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**Mapping Race and Belonging in the Margins of Europe: Albanian, Romani, and Egyptian Sentiments**

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**Mapping Race and Belonging in the Margins of Europe: Albanian,  
Romani, and Egyptian Sentiments**

**by**

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**Dissertation**

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## **Dedication**

This is for you Dad. You told me that whether I finish first or fifteenth, I always finish first with you. I miss you every single day.

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# **Mapping Race and Belonging in the Margins of Europe: Albanian, Romani, and Egyptian Sentiments**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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Racialization and belonging are deeply complex and imbricated processes. Drawing from more than 28 months of ethnographic research with Albanian, Romani, and Egyptian communities, this dissertation maps sentiments, scenes, and sites of socioracial manifestations in Albania's capital city of Tirana. Racial formations are increasingly salient in Tirana, where these negotiations are fraught with tensions that play out through inherited and newly constructed narratives of belonging and non-belonging. These processes of racialization manifest locally in varied ways, and yet, they are shaped by broader global structures. The significance of race and racialization however, has been left out of the larger discussion of identity formation and marginality in the Balkans. I use this dissertation research to think critically about the scenes and sites of racialization and identity formation, and to explore notions of racial belonging and marginality as they are uniquely manifested in the contemporary post-communist moment.

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## Introduction

### THE TRIAL OF THE ANTHROPOLOGIST

“Racism in Albania?” I heard Blerta ask through the phone. “But I did not know that Albanians could be racist,” she said, rather aghast. I sighed. An hour earlier I had been telling Mira<sup>1</sup> and her sister a story about my serving as a translator for a friend who was going to be on Albanian national television. As I was talking Mira had appeared somewhat preoccupied as she casually lit her cigarette and blew the first puffs of smoke in my face. “You know Chelsi, *you* should go on television,” she had announced. “Why should I go on TV? What would I talk about?” I had asked, amused at her suggestion. “About your scholarship, about racism,” she said, “And about the things that go on here in Albania. People need to know these issues and need to hear about your research.” “I do not study racism per se; I study racialization,” I began, but just as she is known to do Mira already was making moves before I had the time to finish my response or contemplate her proposition. That is how I suddenly found myself sitting against her couch while she spoke with Blerta, her friend and colleague who knows the host and producers of the nationally syndicated morning show, *Wake Up Tirana*. I was listening to their conversation as Blerta was requesting more evidence about Albanian racism. I started to panic slightly and tug Mira’s arm to end the phone call, to let Blerta know that I was not accusing anyone of racism or generalize an entire group of people as being racist. Mira, however, continued chatting. When she finally ended the call, she said, “She is phoning her friend now, the one who hosts the morning show.” “Well what did she say?” I desperately plead. “Oh yeah,” Mira replied, shaking her head in a way that she does

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<sup>1</sup> Names have been changed to protect the identity of interlocutors.

when she is very proud of an accomplishment, “They are *definitely* going to want to talk to you.” “Really?” I asked, somewhere between question and doubt. Mira’s phone rang. “Okay, next Tuesday?” I overheard. She leaned over to me: “Can you go down to the station next week on Tuesday to meet the host? After that they want to have you on for a live taping the following Thursday.” “Yes, I can do that,” I answered. “Good,” she says, seemingly to both Blerta and me. “I will go with you.”

### **THE PRE-TRIAL: WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE**

I met Mira that following Tuesday morning outside of The Pyramid, which was designed and commissioned in the late 1980s by Enver Hoxha’s daughter to honor the former dictator’s legacy in Albania. Today it is covered with graffiti, and during the day, many young children climb to the top and use it as a giant slide. A couple of television and radio stations occupy the inside of the building, including the one that broadcasts *Wake Up Tirana*. Mira informed the guard about our meeting and he directed us to the second floor. Upon our arrival we found Enon, the show’s host, waiting for us, along with five other people. I was initially caught off-guard as I thought we were meeting only Enon, but I quickly learned that members of the production staff would join us. After brief introductions Enon immediately opened with questions. He started by asking me to detail my experiences in Albania because as he said, “I did not know there was racism here in Albania.” Mira interjected to explain that I am a social anthropologist, and that there are several issues that I study pertaining to race, but Enon wanted concrete evidence of racism and racist individuals. I initially fumbled a lot of my words as I began to talk about my experiences in Albania, and in particular, sharing stories of various racial encounters. The process was slow and difficult. I had trouble summing up all of these thoughts in a matter of minutes. My body was tense. I tried to connect these stories of

racial encounters to my current broader research questions but I struggled. The group's presence was overwhelming.

At one point while sharing stories about people who have called me a strange *nigger* on the bus as they discussed my hair and hygiene (because many assume that I cannot understand Albanian), Enon interrupted to ask, "Well, do we call this racism or curiosity?" I responded by letting him know that while I do not use that exact binary, I do weigh questions like this in my own research in an effort to understand how people interpret what they do and say, and how they racialize others. I shared with Enon and the others another story in which I was once headed to Tirana, the only non-Albanian on an airplane of about 20 total passengers. At one point an older woman boarded the plane and loudly exclaimed, "*Nigger, Nigger!*" when she saw me. She then ran towards me and began pinching and touching my cheeks and hair. I remained in my seat, jaw tight, eyes bucked, in a state of shock really, as I was unsure how to react to this Fanon-like rupture. She turned to her husband behind her and pointed at me, shouting, "*Nigger!*" As I finished sharing this story in the studio, most in the group immediately made comments like, "No, she was not racist . . . she was just curious." Someone referred to it as "clean" curiosity. This lead Albana, one of the production assistants, to suggest that maybe I cannot differentiate between curiosity and racism, and that Albania is now democratic and tolerant. She wanted me to know that in her opinion the woman did not mean harm by her actions. I explained to the group that the incident itself is very telling about how people respond to race and racialize others, and that my intention was not to debate whether the woman meant to harm me (though their collective responses to the story do shed light on their desires to justify the woman's actions as curious).

Enon and his crew wanted more evidence. I emphasized once again that I do not research racism as much as I try to understand the complexities of racialization as a

process. They wanted to hear more personal stories. I described the ways that some individuals use offensive Albanian slurs with me. People refer to those of African descent as inferior. I also shared times when people have grabbed me in the streets, thrown rocks at me, and followed and chased me home on numerous occasions. I wanted to convey that these types of incidents can reveal ways in which people in Tirana make sense of race and otherness. Enon wanted to know more about the meaning behind these types of actions. As he talked I could tell that he was getting defensive. He demanded that I address the meaning and intentionality of the actions I was describing. I reminded him that I am exploring the idea of meaning but I also gave him a very textbook-like human rights explanation, specifying that when it comes to racism and discrimination, the idea of intent is not as relevant as the outcome of the action. I feel that as anthropologists my colleagues and I regularly talk about this type of thing, but after I gave Enon that explanation, the television representatives in the studio tried to reassure me that I just do not fully understand Albanian culture. They reasoned that if I could better understand where people are coming from then I would know better; that there would be no reason to study race in Albania. In fact, understanding these sense-making processes is a major premise of my research, but I found it difficult to articulate during our studio conversation.

The show's staff was still concerned that I had an unclear understanding of Albanian culture, and that while I was seeking to better understand socioracial manifestations, the consensus seemed to be that it was I who *mis*understands. Mira then spoke up, saying that she had personally witnessed some of the encounters that I had mentioned. My "evidence" seemed weak, so to speak, until Mira began to validate my stories. Once she did so, the group appeared to believe me a bit more, many acting more surprised to hear Mira talk about my experiences. I started to talk about Tirana as the

setting for most of my research when Enon interrupted to say, “Well, I know none of this happens in Tirana.” “Actually, yes, I am talking mostly about Tirana,” I responded. He and the sound engineer both snorted, and Enon said, “Well, then it is not the people who are *really* from Tirana.” This reminded me of a sentiment that manifests often in my research: the idea that rural and uneducated or uncultured individuals keep flocking into Tirana from surrounding smaller cities, ultimately giving the city a bad reputation.<sup>2</sup>

Others in the studio asked more questions about race, particularly about others’ responses to Black people. I mentioned the television show *Portokalia*, a nationally syndicated late-night comedy show in Albania. One of the popular sketches features the character of Drumba,<sup>3</sup> who is played by a white Albanian actor using blackface to impersonate African football players. As I discussed the racist history of blackface and caricatures, Enon unfolded his arms and interrupted me, saying, “The personality that you are referencing on *Portokalia* is something that has occurred in a particular Albanian context. Let me explain the history to you.” He told me that the Drumba sketch is easy to understand, that it is *simple* humor about African football players that come to Albania. He did not address why Drumba dances and makes monkey sounds. He did not explain why he is missing teeth, and why the show’s writers have him intentionally mispronounce Albanian words so that they are vulgar. He did not address the ways in which audience members are encouraged to laugh at Drumba’s stupidity because he is African. Instead Enon reiterated, “It is *only* a joke.” I tried to discuss the issues with blackface, and my own interviews with football players in Albania who are also offended

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<sup>2</sup>Recent research points to high rates of internal migration, particularly the expansion of the Tirana-Durrës agglomeration (see Bickert & West-Ohueri, forthcoming). Many of my research interviews focus on the ways that individuals understand these regional differences (northern and rural migration to central Albania) as racialized. Chapters One and Two discuss this further.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter One features a longer discussion of the character of Drumba.

by Drumba, but Enon abruptly halted the conversation by saying that the Drumba character is a different issue that has no ties to race or racism.<sup>4</sup>

Enon mentioned the fact that I am from the United States, which, compared to Albania, has a different socioracial history and context. As such, he said, I cannot try to study racism in Albania with the same frame as I would in the U.S. “I should remind you,” he said, “that Albania was very isolated. We have been isolated from the whole world for a very long time, and maybe people are, I do not know, afraid of newcomers.” I nodded in agreement—xenophobia is directly tied to my research questions, as is a discussion of isolation. I also informed Enon that I situate my research within a global frame of racialization. He then offered an example of relations between Albanians and Greeks, arguing that from his perspective, Albanians have been the victims of racism from Greeks for a very long time. Albana added that racism in Albania has a different tone, that it does not always have to do with skin color, citing the same example of the relationship between Albanians and Greeks. I told them that I was not trying to compare Albania to the U.S., and added that such framings of Albanian-Greek relations are the types of things that I do study. This seemed to somewhat delight and intrigue Enon.

Once we began the conversation about social relations between groups, I noted that my dissertation research draws attention to articulations of racial identity amongst Roms<sup>5</sup> and Egyptians<sup>6</sup> in Tirana, particularly to the shifts in these that occurred the post-

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<sup>4</sup>After later reflection I realized that there was more than likely a conflict of interests for the television network, as the same group that produces *Wake up Tirana*, Top Channel Albania, also produces *Portokalia*, which might be one reason that Enon quickly ended this conversation.

<sup>5</sup> My use of the term Rom (singular) and Roms (plural) follows the argument of linguist Victor Friedman who writes: “Rom is a singular noun that follows the rules of English grammar like other ethnonyms, such as Turk. Just as we write Turks and not Turkler, so, too, we write Roms and not Roma. The use of the Romani plural noun Roma in place of the adjective Romani is grammatically incorrect, while the use of the Romani adverb Romanes is a marginalizing exoticism. When writing in English, we write that the Roms speak Romani...similarly we write about Romani NGOs just as we can write about Turkish NGOs, not

communist period. Albana said that Romani community is marginalized in Albania but that she does not know if they experience racism. This distinction intrigued me. She added, “During the time of Enver Hoxha, the Roms were treated better than everyone else—they were prioritized.” Her comments are very telling about her viewpoints on race, and echo broader sentiments about racial minorities in other contexts. I used this as an opportunity to try and clarify my position and research angle. I wanted to make it known that I desire to study how people perceive race and racial categories, and how they articulate racial belonging and processes of identity formation. “I do not want to say that Albanians are racist, they....” I began but was interrupted by Enon who finished my sentence for me, “They are ignorant,” he said, shaking his head in affirmation. I explained to him that I do not utilize that dichotomy, either racist or ignorant, but that also, I am trying to figure out how race operates and what racialization looks like, including the ways that racial categories come to be. Ignorance in some ways is a part of that conversation, but not necessarily my object of analysis.

At this point Enon and the producers informed me that they wanted to have me on the show. They believed that the viewers would enjoy the discussion. “You are an anthropologist,” Enon began, “And can speak to these subjects, but we will have a local Albanian psychologist that can talk about the *reality* and explain the things that have happened to you.” The trial was beginning to take shape even more, as they identified this expert witness. They announced that Blerta, Mira’s friend and social psychologist,

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Turks NGOs” (1999:319-320).

<sup>6</sup> Chapter Three features an at-length discussion of Egyptians in Albania. Often considered Romani or Gypsy, the Egyptians of Albania (and throughout the Balkans) reject any association with Roms, and identify with an Egyptian heritage, as opposed to an Indian one. They primarily speak the Albanian language and do not speak Romani. The majority of the Egyptian communities in the Balkans are found in Albania, Kosovë, and Macedonia.

would come on the show with me and speak about Albanian society. She would also serve as someone who could, in some sense, evaluate me. Albana then said that they would also provide the opportunity for viewers to participate, such as an option to call into the show. “People will absolutely have questions,” she says, “Because Albanians do not see things the way you see them.” I anxiously anticipated the jury’s verdict.

### **THE TRIAL**

On the morning of the live airing I met Mira and Blerta outside of the show’s studio. We arrived several minutes early so that I can chat with Blerta about last-minute questions, and discuss how the dialogue would, hopefully, unfold. A production assistant greeted us and escorted us to makeup, where the makeup artist eagerly awaited us. She was very excited that I was going to be on the show because she actually has ebony colored foundation in her collection and has never been able to use it. Her excitement quickly diminished as I told her that I have very sensitive skin and that I am, unfortunately, allergic to most cosmetic products. We settled on a shiny pink gloss for my lips.

As we approached the start time Blerta and I entered the studio where Enon greeted us from behind the cameras. He let us know how glad he was that we were going to be on the show. The lights in the studio were intensely bright, magnifying the small beads of sweat gathering on my palms and the outside of my hands. Blerta and I fastened our earpieces and stood behind our respective microphones at the table. At the bottom of the television prompter screen I saw *Racism or Ignorance?* written as the title of the show. I immediately looked to the producers for a chance to change the title but I had very little time to think about it as the music began and we received the signal that we were going live. Enon introduced the segment: “Today, we are going to feature an

argument that I believe will speak to everyone, one that we will discuss with serious attention. I want to introduce Chelsi West. She is a social anthropologist. She is an American. And she has come to Albania to study aspects of our society and our behaviors here.” He continued. “Chelsi has seen with her own eyes and critically studied the way that Albanians mistreat people of color, for instance people like herself.” This is not exactly the direction I had in mind for the conversation, so once Enon allowed me the opportunity to introduce myself, I emphasized that while the study of race and racism is a major component of my research, I also explore things like post-communism, and cultural aspects of daily life, and that I very much enjoy doing research in Albania. My fear of being misunderstood was so great that I stumbled through my introduction, and delivered a very vague description of my research. My mood immediately became defensive.

Enon continued the conversation, noting that perhaps a particular type of racism, which he denoted with air quotes, may exist in Albania, but that in his opinion, this is a result of the country’s history of isolation and lack of exposure to foreigners. I wanted to respond to that but instead he then offered Blerta the opportunity to respond. “When I first talked to Chelsi and learned of her experiences, I was shocked,” Blerta began. “We were all shocked,” Enon adds. Blerta resumed, “I was shocked because here in Albania we have not had much contact with people with color, we do not have a history of racism or conflict.” After that we began discussing different types of social phenomena, racism, prejudice, and nationalism. Enon acknowledged that in Albania, people use epithets and racial terminology, and that there are differences between groups like Albanians and Roms, but he wanted to know more about acts of racism against me. Once again I felt the need to remind the viewers how much I enjoy Albania, and that I do not use the term racism lightly. It was at this exact moment in the studio that I realized how often I list,

discuss, critique, and grapple with questions of socioracial formations and belonging in academic circles, but things felt very different and more intense in front of a larger and unfamiliar television audience.

I responded to Enon's questions by acknowledging that I seek to critically analyze racial encounters, acts, and ideologies, and the ways people understand race. I offered examples, such as racial categorization and formation, and the ways that people talk about race in Europe more broadly. I tried to make it clear that I want to study how people make sense of race. He followed by asking me to share evidence, to recount experiences of racism in Albania. I shared similar stories as those I told in our pre-television conversations. I discussed the comments that I have heard about Black people when folks have presumed that I cannot understand Albanian. Though I wanted to continue by offering them my thoughts on things like othering and constructions of difference, I hesitated. I was not sure where the conversation was headed at this point. I felt frustrated and sensed a familiar tension. For so long I have practiced a critical distance from these types of encounters so that I can analyze happenings such as these from a particular research angle, and because of that, I regularly have experienced delayed emotional responses. At this moment in the studio I was flooded with emotions that I did not know how to process.

Enon focused on the subject of discriminatory behaviors and attitudes, and asked Blerta whether she thinks such acts could be explained by Albania's long period of isolation. Blerta said that she could not easily say that is the case. She said that the subject of discriminatory behavior and isolation needs to be studied and that it is not simply, "Part of a trait of Albanian behavior." She added that, when discussing issues such as prejudice or racism, it is important to note that these phenomena exist in multiple forms. I was very much in agreement with her point, and hoped that we could continue

along those lines. Enon, however, began to talk about other people of color, specifically Black African football players in Albania. He expressed his opinion that many of the players are treated well in restaurants and clubs, and noted that one or two are married to Albanian women. He also acknowledged that I had interviewed some of these players who also highlighted their own experiences with racism. Enon wanted me to explain to the audience *who* exactly is responsible. Who is to blame for racist acts? I hesitated once again before answering, and eventually said that my experiences are varied, and occur in multiple places, not just one. I did, however, offer that more often than not I have had racial encounters with men in public spaces in Tirana. I believe that in a different setting this would have been an excellent opportunity to reference theories of intersectionality, to talk about my experiences as a Black woman and how they shed light on both race and gender. It also would have been a good moment to talk about the differences between systemic and individual racism. At the time, however, I felt very rushed to remind viewers once again that I was speaking generally. Before I had time to process my thoughts, though, we were already opening the conversation to the viewing audience.

The jury then had an opportunity to speak. Before the show began I was very concerned about possible telephone calls I might have to field on-air, but I was completely caught off-guard when Enon announced, “We are now going to go live to people on the street that we have questioned about this issue.” The telecast then switched to a street-view of Skanderbeg Square, where a reporter was asking people, “What do you think, are Albanians racist?” I panicked once again because I had been arguing continually that this is not the way that I frame my research, and yet, this type of questioning was making it seem as though it were my goal. Inside the studio we adjusted our headphones to hear respondents’ answers, and as the first woman spoke, I overheard a producer utter, “She is a Romani woman.” She was being racialized before she even

finished her answer to the question, and I should note that none of the other white Albanian respondents were racialized in the same way. The first respondent offered the following: “*Shumë racist janë* (‘They are very racist’). Albanians do not accept people of my color, those of *us* that are *dorë e zezë*.<sup>7</sup> Roms and Egyptians cannot find jobs.” Other respondents followed with their answers to the same question—“Are Albanians racist?” — including these:

“There could be racist people but only a small amount... when we have such great harmony between religions, how could we have racism here in Albania?”

“Albanians are very racist.”

“I do not think so, because I have seen white children (‘*të bardhë*’) and children of color (‘*të zezë*’) cry and they cry the same tears.”

“We are extremely racist, more racist than we should be.”

“Albanians are not racist! We are a people of respect.”

“It varies from individual ... it is a subjective question. You cannot generalize everyone.”

“Albanians are not racist. We respect whites and blacks.”

“We are not racist... the [people] who are racist are the Greeks!”

“Yes, Albanians are racist, though God made us the same, one race.”

As the people on the street shared answers, I saw the ways in which this direct questioning captured so much of what I wanted to discuss about the ways people

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<sup>7</sup> The woman here uses the Albanian term *dorë e zezë*, which, when literally translated, means “black hand” or “black side.” This term is often used to distinguish Roms and Egyptians in Albania from white Albanians who are commonly referred to as *dorë e bardhë*, meaning “white hand” or “white side”.. Each of the following chapters features more discussion of these categories of whiteness and blackness, and how they manifest in Tirana.

articulate sentiments of race, about the discursive practices that shed light on the processes of racialization (Goldberg 1993; Lemon 2002). Before turning to the street jury I was afraid of what they might offer, but these live clips formed a type of dataset and a new way to analyze my research question within a different framework. This type of questioning elicits numerous sentiments about the negotiation of race and belonging.

When the street commentary ended, Enon analyzed the variation in responses, acknowledging the differing opinions. He then asked Blerta for her professional opinion as to whether racism or ignorance plays a bigger role in shaping behaviors. Blerta argued that in Albania, prejudice or racism against people of color occurs rarely, and that in her opinion, most of the negative behavior could be explained by ignorance, though such ignorance does not justify offensive behavior. “But perhaps Chelsi can speak to this matter,” Blerta offers, “Because she has had experiences that have been more offensive and then those that have been more about curiosity or people trying to discover more about her.” While I was unhappy with the way she framed this inquiry by positing a binary between racism and ignorance, and putting forth the idea that Albanians have not had racial experiences with people of color (i.e. Roms and Egyptians), I recognized that Blerta was attempting to open the conversation so that I could talk about experiences like the incident from the airplane, wherein which the woman kept shouting out “nigger” in pointing me out to fellow passengers. As I shared that story with the viewers (a story that I do find both curious and offensive, among other things) I realized that I wanted to communicate that practices and processes of racialization manifest and take shape in multiple ways, and that a story like this one sheds light on the ways people understand, negotiate, and respond to blackness and otherness. Instead, however, right after I shared the encounter, Enon asked for the “other” side, for an example of a “more offensive” racial encounter. He once again framed the discussion as a sort of good-versus-bad

binary, or an intentionally offensive-versus-innocent (or curious) dichotomy. I did provide another example of someone yelling the Albanian term *bythzinj* ('dark ass') at me while trying to push me off of the sidewalk, and another of people calling out *majmun* ('monkey') when they see me. Reflecting on this moment in the on-air discussion, I think that I unintentionally created a loose juxtaposition of what racism is and what it is not. I wanted to be able to talk more about racial formations, how they take shape, and the socialities of the post-communist period, but our conversation kept moving towards some type of jumbled definitions of what racism is (or is not), who is responsible, and why. This dynamic is very much tied to a broader discussion of racialization, but in many ways, the television show shed light on the difficulties of public rhetoric and framing what racialization looks like.

