turn the corpse of the killed face to the sky and place the gun that killed him on top of his corpse – would be punished. The most severe punishments would be kept in reserve for those who had broken their 'besa', for those who had broken their given word. (Koliqi 1999: 51) This comparison proves that Koliqi found similarities between a masterpiece of Italian literature "*La divina commedia*" and an Albanian book-law "*Kanuni I Lek Dukagjinit*" that he had scrupulously studied. According to Koliqi, this Albanian heritage was a precious social factor that had "saved the Albanian race throughout decades from fanaticism and from outer destructive forces." (Koliqi 1999: 53) In order to fully understand the influence of foreign literatures in the Albanian literature, it is important to identify the elements of heritage from the older generations and the elements of Albanian psychology given that "literature is the reflection of the life of a country, thus, identifying the conscious and unconscious movements that regulate the inner life of a country equals finding the key to enter its oral richness" (Koliqi 1999: 56).

In the range of sociological, ethical and aesthetic problems that he addresses in his writings, one cannot fail to notice how he combines political issues with artistic ones. He openly admitted this in many articles he wrote and published in the journal he directed and published, '*Shejzat*', by saying that 'the wars with the new world can be won only with culture as a weapon. Those who think differently are simply closing their eyes in a way that they can't see the new rays of sun that shine in this new era of the nineteenth century.' (Hoxha 2008: 122) In his critical writings, Koliqi has expressed his position about original artworks saying 'it's not real art unless you're describing actions with a psychological viewpoint.' (Hoxha 2008: 121) In the first issue of the magazine "*Shejzat*" he will impart the condition, for the correct functioning of the prestigious cultural organ created and managed by him, besides the effective

use "of culture as a weapon with constructive purposes", to be "a platform where to discuss." He announced the invitation to collaborate "to every Albanian who has a fruitful idea and knows how to express it in a pure Albanian language". (Hoxha 2008: 125)

Another issue that deeply worries Koliqi is the lack of freedom of expression in his motherland (which he admits in a language that is metaphorical, just as it is understandable when he writes: "Then the climate and the season changed for the frozen territory named after the eagles, and culture and art could no longer be freely expressed." (Hoxha 2008: 124) Faced with the well-known fact that literary thought in his homeland, Albania, functions in an institutionalized way by means not exclusively aesthetic but also political, he feels the need to work energetically. He would do so from a new perspective, omitting – where possible – the political tools in the evaluation of the works, of the authors, of their classification, which also constitutes the basic principle of an objective thought. (Hoxha 2008: 126)

With the defeat of fascism, Koliqi managed to flee to Italy again, where he lived, continuing to be active in the field of culture and literature, until his death in 1975. (Elsie 2010: 236) Ernest Koliqi would fly back to his beloved Italy as a political asylum seeker. He didn't stop his literary activity, he continued translating from Italian into Albanian and vice-versa, write new novels, found new magazines and unify Albanians living abroad. (Zhiti *n.d.*)

3.2. Ernest Koliqi and translation: the admiration for the Italian culture.

Ernest Koliqi expresses his viewpoint on translation with an example of a reading that lead him to reflect on the importance of translation. When reading the Italian version of Saul by Alfieri, he often enjoyed "the vivid contemporary expression in Albanian much more than the original in Italian, because in Alfieri's Italian are already weighting 200 years." (Koliqi 1965: 275) Even though Koliqi particularly enjoyed reading Italian literary masterpieces in the Italian of the Classics, he confesses the overwhelming feeling when realizing "how amazingly Alfieri's great dialogues sound in our actual, everyday language" [...] (Koliqi 1965: 275)

Throughout his writing career – along with his original works – a dominating role was played by the sheer number of translations he made from Italian into Albanian and vice versa. He translated into Italian important Albanian writers (Fishta, Ali Asllani), he translated great Italian authors into Albanian, such as: Dante Alighieri, Petrarca, Ludovico Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, Giuseppe Parini, Vincenzo Monti, Ugo Foscolo and Alessandro Manzoni. When talking about the translation phenomenon in Albania, Koliqi argues that 'translations have a great weight in all literatures – especially for those literatures who started their development rather late, for different historical reasons. Even Albanian authors, starting from the greatest, felt it was their duty to give their country well-known translations, which helped spreading among us the knowledge of world's masterpieces, helped in crystallizing our lexicon, inspired many authors and opened new horizons [...]' (Koliqi 1965: 262) Just like Migjeni and other well-known Albanian academics, Ernest Koliqi was aware that the oriental, patriarchal mindset was clashing with the western one. One of the characters of his books asks: "Is there anything more

wonderful in this world than bringing civilization to a nation that is drowning in the depths of ignorance?” (Koka et al. 2007: 396). Koliqi’s contrasting political position (i.e. the formal collaboration with the Fascist authorities) with the ideology he professes in his writings (the need and interest into protecting the autochthonous Albanian soul) might be a result of the “hybrid identity of language mediators and their potential untrustworthiness” (Footitt 2012a: 9) When looking at Koliqi’s profile in Elsie’s words it can be seen how his position enabled him to great privileges and more chances of achieving what he – as an author and translator – was really aiming for. Koliqi’s Jesuit education provided him the cultural background and abilities “to serve as a cultural intermediary between Italy and Albania.” (Elsie 2010: 234). In later years, Koliqi’s literary productions would constitute a key element in the transmission of the Albanian culture to the Italian public by publishing, in addition to numerous scholarly articles on literary and historical subjects, the following monographs: *Poesia popolare albanese* (Albanian Folk Verse; Florence, 1957); *Antologia della lirica albanese* (Anthology of Albanian Poetry; Milan, 1963); and *Saggi di letteratura albanese* (Essays on Albanian Literature; Florence, 1972). He also published a large two-volume Albanian-language anthology of Italian verse entitled *Poetët e mëdhej t’Italis* (The Great Poets of Italy; Tirana, 1932, 1936), in order to “introduce Italian literature to the new generation of Albanian Intellectuals eager to discover the world around them.” (Elsie 2010: 234–235) His admiration for the Italian culture and literature facilitated his acceptance towards, firstly, the position that was offered to him and, secondly, the deployment of the Fascist reality in his homeland.

3.3 The ‘minister who burned books’: Ernest Koliqi and the “Carnavon” library

When Ernest Koliqi was appointed Minister of Education, he pursued and implemented various strategies to boost the Albanian language and culture. To fulfill these purposes, he exploited his ministerial powers and his will to do so. Koliqi took full advantage of the opportunities his office offered, and it would be controversial to say, in my opinion, that he did so ‘despite the circumstances’ or ‘thanks to the circumstances’. When Koliqi was minister:

1. Multiple Albanian books and textbooks managed to get published, and it was more Albanian books being published since 1912. Also, a history of Albanian Literature was published, along with numerous folklore collections, unique collections in the history of Albanian published books. This work required the collaboration of the most important Albanian authors and intellectuals.
2. In 1940, he organized in Tirana the International Congress of Albanian studies, which would later spark the creation of the Institute of Albanian Studies, forerunner of the Academy of sciences.
3. In July 1940 he would become the founder of the journal “Shkëndija”, which would constitute a space for thinkers and writers. The journal continued to publish for 18 years.

4. In September 1941 he sent 200 Albanian lecturers to Kosovo, in an attempt to promote and financially support the opening and the functioning of Albanian schools in Kosovo.

However, not all policies conducted by Koliqi involved the promotion of the Albanian language. In an article published in 2014, Aurel Plasari¹² refers to Ernest Koliqi as ‘the minister who burned books’. (Plasari 2014) Plasari begins his article by arguing that an author should never be evaluated based on his political convictions, whatever those may be. Nevertheless, when trying to determine the political reasons for a given literary policy in a given political context, the profile of the minister, who was more qualified for the profession of the writer and that of the translator rather than a politician’s, deserves a thorough assessment. The analysis of the books that this minister allowed to be published, and especially the translations that managed to surpass the fine grid of fascist censorship, do not diminish his values as a writer. However, Plasari argues, his writing skills and his contribution to Albanian literature can’t erase “the madness of a writer who found himself in the role of the politician.” (Plasari 2014)

Plasari argues that even though Koliqi was, in fact, the ‘initiator of the Congress of Albanian Studies’, it cannot be left unsaid that ‘the Congress was filled with Italian names, while Albanian democratic individuals like Konica¹³, Lumo Skendo¹⁴, Fan S. Noli¹⁵ and so on were left out.’ (Plasari 2014) A selective policy that privileged Italians over Albanians, even when the man taking decisions (or at least, the man taking direct responsibility for the decisions that were being made) was of Albanian nationality himself. It’s also true that Koliqi was the initiator and co-author of valuable publications for the Albanian school, but we do not make ‘history’ if we remember these and forget that there was a writer at the top of the Ministry of Education when the books of the ‘Lady Carnavon’ library were burned, when French books were removed from the bookstores of the country, when non-Italian books of the National Library and other libraries of the country were collected and thrown into fire. (Plasari 2014) In a newspaper article for ‘*Bashkimi I Kombit*’ (trans. The unification of the nation) Odrieja provides more evidence to the phenomenon reported by Plasari.

“Italians [...] burned books and notebooks and did everything they could to ruin that little bit of education system we had [...]. The books of this library (Carnavon Library), gifted by Lady Carnavon, were either burned or distributed right and left with the mere purpose of making them completely disappear.” (ODRIEJA, *Bashkimi i Kombit* 1944)

¹² Aurel Plasari (born 1956) is an Albanian lecturer, scholar, writer, translator and professor. At the age of seventeen, while still in high school, Plasari would begin to publish translations from world literature.

¹³ Faik Konica (1875 – 1942) was an important figure of the Albanian literature: stylist, critic, publicist and a political figure.

¹⁴ Pseudonym of Midhat Frasheri (1880 – 1949) was an Albanian diplomat, writer and politician. He was one of the founders of Albanian nationalism.

¹⁵ Fan Stilian Noli (1882 – 1965) was an Albanian writer, diplomat and politician. Founder of the Orthodox Church of Albania, who served as Prime Minister of Albania in 1924. He contributed in the consolidation of Albanian as the national language of Albania with numerous translations of world literature masterpieces.

On the same way, all press organs dating before April 1939 were shut down, starting from newspapers such as “*Gazeta e Korçës*” and “*Përprjekja Shqipëtare*”. In the same way, Lady Carnavon’s books were confiscated, burned or distributed (when the head of the ministry was Ernest Koliqi). French books were collected from the bookstores of the capital city, the non-Italian books of the National Library and other libraries were collected and prepared to be thrown into fire. [...] That was their fate. The only books allowed, promoted and printed were in particular political books – translations in particular. (Kuteli 1944)

The library was formally named “*For the youth*” but would be known as the Carnavon library. Countess Elizabeth Carnarvon, a benevolent English aristocrat, came to Albania in 1923-1929 to give her help to surpass the many difficulties that the country was experiencing in those years. Elisabeth Carnarvon was the mother of Aubrey Herbert, the great friend of Albanians, who was devoted to the Albanian National problem. The Library was built with the contribution of Lady Carnavon and the capital she had raised in England. The “Lady Carnavon” library was inaugurated in 1929, in the presence of Sait Toptani, president of the Youth Committee of Tirana, as well as many well-known Albanian intellectuals. (Odrieja 1944) Along with the building of the library, it was essential to fill in the necessary materials, that is, the reading material. For this purpose, Lady Carnavon appealed to the English press for donations of books in English, French, Italian, German etc. to offer to the newly-built library. For years, this library had been open to readers, until the day the Fascist authorities showed up and confiscated its books, generously gifted by Lady Carnavon herself. That is why those texts disappeared and were no longer on the public eye. Those who made sure they disappeared perhaps thought “as long as we have the Italian books, what do we need the Albanian books for?” (Odrieja 1944) Once the books had been removed, the building was closed.

In an article for “*Bashkimi i Kombit*” written in 1944, Mitrush Kuteli,¹⁶ prophesied that the political decisions of Ernest Koliqi would not quickly be forgotten. (Kuteli 1944) Koliqi will remain imprinted in the Albanian collective memory and will often be associated with unflattering labels, as will be discussed later. Ernest Koliqi, Mitrush Kuteli argues, possesses great stylistic qualities. His novels had the potential to create unique atmospheres. Right after Italy’s capitulation and Koliqi’s resignation from the position of minister, Kuteli argued in a newspaper article that “it would be a good idea, at least now, since his goal of ‘owning buildings in Albania and abroad’ and ‘having a car waiting at his door’ (Kuteli 1944) was fulfilled, to give us the continuation of ‘*Hijet e flamujve*’ (Shadows of the flags). And these people (i.e. Albanians) who forget and forgive so quickly will forgive him as well – for the sake of the written word – the insanity of his actions these last few years.” (Kuteli 1944)

When analyzing this episode that occurred when “the fascist authorities came” (Odrieja 1944) and following the accusative comments in regard to Ernest Koliqi when this episode

¹⁶ Albanian writer and translator (1907 – 1967) is considered the founder – together with Ernest Koliqi – of the modern Albanian prose.

occurred, it can be deduced that the book sequestration and the subsequent closure of the library are quite likely interrelated with the period of Ernest Koliqi as Minister of Education. This is significant in the sense that this episode shows that even though Koliqi's ministerial powers provided him with a certain degree of freedom, he could not have stopped this event without interfering with the Fascist plans and taking the risk of damaging his reputation in front of the Fascist authorities. However, it isn't so relevant to understand what was his reasoning, what he genuinely disapproved or approved of, but to analyze the political agenda he accepted his name to be associated with. In that perspective, during the fascist regime, he accepted to become a fascist collaborator, hence all the Fascist interventions in cultural institutions carried the name of Fascism and that of Ernest Koliqi in front of the public eye. It is therefore undeniable the interrelation of cultural events and political agendas and how one influences another. In the Koliqi case, fascism constituted a "price worth paying", hence he would agree on doing what he could to fulfill his literary ambitions in an unfortunate context.