As our segment concluded, Enon mentioned that due to the recent socioeconomic crisis, numerous Albanians had recently returned from Greece, and that many of them had been victims of racism. I informed him and the viewers that that, too, is a part of my dissertation research, particularly how people understand race in regard to these circumstances I cannot help but feel that with this remark Enon was reminding me that, while I may highlight racist encounters in Albania, Albanians have experienced racism. As she offered her final thoughts on the show, Blerta informed viewers that it is not my intention to chastise Albanians in any way, and that my goal is to spark more discussion on the subjects of race and belonging. I added once again how much I valued my time in Albania and that I looked forward to more dialogue. Enon closed the show by telling viewers that after I had spent more time and done more research in Tirana, they would like me to return to the show with updates from my studies.

## **DELIBERATION AND VERDICT**

The television show illuminates various complexities of race and racialization, and the problems that emerge when engaging in public discussion about these subjects. My experience highlights numerous questions, buzzes, and reactions tied to race, marginality, isolation, nationalism and national identity, methodology, situated knowledges, ethnography, and the role of the anthropologist. At the same time, the show is also a kind of problematic that generates stereotypes, defensiveness, confusion, and jarring responses to the study of race and racialization in Albania. The episode on which I was a guest draws attention to an underlying tension in which I seek to ethnographically study the density of racialization without inscribing or re-inscribing the idea that Albanians are stereotypically backwards, isolated, or ignorant. Perhaps one way of understanding the show is as a particular moment in which various social, aesthetic, and material registers, as well as the meta-discussion of race, all pull apart. And the process of this unfolding, of this coming apart, provides one entry point into the study of racialization and belonging.

The television show experience generated numerous questions that drive my overall research. What can a type of slowed ethnography reveal about the intricacies of racial categories, racial encounters, and racial formations? How are ideas of race and racialization linked to emplacement and embodiment? How do I think about curiosity and isolation? How can I frame encounters or happenings that are entangled and/or confusing? I cannot necessarily say that the show did or did not turn out as I had planned, as I am not sure if I was ever clear what would transpire. I do know that after serving as a guest on the show, I had to consider many things about my approach to ethnographic fieldwork. My discussions with Enon and Blerta, as well as the reactions from viewers, further illustrate the need for more research on questions of race and identity in post-

communist Tirana, particularly including forms of racial consciousness amongst Roms and Egyptians, the negotiation of racial categories, how people define race and racism, and Albanian migrant experiences in Greece and further abroad.

The television interview also allowed me to think further about my positionality and the use of personal racial encounters as means of methodological and theoretical inquiry. I argue that such encounters can reveal quite a bit about the ways people categorize others and the relationship between identity, geography, and body politics. This relationship is informative about the ways that diasporas are read, and the ways that belonging is socially constructed, and it highlights the ways that only certain bodies are allowed to embody the nation.

When defining race and racial categories, Michael Omi and Howard Winant offer the following: “Race is indeed a pre-eminently socio-historical concept. Racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded” (1986:5). Over the past ten years I often have thought about terms such as meaning, history, and context when considering my research, and particularly, the ways in which I include my own experiences of being racialized within my work. Enon, the show’s host, expressed a sentiment that I hear often, and that is that I cannot analyze experiences in Albania the same way that I would in the U.S., because there is a different history and context. I agree that history and context do differ, and are important, but I want to note that this does not erase meaning, nor does it mute the connectedness of global racial formations. As illustrated by the discussions of Romani, Egyptian, and Albanian relations, constructions of whiteness and blackness in Tirana are shaped by the production and reproduction of these categories across the European and global terrain. The woman on the airplane who exclaimed, “Nigger, nigger”! when she saw me and proceeded to pet me like an animal, her use of that word,

and her actions may not carry the same meaning as they would in another context, but they are very much shaped by global understandings of both whiteness and blackness.

Social processes of racialization occur globally, not solely in countries such as the United States and South Africa (Goldberg 2009; Lemon 2002; Pierre 2012). They have unique manifestations and registers in Albania, where the histories of Adolph Hitler and World War II as well as communist discourses of perceived “racelessness” directly shape post-communist newly aligned identities. In Albania these categories and racial projects (Omi & Winant 1986; Pierre 2012) manifest in social discourses about skin color, citizenship, nationalism, health and cleanliness, and the social organization of space. Scholars need to critically question the meanings of race and racialization in Southeastern Europe in order to better understand how race operates, mutates, and shapes livelihoods.

This dissertation maps and highlights various scenes of socioracial manifestations. These manifestations are precarious, kinetic, vulnerable, defensive, and reactive. They are composed of forms and affects that produce particular racial assemblages, and speak to global racial formations, emplacement, and cultural forms of belonging and difference. Racialization takes different forms everywhere, and yet is shaped by broader global identity formations and structures. I aim to think critically about the scenes and sites of racialization and identity formation entanglement; to explore the overlapping local and global racial formations that shape livelihoods in Tirana, Albania. Thinking through these specific socioracial manifestations allows for a broader understanding of marginality, inclusion, and exclusion. This type of ethnographic mapping requires a special attention to the cultural forms and modes of belonging, in this case Albanian belonging. These forms and modes impact and frame the ways that things happen. Given this, I explore certain modes, like that of curiosity, in order to ethnographically trace the emergent and embedded textures of racial belonging.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

I have conducted ethnographic research in Albania over a period of ten years. In this dissertation I mainly draw from research I carried out in 2011, and from 2013--2014, in Tirana, but I regularly draw from fieldwork experiences that have occurred in numerous areas of Albania throughout the past decade. My methodology primarily consists of participant-observation analysis, formal and informal interviews, focus groups, archival research, and a quantitative and qualitative survey. I refer to the survey data throughout the dissertation. Though I designed the written survey on race and belonging, a preliminary trial run revealed that many participants felt distracted by my physical presence, and some were curious about my involvement to the point that it caused a disruption in the survey process. Because of this, I decided to let my two research assistants (an Albanian and a white American fluent Albanian speaker) distribute the survey each time it was administered. Finally, I conducted participatory transect walks with my informants, a technique in which I systematically assessed areas and neighborhoods of Tirana (Bernard 2011). Tirana provides the ideal setting for this type of methodological inquiry, particularly for sections of this dissertation in which I critically engage the space of the road (more in Chapter Four).

Tirana serves as the primary fieldsite and backdrop for this dissertation. The capital city has expanded continually since 1991, and now has just over one million residents (about a third of the country's population) living within the greater area. Tirana has become increasingly compact, noisy, dense, and crowded. The city is constantly undergoing rebuilding and reconstruction. That urban renewal and the resulting changing landscape are woven into numerous aspects of the dissertation, as I map the sentiments of Albanians, Roms, and Egyptians scattered throughout Tirana and in its margins.

## FRICIONS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Though I maintain that this kind of ethnographic research is vastly layered and intricate, when many Albanians meet me for the first time and ask what exactly I *do* in Albania, they often assume that I use my research to determine the degree to which Albanians are racist, as is illustrated in the opening story. I once accompanied my friend Mira to work at one of the university campuses in Tirana. When one of her colleagues asked why I was in Tirana, I commented, “I study race, and belonging, specifically racialization processes in Tirana. He smirked at my response. “If this is your project,” he began, “then you have no research in Albania.”

I receive this type of response often, though I would also quickly add that I regularly receive comments about how much my research is needed, too. Still, many people in Tirana do not embrace research about race and belonging. Other responses to my research include:

“Albania is a small country and we are very homogenous.”

“We are friendly people, we welcome everyone. We are not racist—Albanians love foreigners.”

“We have been very isolated.”

“There is racism everywhere.”

My discussions of race and my research about race elicit a certain type of anxiety. There is an expression that circulates in Albania, one that says that the rest of the world, and especially Europe, *ka parë Shqipërinë me një sytë tjetër*, meaning that Europe and the rest of the world have “looked at Albania with a different eye.”<sup>8</sup> Though many of my

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<sup>8</sup>Also, see Sarah Green’s (2005) discussion of marginality along the Albanian-Greek border and her discussion of “Well this is the Balkans” and the notion of the Balkan region as the internalized other of Europe.

interlocutors frequently question the authenticity of my Westernness (as I am often perceived as *really* African rather than African-American<sup>9</sup>), my positionality as an American impacts the ways in which people receive and perceive my research, and it also shapes the fears of those who worry what my research will reveal about Albania, or how I will ultimately represent Albanian people. As an American researcher, I am constantly reminded that this power dynamic regularly shapes positionalities in the field where, among other things, the East-versus-West dichotomy has particular registers (Blumi 1998; Jezernik 2004; Neuburger 2004; Schwandner-Sievers 2004; Todorova 2009; Wolf 1996). In a time when many people in Albania desperately yearn for and seek European stamps of approval, are frustrated by and fed up with politicians, and harbor deep desires and longings for inclusion in the European Union, many people wonder why I would I try to mark or label Albanians in a particular way, especially as racist? This type of sentiment manifested both during the pre-television interview and during the live show. I revisit this tension throughout the dissertation as it can be productive for illuminating the ways that people understand race.

Many of my friends, interlocutors, and even representatives from the television show heavily scrutinize both my data collection processes as well as the data. The main problem seems to emerge from the fact that I am a Black woman trying to understand these racial phenomena, who at times relies on personal encounters to do so. The encounters are fraught with complexity and can be deeply ethnographic (Tsing 2005). I track such discourses and sentiments about my encounters in order to think more about the ways in which people negotiate local racial categories in Tirana.

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<sup>9</sup>I argue that the processes by which Albania (and the Balkan region at large) has been imagined as other can shed light on the ways in which Albanians have imagined the Westerner (Bakic-Hayden 1995).

At one point in time I considered many of my racial encounters and exchanges with interlocutors as interruptions in the data collection process, but I now argue that they are in fact key aspects of ethnographic research. Ethnographic research necessitates attentiveness to the relationship between the ethnographer, that is the ethnographic self, and her interlocutors (Abu-Lughod 1990; Berdahl 2010; Collins 2010; Ebron 2001; Visweswaran 1994). I argue that this relationship shapes processes of knowledge production as well as the circulation of that knowledge. As a Black American woman conducting research on the subject of race in a space often thought to be “raceless,”<sup>10</sup> many challenges arise as I try to negotiate my positionality, the role of the anthropologist, and the impact this anthropological research has on those around me. For one thing, many early mentors and other scholars pushed me to frame these exchanges through the language of identity and nationalism, without critically considering racialization. Other colleagues at times have instructed me not to give too much weight to racial encounters as they are *only* evidence of a backwards mentality, a residue of an intensive period of communist isolation. I argue, however, that these encounters and other moments of interaction and articulation can shed light on racial entanglements, and further, I desire to map such social registers of backwardness to analyze aspects of race and belonging.

As a part of my data collection process I highlight the ways in which my Black female body gets questioned, read, harassed, categorized, and labeled. Many of the experiences have been painful and at times difficult to name. My position as an anthropologist has often required a critical distancing that demands an immediate

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<sup>10</sup> I often receive a significant amount of pushback and criticism from interlocutors and other scholars who consider race as something with which Westerners, particularly Americans, deal. As such, the construction of race itself is just as important as understandings of race, racism, and racialization. I engage this question more fully in chapter one but for more on this, see Goldberg 2006, Law 2012, Lemon 2005, and Pierre 2013.

response of analytical explanation or questioning of these fieldwork incidents. For these reasons, this distancing has entailed periods of the repression or deferral of my emotional response. Black feminist anthropologists have long studied the frictions associated with the relationship between the ethnographer and her interlocutors (Brown 2005; Ebron 2001; Hurston 1990, Harrison 1991, Jacobs-Huey 2001). Paulla Ebron elucidates various ways to appreciate cultural tensions in the field, arguing that an autoethnographic approach must situate personal senses and memory of events alongside our analysis of sociocultural practices. Ebron argues that this type of analysis must include this intersection (2001:212). While my experience may not reflect a typical autoethnographic approach, I argue that this type of critical reflexive ethnography is important for thinking about methodological and theoretical inquiry, as well as how we communicate and share that situated knowledge (Haraway 1988; Hill Collins 1990).

A thorough understanding of the complexities underlying post-communist transformation necessitates a “theoretically grounded understanding of the system that has crumbled and ethnographic sensitivity to the particulars of what is emerging from its ruins” (Verdery 1996:10). I believe that such ethnographic sensitivity is also important when we study how people previously practiced and presently design and carryout anthropological methodologies. What I am implementing in my own research is not necessarily a traditional endeavor in autoethnography, but rather, an attempt to broaden the ways that anthropologists engage with anthropologic inquiry surrounding positionality, fieldwork encounters, the role of the anthropologist, and the ethnographic enterprise. Some might consider my presence in the dissertation as a form of navel gazing. I prefer to think about it as a way of recalibrating a reflexive ethnographic approach. Writing on this subject, Jemima Pierre notes:

The affirmation of personal narrative and experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge and the recognition that positionality (i.e., ‘standpoint’) is an important aspect of all knowledge production have endowed us with key theoretical and methodological insights. Further, the possibilities available for the insertion of the racialized female at the center of both research and analysis have opened up a space for nuanced critiques and innovative praxis. (2008:128)

My research in Albania connects theoretical analysis with stories, happenings, and ethnographic encounters in order to enter these spaces of nuance and innovation. This dissertation is about an engagement with racialization and belonging, but it is also about the practices of ethnography, and how the sites of ethnographic encounters serve as key facets in the theoretical and analytic research framework.

#### **DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION**

Chapter One provides a broad theoretical overview of the dissertation and its key concepts. Here I explain my focus on racialization as the object of analysis, rather than racism, though these concepts are interconnected. I take a close look at the intersections of race and nation, and highlight other concepts tied to identity formation, particularly in Eastern Europe and post-communist contexts. I engage multiple scholars on these subjects in an effort to situate my research within broader conversations. I then explore the connections between race and belonging, ultimately posing a question of what it means to map forms of racial belonging in marginal spaces. This chapter makes the case for ethnographically examining the registers of racial belonging rather than trying to explain the root causes of racism. At times these forms of racialization may seem to be natural or unchanging, and so I want to reiterate that these processes are “always ambiguous, shifting, and unstable” (El-Tayeb 2011: xiii).

Chapter Two provides a different way of engaging with ethnography and the ethnographic voice. This is a chapter told in five acts. I frame the included ethnographic stories as a collective that explores affective forms of racial belonging, and particularly,

takes a look at the *longing* of racial belonging. A significant section of this chapter examines the often-articulated sentiment that the Greeks are the ones that are *really* racist. I rely on data from focus groups with Albanian migrants recently returned from Greece to probe issues of racialization and belonging. Among other things, I use this chapter to query whiteness, communist nostalgia, longing from the margins, and ultimately, I try to unpack fragments and affects of belonging.

Chapter Three primarily focuses on the Egyptian community of Tirana and the construction of the category of *dorë e zezë* ('blackness'). I trace the emergence of this racial category and explore what it means to be 'black' and assert this identity. The assertion of black identity is fraught with complexity and contestation. Often lumped under the category of Rom or Romani, the Egyptians of Tirana assert an African origin and identity, and regularly reject the idea that they are Romani. Numerous Romani scholars and community leaders (Duijizing 2000; Vesselin and Popov 2013), however, argue that the self-identifying Egyptians are Romani separatists who choose not to identify as such and no longer speak the Romani language. At the same time, many of these distinctions are blurred under the category of *dorë e zezë* ('black'), that both Roms and Egyptians use to identify themselves. This chapter is not an historical explanation of Egyptian social and geographical origins as much as it is an examination of what makes the category of *dorë e zezë* possible and how sentiments of blackness emerge in articulations of racial belonging.

In this chapter, along with Chapter Four, I talk at-length about blackness. When the television producers racialized the Romani woman who spoke about black and white groups in Albania, I began to think more about the ways in which individuals are categorized, and often slip in and out of these categories. During one of my own encounters I was walking home when a group of teenagers approached me and began

calling me *gabel*, a local pejorative for Roms. While I had previously engaged in discussions of blackness, as well as talks about the global connections between Romani and African peoples, this was the first time I had been labeled *gabel*. When I told the young men that I was not Romani, one of them said, “No, you blacks are all the same, you are all *gabel*.” Encounters like this one, and the previously mentioned moments of racialization that occurred during the television show, allow me to think more critically about when and how racialization happens, especially around the racial formations of blackness. Furthermore, these encounters force me to consider forms of articulation, of street talk, and the ways that people name individuals and spaces. All of these moments are valuable ethnographic indexes of how the meanings of race are shaped and transformed.

I extend conversations from the third chapter in Chapter Four, and take a closer look at the intersections of race, space, and place. In this chapter I explore the racialization of space and the spatialization of race (Lipsitz 2007) through an examination of three specific sites including the Romani and Egyptian neighborhood of Shkozë, the site of the boulevard, and the body as a site of ethnographic analysis. I study the ways that the body (including my own) is imagined, marked, interrogated, and inhabits space. This provides a window into the ways that racialization works, and how blackness is read and understood. This chapter introduces two concepts for understanding racial belonging: the concept of *zor* (‘difficulty’) and a form of temporality that I conceptualize as lingering. I engage these two concepts to consider how those who are racialized as black develop their spatial imaginaries and how these spaces shape their everyday lived experiences in marginal places.

The Conclusion in many ways poses more questions than answers. In an effort to thread the overall theoretical and ethnographic conversations, this section includes brief

final thoughts on racial belonging and the notion of European futures. In the wake of the recent *Brexit*, and ongoing discussions of migration, resettlement, and dislocation, there is an urgent need for more attention to matters of race, identity, and marginality. I use the final passages of the dissertation to write about what it means to map these registers through ethnographic stories, and suggest how this research on Albania can speak to broader issues.

I want to note that in this dissertation I do not so much look at questions of Romani social adaptations,<sup>11</sup> but rather I take race and belonging as objects of analysis in this particular Tirana landscape. This is not a study of Romani culture or Romani history, though I would argue that Romani and Egyptian communities are part of the primary focus. I do not use terms such as *Rom* or *Gypsy* to refer to a nomadic lifestyle or an imagined way of life, but rather as assertions of particular ethnic and racial formations, specifically as they are manifested in Albania.<sup>12</sup> While Chapter Three features a more detailed overview of terminology and categories of Romani, Egyptian, and Gypsy identities, I want to note that this dissertation primarily speaks to communities that have been settled in Albania for quite some time. Marushiakova and Popov note that communist policies toward gypsy groups were very similar and “relatively coordinated,” arguing that this can best be seen through what they call “enforced settlement or compulsory sedentarisation” (2001b: 46). Such policies are important for understanding the livelihoods of Roms and Egyptians in present-day Tirana, particularly when examining issues of housing, belonging, and discrimination, which I address throughout the dissertation.

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<sup>11</sup> For more on this see Stewart 2013.

<sup>12</sup> For more on this see Hancock 2010.

## **ETHNOGRAPHIC AND STORYTELLING FRAMEWORK**

Woven in between chapters throughout the dissertation, I have included sections that I refer to as *Dissertation Interludes*. The interludes are key aspects of cultural analysis. They serve to illustrate the ways that social and aesthetic registers of race and belonging are enacted. I use them to speak about the gaps that arise between the language of racialization and racism, and the language of understanding Albanian belonging. The storytelling in the interludes plays an important part of my ethnographic methodology by allowing me to get at the ways that race, place, and belonging intersect, and speak to the tensions surrounding the ethnographic study of these social phenomena. These interludes draw on experiences and encounters from fieldwork that are connected to larger themes and threads of the chapters. At times they are long; other times they are short. Like the interludes of a musical album, these passages provoke, provide pause, and make one think more critically about the ethnographic writing process.

These ideas of race and belonging are extremely complex. In this dissertation I examine many types of configurations, such as the configuration of the body as a sociopolitical and analytical site, or the local configuration of categories such as white and black. I also explore the meaning of these configurations in this contemporary post-communist moment, a moment rife with intensities and charged identity issues around belonging and marginalization. I grapple with the particular history of Albania and the complex ways of being as they manifest in the present moment.

This contemporary moment that is very frictional. It speaks to location, relocation, and dislocation. I explore the forms of dislocation as they emerge and manifest in Tirana, particularly through what I am calling a slowed ethnography of the everyday, a method that tries to capture the textures of the ethnographic present. There are many configurations and reconfigurations here that are not always legible but with this type of

methodological approach, any my version of an anthropological “spy-glass” (Hurstun 1935), I seek to adjust the academic lens to better understand the particularities of racialization and belonging in Albania.

The interludes are a primary component of my methodology. I use them throughout the dissertation to grapple with tensions. Through the use of interludes, the reader is forced to experience modes of racial belonging that are not immediately legible. This is one method for reiterating the density and complexity of racial belonging. In some ways the interludes and stories may seem unfinished but rather than emphasize partiality, I want to draw attention to the active happening, questioning, and processing. This method of writing is designed to open more thought about the registers of racial belonging. Racial belonging is multilayered and I use ethnography as both a research and a writing method to unfold these layers.

The slowed ethnography allows me to delve into the intricacies of the contemporary moment and how it is lived out. This methodological attunement illuminates the cultural forms, practices, and subtleties that constitute identity formation. Identity politics and narratives of difference and xenophobia are not new to this Balkan region but I am arguing for an attenuated ethnographic lens that examines racializations in a particular way. The research here presents entangled sets of registers that call attention to various openings and closings. The vignettes and interludes allow me to slow the ethnography in order to interrogate this multiplicity of registers. I envision this study as a critical exploration of racial belonging in the Balkan region and what it means to map sites and processes of identity formation in this contemporary post-communist moment.

## Interlude: The Hunger Games

### A PARTY WITH PAVLI'S FAMILY

Pavli called me on a Monday to let me know that he wanted to invite me to Shkodra that following Thursday. His brother's daughter, his niece, was celebrating her first birthday, and the family wanted me to attend the party. I thanked Pavli for his invitation and gladly accepted, letting him know that I would be on the first *furgon*<sup>13</sup> to Shkodra. On Thursday morning I caught my regular red *furgon* to the northern city, the one with the nice driver whom I have never witnessed sipping *raki*<sup>14</sup> between shifts.

When we arrived in Shkodra, Pavli was waiting for me near the Rozafa hotel in the center of town. He smiled a big grin, revealing his missing front teeth. "O Chels!" he yelled. We exchanged the typical greetings and I laughed to myself as I always do, because for the first two summers that I knew him, I only understood a few words in Albanian and he knew no English. Back then we always relied on the same exchange every day:

Pavli: *Chels, u lodhe?* (Chelsi, are you tired?)

Chelsi: *Jo, unë mirë* (No, I am fine.)

Pavli: *Sot është mirë. Dielli mirë.* (Today is nice. The sun is good.)

Chelsi: *Shumë mirë* (Very good.)

We walked towards the boulevard and caught the orange bus headed to the other side of town. Pavli always acts like a father figure around me: he is very protective and attentive. He made sure that I got a seat on the bus and stood guard over me the entire ride to his house. His wife Violeta was waiting for us at the door when we arrived at his house. She kissed me four times and shed a few tears. Their daughter came running

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<sup>13</sup>A *furgon* is an Albanian mini-bus or mini-van often used for travel between small cities throughout the country.

<sup>14</sup>*Raki* is an alcoholic beverage, usually clear, and made from grapes, mulberries, or plums (among other fruit and nut varieties).

around the corner to say hello and welcome me back to Shkodra. I sat down inside of their living room and Violeta offered me an *Ivi Soda* and a bag of *7 Days Baked Rolls*. I began to slowly eat as Pavli made a phone call and the women asked about my family back home. When Pavli hung up the phone he encouraged me to eat quickly as we needed to get ready to leave for the village. Soon a friend of Pavli's showed up with a car and we all huddled inside. We began the journey out of the city and to the village, in an area somewhere between Shkodra and Koplik.

When we got to Pavli's brother's house there were at least 20 other people already there. Pavli's relatives embraced one another as though it had been years since their last meeting, though I knew they all probably had visited one another at least once in the past month. I was introduced as Chelsi, their American friend who was visiting for a while. His family warmly welcomed me into their home and two of the young girls, both high-school age, shyly informed me that they had been studying English and wanted to practice a few words with me.

We congregated in the main room. The young baby smiled and giggled in her mother's lap. When someone made an announcement to gather around the table, I headed toward a seat near Pavli's daughter, but instead was ushered to the head of the table near Pavli's uncle, his father's brother, the oldest man at the lunch. I sat between him and his wife as he opened his second or third beer and lit a fresh cigarette. The uncle looked at me and asked, "Who are you with, Edi Rama or Sali Berisha?" He was referring to the two main candidates in the then upcoming election for prime minister. "Edi Rama," I proudly announced, and then the uncle's mouth dropped. "But why? You should be with us, with Sali Berisha!" he responded. "But Edi Rama came up with the idea to paint all of the apartment buildings and I love the colors in Tirana," I retorted, to which Pavli's uncle began to laugh hysterically, slapping me on the back as he roared. He and his wife were

both very tickled by my comments, though I honestly was not sure why. His uncle continued to talk about the elections and on several occasions professed his love for Sali Berisha, though in his heart, he confessed, he was truly a communist. My stomach rumbled numerous times and I kept looking up from the conversation at everyone else at the table but no one seemed to be eating yet. The table was set, complete with fresh salad, soup, olives, onions and pickles, bread, boiled eggs, freshly cut tomatoes with olive oil, and both green and purple cabbage. Soon one of the relatives entered the room with large plates of lamb and placed them in the middle of the table. The smell of the meat made my mouth salivate even more, but still no one started eating. Pavli's uncle, however, continued to talk and tell stories about the history of Albanian politics. And so I listened as he started on a new beer and cigarette.

Some minutes passed that seemed like hours. I looked up again to notice, though, that the room had gotten much quieter. Many of the relatives were staring at me while Pavli's uncle continued his chatter. I stopped responding to him and looked around the room as one of the young girls finally said to me, in English, "Excuse me, but can you start eating now because we are all ready to eat." I looked back somewhat confused, then quickly amused, as I realized that the entire time that I was talking with the uncle, who was still ranting about Enver Hoxha, they were waiting on me to start eating, as I was simultaneously waiting on them. I thought someone would have made a toast, said "*Ju bëftë mire,*" wished the baby another one hundred years, something, but no, they were waiting on me to eat. I then took my fork and went for the cabbage, at which point folks began to hurriedly pile food on their plates and eat too.

## LUNCH AT MRS. B'S HOUSE

Last week I went to my friend Mrs. B's house for lunch. We met more than seven years ago and began what were supposed to be Albanian cooking and language lessons. These "lessons" soon turned into once a week meetings where she would cook for me and I would eat. She liked to do all of the cooking. I often say that she is the best cook in Tirana—she really enjoys food and even talks to it, or about it, as she performs in the kitchen. Below is a typical exchange at Mrs. B's house:

We Albanians eat fruit after meals but Chelsi usually does not want it," Mrs. B says to her sister-in-law, Eli. We have just finished a midday lunch. I always tell her that I love fruit but when she fills me with *byrek*, peas, salad, soup, and peppers, I do not have any more room for fruit—I am stuffed. "But it is just fruit, it is not food," Mrs. B adds. A little while later she asks again if I want fruit. I tell her I will eat a cherry or two. She grabs both bowls and places them in front of us, as she begins to eat cherries and melon. As I figured, she really wants fruit but does not want to eat any if I am not going to do so as well. I start eating and remember how sweet and wonderful fresh cherries are in Albania. Sometimes she complains to people in front of me about how expensive fruit is and how far she has to walk to get the "good" fruit for me, and when I say, "But you did not have to do that," she always says, "No, I do it for you," and smiles. "But really, in God's name (*për Zotën*), this was expensive.

On one particular occasion when I arrived to Mrs. B's house for lunch, her niece Arta was at the house with her toddler son. I was at the house that day for lunch but Arta insisted that she only stopped by to say hello, and to bring her son over for a visit. As I sat down at the table, Mrs. B instructed Arta to join us. Arta said that she was not hungry. At that point, the hunger games ensued.

Mrs. B: Arta, *hajde* ('come')! Come to the table.

Arta: No, *halla* ('auntie'), I do not want anything. I am not hungry. We already ate.

Mrs. B: Please do not be ashamed. Come get food.

Arta: No, I swear to God, I have eaten already.

Mrs. B: We have lots of food. Look at all this food.

Arta: No, in God's name, I have eaten. I ate at home.

Mrs. B: God will give us more food, please, come and eat.

Arta: No, thank you, my son and I both already ate just now at my mom's house.

At that point, Mrs. B sat down and passed me the soup. She said to me, "*Ju beftë mirë*" ("may the food make you well") and we began eating. I find myself playing this game often when visiting someone's home, but I was surprised at the display that unfolded before me that day. I have learned that when someone involves God and says something like, "For God's sake, I have eaten," usually people back off with their demands. Over the years I have tried to figure out how to play this game better, how to both extend gratitude for someone's hospitality and kindness and also genuinely and respectfully convey when I am full or not hungry. When I turn down food at my friend Mira's house, for example, her mother frequently tells me not to be ashamed, or not to be anxious around them, that I can feel free to eat anything I want at their house. I always respond that I do feel free, truly, but that I am not always hungry every single time she sees me. This friend's mom has known me almost eight years and she still does not believe me. She is really good at playing the hunger games.

Mrs. B and I kept eating. After we finished the soup, we started with the salad.

Mrs. B: Arta, please, for God's sake, have some salad.

Arta: No, no, I do not want any.

Mrs. B: Look at how beautiful this salad is, how fresh these tomatoes are. And I picked out this lettuce that is very special. I washed all the pieces carefully. Please have some.

Arta: No, thank you *halla*. I already ate. We ate at my mother's right before we came here.

Mrs. B: But your son, does he not want to eat?

Arta: (looking at her son): Are you hungry?

Toddler: No.

Mrs. B looked away, feeling rather dejected about Arta's refusal to eat. She started telling me stories about World War II, and about the German invasion of Albania. She recounted memories of her childhood, of communist Albania, and stories about her husband, our typical conversation topics. We began eating the stuffed peppers.

Mrs. B: Arta, look how beautiful these peppers are. They are so delicious. (She looked to me to help convince Arta to eat. I intentionally looked away trying not to get involved).

Arta: Yes, I see, but I promise, I am not hungry.

Mrs. B: Do not promise in vain, there is no reason for that.

Arta: I already ate.

Mrs. B: If you do not want this, I can make some pasta. How about some spaghetti? Or some potatoes? I can make potatoes.

Arta: No, I do not want any but thank you. Do not tire yourself. I am fine.

Mrs. B: But what about this meat? I got this from the butcher and he is the best butcher in Tirana. It is so good and tender.

Arta: No really, I am fine.

Shortly after this exchange we finished our meal. Arta's son was running around and playing on the house phone while we discussed a recent news story out of Durrës. At this point Mrs. B asked me if I wanted mountain tea. I told her that I did. She then looked to Arta.

Mrs. B: Arta, do you want tea?

Arta: *Mirë* ('good').

Mrs. B: *Shyqyr!* ('Thank God!'). What about a mandarin, do you want some fruit?

Arta: No, I do not.

Mrs. B: What about him (motioning to Arta's son), does he want any?

Toddler: (reaches out hand for mandarin)

Mrs. B: *Shyqyr!*

### **FLORA'S BIRTHDAY DINNER**

One day during one of our many conversations along the Boulevard, Flora invited me to her house for dinner. "My birthday is coming up soon," she said, "And we want you to come to our house for dinner. My husband wants to meet you, too." I was taken aback by her invitation because up until this point we only ever talked in the road or at a nearby coffee shop. I was also surprised because when I first met Flora's and Albi's families and inquired about where they lived, the conversation stalled and no one wanted to talk about their residences. This happened often during initial conversations with

Romani and Egyptian families. I told Flora that I would be happy to come over and I marked the date in my calendar.

On the night of her birthday I met Flora around half past seven as the sun was just starting to set. She packed up her youngest daughter's stroller and we headed for the bus, her five-year-old daughter leading the way. Flora excitedly chatted about the bottle of red wine her husband was going to purchase, and asked me what I drank. I tried to convince her that water would be fine because I cannot drink red wine (they cause me to have migraines) and she began to list every other drink in the world, insisting that I would not come to her house and only drink water. This debate continued even on the bus. We got off of the bus at the last stop and walked to the small *dyqan* ('store') near her house to buy a drink for me. I told Flora that any type of cola would be fine but she also purchased a *Pit Bull* drink and a beer. I saw her have a quick and hushed conversation with the saleswoman, and then we made our way out of the store. As we walked away she informed me that the owner lets her run a tab from time to time, and when her husband has a good day collecting or when they get a good amount of money from street begging, they pay off their debt. I really wished she had not gone out of her way to get me a drink, and I further wished that I had purchased a beverage to bring to the dinner instead of the small cake that was in my backpack.

We got to Flora's house and she showed me into a room that served as the sitting space, as well as living room and semi-kitchen. The family had a small refrigerator but no oven or stove. Her husband was on the balcony cooking on a portable gas kettle that he had borrowed from a neighbor. Flora poured herself a glass of wine and made me drink *Pit Bull*, which I found even more unflattering than *Red Bull*, but I was determined to

finish all of it. Flora inspected her birthday cake as phone calls rang in to wish her “*edhe nje qind*”<sup>15</sup>. The kids ran in and out of the room, taking off their clothes and putting things in their mouths. The small wooden table in front of us was decorated with what looked like a handmade quilt. After a few minutes Flora’s sister-in-law and two nieces arrived carrying three more large bottles of *Pit Bull*. We toasted Flora, wishing her long life and health. Beni, Flora’s toddler son, could barely pronounce *gëzuar* (‘cheers’) but this did not stop him and his sister from making a thousand cheers as they clang their plastic cups together. He kept bringing his little pink plastic cup over to touch mine, something like, “guzu” coming out of his mouth each time. Every now and then a little of the *Pit Bull* would spill out of his cup, most of it ending up on his face and shirt.

Flora’s husband made delicious chicken and lemon skewers along with *qoftë* (meatballs), potatoes, salad, and cheese. As he brought it to the table, his sister immediately stood up and refused the food she was offered. She seemed insulted by the idea that her brother invited her to join us for dinner. She and the nieces all turned away from the food and swore to God that they did not need any food. The husband and his sister exchanged more words, their voices getting increasingly louder. Flora said, “*Ju bëftë mirë*,” and encouraged me to start eating. As we ate with the kids, her husband became frustrated as he begged his sister to join us. Flora’s oldest daughter was already on her second skewer and her son yelled, “More meat, more!” As I ate my salad I heard her husband say once again to his sister, “Please eat, do not have any shame.” For some reason, even though I was sure he had already said this once, she and her daughters sat down and ate. They began by eating slowly but soon were practically devouring their

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<sup>15</sup>Meaning, “And another one hundred!” This is a common birthday expression.

meals, which indicated to me that they were definitely hungry. One of the nieces later confessed that they had not eaten much at all that entire day.

### **MIRA'S HOUSE**

I go to Mira's house almost every day. She was one of my first friends in Albania, and we have known each other over eight years now. One evening, while we were watching our favorite Turkish soap opera, her mother came home and asked what Mira had served me to eat. She told her mom that we had not eaten anything, and that we just watched television. "I asked Chelsi if she wanted anything to eat and she said that she was not hungry," which Mira said. In response to that Mira's mom asked, "What is wrong with you? How can you do something like that, letting her come over and not giving her any food?" She stuck her head in the refrigerator and began taking out food. "Oh I am not hungry," I began as she interrupted me and said, "Do not worry, you are not a guest here, this is your home... eat as you like." She has said this for almost eight years now. "Yes," I began, "really, I just ate a while ago. I am not ...". She cut me off. "*Mos vij në siklet*" ('Do not get embarrassed'). "Here, eat something. You are at home."

### **A VISIT TO AFËRDITA'S HOUSE**

Afërdita (Dita) was not home when I arrived but Zamira was inside, along with Dita's youngest daughter. Zamira informed me that Dita would be home soon, and told me not to worry (*mos u merzit*), to just sit down and wait for her to return. I told her that was fine and found an empty stool against a makeshift wall inside their tent. I talked with Dita's daughter about her day and whether she had learned any new songs (she enjoyed singing). Zamira stopped what she was doing and came closer to me in the barrack. "*Për Zotën*," she began, "*ne nuk e kemi kafe sot*" ("I swear to God that we do not have any coffee today). She then lowered her face. I tried to assure her that it was okay, that in fact

I had already had several coffees that day, which was true, but she did not accept my words, and instead quickly threw them back at me as she went about her household chores. We all sat in silence until Dita arrived.

## Chapter One. Mapping Racialization and Belonging

A 2013 *Washington Post* story features a map of the world's most and least racially tolerant countries based upon findings from the World Values Survey Data (2006-2010), and labels Albania as the most racially intolerant country in Europe (Fisher 2013). The data on racial tolerance derives from answers to the following question: "Whom would you *least* likely want as a neighbor?" More respondents in Albania selected "people of another race" than did those of any other country in Europe (Fisher 2013). After reading this news story I immediately pondered whether Albanians were more honest or truthful than other individuals that were surveyed. I also questioned the ability to gauge a level of racism or tolerance based on the answers to a single question. Beyond these thoughts, however, I considered how the word race signifies, and the ways that various people in Albania define and employ the term. My experience on *Wake Up Tirana* sheds light on the myriad ways that people articulate what it means to be racist, but how is race constructed and formulated? How does it transform? How does it take shape? I want to call attention to processes of racialization.

Ethnographic research reveals that interlocutors in Albania use the term *racë/raca* (race) to talk about numerous things, including origin, descent, blood, nation, phenotype, color, body build and shape, geography, and kin ('*fis*'). The language of race is employed to articulate discrimination, societal divisions, such relations as Albanian-Greek and Albanian-Serb. Roms and Egyptians regularly utilize the language of race and racism to talk about marginalization, displacement, and injustice. When I have conversations about inequality with Roms and Egyptians, many of them highlight the things that whites (white Albanians or *dorë e bardhë*) have, such as housing, jobs, more money, regular access to healthcare, that blacks (Roms and Egyptians or *dorë e zezë*) do not have. Other

issues include criminality and xenophobia that interlocutors connect with phenotype or the ways they think that they are phenotypically perceived. I want to probe this type of discourse to highlight the ways that people understand and articulate race and belonging.

In one of the questions in my survey that measures the conceptualization of the word *Albanian*, I ask whether the term *Albanian* could refer to an individual's racial and also national identity. Sixty-one percent of respondents said "no" while the remaining 39 percent said "yes". In a different question, I ask if Albanians and Greeks are members of the same race, and that question elicited a significant amount of participant anxiety every time the survey was conducted. Approximately 45 percent of respondents indicated that they felt that Albanians and Greeks are not members of the same race, whereas 55 percent of respondents felt that they are. When juxtaposing the results of these two questions, the data indicate that for almost a quarter of all survey respondents, the term *Albanian cannot* refer to both nation and race, but that Albanians and Greeks are *not* members of the same race.

I will further address Albanian-Greek relations in the next chapter, and will return to data from these survey questions, but at this juncture, I share these results to highlight some of the tensions and complexities related to the term 'race'. I also share this data to shed light on intersections of race and nation. The discussion of race and racialization is intimately tied to the concept of nation. The term *Albanian* is loaded, and is used to reference both race and nation. There are those who understand *Albanian* to encompass Albanians, Roms, Egyptians, Greeks, and all those that reside within the geopolitical nation-state of Albania, as well as those Albanians who reside outside of Albania, such as in Kosovë and Macedonia. There are others who understand the term to apply to those who have been traditionally referred to as "ethnic Albanians," and not to include Roms, Egyptians, Greeks, or any other group residing within the geopolitical territory of

Albania, but inclusive still of those Albanians in Kosovë and Macedonia. There are others who refer to Albanians in Albania as those with white skin but not those with darker skin, i.e., Roms and Egyptians. To provide another example, 2011 was the first time that the national Albanian census included the opportunity for respondents to list voluntarily both their nationality and ethnic identification, and that led to numerous outcries, and to various organizations even denouncing the census. Right-winged groups feared that the census results would artificially increase the size of the Greek minority, whereas the Greek minority in Southern Albania feared that this type of question would minimize the real size of the Greek community and thus weaken their political mobility (Likmeta 2011). The results of that census data reveal that there are many people who identify with multiple identities, so for example, they may feel they are both Albanian and Greek, or Albanian and Romani, not unlike an individual in the U.S. who might identify as both Black and American. As such, when I use the term *Albanian* in this dissertation, it can refer to nationality, citizenship, and also race, as I will further reveal in the following chapters.

Returning to the question of race: just how important are race and racial discourse in terms of articulating identity and belonging in Albania? My research over the past several years indicates that racial formations are increasingly salient, particularly in Tirana, where these negotiations are fraught with tensions that play out through inherited and newly constructed narratives of belonging and non-belonging. What can ethnography in the margins of Europe tell us about processes of racialization and their significance in constructing identities in Albania? What can this type of racial analysis tell us about the ways that belonging is constructed? What implications does this research have for broader questions of social inclusion and exclusion in Europe? I argue that processes of racialization are significant to everyday livelihoods in Albania, but the ways in which

race is significant, how racialization emerges, and the ways in which people understand and negotiate racial categories, have been left out of the larger discussion about identity in the Balkans. The conversations surrounding race, belonging, and identity are deeply imbricated, and in particular, for many Roms and Egyptians, the language of race and racism has become increasingly meaningful in articulating identity and also naming discrimination and exclusion in Albania. These sentiments of race and belonging involve attachments, frictions, and fragmented affects. In this chapter I review theoretical literature on the concepts of race, racialization, and belonging. I have argued that numerous researchers have addressed the subjects of nationalism, identity, and ethnicity in the Balkans, but very few have shed light on racialization and racial formations. In this chapter I will analyze briefly the concept of race, but more importantly, I will make the case for a closer ethnographic examination of racialization. More than a discuss what a race or nation is, in this chapter I look at the ways that race works and how individuals articulate newly emergent and newly aligned racial identities.

In my discussion of racialization in Albania, I draw attention to the intimacies of race and nation in order to analyze the ways in which the constructs of the nation are racialized. I make the case for why I want to study racialization, and then I review literature by scholars on race in Europe and race in formerly communist spaces. We know from Omi and Winant that “racial categories and the meaning of race are given concrete expression by the specific social relations and historical context in which they are embedded” (1994:3-4). This context is important for understanding the ethnographic landscape, and allows me to better connect racialization to notions of belonging and marginality, ultimately making the case for studying the processes of racial belonging. This dissertation sheds light on the ways that race emerges as a site of identity formation, thereby producing racialized identities (Pierre 2012). In this chapter, and those that

follow, I map these sites in order to draw attention to the ways that racialization happens. In doing so, I am able to consider the ways that these processes of racialization marginalize groups and shape spaces of belonging and non-belonging.

Certain key terms (racialization, belonging, marginalization) will emerge and reemerge throughout the dissertation. I connect this research to broader literature, recognizing that studies of race, identity, and belonging are lofty. It is not possible to address every aspect of these discussions here, and for this reason I try to focus my attention on select key areas. A significant amount of anthropological, historical, and cultural studies scholarship in the Balkans has focused on the nation and ethnicity, particularly critical engagements with ethnicity (Blumi 1998; Brubaker et.al. 2006; Engebrigsten 2007; Mandel 2008; Stewart 2013; Zarkov 2007), but very few have approached race and racialization. The discussion of race and ethnicity is complex, but I do not significantly engage the concept of ethnicity in this dissertation. One of the primary reasons for my focus on racialization as an analytic lens is tied to my earlier point about the type of language that my interlocutors use—it is the language of race.

Though many scholars have written at length about the differences between race and ethnicity (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Brubaker 2009; Cornell and Hartmann 2007), one of the key things that I highlight is hierarchy, and the processes of exclusion that are tied to ideas of race (Pierre 2012). Writing about the differences between ethnicity and race, Cornell and Hartmann define ethnicity as “a relational construct used to distinguish one group from another on the assumption that one group shares something that the other does not” (2007:20), and race as a “human group defined by itself or others as distinct by virtue of perceived common physical characteristics that are held to be inherent” (2007:25). Racial grouping at times manifests in Albania through the categorization of skin color along the lines of whiteness and blackness, though racialization takes multiple

forms. There are other bodily characteristics, and also notions of ‘mentality’, tied to the concept of race. One of my key interlocutors, Mrs. B, regularly comments on what she refers to as an “Albanian mentality.” She often remarks that Albanians “*kemi koken tone*,” which can be translated as “We have our own head.” She uses this expression whenever she watches the news, and attributes both local and national dilemmas to this distinct Albanian mentality or mindset, one that, from her perspective, is drastically different from the mindsets of people from rest of Europe. These articulations of an Albanian mentality are made often, and this mentality is frequently seen as detrimental to national prosperity and wellbeing. There are also ideas of a Balkan mentality, a mentality that is seen as a stronghold unique to the Balkan region. At times this mentality is also framed with biological rhetoric, like an inherited mentality, yet at other times, it is seen as the fault of other groups like the Ottoman Turks who, “Ruined Albania with 500 years of rule”, as Mrs. B says.<sup>16</sup>

These are just some of the numerous attributes and meanings associated with race. I argue that ethnicity, and ideas of ethnic groups, ethnic categories, and ethnic conflict (a loaded term in the Balkans) are a part of the racial belonging entanglement, though it also seems that many scholars may use ‘ethnicity’ as a euphemism for ‘race’ (Pierre 2002). There has been quite a bit of research on ethnicity in the Balkans, but this emphasis on ethnicity has not addressed race, racism, or their persistent impact on individuals and communities (Harrison 1995). I argue that there is quite a bit of overlap with the

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<sup>16</sup> I should note that this Balkan mentality that I discuss here is different from the notion of Balkanism (Todorova 2009), though the two are connected. In this instance, I am not referring as much to the ways that the Balkans are depicted or imagined by others, as much as I am highlighting the ways that people in Albania and the Balkans talk about a certain type of mentality. I do argue, though, that of course forms of Balkanism and Orientalism (Said 1978) shape understandings and framings of these mentalities, even though Todorova maintains that Balkanism is not tied to postcolonialism. For more on this discussion see her text, *Imagining the Balkans* (2009). For more on this discussion of mentality, see chapter two of this dissertation and also Sarah Green’s *Notes from the Balkans* (2005).

terminology. I use racialization as a process to think more critically about categorization, identification, typing, rigidity, flexibility, exclusion, and inclusion. Ultimately, I envision this dissertation as a way to understand what an ethnographic study of Albania can illuminate about racialization and not just as a means of porting racialization theory to understand Albania. I argue that the case of Albania can be used to better understand race in Europe, and the ways that whiteness and blackness are constructed and construct one another.