3.4 Ernest Koliqi and collaborationism

Where a historical-political context is concerned – especially in an occupied country by the Fascist regime – Koliqi's selection for the ministry might have had its own peculiar reasons. In an article for "*Journal of war and cultural studies*", about the language role in British war crime investigations and trials, Tobia argues that 'linguistic skills alone, even for interpreters and translators, were not sufficient to climb the promotion ladder.' (2010: 133) Considering that fascism had specific guidelines for the Albanian administration to follow, the 'promotion ladder' could've been a possible reward for the individuals that would agree to collaborate with the regime, and that resembles to a great extent the vicious circle that Koliqi became part of.

When investigating the reasons behind Koliqi's press policies or even just the reasons behind his acceptance of the ministerial post that was offered to him, many questions arise about his background and his education. During the analysis of Koliqi's educational background prior to his Ministerial task, neither political nor legal training/education come up. A sympathizer, a lover of the Italian culture and literature with no political experience or background was offered a senior post in the Albanian administration. By gathering different analytical writings about his profile, Koliqi is often referred to as "the traitor of his homeland" and "the Albanian collaborationist with the invading enemy" (Prishtinasi 2013), based on the Albanian collective memory on which – it is important to keep in mind that – Enver Hoxha's dictatorship and his dedication to censoring Koliqi's works had a decisive influence on the development of said collective memory. The "History of Albanian Literature" published in 1983 explicitly refers to Koliqi as "Koliqi, the *traitor*" (Prishtinasi 2013)

The image of Koliqi resembles that of a translator who took the role of the 'power broker', who during the process of translation has to negotiate with questions of ethics, power and ethnic identity. (Kujamaki, Footitt 2016: 53) At the present stage of documentary research, it is not possible to determine the reasons that motivated Koliqi to make such a decision. Today, after more than 60 years of history, appreciation, disapproval, ban and re-establishment, it can

be said that Koliqi's choice from a formal point of view constituted a serious damage to his image as an author. The Ministry of Education, under Koliqi's leadership, evolved from being a purely administrative body into becoming a catalyst for the entire national culture. (Giuseppe Valentini, *Ernesto, Specchio d'umano transito*, Shejzat, Commemorative number dedicated to Prof. Ernest Koliqi, pg 23). (Gurakuqi 2007) Many researchers and biographers have proven that Koliqi did, indeed, ask for advice from the National Poet Gjergj Fishta¹⁷ on whether or not to accept the Ministerial post offered to him (Zhiti *n.d*). It has also been shown that Fishta wasn't a Fascist sympathizer, but that he widely disapproved of the Fascist ideology and thus refused many of their political honors. Nevertheless, Fishta remained an academic in the Italian Academy and an enthusiastic of the Italian language and culture, which would be the reason of the many attacks to him by the propaganda that followed. Gjergj Fishta advised Koliqi to accept the post, and told him that having him in the position of doing something in favor of his country would be much better than "taking the risk of allowing someone else become a blind tool in the regime's hands." (Zhiti *n.d*.)

The Koliqi case, as well as those of some important personalities of the Albanian nation who did not stand aside in these difficult days of the Second World War, are, in my opinion, cases of personalities with undisputed authority who had the courage to withstand the fascist invasion by collaborating, thus hindering them from clashing against the people. These personalities mitigated the impact of fascism on the nation. (Gurakuqi 2007) Although Koliqi remained loyal to Italy, one cannot say that he was loyal to Fascism, taking into consideration the fact that at that time he succeeded in providing as much help as he could to those Albanian intellectuals whom the regime treated as enemies. (Qeriqi 2018)

Ernest Koliqi stayed for two years (April 12th 1939 – December 3rd 1941) in the Ministry of Education, less than two years in charge of the Albanian Studies Institute and less than half a year as president of the Chamber of Deputies. Ernest Koliqi, Minister of Public Education, collaborated with some of the most important names and writers of the period (which would no longer be seen in the Albanian Ministry of Education) and with them started the preparation and publication of schoolbooks, which are still today valuable models. (Gurakuqi 2007) Ernest Koliqi, together with Mustafa Kruja¹⁸ and Dom Lazer Shantoja¹⁹, were part of that group of the Old Opposition²⁰ who attempted to avoid this predetermined fatality, turning to Italy for an agreement that would not involve the invasion. (Giuseppe Valentini, *Ernesto Specchio d'umano transito*, Shejzat, memorial number dedicated to Prof. Ernest Koliqi,

¹⁷ Gjergj Fishta (1871 – 1940) is considered among the most influential cultural and literary figures of the 20th century in Albania. He is the author of the masterpiece "*Lahuta e Malcís*", an epic poem written in the Gheg dialect of Albanian. Fishta was an Albanian author, educator, franciscan, poet, politician and translator.

¹⁸ Mustafa Merlika Kruja (1887 – 1958) was one of the signatories of the Albanian Declaration of Independence in 1912. He served as Prime Minister of Albania during the Italian occupation from December 4, 1941 to January 19, 1943.

¹⁹ Lazer Shantoja (1891 – 1945) was an Albanian author and translator who mainly translated Italian masterpieces into Albanian. Shantoja was a Catholic priest and was arrested by the communist regime.