Part of the endeavor to explore racial entanglement requires a mapping of particular sites of race. Chapter Four features at-length explorations of sites in Tirana, but it is important to consider the site of Europe, and the larger European context of colonialism, hierarchy, and expansion (Cornell and Hartmann 2007; Omi and Winant 1994; Pierre 2012). This is critical for understanding sentiments of race and belonging that emerge from Roms and Egyptians, migrants and refugees, as well as the language employed by Albanians to articulate discrimination and exclusion they feel from other Europeans. Later in this chapter, I consider Goldberg's idea of racial regionalism (2006) to further situate this European context.

In this chapter I bring racialization, belonging, and marginalization into one conversation. I do engage racism and other --isms but to the extent that they are tied to racialization. One helpful frame for thinking through these varied and overlapping processes is that of Achille Mbembe's conceptualization of entanglement, which he defines as, "Multiple temporalities overlapping and superseding each other, sometimes inside each other...the postcolony is definitely an era of dispersed entanglements" (2001). Though Mbembe's research focuses specifically on postcolonialism, I think that this concept of entanglement is helpful for highlighting the overlaps, frictions, and tensions embedded within the socioracial processes of identity formation in the post-

communist period. John Hartigan writes that whiteness and blackness are “constantly entangled registers” (2005:203). This dissertation is an ethnographic investigation of these junctures of entanglement. Though racialization and racism are connected, I argue that racialization has to be approached apart from racism to better understand how racialized identities are produced, and how they operate in everyday life. Through the use of ethnography that prioritizes the slow and the emergent, we can better understand how categories are formed and deployed, and how places are marked and marginalized.

While I do focus on racialization, much of the ethnographic data is related to significant conversations, interviews, and eruptive encounters about racism, whether they are vehement denials of racism, passionate accusations of racism, or very zealous naming of *true* or *real* racism. “I will tell you who the real racists are,” or “No, the true racism stems from ...” are commonly used to begin narratives about what and where racism *really* is. These types of sentiments are very much connected to the larger study of racialization and belonging, and I argue, are important for understanding the dynamics of racial formation.

## **WHY RACIALIZATION**

Racialization processes shed light on the emergence, maintenance, and negotiation of racial categories and meanings. I choose to use the analytic lens of racialization to better understand social processes, rather than try to frame my study so that it pits one racial group against another. In this dissertation I focus on the notion of self-making and how people self-identify and respond to the ways in which they are racialized. I try to link these processes of self-making to historical racialization processes and broader global structures of race and racialization. Questions that I ask include: What is the language that people are using in their everyday lives to talk about identity politics?

How do people frame understandings of inequality and marginalization? Oftentimes people employ discourses of race and racial categories to do so, and this is what compels me to want to study to a further extent the processes of racialization that shape spaces of belonging and non-belonging. My use of racialization is informed by Cornell and Hartmann's approach in which they ask, "which certain bodily features or assumed biological characteristics are used to systemically mark certain persons for differential status or treatment" (2007:34), as well as Omi and Winant's understanding of the ways in which racial categories are, "created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (1994:55). Jemima Pierre's framing of racial formation, which engages the work of Omi and Winant (1994), shapes my theoretical approach. Pierre defines racial formation as:

A set of racialization processes—processes that give race its constant and shifting social, cultural, and political meaning and that determine how such meaning is deployed ideologically and through various practices and institutions. In addition, processes of racialization are multiple and entail the interplay of often contradictory 'racial projects,' each of which works to advance its own conceptions of race in contemporary society. In other words, 'racial projects' are the building blocks of racialization processes (racial formation) (2012:4-5).

The mapping of sites of racialization sheds light on those racial projects that shape the meanings of race in a society. Slowed and attenuated ethnographic examination allows scholars to understand how these sites and nodes of racialization are at work in the social landscape. In order to examine these processes, though, it is important to take a brief look at literature on the intersections of race and nation. I consider the ways that some scholars have approached this topic and then highlight studies of race and racialization in formerly communist spaces that are connected to broader discussions of race in Europe.

This chapter's ultimate goal is to bring racialization into conversation with belonging. Belonging, I argue, is generated by racial inequalities, and I chart the ways

that forms of belonging and non-belonging are articulated by Roms, Egyptians, and those racialized as white and black in Tirana. Thinking along these lines allows me to conceptualize a racial belonging. I want to note that the discussion of race in the Balkans and in Europe as a whole is intimately tied to discussions of whiteness. I will therefore also review literature tied to the constructions of whiteness and otherness. Moreover, as previously noted, in chapters two and three, I closely examine the ways in which this dissertation operationalizes terms such as white and black. This chapter features a discussion of marginality, and then ties that to a broader conversation about race, belonging, and place.

Though I maintain that these discussions of race and belonging are extremely complex and nuanced, I also argue that it is still important to consider forms of global racial formation and the constructions of white supremacy and anti-blackness that continually emerge in the social landscape (Harrison 1995; Pierre 2012; Burton 2015). Anthropologist Faye Harrison writes that, “Despite its uneven development and varying systemization, racism is characterized by an international hierarchy in which wealth, power, and advanced development are associated largely with whiteness or ‘honorary whiteness’” (1995:50). The concepts that I engage in this dissertation are messy, and not fixed. There are heterogeneous forms of whiteness and blackness, and ambiguities in-between but still, there are global forms of white supremacy and anti-blackness that manifest in local ways. I believe that one benefit of ethnography, particularly a type of slow ethnography, is that it can illuminate both racial formations and the ways that racialization unfolds, while still drawing attention to these larger social phenomena that continually produce and reproduce marginality and injustice. In this dissertation I try to parse this type of friction to better understand race and belonging.

## INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND NATION

This section is divided into two parts: in the first I provide a discussion of race and nation, as a kind of a backdrop for the chapter. In the second section I situate the analysis within both post-communist and European contexts. Though in this dissertation I examine particular identity and socioracial formations in Albania, my key interests are tied less to what a race or nation *is* and more to how nation and race *work* (Brubaker 2009).

There are numerous discussions of the nation and nationalism in the Balkans (including but not limited to Brubaker et. al. 2006; Glenny 1999; Lehmann 2001; Verdery 1993), but very few, if any, interrogate ideas about race. While I do not engage conceptual analyses of race and nation, I do examine how national identities and national belonging are defined and articulated within racial discourses. Race, nation, identity, and in this case I will include ethnicity, are not concepts that stand alone, apart from one another (Basch et. al. 1994; Brubaker 2009; Gilroy 1987; Harrison 1995; Simmons 2002). Anthropologist Kimberly Simmons has this to say on the matter: “Nationness is expressed along racial and national terms as lines are drawn and distinctions are made about a sense of belonging to a particular place or community within or across borders” (2002:18). This connection between nation, race, and belonging is important because it allows us to understand how these processes work. Emphasizing the point even more, Basch. et. al. write:

To talk about nation, therefore, is to talk about race. We are coming to understand that concepts of nation and race can be usefully understood to be two poles of a single historical discourse. If at its core the concept of nation is oppositional and hierarchical, the nation stands in opposition to those defined as biologically different only by envisioning the nation as composed of those who are biologically similar (1994:37).

Taking these two points together, we can see the ways that race and nation are overlapping and intersecting. Writing about Europe, particularly the United Kingdom, Paul Gilroy says, “the discourses of nation and people are saturated with racial connotations” (1987:56). Gilroy argues that the language of nation is “racialized to its core” (1987:68). When studying processes of identity formation in Albania, it is critical to assess the ways that this language of nation is racialized. Discussions of race often elicit understandings of phenotype, particularly forms of whiteness and blackness. But as I have stated earlier, racialization processes are not limited to differences in color, and the language of race, the discourses about those who are biologically similar and those who are biologically different, organize and shape everyday life in varied ways. Furthermore, notions of race and hierarchy shape constructions of the nation, which in turn mold spaces of inclusion and exclusion, that often render such groups as Roms and Egyptians in spaces outside of the sphere of belonging. As we can see with rising issues around refugees, migration, and what it means to define national belonging along racial lines, the continual study of race and nation will only aid in a better understanding of how these dynamics shape human interaction.

As previously stated, though I do not analyze the –isms (such as racism and nationalism) as much as I do the social processes of racialization, they are still connected to the larger conversation. Gilroy poses a stern critique of Benedict Anderson, who tries to distinguish racism from nationalism. Anderson writes:

The fact of the matter is that nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations . . . . The dreams of racism actually have their origins in the ideologies of class, rather than those of nation: above all in claims to divinity among rulers and to blue or white blood and breeding among aristocracies. No surprise then that . . . on the whole, racism and anti-semitism manifest themselves, not across national boundaries but within

them. In other words they justify not so much foreign wars as domestic repression and domination (1983:136).

Here we can see how Anderson is unable or unwilling to consider racism and nationalism as intersecting. According to Gilroy, Anderson maintains that in theory, anyone could learn the language of a nation and become a citizen under its laws, and this, Gilroy states, is wrong. Gilroy writes that “The politics of ‘race’... is fired by conceptions of national belonging and homogeneity which not only blur the distinction between ‘race’ and nation, but rely on that very ambiguity for their effect” (1987:45). Constructions of national belonging and homogeneity are racialized. Furthermore, Gilroy goes on to link discourses of patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, Britishness (which in this case, can be compared to Albanianess), militarism and gender difference. All of this gives race its complex meaning (Gilroy 1987; Nassef-Brown 1998). This excellent point sheds further light on the interconnectedness of race and nation, and the ways that processes of racialization directly shape expressions of nation and nationalism.

Gilroy notes that forms of racism are concerned with “mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, [specifying] who may legitimately belong to the national community” (1987:45). This legitimacy manifests in multiple forms, emerging in racialized discourses of belonging. This calls attention to the meanings of Albanianess, Europeaness, and the possibilities of these meanings, how they are produced and reproduced, and what it means to embody Albanianess or Europeaness. We can also understand how this type of racialization shapes the marginal and delegitimized spaces of belonging, and think more critically about the social reality of race.

The social realities of race have to be historically contextualized. Discussion of race and nation in Albania, and particularly in Europe, necessitates an engagement of the Holocaust, which shapes significant facets of the dialogue about racialization and

exclusion. Revisiting the above quote from Anderson (1983), and his attempt to separate nationalism and racism, it can be understood how he links racism and anti-Semitism. This link is important because it illuminates the ways in which conversations about race and racism in Europe are intimately tied to the historical moment of the Holocaust. However, analyses like Anderson's also reveal the ways in which racism in many parts of Europe is equated with anti-Semitism, and in many cases that renders Romani populations invisible (Hancock 1997; Law 2012), so that there is no way to talk about race and nation in Europe and Southeastern Europe without discussion of the Holocaust. Perceived notions of racelessness are directly shaped by the post-Holocaust moment in Europe, in which, for many, the war presumably eradicated racism in Europe. The Jewish Holocaust informs many understandings of race and racialization, and yet, there has often been a failure to recognize the Romani Holocaust, or *Pořjamos* ('the devouring'). This type of continual framing is related to the racial projects that have marginalized Romani and Egyptian populations, and makes it difficult to frame their experiences in Europe with the language of race and racialization. These aspects of racial formations are critical for examining the particular context of race in Albania and Europe.

Writing about Central and East European countries, Ian Law argues that in these spaces, anti-Semitism and racism were not necessarily tied to one another, but that during communism, racism was still shaped by the post-World War II moment. He says that,

Racism was not seen as encompassing anti-Semitism and with ethnic and racial identities being actively discouraged under communist rule, where there are no races, there can be no racism. Racism was a white/black issue that happened in the United States and South Africa not in CEE socialist countries (2012:39).

I now turn to literature about race and communism, as well as scholarship on race in a European context to examine processes of racialization in this particular Albanian and European setting further. In the next section I engage such scholars as Ian Law,

Alaina Lemon, and David Goldberg, who argues for a study of what he calls “racial regionalism” instead of racialization.

### **CONTEXTUALIZING RACIALIZATION**

As previously noted, racialization processes are my primary focus in this dissertation but my discussion of racism is intimately tied to racialization. Gilroy frames racism in this way: “Racism is not akin to a coat of paint on the external structures of social relations which can be scraped off if the right ideological tools and political elbow grease are conscientiously applied to the task” (1987:11). Racism is intricately embedded within social relations. Studies of global racisms help us to better understand the ways in which processes of racialization unfold and take shape. This is the case with Ian Law’s approach to mapping global racisms in formerly communist spaces. This type of critical analysis is rarely done in the East European, Eurasian, and Russian contexts, and it is key for understanding the roles of history and place in shaping the ways that racialization emerges. Law’s key concept is that of *red racisms*, which he defines as, “active state racism allied to communist ideologies” (2012:41). The ideologies and practices, he argues, are visible through the ways that certain groups were constructed as “backwards,” “exotic,” “oriental,” and “morally inferior” (2012:5). These identity constructions marked persons and bodies for (mis)treatment, including forced emancipation, forced evictions, and forced assimilation processes, all of which were tied to what Law calls the “socialist solution” (7).

Law writes extensively about Roms and Gypsies, whom he says were, and still are, seen as a “racial threat to national stability” (2012:38). He writes: “After the Second World War socialist governments in CEE engaged in a concerted and culturally repressive effort to assimilate and settle the Roma populations. The target was to

gradually eliminate national differences, but actually this meant the elimination of ethnic minorities (i.e. their forced assimilation)” (*ibid*). In this dissertation I take a careful look at the ways in which Roms and Egyptians have become a racial threat and nuisance in Albania. This is visible through the policing of their bodies, the spatial configuration of their communities and camps, forced evictions, and the demolition of their neighborhoods, all of which are discussed more in the subsequent chapters.

Law uses the example of gypsy groups (broadly defined) in the Czech Republic to discuss state responses to what he terms the “Gypsy problem” (2012). Law writes that “The ‘Gypsy problem’ was regarded mainly as a social and economic one. Roma (*sic*) were perceived as victims of the capitalist class system, and a simple solution was designed with the aims of removing poverty and providing employment for Roma” (2012:44). These types of policies that could address perceived Gypsy “backwardness” (*ibid*) were presumed to be the socialist cure for inequality and disparity. Though communist state policies towards Roms and Gypsies were similar in some ways, there was much variation and no singular state response (Marushiakova and Popov 2006). There has not been much research in Albania on specific state policies though there is some limited literature about the regime’s attitude towards Roms and Egyptians, and the various types of activities that were permitted. I discuss these elements, as well as present-day sentiments and remembrances of the communist regime, particularly the ways in which attitudes about the regime and race emerge in everyday conversation. For example, Albana, one of the *Wake Up Tirana* staff members, felt that Roms and Egyptians were “treated better than whites” under the Hoxha regime. I explore articulations such as these to think both about the ways in which the communist state attempted to address inequality, but also, to think more critically about the ways that race is articulated, discussed, and remembered in the post-communist period.

Writing about the Czech Republic, Law later states that “The communist regime refused to take into account Romani ethnic and cultural distinctiveness, their socio-cultural traditions and language. Roma were not recognized as a national minority” (2012:45). In a similar way, Roms and Egyptians were not recognized as national minorities in Albania, and that is currently still the case . This is a critical aspect of the larger conversation on race and belonging: because they were not recognized as a distinct group (or groups) post-1944, there were no efforts to protect them as a minority group in the way that such groups as Greeks or Macedonians received state protection. Moreover, there was never any state recognition of the Romani language, and as such, there were no formal schools that taught Romani and very few exist today, if any. Chapter four further details more about this dilemma but it is important to highlight here the ways in which certain state policies contributed to the erasure of any kind of difference, even though groups like Greeks and Macedonians were recognized and received protection as minority groups.

Alaina Lemon also situates her discussion of race in communist and post-communist contexts. Writing about race as a discursive practice, she pays attention to language in processes of racialization, arguing that “to ascribe identity is not only a ‘mark’ of practice, nor just a brake on practice, but *is* a practice” (2002:54). Thinking about this type of practice helps to understand how racial categories, terms, and labels were made, created, and operationalized. This type of categorizing shaped forced movements, purges, and resettlements of the communist period. Discussing purges, Lemon writes, “To sketch the broad outlines of an event in which policy targeted every member of a group does not itself *prove* racial logics were at work... though it signals that we should look more closely for racial logics” (*ibid*). These racial logics, as previously mentioned, work to shape multiple facets of everyday life.

Analyzing certain discourses and articulations is key for thinking about the social processes of racialization and belonging. Lemon writes that “Discursive practices of recognition—and misrecognition—offer locations for scholars to seek processes of racializing or nationalizing” (2002:55). The misrecognition of Roms and Egyptians in Albania provides a key example of how scholars can map racializing processes and the ways in which these processes shape spaces of belonging and non-belonging. These types of indexes shed light on the ways in which racializing criteria organize social relations (Lemon 2002:56) that shape the terrain of Tirana.

Though few scholars address it, racialization is a relevant concept for communist and post-communist studies. Lemon writes that:

The argument that I have elaborated elsewhere has been simply that people in post-Soviet Russia, like people in the United States and elsewhere, *did* infer internal, biological, and inherited essences from external (if not always physical) ‘signs.’ That meta-terms such as *race* were only just entering broad circulation to describe these discursive practices did not mean that those practices themselves were brand new (2002:57).

People in Soviet Russia, just as in Albania, did infer internal and inherited essences from external signs, and these practices are produced and reproduced in the post-communist landscape. In the chapters that follow, I rely on ethnographic research to demonstrate this point, but I want to emphasize it here to highlight the importance of mapping these practices, signs, and semantics. This is how scholars can locate racial projects.

Understanding the communist and post-communist context is very important for a thorough discussion of race in present-day Tirana. This communist context is also critical for exploring nostalgia about the perceived equality of that time in Albania. On the one hand, there is the notion that the Albanian communist regime supported racializing practices that were detrimental to certain communities (those in rural spaces, Roms, and

Egyptians, for example);. At the same time, however, my research points to numerous people who think that Hoxha's policies were more beneficial for groups like Roms and Egyptians, who feel more racially marginalized today. So, in asking how people were and are racialized, it is also important to pay attention to the event of the collapse and the sentiments that have emerged in the aftermath, particularly among those most economically and socially vulnerable groups like Roms and Egyptians, who have continually lost out in terms of housing and jobs.<sup>17</sup>

### **RACIALIZATION AND RACIAL REGIONALIZATION**

David Goldberg proposes that scholars consider the concept of 'racial regionalizations' in lieu of racialization. The idea of racial regionalizations privileges a regional model or mapping that has its own material and intellectual history (2006:333). Such a focus, he argues, is ideal for studying the context of race in Europe, as scholars have to be aware of the certain prompts and parameters that shape the ways in which race is manifested in a particular place (*ibid*). These racial regionalizations are often interactive, he argues, and need to be distinguished from one another. I believe that this conceptualization is beneficial for examining the local processes that construct and form racial logics. Goldberg argues that racisms themselves have the possibility of traveling, of circulating, but at the same time, there are aspects of these racisms that are unique to Europe, thus the notion of racial regionalizations (2006:333). For Goldberg, in the case of

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<sup>17</sup> It is very difficult to gather numerical figures on housing and employment for Roms and Egyptians in Albania. Even when this data is compiled in official reports by groups like the United Nations Development Program or the World Bank, their numbers very rarely reflect the struggles with work and housing, particularly since many of these surveys consider scrap collection to be a form of employment and shacks to be a form of housing. Chapter Four's discussion of the *Shkozë* community outside of Tirana gets into more detail about earnings and housing. For an example of housing and work, in this community, of close to 60 Romani and Egyptian families, only 10–20 percent of its residents have full-time work outside of scrap collection and begging. All of these families reside in shacks alongside the river.

Europe, it is important to try and uncover the particular regional articulations and historical manifestations of race and racisms, which are part of the broader racial regionalizations project (*ibid*). I do not adopt the term racial regionalization necessarily, but I do believe that this conceptualization is important for understanding the role of place in shaping racial belonging. I additionally argue that the notion of traveling and circulating racisms highlights interconnected aspects of marginalization, xenophobia, inclusion, and exclusion. Racialization is extremely textured, and this type of regional analysis is very helpful for elucidating those textures.

For Goldberg, race cannot be framed categorically as a set of ideas or understandings. He writes that race “represents more broadly, a way (or a set of ways) of being in the world, of living, of meaning-making” (2006:334). Goldberg acknowledges that these ways of being and living have unique spatial and temporal variances, but there is also a great deal of overlap. Still, many scholars are hesitant to acknowledge or address race in Europe. According to Goldberg, for Europeans, race is not, or really is no longer (*ibid*). He notes,

European racial denial concerns wanting race in the wake of World War II categorically to implode, to erase itself. This is a wishful evaporation never quite enacted, never satisfied. A desire at once frustrated and displaced, racist implications always lingering and diffuse, silenced but assumed, always already returned and haunting, buried but alive. Race in Europe has left odorless traces but ones suffocating in the wake of their, at once denied, resinous stench. (2006: 334)

His imagery is powerful. This racial regionalization, or “racial Europeanization” as he also calls it, is concerned with “racial avoidance or denial of or at least failure to acknowledge its own racial implication” (*ibid*). This framing of race elucidates some of the reasons that scholars may not have engaged studies of race in Southeastern Europe. I want to use this framing to draw attention to some of the tensions around this issue. On

one hand, there is the recognition that scientific racism is a thing of the past, and that scholars no longer want to acknowledge systems that classify people into groups that promote racial superiority and inferiority. In this sense, like Goldberg writes, there is a strong desire to think that race and racism evaporated after World War II. On the other hand, not only do race and racialization linger, but also racialization has very real consequences that actively shape lives in Europe and throughout the world. The practice of not naming it, of avoiding it in research, does not make race itself go away, nor does it help us understand how people are racialized or the ways that racial categories are formed.

Nina Glick-Schiller puts it this way: “On the one hand, the crimes of Nazism are condemned; on the other hand, other kinds of discrimination based on essentialized cultural difference often go unnoticed in ways that reintroduce and normalize processes of racialization” (2005:257). Race has organized societies to varying degrees, and so while such spaces as Southeastern Europe may not reflect the racial history of other locations, this does not mean that we cannot engage in discussions about racialization and its impacts.

At the same time, however, I would pose the question of how beneficial this type of European regionalization is for understanding the all of Europe, particularly thinking about the different spaces of Western and Eastern Europe. Can we address Europe without considering the varying histories and registers of the continent? I believe that Goldberg’s notion of racial Europeanization at times does not provide the space to think about this variation. An example comes from his framing of Europe’s response to the Jew and to the Muslim (which, he maintains, is how race and racism can be understood in Europe). Goldberg’s conceptualization of “Muslim” seems to refer to immigrants or those “postcolonial migrants [from] former colonizing metropolises [and] refugees from global

trouble spots and guest workers” (2006:345). His use of Muslim does not seem to acknowledge Muslims in such places as Albania, Kosovë, Montenegro, Bosnia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and those Muslim Romani populations throughout Europe.

This introduces another important consideration,, that of the relationship between religion, race, and belonging. Goldberg writes:

The figure of the Muslim, alongside that of the Jew, has historically bookended modern Europe’s explicit historical anxieties about blackness.... The Muslim, his color and culture a warning against his ever-potential treachery, came to be read as inevitably hostile, aggressive, engaged for religious purpose in constant jihad against Europe and Christianity in particular, and later the West and its supposed secularist leanings more generally (2006:334).

While I do not have a lengthy discussion of religion in this chapter, I do want to highlight a key question about religion here. Within this framing of the Muslim, and considering Goldberg’s writings on race and religion, does Albania belong to Europe? How do we configure race and religion in this discussion? This dissertation does not feature an at-length discussion of religion in Albania, and perhaps this is one area that needs further examination. Albania is a majority Muslim country, though the figures of 70 percent Muslim, 15 percent Catholic, and 15 percent Orthodox are based on statistics gathered during the 1920s, and it is important to remember the former communist regime’s ban on all religious practice. Still, the country has a significant Muslim population, and religion is intimately tied to discussions of race, belonging, and marginalization. However, Goldberg constructs a notion of Europe that seems to not include those Muslims in European spaces. Or, perhaps a better question to ask is whether the construct of Europe includes spaces such as Albania? What does it mean to construct Albanian Muslims outside of a category of white, or, what does Muslim identity mean for the category of whiteness? Does this Muslim identity shape Albania as a space of non-belonging in Europe?

Goldberg goes on to say that people of color and non-Christians are not *of* Europe and do not properly or fully belong (2006:352). He writes, “The idea of the European excludes those historically categorized as non-European, as being not white. You are here but do not (really or fully) belong” (2006:347). The figure of the Muslim takes on this space of elsewhere. So, how do we understand articulations and expressions of whiteness and belonging to Europe, particularly in this post-communist moment? What does it mean to assert a European identity in a place such as Albania? These theoretical questions guide the ethnographic discussions in the following chapters, particularly in Chapter Two.

#### **ON ANTIZIGANISM (ANTI-GYPSYISM) AND DEHUMANIZATION**

*“Jam kafshë! Jam si kafshë këtu!”* “I am an animal! I am like an animal here!” This is what Rigers yelled as I watched him start to cry. A Romani man who grew up on the outskirts of Tirana, Rigers stands outside of the same street market every day, his arms outstretched, his hands holding a small paper cup that he uses to collect change. Some days he collects a couple of dollars. Other days he gets more cigarettes than he does money. This outcry was his response to my question about his life in Tirana. He says that he is an animal in Albania.

Considering Rigers’ sentiments, I want to draw attention to statements that the European Union Commission has published on Romani and Gypsy groups. The Commission writes the following about Roms (they use the term ‘Roma,’ whom they describe as an ethnic minority):

The European institutions and every EU country have a joint responsibility to improve the lives of the EU’s Roma citizens. The Roma people are Europe’s largest ethnic minority. Of an estimated 10–12 million in the whole of Europe, some six million live in the EU, most of them EU citizens. Many Roma in the EU

are victims of prejudice and social exclusion, despite the fact that EU countries have banned discrimination.

The EU uses the term *Roma* to include numerous groups, such as Roms, Egyptians, Gypsies, Travelers, Manouches, Ashkali, Sinti and Boyash (European Commission 2015). I share such official statements as the one above to illustrate how such stances employ terms like ‘prejudice,’ ‘exclusion,’ and ‘the official “ban” on discrimination,’ without acknowledging the sentiments of dehumanization they reflect or the ways in which Roms and Egyptians are racially marginalized.

Mapping racialization and belonging in Southeastern Europe sheds light on the ways that these processes work alongside and overlap with forms of antiziganism. Ian Hancock defines antiziganism, or anti-Gypsyism as it is also referred to, as institutionalized prejudice against Romani people (1997). He maintains that the phenomenon extends back to the fifteenth century, noting the importance of situating the historical context of Europe’s relationship with Romani populations. Hancock lists several causes of anti-Gypsyism (1997:19-20), including the following:

1. The first Roms in Europe were associated with the encroachment of the Asiatic invaders and of Islam, an association that is reflected in a number of contemporary exonyms that are applied to Romani populations
2. In medieval Christian doctrine light is associated with purity and darkness with sin. The earliest church records that document the arrival of Roms alluded to the darkness of their complexion and the inherent evil that that supposedly demonstrated
3. Romani culture does not encourage close social relationships with non-Romani populations.

Hancock argues that forms of antiziganism work alongside the phenomena of non-territoriality (1997:23), which has significant repercussions in post-communist Europe, where Roms, “now find themselves outsiders in everybody’s ethnic territory”

(*ibid*). This framework of non-territoriality is necessary for understanding the ways that Romani outsidership is racialized, and the ways in which Romani populations become marginalized in other folks' territories. This is especially true when thinking about the Holocaust and the historical context surrounding this in Europe and Eastern Europe. Goldberg writes,

Being comes to know itself only through what it takes itself not to be, to non-being. And in Euro-modern terms, this focus on sub-being or non-being, on creatureliness, has been necessarily elaborated in relation to the sub- or less-than-human, to the racially diminished, of the animal or the animal-like (2006:348).

In subsequent sections of this dissertation I will further probe forms of this non-being and think about this notion of being sub- or less than human.

The sentiments of not belonging, of not being included, of being in a perpetual state of wandering and waiting, emerge and reemerge throughout this dissertation. Framing antiziganism together with non-territoriality also illustrates how racialization is spatialized, and how space is racialized (Lipsitz 2007), as I discuss in further detail in Chapter Four. Anti-Gypsyism is particular to Romani people but it is a form of both racism and dehumanization, which are common to processes of marginalization worldwide. I do not utilize the term as a means of explanation for behavior, though I quote interlocutors who do.

#### **ON BELONGING AND RACIAL BELONGING**

Writing about belonging, Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and Gerard Toffin maintain that a person can have a sense of belonging, even when identity is uncertain (2011:xxix). This type of sentiment has appeared in my fieldwork, particularly around Romani and Egyptian identities. One interlocutor once said she knew that she was black, and she knew who *her* people were but, she commented, "Only God knows if I am really Romani

or Egyptian.” I explore such sentiments of racial belonging in further detail in chapters three and four. Philippe Ramirez, who studies boundaries and ethnic groups in Northeast India, frames belonging as a “series of affinities” (2011:78). This is useful for thinking about the attachments and connections of belonging, as a process that is actively working, changing, and shaping the social landscape. Nira Yural-Davis maintains that belonging is always a “dynamic process” (2006:199). She differentiates between belonging and what she refers to as the politics of belonging. Belonging, for her, is tied to notions of social location, individual identifications, and emotional attachments (*ibid*), whereas the politics of belonging are concerned with the boundaries that “separate the world population into ‘us’ and ‘them’” (2006:204). This division is tied to the struggle around boundary maintenance, including the narratives that shape what it means to belong (or not) to a group (2006:205).

In this dissertation I try to bring discussions of racialization and belonging together in order to explore processes of racial belonging. This concept is useful for thinking about the ways that belonging is shaped by racial categories and formations. L. Kaifa Roland refers to the following as the questions of belonging: “Who is racialized as inside the sphere of belonging? Who is racialized as an outsider? How stable are these categories? How does whiteness [or blackness] become a signifier of racial belonging?” (2013:414). I would add to this Goldberg’s discussion of race and belonging, in which he writes, “Race serves as an invisible border line demarcating both who formally belongs or does not belong, and what can or cannot be said about it” (2006: 349). Racial belonging works to include and to exclude. It marginalizes. Racial belonging configures boundaries of whiteness and blackness (Goldberg 2006; Roland 2013). If belonging is determined by series of affinities and attachments, my exploration of racial belonging seeks to map the ways that those affinities, attachments, and affects are tied to processes

of racialization. I want to think critically about the relational aspects of belonging, to think about the ways bodies are grouped and relate to one another, to consider the intimacies of those spaces marked both inside and outside realms of belonging. Racial belonging illuminates the boundaries, borders, and blood that shape the lines of inclusion and exclusion.

Racial belonging relates to the cultural dynamics of belonging (Hartigan 2005). It involves expressions of sameness and difference, about similarities and otherness. Writing about borders, Goldberg maintains that they are,

Constituted through race, the biopolitical technology par excellence, fashioning the foreigner, the stranger, the *not-belonging* (emphasis added). Europe has long negotiated the lines marking off those who belong, whose being constitutes Europeanness, whose genesis can be traced in some extended sense to Europe, temporally and spatially (2006:358).

I agree with Goldberg's assertion that the European project is shaped by the quest for belonging (2006). This spatiality and border making is critical for thinking about *who* belongs, who does not belong, and where those lines are drawn. I use the notion of racial belonging to try to understand the construction and maintenance of both geopolitical and social borders.

Racial belonging deals with the encounter. As such, I approach the ethnographic encounter as a site of analysis, as a means for understanding the forms of racial belonging that emerge from these spaces. This is particularly true when thinking about the types of encounters that I address in subsequent chapters (Albanian-Greek encounters, Albanian-Romani encounters, Albanian-Egyptian encounters).

Racial belonging is concerned with the hierarchy of difference and the demarcation of these hierarchies. These types of processes organize social relations in present-day Tirana. This is the case with Roms and Egyptians, as I discuss in the chapters

that follow. Racial belonging also provides a window for understanding the discursive practices that illustrate perceptions of Albanian belonging, in particular a type of outsidership. This type of outsidership or backwardness can be seen in many spaces of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. I offer the following passage from Slavenka Drakulić's *Café Europa*:

In Prague, Zagreb, Bratislava or Ljubljana and other Eastern European Cities, towns— even villages—you can eat, drink, sleep, dress or entertain yourself in places with Western European and, to a lesser extent, American names...to create the impression that you are already in the West... . On the surface, this practice seems merely a trick to attract customers. But it has a deeper significance in that it symbolizes how people in these countries see themselves—or rather, where they would like to see themselves... . They also reveal a longing, a desire to belong to a preconceived idea of Western Europe (1992:9-10).

In Chapter Two I enter the space of this type of longing, to try and map the sentiments of that intense desire to belong. Mrs. B, one of my interlocutors, often says, “*Shqipëria është nuse bukur por me rrobat pa larë*,” meaning “Albania is a beautiful bride but with dirty clothes.” This type of sentiment is a fragment of belonging, illustrating the perceptions that people hold about Albania and Europe too. It shows how individuals perceive themselves in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Belonging is thick, and involves affinities and attachments. Belonging is fluid, rather than rigid. Belonging is always in process.

Racial belonging can be mapped through the body: the ways that certain bodies are organized read, named, recognized, or not. I situate the study of embodiment alongside that of racial identity to question the ways that bodies are interrogated and become sites of identity and racial formation (Fassin 2011; Foucault 1977; Lemon 2005; Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). In her study of post-war Yugoslavia, Dubravka Zarkov (2007) examines the ways that particular identities were inscribed onto bodies after the

break-up of Yugoslavia, and the ways that certain bodies came to represent certain nations. While Zarkov's text works within the framework of ethnicity, I argue that her work is a good example of the ways in which the nation itself is both embodied and racialized, recognizing that only certain bodies can embody and represent the nation. The experiences of Roms and Egyptians in Albania speak directly to this.

One way of thinking about racialized identities is through the configuration of race itself as a site of identity formation (Pierre 2012). In doing so, I approach race as a site but also think about the processes of racialization and how race works. In this dissertation I attempt to locate and map these sites where processes of racialization actively marginalize and shape spaces of belonging and non-belonging. The body itself also becomes a site of racialized identity formation. Didier Fassin writes, "The body is precisely where the three dimensions ['reality', 'experience', 'expression'] are articulated: the violence of racialization is exerted, experienced, and performed through the body" (2011:428). I maintain that a thorough exploration of race and racialization pays careful attention to the body. Alaina Lemon writes:

Race, as an organic metaphor, is not only about bodies (nationalism and gender rely on bodily imagery, too) but about a particular connection *among* bodies, bodies whose substance is bound over time, unmixed with other bodies' substance. It is the means by which people index connections among bodies that is key (58).

In this dissertation I try to map these connections between bodies, how the body is configured, and how the body relates to space and place. The ethnographic attention to the body is a critical aspect of my conceptualization of racial belonging.

## **ON WHITENESS AND SENTIMENTS OF ALBANIAN BELONGING**

Notions of whiteness and blackness emerge in varied ways, and one of my goals is to think more critically about the operation of these categories. Both categories are unstable, yet blackness is often more readily deployed to talk about and label Roms and Egyptians (and those thought to be Romani and/or Egyptian), while whiteness is not articulated in the same way. In some ways, this conversation is shaped by the notion of what it means to be marked and unmarked. Both categories are precarious and shifting. In particular, there are frictions of whiteness, such that white Albanians shift in and out of whiteness, at times included within this sphere of European racial belonging, and at other times constructed outside of it. These categorical notions of whiteness play out in different encounters and settings, for an example, in Albanian encounters with Roms, Egyptians, and people of African descent. Theories of whiteness help us to understand this type of racial buffer status of whiteness in Europe (Harrison 1995). In later chapters I will discuss, though, especially, how blackness operates and who gets marked as black and white, the slipperiness of these categories. The boundaries of both whiteness and blackness in Europe are unstable and contingent (Harrison 1995; Nassegy Brown 2005).

Writing about whiteness, John Hartigan notes, “Rather than representing a uniform social position, whiteness is constituted and reproduced by distinct political, economic, and social forces, operating with differing impacts at local, regional, national, and international levels” (2005:13-14). Hartigan tries to shift the analytical view of whiteness by forcing us to consider the intricacies of whiteness itself. This type of analytical shift allows anthropologists to think about the assemblage of racial categories.

Through ethnographic research I try to address the following questions:

1. Who gets to be marked as white? How is this whiteness deployed?
2. How is blackness manifested in Tirana? What forms does it take?
3. How does this whiteness shape certain spaces?

How are expressions and articulations of whiteness and blackness in Albania shaped by one another? I want to consider the production of whiteness in such a way that sheds light on the ways that racialization does configure spaces of belonging and non-belonging in the lives of those racialized as white, *yet*, this should not take away from the dominant power structure that continually reproduces a landscape in which Roms and Egyptians are racialized as outsiders. I want to acknowledge that Roms and Egyptians are social pariahs in a way that does not impact those racialized as white. As Faye Harrison notes, “Whiteness is a key site of racial domination” (Harrison 1995:63). What does it mean to ethnographically study that site? What can it illustrate about forms of racial belonging? What are the sentiments, particularly sentiments of longing, that emerge around the category of white’ (or European)?

Roms and Egyptians are racialized outside of the Albanian national imaginary, in the realm of non-belonging. At the same time, the figure of “The Albanian” (and this takes multiple forms: the other, the Muslim, the undocumented migrant) is at times constructed outside of European whiteness, creating a sphere of non-belonging for Albanians. Physical appearance becomes a marker that signals a cultural, racial, and national commonality, but the discourse about color, and particularly political discourse about blackness, is emerging in new and unique ways. I use the ethnographic stories in chapters two and three to query the ways that discourse about color takes new forms. In addition to the discussion of phenotype, I also explore the figure of the *malok* (‘hillbilly’) within the framework of whiteness. Hartigan’s discussion of white trash is particularly useful for this type of analysis (2005). Albanianness gets expressed along racial lines of whiteness but this expression is very much shaped by ideas of class, superiority, and region.

Albanian national identity is often constructed in terms of honor and trust, and very often, Roma and Egyptians are constructed outside of this identity. As Trubeta notes, “In each of the countries where these groups are present, they are not considered to be members of a titular nation. Furthermore, such groups [as Egyptians] are socially positioned more or less on the margins of their respective societies” (2006:77). Through ethnographic research I am able to examine the space of that margin, to think about what constitutes that space and in what ways the space is racialized.

### **BELONGING AND PLACE**

The discussion of place is tied to the intricacies of racial belonging and the sites of racial identity formation. In Chapter four I detail this conversation further but I want to take a moment to review some of the overarching literature and intersecting concepts as they pertain to the ways in which the Balkan region is situated and imagined (Todorova 2009).

Maria Todorova’s analysis of the term “Balkan,” reveals the ways that it is infused with distinct social and cultural meanings beyond its use as a geographic signifier (2009:21). “Balkan” is both a metaphor and a pejorative term (2009:194). Todorova further argues that the term “balkanization” retains a negative connotation, because it means to “break up into small, mutually hostile political units” (2009:33). This shapes an understanding of the Balkan region as hostile and steeped in antagonism and division. At the same time, Balkanization denotes a kind of reversion to “backwardness” or “tribalism” (2009:1). These depictions of the Balkans illustrate the hierarchal notions of what and where Europe is, and who belongs there. They provide a framework for understanding how the Balkan region has been othered, and how Balkan self-identities take shape across countries of Eastern Europe.

Another category that emerges within this conversation is that of the Western Balkans. Tanja Petrović notes that the term “Western Balkans” has become a new practice of othering that legitimizes the boundaries of Europe (2009:20). Petrović examines public discourse in Slovenia to reveal the ways that the former socialist countries have to “‘prove’ their Europeanness before joining the EU and must continue to do so even as EU members” (2009:25). The “Western Balkans”, from which Slovenia has now been “removed”, are therefore geographically located within Europe but outside the notion of a “true Europe” (2009:27). Petrović argues that it is difficult to identify commonalities or shared identities of the Western Balkan region, and that “the question of what the Western Balkans are can be answered only if we invert it and ask instead what the Western Balkans *are not*. The answer is self-evident: they are not the European Union” (2009:30). Petrović highlights the fact that there is no Eastern, Southern, or Northern Balkans, just the “Western Balkans”, which, like the term “Balkan,” carries many more sociocultural implications beyond those having to do with geography. Todorova argues that this naming of the “Western Balkans” only evidences the ways that Balkanism has not disappeared but has shifted (2009:192).

In this dissertation I trace several sentiments of belonging and non-belonging that are linked to the broader conversation about what it means to be Balkan, to be Western Balkan, and what it means to not feel fully European or to be on the European periphery (Todorova 2009:16-17). These types of sentiments emerge in numerous ways along particular borders and marginal spaces. One such example stems from the stories of Albanian migrants in Greece. Todorova writes that “Identity and alterity (otherness) clearly exist in a symbiotic relationship, and their most sharply defined characteristics are best articulated at [the] border encounter” (2009:197). I utilize the framework of racial belonging to better understand these border encounters that occur in the spaces of Tirana,

throughout Albania, as well as borders of Europe and European belonging. Like racialization processes and belonging, these borders are unstable and ever-shifting. I aim to map them and grasp how they take shape, and are produced and reproduced.

Place is significant for how identities are constructed (Hartigan 2005). For bell hooks, the notion of place allows her to explore what it means to belong. She explores a sense of belonging through a connection with the earth and through such practices as walking, which allows her to tap into the affects and sentiments of what it means to be *in* and *of* a place. Her conceptualization of place focuses on perception, affinity, attachment, and the way that geography shapes livelihoods. This is helpful for considering the role of place in the discussion of the racial belonging. At the same time, I do not mean to perpetuate a notion of boundedness. I seek to probe these analytical questions of racialization and belonging without subscribing to an idea of bounded identities. Taking the lead from Akhil Gupta, I agree that these elements of identity and race are “implicated in the texture of everyday life” (1992:62). At the same time, it is important that scholars “investigate how feelings of belonging to an imagined community bind identity to spatial location such that differences between communities and places are created” (*ibid*), without subscribing to the idea that racialized identities are bound to these places. I hope to connect social processes, feelings, and sentiments to broader, global happenings and interconnections across social and geopolitical borders and boundaries of belonging.

## **MARGINALITY**

Misha Glenny (1999) once referred to the Balkans as “the margin of Europe” (1999) and Michael Herzfeld proclaimed Greece as being “in the margins of Europe” (1989). C Nadia Seremetakis writes about resistance in the Greek margins (1991) and

Sarah Green discusses marginality and ambiguity along the Greek-Albanian border (2005). The space of the margin is located at the edge, adjacent to but not in a place, close but not fully inside. The margin is near the line of demarcation or outside of it altogether. It is the fringe. These are elements of marginality. I argue that processes of racial belonging shape marginal spaces. What do bodies in the margins look like? What do the voices sound like there? How can these be mapped ethnographically?

I situate this work in marginal spaces and places alongside Kathleen Stewart's positioning of the West Virginian hills in her text *A Space on the Side of the Road*. Focusing on a place that is simultaneously "diffused and intensely localized, incorporated into a national imaginary and left out" (1996:4), Stewart's research in "other America" draws attention to the ways in which that marginal space tells the story of America itself. I argue that Albania is a similar kind of a space that is related to a larger story of Europe, a story about belonging and becoming, of inclusion and exclusion, a story about what it looks like to continually occupy a space of almost-belonging but not fully or properly being *in*, a story of what it means to be, and not be, European. What does it mean to linger in the spaces of the periphery, in the margins of Europe? What emerges in the margins of Tirana?

I try ethnographically to capture voices from the side of the road. I highlight the stories of migrants who maneuver the back roads and mountains out of Albania into Greece, and back to Albania. This dissertation features significant discussion of what people think makes someone black or white, but this work is not about essentialized identities. Instead, I aim to locate emergent forms of racialization that powerfully shape marginal spaces, that shape access, that mark bodies in particular ways, that are tied to forms of power. I highlight stories from those that refer to themselves as the "niggers of Europe," the Romani girls turned away from jobs because employers only want beautiful

white people to apply. I draw attention to elements of marginalization and outsidersness, group formation, affiliation, and the spaces of the in-between. I map sites of racial belonging, not necessarily as an effort to name racism but to examine more closely the articulations and expressions of unwantedness, undesirability, inclusion, longing, and exclusion.