²⁰ With the term "old opposition", Valentini refers to the group of Albanian intellectuals abroad who tried to unify and create a new party in order to defeat communism in Albania.

page 21). The facts and the course of events showed that their faith, their efforts in reaching an agreement had failed, and their disappointment was inevitable. Koliqi himself, informally, among friends and colleagues, has confirmed his unsuccessful involvement with the Italian side. (Gurakuqi 2007) Koliqi, the most knowledgeable of the problem at its core level after Konica²¹, while talking about the tempestuous period between the two world wars, when, according to him, to the dozens of intrinsic and opposing tendencies in collision were added dozens of others from abroad, formulates the lapidary phrase: "*And there came a time when the events were bigger than men.*" In other words, no matter how idealistic, how visionary, how heroic the man was, it was impossible to escape those events without being contaminated to some extent, and to be able to keep their dreams unbroken and unchanged, without any small or big wounds. (Qeriqi 2018) Elsie argues that there is a direct correlation between Koliqi's love for the Italian masterpieces and his acceptance of the Fascist reality in Albania:

"Koliqi's strong affinity for Italy and Italian culture, in particular for poets such as Giosuè Carducci, Giovanni Pascoli, and Gabriele D'Annunzio, may have contributed to his acceptance of fascist Italy's expansionist designs. As much of an Albanian nationalist as anyone, Koliqi, now the country's éminence grise, chose to make the best of the reality with which he was faced and did what he could to further Albanian culture under Italian rule. Accepting the post of Albanian minister of education from 1939 to 1941, much to the consternation of large sections of the population, he founded and subsequently ran the literary and artistic monthly *Shkëndija* (The Spark) in Tirana." (Elsie 2010: 235)

When Koliqi was in power, the Ministry of Education enjoyed a liberal breath that was completely contrary to the political directives given from those who Ernest described as "the rulers of the time". Giro, writes Koliqi, had repeatedly protested violently against Koliqi's excessively nationalistic educational policy, but Jacomoni never allowed him to interfere with their policies in the ministry. According to Koliqi, he and his collaborators succeeded into including in the list of authors (in the book of Literature History) Mit'hat Frashëri, Fan Noli, Faik Konica, declared enemies of the regime, and many others. Migjeni was also added to these, to give an example of literature with reference to the social condition. (Letter from Ernest Koliqi, 20.03.1960, Correspondence abroad, File 2) (Gurakuqi 2007) Koliqi describes his thoughts about the Albanian reaction to his Ministerial policies, in another personal letter to Prof. Karl Gurakuqi. Koliqi argues that the implicit or openly hostile comments about his persona, did not affect him minimally as his conscience was clear and his intentions pure. To his belief, he had always carried out his duty as a good Albanian citizen even in "the most difficult circumstances" (Gurakuqi 2007). Koliqi considers Gurakuqi as one of his loyal collaborators – even in the most critical moments – who knows very well that when Koliqi was minister, the Italian representatives in the Ministry had no say or influence in the linguistic

²¹ Faik bej Konica (1875 – 1942) was an important figure of Albanian language and culture in the early decades of the twentieth century. As a stylist, critic, publicist and political figure he had a tremendous impact on Albanian writing and on Albanian culture at the time.

policies followed by Koliqi. “It was us who prepared the school textbooks, the ones who set up a definitive school terminology; us who founded the Albanian Studies Institute.” (Gurakuqi 2007) At a time when Italians had the political power over the Albanian education system, the motto of the Minister was: “Albanian culture above everything”. (*Letter from Ernest Koliqi* 16.3.1951 Correspondence Letter, Folder 1). (Gurakuqi 2007)

Was Koliqi’s new social position and his new post on the Albanian ministry an influence on his writing career and his translating activity? Or was it rather his translating history that led to his election for this extremely important role? It is important to highlight the flexibility of Koliqi’s role and how both his professional sides – the minister and the translator – have undeniably influenced one another, in order to fulfil Koliqi’s interests as an author/translator without becoming a threat to the regime’s interests. His new position offered him many powers and privileges but it also came with restrictions and responsibilities. Also, in this particular case study, it can be noticed how Koliqi’s role was conceptualized as a very flexible one, given that he covered two positions that are – in my understanding – completely different. The overall performance of his ministerial task had implications in political, national, historical and linguistic terms.

It is in my belief that many reflection points on Koliqi’s beliefs and political convictions can be found in his writings. For example, Fishta emphasized one of Koliqi’s main characteristics of his writing that may be revealing. Fishta says “...I can honestly say that in some verses there’s a rare talent shining through. But... something seems to be holding him back. I believe it’s the lack of freedom that forces him to seek refuge in hermeticism.” (Fishta) In one of his novels, one of Koliqi’s characters talks about ‘being careful not to sell your soul to the devil’:

«You tell yourself you’re living, but you’re not. You’ve been liquidated by the living, therefore go ahead and fill up this store of yours where you’ve locked yourself up. This place will become your cemetery. And, concerning Albania, I assure you it will stand tall. Therefore, have no worries, you will succeed in selling all your flags, but be careful not to sell your soul to the devil.” (Excerpt taken from “The flag merchant”, 1935)

Koliqi reveals his thoughts in the dialogues that take place in between the characters of his novels. Koliqi's characters are in the dilemma if they should free themselves from the imprisonment of past models, thus committing into choosing the best basis where to compress the model of a modern and progressive Albania.

3.5 Ernest Koliqi and censorship

As an author, many of Ernest Koliqi’s works were forbidden during the communism era because of his collaboration with the Fascist authorities. In addition to his great cultural and linguistic merits, a significant national contribution of Ernest Koliqi, which he was denied, or hardly talked about at all, involved the opening of the first Albanian language schools in

Kosovo. He also contributed in providing scholarships to Albanian students in Kosovo in order to receive education in Italy and Austria. Elsie has documented and argued on this phenomenon:

“Because of his activities and at least passive support of fascist rule and Italian occupation, Koliqi was virulently attacked by the postwar Albanian authorities — more so even than Gjergj Fishta, who had the good fortune to be dead — as the main proponent of bourgeois, reactionary, and fascist literature. The 1983 party history of Albanian literature refers to him only in passing as ‘Koliqi, the traitor.’” (Elsie 2010: 236)

Ernest Koliqi's achievements before and after the Second World War are many, but unfortunately during the communist regime of the dictator Enver Hoxha, and to this day, Ernest Koliqi continues to be judged on his brief political activity instead of being evaluated for his contributions to Albanian literature, culture and language in general. (Shkreli 2013) After the end of the Italian occupation, Koliqi was sentenced as a collaborator of the Italo-Albanian regime and his work was not valued. (Qeriqi 2018) Koliqi, one of Albania's best-known writers and intellectuals, when appointed Minister of Education he ‘became part of a government made of people without any special worth.’ (Fischer 2000: 67) Koliqi belongs to that formation and gathering of the Albanian elite that would see the salvation of the Albanian nation within a modern Western culture, nurtured and made of purely Albanian virtues.

Every political decision concerning press policies and education policies in the Albanian territory – during the years Koliqi worked as a minister – had the name of Fascist Italy and Koliqi written all over. Koliqi followed and implemented policies that satisfied the political interests of the Fascist regime, regardless of his personal beliefs and his approval of the language policies undertaken.

3.6 ‘The personal is political’: Koliqi’s epistolary heritage

The political personalities mentioned in this section were key individuals – most of whom educated in Western countries – in the Albanian Literary Circle in Italy. They left Albania fallen into the hands of Communist Party. Their exile was due to the deliberately extreme situation, considering that in Albania (1945) “started the prosecution against the ‘enemies’ of the ‘liberators’”. (Ndoja 2014: 42) The personal letters Koliqi wrote to many of his friends and collaborators are valuable testimonies of Koliqi’s personal viewpoints on many national and individual matters. In Koliqi's subjective expression in the letters dating in the first decade of his departure from Albania (following Italy's capitulation) there is mentioning to the events, relationships, conflicts, personalities of the Albanian political and cultural life. From his viewpoint, the fascist invasion is relived, his personal relationship and reflections on the years he worked as a minister for the regime, the political developments of the Albanian diaspora in Italy, the literary circles and the controversies, the diversionary action within

communist Albania, reflections on Kosovo or "Great Albania" conceived from its beginnings as "with a precedent in the history of the Balkans" and so on.

From his letters, Koliqi's own voice comes to light without the mediation of the literary work, without the mediation of criticism and especially without the mediation of history interpreters. This is his intimate voice, the voice that testifies his true self. These readings give an internal look of the correspondence with his friend Karl Gurakuqi, his son Gilbert, his successor Romeo Gurakuqi and many others who with love and respect for their author and his epistolar confessions kept them and allowed for them to be converted into a historical legacy.

In 1952, he wrote to Karl Gurakuqi from Asiago (Province of Vicenza, Italy) about an article that had recently appeared in the newspaper "Flamuri" (The flag). According to Koliqi, this article was attacking him and others cruelly. "They're telling the world we're fascists! But who denied that? Their purpose is elsewhere: they want to convince everyone that April 7th 1939 was committed by the Catholics." (Koliqi 1952) Koliqi's language in his letter shows his disbelief and disappointment in seeing such comments about him and other Albanian intellectuals. This article, he believes, is an attempted interpretation of historical events. Koliqi says "they're trying to leave the treason by Catholicism's door." (Koliqi 1952)

In another letter to Karl Gurakuqi, Koliqi describes in detail all the linguistic policies he followed in order to protect and promote the Albanian language and culture. When he was a minister, Koliqi argues, he granted hundreds of people with advantages and privileges and now he finds himself dealing with being "the only traitor!". (Koliqi 1951) It is unacceptable for him to be called a traitor by his own people and in his own language – a language he feels he did everything in his power to protect. After explaining the series of policies he implemented and that condemned him to being pictured as evil, he ironically described a call he supposedly made to Mussolini and told him: "There you go, come and take Albania, as I'm selling it to you for the cheapest price! Didn't Mussolini – after my call – come and take it? That's how good I am!" (Koliqi: 1951)

From Karl Gurakuqi's archives emerges a strong declaration from Koliqi. In this private letter, Koliqi confesses to his friend his thoughts about the dictator that was ruling Albania with an "iron fist" (Fevziu 2011) and had categorically prohibited all his literary works on Albanian soil. "Enver is tearing our country apart, Enver – who got the power by these so-called patriots!" (1952) Censorship in communist Albania, under the dictatorship of Enver Hoxha, followed the models of USSR and China and it involved the constriction of the themes of literary artworks to the glorifying the dictator and the system. The Enver Hoxha government believed that certain literary artworks could jeopardize – or likely trigger reaction by the Albanian people – the existence of the system, therefore it imposed a ban on such artworks. This ban was seen by Koliqi as a failure on the part of the people to see the truth as it was, and not as the system wanted to sell it to the people. The writers were either submitting to the rules of censorship or their works would never see light. Orwell has argued that "everything in our

age conspires to turn the writer, and every other kind of artist as well, into a minor official, working on themes handed to him from above and never telling what seems to him the whole of the truth.” (Orwell 1945-1950: 60) Ismail Kadare, internationally famous Albanian writer, when describing his relationship as a writer with the dictator Hoxha he says that the relationships between dictators and writers are never easy to explain, but rather complex and difficult. The reason, Kadare argues, is that “they are both tyrants, however, in this clash, the dictator is a false tyrant...” (Fevziu 2011: 260) The most severely punished crime remains – during the years of Fascism in Albania but also under the years of communism – independent thinking.

In a reconstruction of the history of Albanian Literature, Beqiri (2015) explains how censorship, and even the repeated attempts at producing just one single “critical endorsement” of the literary heritage of Gjergj Fishta, F. Konica, E. Koliqi, Z. Schiro into the textbooks and academic works (1960, 1976, 1989) encountered official opposition. Koliqi wasn’t the only author who became subject to censorship, but also many representatives and founders of the modern Albanian language. Communist censorship therefore caused serious damage to Albanian literature. (Beqiri 2015: 818) The history of Albania doesn’t begin with the communist take-over, a period that “turned Albanians into the vassals of the Slavs”, argues Koliqi (1999: 281). He disagrees with what was said in a speech by Nexhmije Hoxha, wife of Enver Hoxha, about how communism “didn’t destroy the historical and cultural traditions of this country”. According to Koliqi, “he (i.e. Enver Hoxha) interrupted the genesis of a literary national progress.” (Koliqi 1999: 281)

E. Koliqi writes: "We are one of the unluckiest generations that human history has ever witnessed. There have never been more pure and generous purposes, more crystal-clear moral and mental strength being invested for the use of a country - only to fail so deeply and badly and fall into darkness and silence" (3/11/1957), and proceeds in the following letter:

"My great misfortunes failed to knock me on the ground: I am the same as I was. I might have made mistakes, but my intentions were genuine. And for as long as I'm alive, I won't be silent. The enemies (most of whom we have done favors to) might start coming to terms with this. For many of them it is better to have as enemies, rather than as friends" (Koliqi 15/12/1957).

For linguists like Mustafa Kruja and Karl Gurakuqi, for Albanologists like Valentini, for writers such as Ernest Koliqi and Martin Camaj, leaving their homeland must have felt like a curse. Far away from Albania they were missing the raw material: their people and their language was no longer with them. Koliqi, Camaj, Valentini, Gurakuqi would have a lot of trouble trying to fill this absence in two ways: going among the Arbëresh and preferring the company of other Albanian exiles, especially from the mountain regions. Those who have known him personally narrate how Ernest would spend hours and hours in the company of simple "malcor" (people who lived in the mountains), picking up from their mouth rare words and sayings that - after getting filtered in the writer's lab - would rightfully enter the kingdom

of Albanian letters. In this correspondence it can be felt how deep is the absence of scientific literature and Albanian literature. In these letters we cannot see any warnings of joyful segments, but only their sadness for Albania and their relatives who suffer, as well as the sorrow for the miserable state of emigration.