## **Interlude: An Anthropologic Absurdity or An Absurd Anthropology**

I am in the field. Fieldwork? That name evokes a chuckle. My family thinks that it is odd that I refer to my research as *fieldwork*. In the field I encounter many questions such as, “What are you doing in Albania?” and “Why are you here?” There is a significant amount of puzzlement, and a lot of suspicion—but why shouldn’t there be? Am I an intrusion? Am I a spy? There is resistance, too. I am privileged to do this type of research. All of these questions and issues call attention to positionality, to research motivations, to the ethnographic process and how it unfolds. This story is about buying bread.

I left my apartment to buy some bread from the bakery nearby. The owner is very nice and always speaks to me and asks questions about my day. Her son is very friendly and checks on me in the evenings to make sure I have everything I need in my apartment. The first time he saw me walk by he spoke to me in English and wanted to know why I was in Albania. He told me that he spent some time abroad, in the States I think. He asked me if I was into Albanian guys and then gave me a devilish smile. I laughed and told him that I was married.

When I arrived today another woman was purchasing bread. She had curly black hair and a beauty mark above her right eyebrow. “*Mire ditë*” (“Good afternoon”), I said, speaking to the baker behind the counter. “*Ç’kemi*” (“What’s up?”) she responded, smiling. “This is a foreigner, an American,” the baker said to the other customer, talking around me. “Oh, okay,” the woman said, “because I was wondering who she was.” She made that what-in-the-hell-is-a –Black-woman-doing-here-speaking-Albanian face that I have grown accustomed to seeing. “You miss your husband?” the baker asked me, and I replied, “Yes, of course, a lot.” She smiled. “Why, where is her husband, is he not here?”

the customer asked. “Oh, no, he is in the U.S.,” I told her. “Why”? she demanded. “He has to work,” the baker told her. She and I have had many exchanges before and she practically knows my life story. “He is a prosecutor and works for the U.S. government,” I further explained. The woman looked at me somewhat disappointedly. “He will be here in March,” I added, “to visit me for a while.” “And is he like you,” she asked. “Or is he white?” “He is like me,” I told her. “What is the word for your people—how are you called,?” she asked. I settled on “people of color” (*njerëz me ngjyrë*), not feeling in the mood to have the long explanations and eye-rolling that come along with words like *zezake* (which can mean Black person but is more readily translated as both *Negro* and *nigger*) or even *Amerikan-Afrikane*, which is loaded with assumptions about *real* Americans, a term that is usually reserved only for white people.

Turning back to the baker the other customer asked, “But why is she here, what is she doing here?” Once again it was as though I was not present or as though I did not speak Albanian. The baker told her that I am in Tirana to conduct research and write a book, a book about Albania. “Well, *Kismet Zoti* (‘if God gives the chance’) to write a book,” I added, in hopes that I someday get an opportunity to write a book from the research. “Well, how long are you going to stay in Albania?” “She is going to stay 7 years,” the baker answered. I quickly interjected and said that I have been coming and going over the past seven years but that I was only staying this time until the following September. They then asked about my hair and how I got it the way that it is, and whether I style it myself. I tried explaining how I manage it but the vocabulary does not work well. For starters, few people in Albania know what a loc or dreadlock is. If I were to say, “Oh, I began with two strand twists, and then palm rolled those for a few months and slowly my hair began locking, and now I re-twist it every few weeks with pomade and gel,” I am sure people would get lost in the explanation. For some, typically younger,

folks who know about Rastafarianism, I can usually just say that my hair is like the Rastas and they understand what I mean. These two women, though, were middle-aged. I told them that my hair is kind of like braids but different and that it stays like this because of my hair texture. I just have to tend to it every couple of weeks. They looked puzzled. The customer asked the baker if it was fake hair. The baker returned her question with that quintessential Albanian face that says, “Why the hell would I know?” I told them that it was my actual hair. They were still puzzled.

The customer changed the subject. “So where do you live here in Albania?” “Nearby,” I told her, “in a rented apartment.” “You live alone?” She looked appalled that I might just say yes. “Yes,” I responded. They were both taken aback. I am not sure why the baker reacted this way because she already knew this, yet she still gasped. “And how much do you pay in rent,?” the baker asked me. “Two hundred and fifty euros” I told them. They do not think that it is necessary that I should pay that much to live alone. When I told the two ladies that I had a fellowship that paid for my expenses, they were even more surprised. “Someone pays for you to live here, eh? And to write about Albania?” I nodded in affirmation, and not the American up-and-down nod but the Albanian side-to-side nod. Their faces froze in perplexity. “I can understand this, though,” the customer began. “Americans come here because we are warm, nice, friendly people. Americans are really cold, right?” she said, looking to me to confirm this. I hesitated but then realized that what she really wanted me to do was to acknowledge how nice Albanians are. “Yes,” I said, “Albanians are really warm”, or something to that effect.

“So all you do everyday is write, just write about Albania?” “Yes,” I replied. That garnered a strange look almost as strange as the fact that I live alone. “Where did you learn Albanian? Did you take a course or something?” I told her that I took a course

here in Tirana at the university, and that I also took another at a language center. “And you are going to write a book about Albania?” I told her that I was writing a dissertation, that was long like a book, and that yes, it was about Albanian culture and society. “Eh, the culture, so Albanians have culture, huh?” the baker asked, and the two of us laughed. “So will all of this be available in Albania when you are done?” the customer asked me. I assured her that I am going to do my best to have it translated into Albanian. “Just make sure you only write good stuff” the baker threw in, a remark I constantly hear.

“And what about your husband,” the customer asked me. “Does he have someone else in the States?” I was initially confused and thought she was asking me if I wanted someone else in Albania, like an Albanian man. “No,” she corrected, “Is your husband with another woman while you are here?” “Oh, no, definitely not”, I stated, immediately feeling both flabbergasted and naïve. I wanted to tell them that I realized my research in Albania seemed weird to them, strange, and that my husband and I knew this before we got married that I would be coming to Albania to do research. I wanted to say that the distance is not easy but we are getting through it, and that I have invested a lot of time and energy into my degree. “This is important for me to finish this right now, to finish my research,” I eventually responded. “Important to write about Albania?” the customer asked. She laughed.

“Well, you know that could happen with the husband,” the customer said to the baker, who nodded along with her. “What about you?” the baker inquired. “You got someone here?” “No, no I do not,” I replied, once again flabbergasted but also amused. “How old are you?” the customer asked me. “Twenty-seven.” “Do you have any kids?” she asked. “No, not yet.” “Will you have kids?” she asked me. I touched my womb and said, “*Ishalla.*” That did not translate as well as I wanted it to. Albanian women touch my womb all the time and say, “*Ishalla do bëhesh një femijë*” (“By God’s will you will have

a child”) and it seems to be normal. I guess it does not have the same effect if I do it myself. “You need to have a kid now,” the baker said. “She is young,” the customer remarked but the baker was not convinced.

## Chapter Two. On Racial Belonging and Longing

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores a different way of engaging with ethnography and the ethnographic voice. It is a chapter told in five acts. In each act I share ethnographic stories and these are framed as a collective that explores racial belonging and the *longing* of belonging. These stories of race, longing, marginalization, and desire provide a lens for understanding how racialization and belonging happen, work, and overlap and intersect. In this chapter I think about registers, sentiments, expressions, words, and affects. These stories are connected, and somehow, the voices of the margins emerge in varied ways.

Delving into the space of the encounter, I examine the frictions of the event, of the moment. From interactions between Albanians and Roms around the notion of race, to a group protest led by Romani and Egyptian activists, in this chapter I engage the intensity of surges while I also pay attention to the mundane spaces of encounters. These stories and encounters shed light on the nodes of racial belonging and racial assemblages that are a part of boundary-making processes. This draws attention to the folds, strands, bends, and breaks of boundaries, the ways that boundaries and borders take shape, the embodiment of borders, the voices from the inside looking out, the sentiments that emerge from the outside looking in. In this chapter I try to locate fragments of longing, those pieces that construct what it means to belong or not belong. One way to do so is through an analysis of the Albanian term and concept of *mall* ('longing' or 'yearning'). These five acts approach this *mall* from different angles, to help us think about the tenderness and depth of a visceral longing, and how this longing unfolds in everyday life.

Belonging, as stated earlier, involves attachments, affinities, and tensions. It is textured. These five acts, examining history and the present-day, highlight the grooves and ridges of that texture to consider what it means to long for Europe and to yearn for inclusion. They call attention to memory, of those that long for a past when unable to imagine a future. Throughout fieldwork, many individuals expressed sentiments of a lingering in-betweenness—being between an historical past of communist rule and an uncertain future. The opportunistic desires that they thought seemed possible at an earlier date and that many tightly embraced, at some point became elusive. This began to engender fears of returning to a communist past. At the same time, many individuals expressed a longing to retreat to that same past, dismayed by unfulfilled promises of what Albania was to become. In this chapter I try to capture the stories of this in-betweenness.

These stories feature articulations of day-to-day racial discrimination and division. They illuminate narratives about Enver Hoxha, about whiteness, and about birthday parties. In analyzing them I try to understand some of the ways that race and belonging emerge in this frame of longing. Recalling Goldberg's point about race being not just a set ideas but also a "way or set of ways of being in the world, of living, of meaning-making... that differ across space and time" (2006:334), these stories illustrate the entanglement of meaning-making and longing. This chapter, in five acts, captures such sentiments of being and meaning inherent within processes of belonging; the acts explore the voices, feelings, and yearnings from the margins.

In Act One, I use several stories to investigate a longing for Europe , and feature a particular story from an interlocutor who once characterized Albanians as the "niggers of Europe." In Act two, I address the idea that it is not Albanians who are racist but rather it is the Greeks. This section is anchored by the voices of Albanian migrants who grew up in Greece and have recently returned to Albania in the midst of the socioeconomic crisis.

In Act three I focus on questions of whiteness and explore the Albanian term *malok* (“bumpkin” or “hillbilly”). In Act four I highlight a longing or nostalgia for Enver Hoxha, the former communist dictator, and do so primarily through an analysis of a housing protest in Tirana. Then, in the final act, Act five I tell the story of a birthday party and explore longing from the point of view of a Romani-Egyptian community just outside of Tirana.

## **ACT ONE**

In his inaugural speech as prime minister in 1992, after the first elections in Albania in the post-communist period, Sali Berisha proclaimed, “The greatest dream of every Albanian is the integration of Albania into Europe.”<sup>18</sup> What does this dream look like? What forms does it take? The dream sheds light on the desires, anticipations, frustrations, and yearnings suspended in everyday life.

### **Phone anxiety**

Some might think of it as a task that would take ten to fifteen minutes, maybe twenty if the company on the other end were slow. Bona and Kujtim, a married couple, have recently returned to Tirana after living in New Jersey for several years. They tried their hand at living in the States, and found that in their older age, they are more comfortable living in Albania. Their current bankcards have expired and they need to make a call to the American bank so that the updated cards can be sent to their new address. Bona is especially anxious about the task at hand. She and Kujtim do not feel confident in their abilities to carry it out. She had previously tried to call, and it caused such a headache that she feared trying again on her own. Due to this they have organized

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Kajsiu (2011:28).

a coffee date with two younger neighbors, both of whom are more familiar with technology, in hopes that the neighbors might help them with their dilemma.

At the coffee shop Bona learns that the phone number listed on the back of the card is a 1-800 number but she is unable to make a 1-800 call to the U.S. with her standard Albanian cell phone. The bank offers no international code for Albania, only nearby European countries such as Italy and Greece. Bona and Kujtim nod their heads in unison. “It is because we are not *really* in Europe,” she says. “We are a bit behind,” Kujtim agrees. After one of the neighbors searches online, they are eventually able to locate a private number for the bank, but when Bona tries to dial it, her cell phone does not work properly. She keeps reaching an operator who informs her that the call cannot be placed. “If we were in Europe this would not be a problem,” Bona further laments, as they wait to speak with a PLUS Phone employee about their phone. Temporary success: under the phone’s settings, international calling was disabled. The phone operator explains how to enable international dialing, and then informs Bona and Kujtim how to make the call. They will, however, need a PIN code. Bona says that she does not have the PIN. She sighs. The neighbor has some prepaid minutes on her cell phone and offers to make the call to the States. Bona and Kujtim initially object but then give in and make the call.

English. Albanian. English. Albanian again. Bona seems overwhelmed. The bank, it turns out, will not send the cards to their Albanian address, and will only send them to the address on file. A relative or someone in the States will have to go to their New Jersey apartment, retrieve the cards, and mail them to Albania. Bona and Kujtim are disappointed with this outcome. “Well, we tried to do it. If only we were not in Albania,” Bona muses.

## **The niggers of Europe**

The afternoon is sleepy. A man sits perched on a small chair at a coffee shop near the center of Tirana. “Oh, you are writing about race,” he asks. “Well look at us... Albanians are the niggers of Europe. Do you know how they treat us in England? In Germany? In Italy? We are the niggers!” His voice shakes a bit as he yells with greater intensity. “Make sure you write about that.” The “niggers of Europe”—his statement is very matter of fact. It is loaded, packed, explosive.

In their study of Albanian migrants in Italy, Russell King and Nicola Mai write about racist attitudes displayed towards Albanians. “Albanian migrants’ overall experience of social inclusion and exclusion in Italy,” they note, “has been continuously filtered through a thick veil of prejudice affecting all spaces and moments of social interaction” (2008:187). One migrant in Italy noted: “*Albanian* is the adjective Italian people use when they show contempt for something” (188). The gentleman at the café used the word *nigger*. Is this his way of trying to articulate a particular type of discrimination and mistreatment, on par with the experiences of Blacks in the United States? Is it his way of saying that Albanian marginality in Europe is parallel to that of Black Americans? What then, does that mean for Black people in Albania? In the following section I highlight sentiments of anti-blackness that emerge in Albania.

## **Football voices**

Once, during an away game in the city of Laç, many of the fans began yelling racial slurs at me. And then, they started hollering more and throwing bananas at me, and spitting at me from the stands. They started yelling ‘majmun’ (‘monkey’). My coaches and teammates did not really say anything. After the game I went to the head of the federation about what happened and no one knew how to deal with it. The federation felt that they could not do anything to control the fans. There was a federation representative present but he did not say anything or take official notes.

This is Gabriel, a Nigerian former football player turned coach in Albania. As far as he knows, he was the first African football player officially recruited to play professionally in Albania. In his fifteen years in the country he has played for numerous teams and is now the only African coach.

“We check for racism, but Albania as a country, we do not have any problems with foreigners.”

This is one of the heads of the Albanian Football Association. He says this matter-of-factly, that Albania does not have any problems with foreigners. John, another football player, shares his experiences:

One night, we went to the club in Blloku. These three Albanian guys kept watching me while I danced with my [Albanian] girlfriend. It was like they were obsessed with me. They followed us outside the club. I went up to the guys and asked them what their problem was. That is when they showed me a gun. I did not want to fight them but they attacked me, hit me in the face and kicked me. I tried to block back but they kept beating me in the face and yelled, ‘Fuck you nigger!’ (‘Të qifsha zezak’) over and over again.

John is an almost thirty-year old football player from Nigeria. He has lived in Albania almost eight years, and has played for several teams throughout the country. He shares this story from a popular nightclub in Tirana, which ended with a trip to the military hospital for several stitches. This incident was not John’s first struggle with race and dating in Albania. His previous girlfriend was an Albanian woman in the town of Fier, where he once played football. He was surprised when he first met her because she spoke a little Yoruba that she learned while living in the U.K. The two dated for three years. John says that he wanted to marry her, but when it came time to meet her family, she would only introduce him to her mother. John says that the mother told her daughter, “You can get married but only if you leave Albania—your father would never accept this.” John says the young woman was willing to get away, to leave Albania for a place

such as Italy. But he could not break his contract and did not have a visa that would allow him to go to Italy. His girlfriend said she could never reveal the relationship to her father. In the end, they went their separate ways. John continues:

Albanians always say that they are not racist but they do not fully accept us. And people think that a lot of things are funny that are not. Sometimes when you are walking people say to you, “Hey, look at how white he is,” like it is the funniest thing that they have ever heard.

Jokes. Humor. The television variety show *Portokali* is known for its comedy. Sometimes the actors dress up as gorillas or apes to make fun of black people. The show also features the character *Drumba*. In one of the show’s popular sketches, an Albanian actor wears blackface, a large black, curly Afro wig, and a mouthpiece with several missing teeth. *Drumba* is from Africa (seemingly not from any particular country). He often appears on stage with his football coach, a corrupt mafia-like gentleman who works for the football association. This coach owns *Drumba*. *Drumba* dances around the stage and sings loudly, his words usually nonsensical. He does not speak Albanian very well and the audience finds this funny. The character’s lines are often written so that he mispronounces words in such a way that their meaning is derogatory but supposedly entertaining for the audience. An example comes from one episode in which *Drumba* tries to say the word *Mamurras*, the name of an Albanian city, but instead repeats “*Mua më rras*,” which can be a derogatory expression about forced sex.

During several sketches the coach asks *Drumba* if he wants more money or a longer contract, and *Drumba* always responds that he does not, that he only wants *byrek* (traditional Albanian pastry dish). The audience erupts in laughter. “*Drumba* only wants *byrek*, it is so funny!” someone remarks while watching an episode. Apparently, this reference to *byrek* is tied to a communist-era documentary television show that chronicled issues such as famine in parts of Africa. As older Albanians have explained,

this show, *Vendi dhe Populli* ('Country and People'), was used by the regime to highlight the extreme poverty and hunger of other countries, thereby casting Albania in a better light compared to those other places. Because many people lacked food in those featured African countries, it is thought that all African football players really want Albanian *byrek*. This in turn, is supposedly funny to many Albanians, because *byrek* is a cheaper and widely offered dish. In other words, it is not fancy food of any sorts. "Drumba is not racist! This is a part of Albania's history." These words are Enon's, the host from *Wake Up Tirana*. He says Drumba is not about race. It is simply humor ('*shaka, thjeshtë*').

#### **ACT TWO: "THE GREEKS ARE RACIST!"**

"It is not Albanians that are racist. I will tell you who is racist—the Greeks are racist!" The white-haired gentleman in the gray coat looks into the *Wake Up Tirana* television camera and spits these words. The television host agrees. When they return to the studio, the host asks the anthropologist about racism in Greece, particularly the racism experienced by Albanians in Greece. It is a commonly articulated sentiment: "The Greeks are racist!"

As a reminder, in the survey on race and belonging I asked whether the term *Albanian* could refer both to an individual's racial and national identity. Sixty-one percent of respondents said "no" while the remaining 39 percent said "yes".. A different question asked if Albanians and Greeks were members of the same race. Approximately 45 percent of respondents indicated that they felt that Albanians and Greeks were not members of the same race, whereas 55 percent of respondents felt that they were. When juxtaposing the results of these two questions, the data reveal that almost a quarter of respondents indicated that the term *Albanian* could *not* refer to both nation and race, but felt that Albanians and Greeks were *not* members of the same race.

## **The taxi driver**

The taxi driver makes his way from *Pesë Maj* to the Shkozë Bridge. He asks the usual questions about Tirana, about the people, soliciting opinions about Albania and Albanians. “I lived in Greece for ten years,” he says. “The country is beautiful but the people are very racist,” he states emphatically. “What a shame that *they* are in Europe. Most of the people were not friendly. All of the women that I knew could not date or marry men that were not Greek. And the Greek men are especially racist!” “Tirana has no problems with race,” he continues, and reiterates it as he drives. He looks back through the rearview mirror and says, “I bet you have no problems or have not had anyone offend you. If so, it must have been a villager (*fshtarë*), or a *malok*. They are not educated or exposed like others. Everyone gets along in Tirana... life is beautiful here.”

Between 1946 and 1991, under the Hoxha dictatorship, Albania experienced arguably the most extreme form of totalitarian control and communist isolation in Europe. After breaking pacts with Yugoslavia, the USSR, and finally with China, Albania slowly severed ties with the outside world throughout the late 1970s and closed its geopolitical borders with neighboring countries. Movement outside of the Republic was increasingly restricted, and ownership of private vehicles was outlawed, instilling a sense of boundedness in the country. This sense of boundedness was ruptured with the fall of communism in 1991 and the massive out-migration of Albanians to other European countries, the largest migrations in Europe since the displacement that followed World War II. Located to the southeast of Albania, Greece served as the primary haven for socioeconomic refugees and migrant laborers in search of economic betterment. Additionally, Albanian residents who were able to “prove” their Greek origins were granted free movement across the newly opened geopolitical border, in order to live and work in Greece (Bon 2008; Kapllani and Mai 2005).

Though Albania's post-communist migration parallels that of other countries (Bulgaria or Macedonia, for example), Albania's abrupt shift from boundedness to openness and the intensity of its post-communist out-migration distinguishes it from other countries in the region (King and Mai 2008). Additionally, the country's socioeconomic collapse in the late 1990s, following a series of pyramid schemes, further increased out-migration to Greece. Statistics from 2003 estimated about 580,000 documented Albanian migrants in Greece and around 200,000 undocumented migrants (Barjaba & King 2005). Many of these migrants arrived from Southeastern Albania, an area saturated with its own internal conflict over territorial belonging, dominant language assertions, and cultural heritage (Bon 2008; Dalakoglou 2010; Drinis 2008). In the wake of the socioeconomic crisis that began in Europe, and intensified in Greece in 2010, many of those same migrants found themselves without work, and in varied socioeconomic predicaments. Cities like Tirana have recently played host to many of these migrants returning to Albania. People intensely grapple with feelings of anxiety due to looming socioeconomic instability in their lives. The conversations with return migrants draw attention to this precarity and uncertainty, and also highlight lingering sentiments about race in Greece.

At times, relations between Albania and Greece, like many other Balkan relations, are framed within this broader concept of "ethnic division" or similar rhetoric. Writing about relationships between Albanians and Macedonians in Skopje, anthropologist Vasiliki Neofotistos (2004) argues that concepts such as "ethnic division" are too broad and far-reaching, and do not account for the tensions and negotiations of everyday life. This type of framework masks ambiguity. Instead, she argues for the need to better understand the "intricate dialectics" (48) of local life in Macedonia, examining the ways in which these social relations shape what it means to be Albanian, to be Macedonian.