Koliqi would openly support every initiative from Albanians abroad to write into their mother tongue. In an article for the journal he directed and wrote for, he talks about the new periodical published in New York, “*Rinia Shqiptare në Mërgim*” (Albanian youth abroad), to which he refers to as “an attempt to be supported and applauded”. (Koliqi, Shëjzat 1-4 1972) The young people who were obligated to leave their motherland had to be able to their own health club where they could express their thoughts and feelings and exercise the language of their homeland in writing. Of course, these publishing initiatives, which show goodwill and idealistic values, will come with great care in the choice of themes and styles. “We are confident that the publishers of this journal will fulfil the need of a new emigration wave in the thinking life of the diaspora.” (Koliqi, Shëjzat 1-4 1972)

In 1948, in a correspondence with Mustafa Kruja, Koliqi explains to his friend the general belief that was created in Rome about Koliqi’s intentions and political beliefs. Here in Rome, he writes, people are convinced that I have been sold to King Zog and that I’m supposedly hiding my real intentions, which is, destroying the Block.²² (Rapallo, 23.09.1948) (Kruja 2013: 20) Koliqi proceeds on affirming that his intentions were genuine and that he was, in fact, a supporter of the ideas of the Block. When addressing the Albanian issue, Koliqi states that in order to find a solution to the problem, a coalition among the groups in immigration is necessary. (Kruja 2013: 21) In a meeting with a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rome, September 14th 1948, Koliqi was informed about the attempts of their department to obtain information concerning the Albanian matter, and that what they knew was “rather negative” (Kruja 2013: 21) considering that in America, the only community that fiercely defended communism, were the Albanians, thus showing their sympathy for a “non-American ideology” and therefore “operating against the interests of their host country.” (Kruja 2013: 21) The department had had difficulties in taking seriously some anti-communism movements organized by Albanian refugees – as they appeared divided. The department had expressed their preference into getting the Italians involved in the Albanian matter considering their “*experience in the Albanian matter*”, says Koliqi in his letter. He concluded by saying that he was doing what he could and encouraged his friend to keep going with the negotiations because “the coalition between parties shouldn’t frighten anyone because it’s for the good of the Albanian matter” (Koliqi 1948).

I spent last week in Sicily – says Koliqi in another letter to Mustafa Kruja on the 7th of December 1948 – in an international Congress of Albanian Studies, which was a huge success.

²² The Block refers to “Blloku Kombëtar Independent” (National Independent Bloc), was a patriotic political party of the Western Europeanism of Albanianism created on November 6, 1946. Its main aim was the organized war against Slavic-Bolshevik communism.

Following the success of the Congress, in Palermo was founded the first Centre of Albanian Studies on the 24th of November that same year. This center would be directed by Dr. Petrotta and prof. Riberzo and involved Karl Gurakuqi as its general secretary. (Kruja 2013: 24)

After learning about Mustafa's illness, Koliqi prepares another letter which dates March 21st 1949. In this letter, after exchanging the ritual pleasantries, Koliqi commented "I was happy to hear that Zog has treated you decently. These things leave a good impression and spread feelings of trust and brotherhood." (Kruja 2013: 26) When addressing the issue of the Albanian matter, Koliqi mentions how Ali Klissura²³ (i.e. Ali Këlcyra) was categorically against the coalition of the groups of refugees while Koliqi, Kapidani and Ismail relied on this coalition as the only solution to their problem: "Albania's freedom from the Soviet oppression." (Koliqi 1949) Koliqi further explains to Mustafa that he is willing to convince Këlcyra that what he and his colleagues wanted was the "collaboration with the true anti-communists" (Koliqi 1949).

In a letter dating 26th of December 1949, Koliqi expresses his fears about the confidentiality of his letters being compromised. Addressing Mustafa Kruja, he apologizes for his late response with the excuse of the "fear that my letters are being read [by third parties], which keeps me from expressing myself freely." (Koliqi 1949) Koliqi further argues on the importance of commenting with his collaborators the newest developments and news from Rome, but after discussing the issue of privacy with his friends and collaborators, they decided that it "wasn't reasonable putting on paper delicate information." (Koliqi 1949)

When addressing the Albanian issue, in a letter sent to Mustafa Kruja on December 26th 1949, Koliqi argues that Albania was becoming a subject of debate from all parts. However, there was big confusion and, as Koliqi put it, "there are as many thoughts as there are people". The question was to be treated not sentimentally, but technically. It would be good, he argued, to organize the Committee from scratch and to include only the *real* anti-communist Albanian forces. This way "our efforts and foreigners' support won't go in different directions." (Koliqi 1949)

In February 1952, Koliqi describes his literary activity to Mustafa in another epistolary exchange. "I am systematically teaching at the University, I often write in Italian journals and newspapers, I am writing regularly for '*Albanie Libre*' and I even find the time to create something for myself" writes Koliqi. "Here at our University we have all it takes to satisfy our cultural needs. I am putting together an Albanian section at the library with those few books we happened to find." (Kruja 2013: 37)

Two years later, after a long break from their written correspondence, on January 16th 1954 Koliqi writes to Mustafa Kruja that the reason for this long break was that he had been

²³ Ali Këlcyra (1891 – 1963) was a member of the Albanian parliament in the 1920s. He was co-founder with Mit'hat Frashëri of the "Balli Kombëtar" (The National Front) organization in 1942.

warned “that the letters are subject to censorship” (Koliqi 1954). Another friend of Koliqi had given him the proof for these allegations, given that he had been interrogated in an official office and notified Koliqi that he was being monitored. “This is what kept me from writing to you”. (Kruja 2013: 38) Koliqi also expresses an honest opinion about the years he spent as Minister during the Fascist regime. “Thinking that we spent most of our lives in opposition – and the period 1939-1943 obligated both you and me into an opposition that we didn’t really understand and that led us into making mistakes – was exhausting.” (Kruja 2013: 40) Koliqi argues that being in the opposition can be mistaken for a idealistic, chivalrous, theatrically beautiful role, but that “causes damages when historical events unfold too fast and when a historical event lasts too long.” (Koliqi 1954)