Like Sarah Green's (2005) focus on ambiguity and marginality, this kind of approach can be helpful for exploring the frictions of belonging, what it means to be Albanian and to be Greek, and further, what it means to be European. At the same time, with the rise of such groups as "The Golden Dawn," who proclaim a "Greece for Greeks," and emerging conversations about resettlement, dislocation, and the current migrant and refugee "crisis" in Europe, there needs to be more consideration of racialization and xenophobia. Research needs to move beyond a study of stereotypes and hollow constructions of ethnic division to look at the nuance of social interactions, while still paying careful attention to the forms of racial belonging and marginalization that are shaping people's lives.

The borders themselves are key to this discussion. The geopolitical border between Albania and Greece is a physical boundary of separation but also a site of sociopolitical boundary making, and a site of marginality. Green refers to this marginality as "tricky... evoking a sense of unequal location as well as unequal relations" (2005:1). As these migrants and return migrants cross the physical border, what does the border become? Beyond the geopolitical border, how do these individuals carry the border with them, and further, how is the border itself inscribed on their bodies (Stephen 2007)? Neofotistos argues that bodies and bodily movements are critical for understanding social relations. In her work in Macedonia she examines the ways in which Albanians "come from the side" (2009), in an effort to explore how Macedonians accuse Albanians of participating in a type of sociopolitical encroachment. This bodily focus has implications for understanding what it means to embody socioracial boundaries and borders.

A group of Albanian return migrants gather together to discuss these intersections of race, belonging, and boundaries. They talk about racism. They talk about their lives in Albania, in Greece, in the spaces of the in-between. They talk about what it means to transverse multiple borders of space and identity, and what it means to carry those

borders with them. They also talk about longing, about *mall*, and the forms that this longing takes. Belonging is a dynamic process (Yural-Davis 2006), and these migrant sentiments provide a lens for thinking about the ways that space, place, boundaries, and marginalization shape the politics of belonging across this Albanian-Greek border. The next section uses numbers to identify the speakers from the focus group conversations.

### **On Returning**

All four of them are close friends, and have known each other for many years. “These guys are my best friends—we all have similar stories,” Speaker 2 says. Like everyone else present, Speaker 2 is a late twenty-something Albanian man who ventured to Greece in the 1990s and spent many years there until he recently returned to Albania. His family is from a small town in Southern Albania. The other migrants are also from smaller towns and villages in the south. of the country When asked why his family first went to Greece, Speaker 2 quickly responds, “Well, we went for money.” They traveled by night to get to Greece. He trekked through the mountains with his family, and sought places to hide here and there until they were able to get across to the other side. A significant portion of their journey involved travel by foot until they eventually found their way to a small city not far from Thessaloniki. Speaker 1, whose family also went to Greece in the early 1990s, tells a similar story. Speakers 3 and 4 went a bit later, around 1997, during the time of Albania’s pyramid scheme crisis, when the country was on nearly on the brink of civil war. Despite their differences in terms of when they sought refuge, financial reasons were the impetus for all of their migrations. They all traveled with family to the city of Thessaloniki, which was the largest attraction for Albanian migrants in Greece and served as their new home.

“It was like night and day,” Speaker 2 recounts. “That is what Greece was like compared to Albania”.. Speaker 1 adds: “Seriously, it was really like night and day because over there [in Greece] there were lights. We did not have any lights in Albania.” Speaker 1 stayed in Greece for almost 18 years. Of the four, he was the youngest when his family first left Albania. “I did not know one word in Greek,” he says. However, he knew what people meant when they used the word *Shqiptar* (‘Albanian’). The syllables slapped his face and made him feel like a criminal, a wrongdoer, and a perpetrator. “They do not mean it in a good way when they call us *Shqiptar*. It is an insult.”

All four were young when they arrived in Greece, and each had to attend primary school before learning Greek. “The racism began early in elementary school,” Speaker 1 says. “But, kids are kids,” he adds, somewhat hesitantly. Speaker 2 interjects, “Those that are older, around age 30 or so, they are more racist... . I have witnessed that they just do not like Albanians. Racism does not just refer to people of different colors,” speaker 2 says. “Greeks and Albanians have similar traditions,” he continues. “They are more alike than say, a Greek person and a Pakistani person, but when it comes to Albanians ...” “They are unwelcoming,” Speaker 4 chimes in. “They are unwelcoming in supermarkets and in public places because they do not want us there.”

“In terms of public spaces, how did others know that you were Albanian? ” I asked them. “Was it language? Were there other physical markers?” “In the beginning, it was from our outwardly appearance,” Speaker 2 says. “We did not have nice clothes like the Greeks when we first got there. After that they could tell by the way we spoke; even once we learned Greek, we still spoke it with a certain accent.” “The Greeks are big on assimilation,” Speaker 4 notes. “And they care about baptism, they want everyone to become Greek. The Bible is just as important as the passport when talking about what it means to be Greek,” Speaker 1 says. They all laugh.

Two of the migrants were baptized as children in Greece and the other two have never been baptized. All four of them, however, downplayed the role that religion currently plays in their lives. And yet, they all acknowledged that their family's religious identification as Orthodox played a role in their overall experiences in Greece, from the initial motivations to go to Greece to the connections they were able to make in Thessaloniki. Despite these shared religious spaces, their voices echo sentiments of outsidership, of not being able to locate spaces of belonging.

"The media are the worst offenders! The media is racist!" Speaker 1 is passionate as he speaks up. "When it comes to the news, all of the bad things that happen are attributed to Albanians," he says, "Even saying things like, 'A robbery has been committed and it is very possible that the Albanians are at fault'." Migration theorists Russell King and Nicola Mai (2008) document similar sentiments, noting the ways that Albanian migrants in Italy believe that the Italian media creates a "stereotypical construction of the Albanian migrant as the embodiment of all the features characterizing *uncivilization*" (188). Speaker 1 reiterates that in his opinion, the Greek media is very racist. "It is not just racism but also a fear of outsiders and foreigners," Speaker 4 maintains. He connects Greeks' reactions to Albanians to a larger issue of xenophobia. "It is difficult to separate racism from other expressions because of the current crisis." The speakers comment more and discussion ensues. Someone asks: What is racism? How can it be differentiated from other phenomena, like xenophobia? The conversation is imbued with accusations, apprehensions, melancholy, assuredness, doubt, anger, and cynicism.

"There are problems dating Greek women," Speaker 3 begins. Speaker 1 adds, "Everything about you is perfect except that you are Albanian. And their families are racist". Agreement surges on this subject. Dating strikes a chord with everyone at the

table, as they all offer stories of rejection and what it was like when girls learned that they were *really* Albanian, after initially thinking that they were Greek. Speaker 1 laments a relationship that ended because the young woman's family did not want her dating an Albanian man.

One of the speakers asks if it is possible to separate racism from ignorance. He wonders aloud if there is a difference. The word ignorance hovers over the conversation, suspended in the midst of the exchange. Other questions emerge. Someone asks: Could it be that the Greeks are just ignorant of others? That they are just not open to other cultures and to other people? The men argue. They have heard words whispered in Greece: "But why would anyone go to Albania or to Tirana? Do they not know that Albanians are thieves? They will kill you!"

"Greece is a very closed place. They do not know anything about any place other than Greece," muses Speaker 3. Speakers 1 and 2, however, feel that the bigger social problem is that Albania is at the bottom of Europe; that the country is backwards. Speaker 1: "Albanians long for Greece, for Greek songs, Greek celebrations, Greek customs, but the relationship is not reciprocal... the Greeks do not feel this way and Albanians are not celebrated in Greece." Speaker 2 adds, "The Greeks still have the Balkan mentality though." Balkan mentality. The words linger for a few minutes. They mirror anthropologist Sarah Green's often-encountered expression, "The Balkans—what do you expect?" While the definition of 'Balkan mentality' is slippery and elusive during our conversation, all four speakers feel without a doubt that both Albanians and Greeks possess it.

"Albanians cannot get a 'Greek job'. Albanians work at jobs that the Greeks do not want to work," Speaker 3 says. Why is it that Albanians cannot get the Greek jobs? Are things different in other Greek cities? Thessaloniki, it seems, has more far-right

extremists but Athens is “more European”, as Speaker 4 puts it. For this reason, life in Thessaloniki might be more difficult. A discussion of class emerges. Speaker 2, the most vocal respondent, suggests that, “An Albanian from the city, a city Albanian, is not that much different than a Greek.” Does this mean that the “city Albanian” has a different experience than other Albanians? Maybe. The consensus remains, however, that there are certain jobs that Albanians do, and those are jobs that Greeks seemingly do not want. Jobs are a problem. They are the primary reason each speaker cites for his return to Albania. What exactly is a Greek job? It seems that it is a “good” job. The list of positions one might secure in Greece is not set but it does include businessmen, salespersons, managers, attorneys, and engineers. What is an Albanian job? “Well that is a job that is half-done,” says Speaker 2 as they all laugh.

The laughing slowly fades. Our conversation returns to jobs. “No money, no funny,” one of the migrants says in English. Laughter returns again, this time lighter, more hesitant. None of the migrants have permanent employment at the moment. They are all trying to piece together whatever opportunities that they can. Some are using family connections while others are trying to find chances for more secure work. They all say that they left Greece for financial reasons but Speaker 2 says that he was bored and upset with Greece even before the crisis began: “My work slowed a few years ago. And also the women were boring me,” he jokes, as the laughter rains heavily once again. Speaker 4 says that around the year 2010 his family was not as interested in Greece anymore. The opportunities that they had previously hoped for had dissipated. There was no longer much for which to hope.

What is it like to return to Albania, in more than a temporary sense? What types of encounters have the migrants faced? Difficulties? Questions? Frustrations? Speaker 3 responds: “Have I had problems since returning to Albania? No. Mockery? Yes, I find

that people joke around and make fun of me. It is the fun and trivial type of banter.” “But there is bullying that happens,” notes Speaker 2, who uses the English term ‘bullying’ as he says that there is not an exact translation in Albanian. Brief debate ensues once more. Where is the line drawn between playful exchanges and bullying? Where exactly do migrants belong? What happens after crossing the border to the other side?

There is a belonging in-between, a question of being reared or raised in Greece, with aspects of what the migrants refer to as “Greek culture,” but also being in the margins in both Greece and Albania simultaneously. Speaker 2 says that, “I am Greek because I have Greek culture but I am not authentically Greek.” How is this authenticity denoted? What does it look like? For speaker 2, he says that it is a matter of blood, and in his case, it is Albanian blood. His conceptualization of authenticity is entangled with multiple registers of belonging, blood, and varied understandings of what it means to *really* be Albanian and to *really* be Greek.

They muse about nationalism and identity, and speaker 4 says: “Communism has made us backwards. It has given us an inferiority complex and this manifests between Albanians and others. It is why we have a weak national consciousness.” This produces some confusion over what constitutes Albanian identity exactly, and what it means to be Albanian. Speaker 2 begins: “When it comes down to it, when we are in Greece, “*Njerëz kanë mall për Shqipërinë*” (“People miss or long for Albania”). They yearn deeply for Albania. There is a tenderness, a nostalgia. This longing shapes social interactions and modes of being. It frames what it means to belong to one place or another, or to be stuck in the in-between. Belonging in Albania and Greece is intimately tied to economic stability and the ability to provide, and calls attention to the socioeconomic facets of racial belonging. There is a longing for inclusion, a longing that drives, motivates, and shapes desire. But it is also a longing that can be difficult to fully capture or readily

name. The end of the conversation leaves all four speakers believing that the Greeks are definitely unwelcoming and racist towards Albanians. Their racism plays out in many ways, though intent is mentioned, and someone questions whether the racism is different from that shown towards other groups. The final words, though, are all about *mall* and what it means to miss Albania, to not be in a certain place, and what it means to negotiate home and how to get there.

### **ACT THREE: REGIONS**

#### **Selitë**

Alba is a Romani woman who lives in a small residence in the Selitë neighborhood. Though many of her neighbors have been forced out of the community due to the expansion of the Ring Road (*Unazë e Re*), she and her daughter barely hang on to their dwelling, for now. Each morning they sit along Rruga Kavajës, selling whatever household objects they are able to scrounge together from collections and vendors. Today they are selling small sponges and dish rags. Alba is very vocal about her experiences with Albanians, or *dorë e bardhë* ('white side') as she refers to them. Today's conversation plays out over piping hot Turkish coffee, purchased from a small shack-like café nearby. An Albanian *furgon* (minivan) driver pulls up and gets out. He briefly listens to the discussion before inserting himself and offering his thoughts about the *truth* ("e vertetë") in Albania: "In Albania, there is no racism between groups like us," he offers, moving his hand in a circle around Alba and himself. "The *real* racism comes from the political parties... they perpetuate racial divisions between city and mountain folk, between people from the north, like me from Dibra,<sup>19</sup> and the people from Tirana or the

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<sup>19</sup> Dibra is a small town in northern Albania.

south.” Alba interjects with a series of questions and responses. Clicking her tongue several times, she frowns at his pompous attitude and disregard of her feelings. What about the ways that the majority population (*magjoranca*) mistreats Roms and Egyptians? What about neighborhoods like hers, where living spaces are segregated between *dorë e bardhë* and *dorë e zezë*? He looks up, smiles, and retorts, “Well coffee is black and we all drink that, so clearly there is not an issue with color in Albania.”

This interaction sheds light on aspects of racial encounters (Hartigan 1999) and the frictions that occur as people express varying sentiments about race. Both Alba and the furgon driver discuss their understanding of relations between Albanians, Roms, and Egyptians, but the furgon driver (who never provides his name) asserts his ideas while also joking about Alba’s conceptualization of whiteness and blackness. He articulates racial division as a phenomenon that does not exist between blacks and whites but rather between the rural and urban, the mountain/village and the city, the northerner and the southerner.

Many Albanians downplay or attempt to minimize issues of race and racism between Albanians and Romani/Egyptian communities. This furgon driver’s sentiments are directly tied to those expressed in the television segment in which people were asked if racism existed in Albania.<sup>20</sup> While the man from Dibra is willing to acknowledge what he saw as racial divisions between northerners and southerners, perpetuated by political parties, he is unwilling to acknowledge racial division between *dorë e bardhë* and *dorë e zezë*. However, this racial framing of northern Albanian and southern Albanian conflict

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<sup>20</sup> Interestingly enough, in both the television show and this conversation in Selitë, the conversation was not intended to be as much about racism as it was racialization and belonging. In both instances, however, individuals got extremely passionate and vocal about racism, particularly desiring to highlight the *real* or *true* racism, as is evidenced by this discussion in Selitë .

provides an entryway into understanding the relationship between racial belonging, class, and marginalization,<sup>21</sup> and how these things operate within whiteness. Below is a related ethnographic vignette from an area on the outskirts of Tirana.

“How much does it cost to rent an apartment in this neighborhood?” It seems like a simple question, and one that the bus driver could more than likely answer since he spends a significant amount of time in Shkozë each day. “You want to know about rent prices here? Why, are you thinking about living here?” Enter the *faturina* (bus fare collector) who perplexedly asks why someone was looking for apartment prices in Shkozë. Curiosity does not suffice for an answer. “Does it need to be furnished? What size apartment is needed?” The intent was just to compare prices to other areas of town, to better understand the cost of living in this neighborhood. The bus driver shifts the bus into park, and runs out to a nearby *lokal* (café). He promptly returns. “The men who work here can come now and provide details about living here, the best places to look, expected price range, and things like that.” He continues. “But, it is not good to live out here. There is no security—the houses are affordable but the people are not good. They are thieves.” The *faturina* adds, :

“Do not live here. It is better to live further away, closer to the center of town. The people who live in this neighborhood are like cows. Do you know what I mean when

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<sup>21</sup> The subject of *Gheg* (northern) and *Tosk* (southern) identity and language in Albania is lengthy and multifaceted, and cannot be addressed in its entirety here. However, this racial framing of north and south is tied to both understandings of class and whiteness, particularly thinking about the ways that the north and south signify and register. There is a significant amount of literature on the *Gheg* and *Tosk* dialects of the Albanian language, and these linguistic differences play out in numerous ways that shape the politics of identity in complex ways. The historical study of *Gheg* and *Tosk* regionalism is well documented, and Isa Blumi (1999) in particular points to the ways that scholars need to both understand the historical context of the division (tying it to the Ottoman empire) and try to nuance the study of the divide. The *furgon* driver does not use the language of *Gheg* and *Tosk* but he does talk about northern and southern divisions, and these notions are connected. For more on *Gheg* and *Tosk* Albanian dialects, please see Robert Elsie’s website: <http://dialects.albanianlanguage.net>.

I say the word cow (*lopë*)? Like cows, when you set these people free, they go wild. It is not a good area to live. These people come from the north, places like *Kukës* and *Tropoja*. They do not have any culture. I am from the South, from *Pogradec*, where there are good people not like these people.”

Both of these stories shed light on the ways that individuals frame northern and southern relations, particularly as they play out in Tirana. Referring to data from the survey on race and belonging, approximately 60 percent of the survey respondents agree, and 25 percent strongly agree that racism exists between Albanians from the north and south. Approximately 90 percent of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that racism exists in Albania. What this question about regional differentiation shows, is that 85 percent of those surveyed agree in some form that one of the ways that racism emerges is through northern and southern relations. Or rather, that a significant number of individuals would use a word like ‘racism’ to name certain intra-Albanian hostilities and conflicts. The answers to these questions shed light on the ways that people understand race and racial formations, and furthermore, illustrate how individuals articulate understandings of race and belonging. These preliminary findings suggest that notions and understandings of race and racism are dense, and vary across multiple terrains and situations.

One of the ways that those from more rural spaces feel further racialized and marginalized is through the use of the word and category of *malok* (‘bumpkin’ or ‘hillbilly’). An interlocutor once referred to the word *malok* as ‘lethal’, as a word that can kill (“*fjalë malok vret*”). The second section of the race and belonging survey featured a question about the term *malok*, and asked whether the term has racist implications or could be used as a racial epithet. The results reveal that approximately 73 percent of respondents answered ‘yes’. When these data are combined with selections from the

qualitative section, they reveal some of the ways that race is constructed. Many respondents talk about racism as a social problem in Tirana, but not necessarily between Albanians and Roms and Egyptians, or even Albanians and Greeks, but often, between Albanians from the north and south, and those from more rural, village, and mountainous areas versus those from cities. In particular, this construction of *malok* highlights the ways that people both articulate and negotiate spaces of belonging and non-belonging. This survey data sheds light on racial formations and the role that class plays in shaping belonging. The data further highlight the role that place plays in shaping what race means, in shaping identities and the articulations of belonging.

John Hartigan writes about white trash as “generated by distinctive cultural poetics” (2005:24). In a similar way, discourses about northerners and what it means to be *malok* are generated by particular cultural poetics, poetics that are rooted in historical identity formations and are tied to the ways that people understand race and belonging. For many interlocutors and survey respondents, the concept of race can speak to phenotypic difference, intra-country geographic region, and also a mentality, like the notion of the *malok* mindset or mentality (*malok nga mendje*). People deploy this type of language with biological notions, as though the notion of *malok* is biologically determined. *Malok* signifies those who do not belong or do not fully belong in Tirana.

#### **ACT FOUR: LONGING FOR ENVER**

##### **Voices from the field**

“To understand Albania, you have to understand politics, and you have to go back to the Turks! They ruled for five hundred years! Five centuries! They messed us up!”

“You are here to write about Albania? It must be about politics, right?”

“There are only three men that one needs to know to understand everything in Albania. Zog i Par<sup>22</sup> (King Zog I), Enver Hoxha, and Sali Berisha.<sup>23</sup> Enver made sure everyone had jobs and went to school but then Sali destroyed us. Today Albania is a catastrophe thanks to Sali!”

“It all comes back to politics,” Sami says. “Democracy came and so did racism. During Enver’s time, *everyone* had work. Then as soon as democracy started, the racial divisions started. Now, no one has work.”

“Only Enver would have prevented today’s catastrophes from happening.”

Comments such as this circulate often. What are the doings, un-doings, and re-doings of communism? How do they shape sentiments about Albania, and about race and belonging? Very often, everyday articulations are framed by this longing for a different time and place, and many times, the future is elusive and unimaginable, but the past is a regular retreat for relief, comfort, and understanding. At times this yearning for a retreat merges with discussions of politicians and their antics, and what emerges is a framework for explaining what is wrong and how to fix it. This framework is generative and provides an important lens for understanding sentiments of longing. A young Romani activist, who was born after communist rule, once said, “Things were better before. Under communism, *ai shefi madh* (Enver Hoxha) got it right. He would say, ‘Leave the Roms alone and do not worry about them because they are not a problem. They are not a problem for our nation.’” There is a longing to return to a previous place, to a place that perhaps made more sense, to a place that was more familiar. The next story takes a closer look at ways in which some of this longing emerged in a housing protest.

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<sup>22</sup>Zog i Par, or King Zog I, was leader of Albania from 1922–1939, serving first as Prime Minister, then President, and finally King until the start of World War II, when he and his family were forced into exile.

<sup>23</sup>The first democratically elected president after the collapse of the communist regime.

## The Protest

Their shouts puncture the air of the city square: “*Duam strehe! Duam strehe!*” (“We want shelter! We want shelter!”). The day is International Roma Day,<sup>24</sup> a day created to celebrate Romani culture throughout Europe and the world. About 150 men, women, and children, mostly residents from the Selitë neighborhood and local activists, are gathered near the Ministry of Urban Development to protest the deplorable housing conditions for both Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania. One of the biggest issues facing these communities is housing. Signs read, “*Nuk jetohet mes plerave*” (“I cannot live in the middle of trash”) and, “*Meritojmë një jetë më të mirë*” (“We deserve a better life”). A woman sits on the ground cradling her small child, wiping her baby’s hair with one motion and pushing away tears from her eye with a second. She rocks back and forth, clinching her child tighter with each forward movement. Reporters thrust microphones in the face of a community activist who reads statements on behalf of the group. Many in the back continue their chanting, voices now lowered yet steady.

The protestors resume their marching. People slowly inch toward the municipality offices, continuing their chants along the way, “*Duam strehe, duam strehe!*” One man in a dark blue sweater begins to yell in the direction of the office door.

This is racial discrimination! Roms are divided from Albanians! They do not want us here at all! We sleep in the cans—in the cans and in the garbage bins we sleep! All we do is gather cans; for cans we live! Our kids look and move for cans, all they know is cans!

At this point a small circle forms around this gentleman and others begin to offer their comments. Other statements erupt. “We only want a house! We are tired of spaghetti and

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<sup>24</sup> The Day was officially declared in 1990 at the site of the fourth World Romani Congress in Poland.

macaroni from aid groups!” “Who has eaten (i.e. stolen) all of the money for the Roms of Albania?” Fredi, another resident of Selitë, steps forward:

When Enver was around things were different.<sup>25</sup> Enver would not have allowed people to move around and aimlessly wander. Under Enver they provided us with everything: with a house, with a job, with school. Now that democracy has arrived, we are just street people. We suffer too much. Beforehand [the State] considered us the same. We used to say: ‘*rroftë partia, rroftë Enveri se Mehmeti desh na theri!*’ (‘Long live the party, long live Enver, because Mehmet wants to cut us!’) . . . Now democracy has arrived and we are still suffering. I do not know what we are going to do. Only God knows . . . Better to pack up our bags and leave this place because otherwise we are just going to suffer.