On September 9th 1954, Koliqi expresses his concern about the Albanian question once more. “Is there a remedy to such unawareness and evilness of thoughts on the national matter? How can we free ourselves of the uncertainties and create a solid basis?” (Kruja 2013: 49) Koliqi argues that the Committee should leave out any outer influences and rely on her inner forces, so to become autonomous and focused on the interests of the Albanian people. However, the Party of the Legality had been dissolved causing many difficulties to the Committee – its former components were getting everyday deeper and deeper into disagreements. “Only the King – Koliqi argues – can find the way to reunite them and put an end to their hostilities, on the basis of new criteria, and without wasting any time.” (1954) Koliqi’s urgency is due to the Committee of Paris that was accelerating the process of dissolving their committee and because the King wasn’t taking action into stop such process. “After having restructured his party on new fundamentals and compiled a clear action plan, the powerful voice of the King shall be heard loud, very loud. [...]” (Koliqi 1954) Koliqi asks Mustafa Kruja to convince the King into doing so and thus giving them the opportunity of creating a strong alliance that would give to the Albanian State a useful national activity, that had always been lacking. “It shouldn’t be difficult to create a party that has only one goal: the liberation of the country. The only way to do so is establishing solidarity in between the most serious parties in immigration.” [...] (Kruja 2013: 50)

Considering the self-censored nature of his own letters and the awareness of how counter-productive this phenomenon was turning out to be, Koliqi invites Kruja to a private meeting in order to discuss their political plans. In his letter, dated November 26th 1954, Koliqi writes in a post scriptum note that “the fact that we’re not able to freely exchange our ideas and opinions, is causing the delay of many of our brave projects.” Having his personal letters monitored proved to be a serious obstacle for his political plans to endeavor. In this case, it can be argued that “the personal is political”.

In response to Koliqi’s last considerations and suggestions concerning the Albanian problem, on the 18th of December 1954, Mustafa Kruja raises the issue of the latest developments in Former Yugoslavia concerning “what they’ve done – and what they’re still doing – to our language and culture.” Kruja is astonished to see the indifference of the

authorities of Rome with regard to the political policies of such activity in Beograd. “When under the ottoman hegemony, Italy was a lot more interested than Austria about the Albanian issue.” (Kruja 1954) Kruja argues that the participation of the Albanians in Balcan combinations would be the best solution to their national issue.

Rome, January 1st 1955, Koliqi argues about the difficulties of their Committee caused by “many of those who rejoiced privileges during the period 1939 – 1943, who are openly declaring opposition to us and our ideas”. (Koliqi 1955) He proceeds on asking information about the “chief” (i.e King Zog) and his serious health issues and wished him a quick recovery – in order to regain “the function of the promoter and the inhibitor” (Kruja 2013: 62) of their cause. The Committee failed during the elections, says Koliqi on December 20th 1955, therefore the “Albanian political groups in immigration are failing to reunite.” (Kruja 2013: 70)

In 1957, September 23rd, Koliqi sends to Mustafa a copy of the first release of “Shejzat”, cultural magazine he would be in charge for 18 years. “The journal will focus on the simplest sphere of *Albanianism*²⁴. Cultural, but not academic. The most important topics will be discussed vividly, but with a contained tone” says Koliqi in a private letter to Mustafa Kruja. (Koliqi 1957) In the official letter published in “*Shejzat*” (The Pleiades), professor Ernest Koliqi and dr. Martin Camaj²⁵ discuss the objectives of the journal and put into perspective the Albanian language, the Albanian people and the Albanian studies. “Shejzat aims at becoming a health center – without any political inclinations – for all ideas that are oriented towards the strengthening of the notion of *Albanianism*.” (Kruja 2013: 77) The journal targeted Albanians within the borders and particularly the Albanian diaspora abroad, so that everywhere in the world could exist Albanian-speaking people. An ambitious goal that the journal pursued for years and that was achieved with great success thanks to Koliqi and his many collaborators.

April 3rd 1958. Koliqi writes to Mustafa Kruja: “Youth don’t know anything about what we had to go through. They think everything began to exist on November 29th 1944. Before that – they believe – there were only traitors, exploiters, cynics.” (Koliqi 1958)

Outlawed by his Motherland, insulted and rejected for his political actions, stripped of his artistic values, while homesick and with a burning desire to return physically to his homeland, he continues to wait at the Roman cemetery "Prima Porta", under a red slab of marble, surrounded by foreign people, covered with foreign earth, under a foreign sky - the return to his Motherland - while his work never left Albania and, especially, Shkodra.

²⁴ Albanianism is a concept associated with the Albanian nationalism that includes ideas on the creation of a geographically expanded Albanian state or a *Greater Albania* encompassing adjacent Balkan lands with substantial Albanian populations. Albanianism or “Shqiptaria” is a concept according to which Albanians can have different religions but their main religion is Albanianism, i.e. having an Albanian identity.

²⁵ Martin Camaj (1925–1992) is considered as one of the major authors of modern Albanian prose. His novel “*Rrathë*” is considered to be the first psychological novel written in Albanian.

Conclusions

The linguistic and cultural movements Koliqi initiated during the fascist regime, led to the common interest of progress, development and investments in the Albanian language and culture. The political contexts where Koliqi was involved (i.e his acceptance of the role of Minister of Education in Albania during the Fascist occupation) led to linguistic policies that were interpreted as manipulative tools aiming towards a “linguistic substitution” policy. The concentrated levels of Italian language into the Albanian educational system, media, press etc. caused a general dissatisfaction in the Albanian population. The introduction of the Italian culture didn't turn out to be a cultural exchange but rather a cultural domination, a reality where one of the two cultures involved is more present than the other. Translation constituted an instrument of oppression rather than an instrument of resistance.

Koliqi was at the forefront of those who volunteered to defend and sacrifice their name for a cultural heritage that would be handed down from generation to generation, for a vision of what a national heritage could evolve into and for the protection of the traditions and spiritual values that characterizes the Albanians. Italian culture was a model to take inspiration from: a culture to decipher, to assimilate and to apply into the Albanian reality. Koliqi took upon himself a responsibility that belonged to every Albanian. Koliqi, although misunderstood and anathematized because of his choices in the chaotic political order he became part of, remained true to his intentions. Koliqi was the embodiment of the devoted servant of the Albanian linguistic legacy. In the intense journey of Albanian national consciousness, Ernest Koliqi has earned a place in the pantheon of those who contributed and achieved in the linguistic progress, even though his name and his work for a long time were constricted in oblivion and silence (i.e. during communism in Albania).

Koliqi accepted to collaborate with the Fascist regime for purposes that went beyond his personal interests such as the assumed “climbing the promotional ladder” or his potential “personal and political ambitions”. It would make more sense to call him an ‘infiltrator’ and, subsequently, a misunderstood ‘martyr’, rather than simply labelling him as a ‘fascist’. The strongest argument to support this is the fact that he voluntarily quit his Ministerial position before Italy's capitulation in order to concentrate on directing the Institution of Albanian Studies and the journal “*Shkendija*”. Both these institutions were a result of his “ministerial powers”, given that he initiated both when he was still minister, meaning *when he had the power to do so*. Once he achieved these ambitions he turned away from the Fascist reality and only concentrated on what interested him mostly, i.e. contributing on boosting the Albanian language and culture. Whether he couldn't stand any longer the reality of his office or whether he didn't want to be associated anymore with the Fascism, it is undeniable the damage his ministerial position did to his image. However, it can be argued that he was an initiator, a revolutionary: with the powers he was given, he changed the system from within to the extent he was allowed to.

Formally, he supported the power that supported him (and in this sense it doesn't matter the actual degree of acceptance towards the ideology of fascism), he passively submitted and offered his tacit consent towards the power (Fascism) that gave him power. In this sense, he agreed and allowed his image to be associated with that of the Fascist regime, in order for him to pursue to a certain extent his literary ambitions. It is thus undeniable the impact that his decisional strategy had in the history of Albanian literature, as well as in the political history of Albania.

Appendix: Chronology of Ernest Koliqi's life and work.

1903: Is born in Shkodër, May 20th in a family that was originally from Dukagjin.

1918: Starts studying in Italy. Co-founds the weekly newspaper "Noi giovani" (Us, youth) in Bergamo, where he would publish his first poems in Italian.

1921: Returns to Albania, strengthens his friendship with Luigj Gurakuqi. Concentrates in studying and improving his Albanian language knowledge. Wins the Ministry of Education competition for a national anthem with a jury: Father Gjergj Fishta, Fan Noli, Mit'hat Frasheri and Luigj Gurakuqi.

1923: Becomes a member of the circle "Bashkimi" (The union) of Avni Rrustemi. Leaves his homeland and publishes the poem "Kushtrimi i Skandërbeut" (Scanderbeg's summons).

1929: In Zadar, Dalmatia, Croatia, publishes the volume of novels "Hija e maleve" (The Shadow of the Mountains).

1930 - 1933: Teacher in the cities of Vlora and Shkodra.

1932: Publishes the first volume of his translations entitled "The Great Poets of Italy" (Dante, Petrarca, Aristotle and Tasso).

1933: Publishes the book of poems "Gjurnat e stinëve" (The traces of the seasons).

1934: Cooperates with the contemporary newspaper "Illyria".

1935: Following the success of the first volume of novels, he publishes a book with 16 novels entitled "Flags' Merchant" with subjects derived from the everyday life of his people, especially that of the city of Shkodra. The social events and problems affecting the book always undergo a profound psychological analysis. This volume of novels, as Miaser Dibra notes, belongs to a more advanced stage of his artistic maturity. In the same year he also publishes the poem in prose "Quattuor".

1935: Publishes the second volume of the Anthology "Poetët e Mëdhenj t'Italisë" (The Great Poets of Italy)

1936 - He is appointed Lecturer of Albanian language at the University of Padova, directed by Carlo Tagliavini. He publishes the second volume of the anthology "Poetët e mëdhenj të Italisë" (The Great Poets of Italy) (preface by Tagliavini). This volume includes translated poems by four other Italians: Parini, Monti, Foscolo, Manzoni. The third volume was prepared but didn't get published.

1937: He completes his university studies and his PHD in Padova with the subject "Etika popullore shqiptare" (Popular Albanian Ethics).

1939: On the 12th of April Koliqi is appointed Minister of Education and will remain until December 3rd 1941. He is the main supporter of the publication of two important volumes

“Shkrimtarët shqiptarë” (Albanian writers) and "Visaret e Kombit" (The treasures of the motherland). He was appointed as Titular of the Department of Albanian Language and Literature at the University of Rome.

1940: Organizes the Congress of Albanian Studies in Tirana with the participation of the most renowned scholars from the country and the world.

1940: Is the founder of the journal “Shkëndija” (The Pleiades).

1941 - 1942: Minister Koliqi sends to Kosovo 200 teachers for the opening of the first schools in Albanian language.

1942-1943: After leaving the Ministry of Education Director of the Institution of Albanian Studies.

1944: Following Italy’s capitulation, Koliqi will head to Italy. His literary works will be forbidden because of the author’s political activity and his religious belief.

1947: Writes for the newspaper "L'Albanie Libre", published in Rome. Among his many writings, in this newspaper he begins to publish from 1954 to 1961 the comparative study “Dy shkollat letrare shkodrane – e Etënve Jezuitë dhe e Etënve Françeskanë” (The two literary schools of Shkodra - the Franciscans and the Jesuits). In this study, it can be noted the attempt to gather a reliable history of the Albanian literature, outside of political and ideological beliefs.

1957: By decree of the President of Italy, the Department of Language and Literature of the University of Rome is honored by becoming the Institute of Albanian Studies for the excellent guidance of its leader, Koliqi. He publishes in Florence, in two languages, Albanian and Italian, the volume "Popular Albanian Poetry". In Rome, he founds the cultural, literary and scientific magazine "Shejzat", which will be under his direction for 18 years. This magazine would publish over 8,000 pages in 19 years of its life, becoming the capital benchmark for all Albanian culture in the West during the years 1957-1978.

1959: Publishes the volume “*Kangjelet e Rilindjes*” (Hymns of the Renaissance) translated in Italian as an encouragement for the Arbëresh to preserve their national language, customs and identity. At the same time, he encourages them to have faith in their clan’s immortality.

1960: Publishes the novel “*Shija e bukës se mbrume*” (The taste of the leavened bread) with the pseudonym “Hilush Vilza”. The novel discusses the topic of exile due to communism. The reason for publishing with a pseudonym was the awareness of the critics the novel would receive for the political implications within the work.

1961: Translates in Italian the poem of Ali Asllani “*Dasma shqiptare*” (The Albanian Wedding).

1962: Translates in Italian the 26th poem of Gjergj Fishta's "Lahuta e Malcis".

1963: Publishes "*Pasqyrat e Narcizit*" (The mirrors of Narcissus) and the "Anthology of Albanian Opera" in Italian, including poets from Kosovo for the first time.

1965: Publishes monograph for Albania "ALBANIA".

1970: Publishes the play "*Rrajët lëvizin*" (Roots move) and the poem "*Simfonia e shqipeve*" (The Symphony of Albanians).

1971: Translates in Italian from "*Lahuta e Malcis*" the episode of Marash Uci (songs 12 - 13 - 14 - 15).

1972: Publishes a collection of essays "*Saggi di Letteratura Albanese*" (Essays of Albanian Literature).

1973: Continues in Italian "*Lahuta e Malcis*", the episode "Oso Kuka" (songs 2-3-4-5).

1975: He dies in Rome on January 15th and is buried on January 18th in Rome

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