Long live Enver. Fredi’s expression is often repeated in Romani and Egyptian circles. People reference it during conversations. They teach it to their children. Long live the party, long live Enver, because Mehmet Shehu has it out for Roms and Egyptians. This is how Elton explained it to me. “The elders recite this because Enver was better for us.” Mehmet Shehu served as premier of Albania from 1954–1981 and was often regarded as Enver Hoxha’s right-hand man. Numerous Roms and Egyptians recall Shehu’s strong dislike of their communities, even to the point of drafting legislation that would prevent Roma and Egyptian populations from residing within city limits and entering city centers. Many speak of this legislation but it is difficult to document. “Oh, things like this are not going to be in any archive or library,” Elton remarks. “That kind of knowledge is only here,” he says, pointing to his head with this index finger. “That kind of thing is in our songs and stories. We know this to be true. It is in our memory.”

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<sup>25</sup> A Note from the World Bank Working Paper on the Roma of Albania: “While harmful to the country’s cultural diversity, Communist Party rule was beneficial for its poorest and most marginalized communities, including some Roma and Egyptians. The government had specific social policies to support poor population groups and integrate them into society. As a result, both communities experienced improvements in their general welfare that included improved employment, education, housing, health care, and free access to social services during the socialist period” (De Soto et. al. 2005:11).

A few weeks after the protest, Kujtim, an older Egyptian man, sits outside of this barrack smoking a cigarette. “Things were better with Enver,” he says, his voice raspy. “Only Enver Hoxha would not have allowed racial division like this.” He angrily puts out the cigarette while his small granddaughter plays with the barely-there umbrella above the door to his shack. “*E tmerrshme*,” (“It is terrible”) he laments. Many folks like Kujtim, Elton, and Fredi carry these sentiments, infused with a particular longing and nostalgia. Svetlana Boym (2001) writes about a nostalgia that rebels, one that yearns for a different time. Kathleen Stewart (1988) writes about a nostalgia that erupts. Certain feelings, responses, and stories erupt in the space of these housing protests, highlighting the longing for a previous time. Speaker Two, the Albanian migrant from Greece, spoke about the longing, the *mall* that many Albanians experience while in Greece. This *mall* can become a state of being, a desperate desire for return. This *mall* is embodied. The story is not true for every Romani or Egyptian person but a significant number long for a return. This same *mall*, though, is about longing for a place, an elsewhere, a place not here. It is a kind of longing for Europe, for inclusion, or a longing to be away from the margin. This *mall* sheds light on the affective dimensions of belonging, and the viscera and sentiments that at times escape verbal expression. It is a deep and prickly yearning, a temporality shaped at once by melancholy, hope, apprehension, insecurity, doubt, and anxiety. The margins are a spatial imaginary shaped by longing.

#### **ACT FIVE: MERITA’S BIRTHDAY**

It is Merita’s birthday. She turns four today. Her mother Shpresa has told me that she really wants a *motori* for her birthday, a small motorbike so she can ride around like her dad and uncles do when they do their waste collections. All of the children in the neighborhood like to pretend like they are riding motorcycles, especially the younger

ones who purse their lips and make the motor sound as they run around their Romani-Egyptian neighborhood in Shkozë. Merita is dancing outside her family's barrack, wearing a newly washed dress that her mother found in the river. "People throw out dresses and shoes often," her mother Shpresa says. "So I go down and grab what I can for Merita. I have already found three dresses and a pair of sandals that I have washed and made new for her." Merita's dress today is sleeveless, bright green and pink, with small ruffles along the bottom.

"Shpresa has been playing music since the very sight of morning," the neighbors say, as they laugh. About seven to eight people have gathered in chairs and plastic stools outside of the barrack. Shpresa tries to get a few folks to dance with her, and one of the neighbor's sons, a teenager, eventually joins in for a little *valle* (dance). A conversation erupts about the empty apartment buildings near the neighborhood, apartments that tower over this community of folks living in tents and barracks. "*Sa gjynah*" ("What a pity/such a shame") someone laments. "Those buildings are there, *kot* (useless/in vain), when we are struggling just feet away. Shpresa keeps dancing.

The musical vibrations creep throughout the neighborhood. Shpresa continues dancing, wearing a black jumper and tights, with a scarf tied around her waist and hips. Merita and her friends join in with her mother. Afërdita, one of the neighbors, sits outside on a cinderblock, smoking a cigarette. Her young son is the teenage boy dancing with Shpresa. Afërdita helps Shpresa serve some glasses of *Pit Bull* (a drink similar to Red Bull) and candy. They force everyone to take a few pieces, even when people vehemently object. This is a common practice, the back and forth over food. Laundry hangs from a line just over everyone's heads. Shpresa finally sits on a cinderblock. The music, still loud, starts to go in and out, with certain beats sounding as though someone is spitting them out one at a time. Someone gets up to fix the music, but there is a problem with one

of the speakers. The kids run over to try and change the volume. “*Mistrec!* (‘Troublemaker’),” one of the adults yells, to try and get the kids to scatter. Afërdita moseys towards her barrack but yells for Shpresa to turn the music up, as she still wants to hear it. “It is too hot out here but I want to enjoy the music.” Shpresa turns it up.

Shpresa goes inside and returns with a small watermelon that she begins offering to neighbors and guests. Her husband, Merita’s dad, yells, “Everyone we know is coming over, we will not have enough watermelon to give everyone a piece.” He takes his friend’s large drum and leaves the barrack. Shpresa sits down and tells the kids to move along, as it is time for a grown-folks conversation. One of the kids stumbles and falls, and Shpresa laughs and says, “She has become drunk,” in response to the *Pit Bull*. It is half past one. Shpresa is *mërzitur*, a complex word whose meaning can range from upset and sad, to bored, annoyed, or frustrated. She may be experiencing a combination of these feelings. She does not have much for Merita’s birthday. Her husband’s grandfather provided a couple of beers and the *Pit Bull*. Shpresa fished a broken doll stroller out of the river. Aside from the missing wheel, most of the stroller is in tact. They cleaned it for Merita. They do not have a cake. Shpresa says that people will stop by all day, including her mother and sister-in-law who will come later. Her husband will walk over to be with them after he finishes playing the drum in the street, which is where he has gone to try and make a little money for Merita.

Someone finds a large umbrella that only has one or two small holes. Shpresa sets it up on a table and puts out the remaining candy for some of the guests sitting in the sun. Her husband returns, wearing a white baseball cap and button-up shirt. He carries the large drum strapped around his shoulders. He hugs Merita, burying kisses on her face and neck. He gives her a small lace sack that has 100 lekë (about \$1) inside. Merita starts dancing and singing to her friends, waving her money above her head. She is wearing her

sandals from the river. Merita and the other children make their way down the road, heading to the small *dyqan* (store), more than likely to buy candy. Her dad sits in one of the chairs and takes off his hat. He gets up, repositions the umbrella, and sits back down. He is sweaty. He walked up and down the road, playing the drum for over an hour to get that money for Merita. “Turn the music down!” he demands. “It is giving me a headache.”

Merita returns, and runs to her dad, clasping a blue plastic bag. Inside there are several pieces of candy, a chocolate croissant, and a Kool-Aid type powder that she pours inside of a plastic bottle with water to make a drink. Edi, one of the neighbors, walks by and asks Shpresa about the music, which has gone out again. He says that he has a speaker system if she wants to use his. Some of the neighborhood boys take the other music system back and switch it out. They get the music going again and more people start dancing. “You have to really shake your ass to dance well,” Shpresa says. The women nearby laugh at this. Another neighbor comes over to greet Merita. “*Edhe një qind zemer!*” (“And another 100 years, my heart!”), she says, as she kisses her. Shpresa offers this neighbor some of the candy and one of the remaining pieces of watermelon. Her husband interjects, “Well the whole damn neighborhood cannot come over—we do not have enough watermelon for that! And quit giving all of that candy to the kids, we do not have enough candy! How are we supposed to welcome guests like this? I am ashamed that people see us like this.” He strikes the top of the barrack as he goes inside. Shpresa yells after him, “*Për zotën ti më mërzit jeten* (“I swear to God you upset my life”)! ”

“*Jam e lodhur, shumë* (‘I am very tired’),” Shpresa laments. She sits down on a cinderblock, the music once again pattering in and out. Merita dances with her friends, waving what remains of the chocolate croissant.

### **Interlude: *Shaka* (Joke)**

Three jokes. Three stories. Three spaces. Three encounters. This interlude enters the realm of the joke, of curiosity, of humor. I use this it to showcase the ways that things get coded as jokes, how humor happens, and then ultimately tie it to racialization and jokes. Jokes reveal a lot about how people make sense of the world. I use this interlude to query the cultural forms, poetics, and sentiments of belonging.

An Albanian joke that I once heard goes a little something like this. A police officer walks into a store and asks the saleswoman, “How much is this refrigerator?” “You cannot buy it,” she responds. “Why,?” he asks. “Because you are a police officer.” The officer is taken aback but then leaves the store. He soon returns in different clothes, this time in athletic gear. He proceeds to tell the saleswoman, “I want to buy this refrigerator.” “You cannot buy it,” she again responds. “Why not,?” the man asks. “Because you are a police officer,” she answers. The man is perplexed again and leaves the store empty-handed. He returns home and puts on the best suit in his closet, the best suit he owns and visits the store once more. When he arrives he says to the saleswoman, “I want to buy this refrigerator. How much is it?” “You cannot buy it,” she says, “because you are a police officer.” “But how do you know that I am a police officer,” the man exclaims. “I have come multiple times in different outfits, how do you know that I am a police officer,” he demands to know. “Because,” she begins, “this is not a refrigerator, it is a washing machine.”

I once visited N, my local eyebrow stylist in Tirana. She works at a hair salon near my apartment, and every few weeks I drop by and she shapes my eyebrows, a process that usually takes about twenty minutes. On this particular day she was pretty busy so I began reading a magazine. I overheard another customer talking about a family

member who had a job to finish but was essentially dragging his feet. She described this person as being lazy. “You know what they say,” she said. “*Punë e sotme mos e lë për neser* (‘Do not leave today’s work for tomorrow’),” she began, and then laughed with N, the stylist, and I too laughed and finished her statement, “*Se mund ta bëj edhe pasnesër* (‘Because you can do it the day after tomorrow’).” N began laughing even louder, as did a few other women in the salon, but the woman telling the story stared at me, surprised. She then said, “Eh, you see, now the foreigners even know about it. Even they know that we do not work. What a shame!”

I walked along Sami Frasheri road, heading to meet a friend for a drink. Three young boys slowed their gait behind me. One reached out to grab my hair and said to his friends, in Albanian, “Hey, look here, she is Jamaica! O, Jamaica, what’s going on Jamaica?” They snickered loudly. I turned around to look at them, my faced vexed and eyes pointed. “Look, it is joke, simple (*thjeshtë*),” the young man remarked. “I am not racist.”

### Chapter Three. Tales from the ‘black’ side: Egyptian Identity, Racial Constructions, and Notions of Blackness

“I just want to know about *my* history, *my* people. Who are we, the Egyptians (*Egjiptjanët*)?” I am seated at a coffee shop with Allaman and Fredi, two members of an emerging political party for a group known as the Egyptians (or sometimes referred to as Balkano-Egyptians) of Albania. Allaman, the group’s secretary, invited me out for coffee so I could learn more about their political party. “The Romani community has a name, a status, and a flag. We do not have those things. But *they* [Albanians] call us *Roms*.” He pauses. We sit in silence for a while, watching the café swell with the typical Sunday evening crowd. “There are at least 300,000 Egyptians in Albania,” he continues. “*Our* houses are in areas by the [Ottoman] castles, in older cities like Berat and Shkodra. This means that we have been in Albania a long time—our community has to be as old as these cities,” he rationalized. “Do you know the music of central Albania?” he asks me. “We are responsible for that music and that sound...that came from Egyptians.” “I do not know about the language,” he adds. “We speak Albanian but why do I not speak the Egyptian language [Arabic]? The Roms speak *their* language. What about customs, culture, where is that for *us*?” He looks at me as though I have an answer. I have none and so I do not respond. The three of us sit in silence as we finish our Turkish coffees.

I share this moment from fieldwork to introduce one of the key questions of this chapter: Who are the Egyptians of Albania? Years ago, when I first began research in Albania, I was not aware of the term ‘Egyptian’. Most people referred to a group of darker skinned individuals as either *gypsies* or *Roms*. After spending more time in Tirana, however, I quickly learned that there were numerous people who were regularly called *Rom* or *Roma* but did not self-identify as Roms. Often lumped under the category of

‘Rom’ or ‘Romani,’ the Egyptians of Tirana assert an African origin and identity, and regularly reject the idea that they are Romani. Many scholars consider this Egyptian identification to be a more recent phenomenon, though, as I will discuss shortly, there are many who argue otherwise. This chapter has four main goals:

1. To highlight this Egyptian community and ponder the emergence of the term ‘Egyptian’
2. To analyze the constructions of two different categories: ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Rom’
3. To explore the notion of blackness and the Albanian category of *dorë e zezë* (‘black side’)
4. To share ethnographic accounts around the categories of Egyptian and ‘black’ to think further about the complexities of racialization and belonging

Terms such as race and belonging are complex and contested, and highlight frictions within processes of identity formation. It is not my intention to enter the debate about the origins of Egyptians in the Balkans, nor am I trying to argue whether the group is *really* a Romani separatist group (I will get to this in a bit). Like Trubeta (2005), I do not argue that this group of Egyptians falls under the category of nation but I do want to better understand the type of grouping at play in this present moment in Tirana. Through ethnographic engagement with individuals, I feel that scholars can better understand Egyptian racial belonging. I will begin many of the sections with an introduction to an individual or group, and then refer back to these persons as I discuss the subjects of racialization, identity, and belonging.

## **ON THE MEANINGS OF *JEVG* AND *EGYPTIAN***

### **Meet Fatmiri**

The first time I meet him in the road he stands next to me and extends his hand, saying, “*më jep një qind lekë*” (“give me 100 lekë”<sup>26</sup>). A waiter is standing outside of a

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<sup>26</sup> Lekë is the Albanian form of currency. One hundred lekë is about the equivalent of \$1.00.

cafe and yells “*mistrec!*” (“troublemaker!”) at the young boy. I look down into his large brown eyes. “Please,” he says to me, in English. This makes me smile. “Where did you learn how to say ‘please’ I ask him in Albanian. He returns the smile. “I learned it from a friend,” he says. Fatmiri begins to examine me, inspecting my outfit and my glasses. “What kind of hair is this,” he asks, attempting to grab one of my locs before I jerk my head back. “Well,” I begin to explain, “they are called locs and are kind of like braids but a little different.” He is confused. “How does it stay in place like that?” “I use hair gel,” I say, as his eyes immediately widen and I quickly realize my phonetic mistake. Though I have been speaking Albanian for many years, there are a few sounds with which I still struggle. The word for “gel” in English is pronounced *xhel* in Albanian, but, as I often do, I mistakenly say the word *gjellë*, which means “food dish”. After this first encounter, Fatmiri would always joke with everyone about my hair made of *gjellë*.

I ask him his age. He tells me that he is twelve. I furrow my brow and tell him that he looks far too small to be twelve. “Okay, okay,” he says, “I am ten.” I later learn from his sister that he is eight. I asked him if he goes to school and he tells me that he does not. I asked what he does during the day and he tells me that he mostly walks the street of the *Blloku* district. I look down and realize that he is not wearing shoes but instead thick socks that are several sizes too big. He also wears a pink and yellow hoodie that is falling off his shoulders.

Fatmiri weaves in and out of nightclubs and cafes. He moves about the streets at night. I eventually begin to spend more time with him and his sisters, as well. Each day in the late afternoon, the three of them come to the *Bllok*, a hub for coffee shops and nightlife in Tirana. Sometimes they come with their older sister-in-law who begs with her

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young child on a piece of cardboard with her face always covered with a scarf. At other times they are accompanied by their mother, who has a heart condition and often falls asleep with her hand outstretched and cupped, as she slumps against the gate around Enver Hoxha's former villa. "So is your family Romani,?" I ask Fatmiri one day. He scrunches his small face and clicks his tongue, "No, I am not *gabel*,<sup>27</sup> we do not speak that *gabezqe*." Fatmiri resents that label. "We do not dig in that trash like them—we beg for money."

Fatmiri and his siblings do not speak the Romani language, and they live in a neighborhood where everyone identifies as Egyptian or *Jevg*. I later learned that many of the kids who beg in the streets surrounding the *Bllok* identify as Egyptian and many are insulted by the idea that they are considered Roms. During one of my conversations with his mother, I ask about her family background. "My father was black, real black, I mean darker than you," she says to me. She smiles. "Does your family consider themselves to be Romani?" I ask her. She clicks her tongue and wags her finger. "No! We are Egyptian. We beg because we lost our house and our money and cannot get jobs in Tirana. But we are not like the *others*—we are not Roms. We are Egyptians."

#### **ROMANI/GYPSY/EGYPTIAN: EXPLORING TERMS AND CATEGORIES**

When discussing Rom/Romani, Gypsy, and Egyptian communities in Southeastern Europe, and particularly Albania, there is an exhaustive, though not conclusive, list of terminology and categories of identities. These names are controversial and tied to complex notions of identity. The European Union, for example, uses the term *Roma* in official documents to encompass Gypsies, Travelers, Manouches, Egyptians,

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<sup>27</sup> In this instance *gabel* is used as a pejorative term for Roms. *Gabezqe* is a derogatory word for the Romani language.

Ashkali, Sinti and Boyash. Recalling the earlier discussion from my introduction, when I use the term ‘Rom’ or ‘Romani’ (written as *Roma* in Albanian), I am referring to the Romani people who are thought to have first arrived to Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and continued to arrive in waves through the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> The term *Rom* means “man” or “person” in the Romani language. I do not use *Rom* or *Gypsy* to refer to a nomadic lifestyle or to indicate something along the lines of an “imagined way of life”, but rather I use this terminology to describe particular ethnic and racial formations, specifically as they are manifested in Albania (see Hancock 2010 for more on this subject). I should note, again, that when I use terminology such as *Rom*, *Gypsy*, and *Egyptian*, like Trubeta (2005), I do not employ these terms to describe homogenous social groups, but rather, I am interested in the ways in which these terms are configured, utilized, embraced, rejected, and refashioned. I am interested in processes of grouping and who is or becomes *Rom*, *Egyptian*, *black*, or *white*, and so on.

There has been much speculation for numerous years about the origins of Romani/Gypsy people and the ethnonym *Gypsy*, particularly as it pertains to Egypt. This term appears and reappears in popular culture, often used as a catchall for anyone thought to be exotic, defying, poor, wild, free, old, bare, enticing, exciting, wandering, mysterious, or thieving. Curtis Mayfield (1961) described a Gypsy woman as someone who emerges out of nowhere, “Through a caravan around the campfire light. A lovely woman in motion with hair as dark as night...she danced ‘round and ‘round to a guitar melody, from the fire her face was all aglow.” Singer Cher (Stone 1971) had this to say about Gypsies:

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<sup>28</sup> See Hancock 2010 for a longer discussion of the waves or strata of Romani migration to Europe.

I was born in the wagon of a travellin' show  
My mama used to dance for the money they'd throw  
Papa would do whatever he could  
Preach a little gospel, sell a couple bottles of  
Doctor Good

Gypsies (*sic*), tramps, and thieves  
We'd hear it from the people of the town  
They'd call us Gypsies, tramps, and thieves  
But every night all the men would come around  
And lay their money down

In one of her songs, singer Shakira (2010) says that she, “Might steal your clothes and wear them if they fit me,” because she is a Gypsy and, “does not make agreements just like a Gypsy.” I share these song excerpts to highlight the variegated uses of the term *Gypsy* and draw attention to the ways that this usage in popular culture is tied to the ways that Roms and Gypsies are racialized, identified, labeled, and marginalized.

This chapter highlights two distinct groups in Albania: *Roms* and *Egyptians*, but the term *Gypsy* further complicates these categories, as *Gypsy* is often used to refer to both Roms and Egyptians even though Egyptians in the Balkans reject the label of Rom or Romani. Trubeta (2005) notes that early Ottoman documents include discussion of groups named “Çingene” or “Kipti” that scholars now tend to link with Egypt, as the term “Kipti” refers to the Coptic confession of Egyptians. Duijzings (2002) notes that many Europeans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries first thought Romani groups to be from Egypt, and includes two main speculations as to how this came to be. The first theory is that early fifteenth-century Gypsy chiefs presented themselves under the guise of “Dukes of Egypt”, in hopes that they would be accepted by European societies. A second theory suggests that Europeans misnamed Roms as Gypsies. Linguistic and genetic research from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries strongly suggests that Romani people have

Indian origins (Hancock 2002; Hancock 2010; Matras 2004), and this is the most commonly held view of most scholars.

The majority of white Albanians consider both Roms and Egyptians to be Gypsies (Courthiades 2002), though there are many local designations that I think are important to mention. The following designations<sup>29</sup> come from Marcel Courthiades's (2002) research with Romani and Egyptian groups in Albania.

***Gabel***: A word of Mediterranean origin (possibly from Latin) meaning “stranger” or “foreigner.” It is often considered derogatory, particularly when used by a non-Romani individual.

***Jevg***: A term used for people who are often called “gypsy” and have darker skin but do not identify as having Indian origins. A person who is referred to as *jevg* is considered to be of a different group than those who identify as *gabel*. Often this term is considered derogatory, particularly when used by a person who does not identify as *jevg* or Egyptian.

***Magjyp***: Related to the etymology of the word “Egypt”; used to designate Roms and Egyptians, especially in Northern Albania

***Arixhi***: “Bear tamer”; a derogatory term for Roms and Egyptians, predominantly used in the southern Albanian dialect

For the purposes of this chapter, I want to focus more on the terms *gabel* and *jevg* from the above list, as the term *gabel* has more commonly marked Roms while *jevg* is considered to be a term for Egyptians. These terms are both shifting (as all of the terms in the aforementioned section are). At times they are considered derogatory and at others, they are used as a means of self-identification. Historically in Albania, the present-day

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<sup>29</sup> I also want to highlight the term *gaze* or *gadje* in the Romani language (sometimes written as *gadjo* in Albanian), which is used to designate a person who is not Romani. While many Roms in Albania use this term in Albanian (*gadjo*), my Romani interlocutors also regularly employ *dorë e zezë* to refer to themselves and Egyptians, whereas *dorë e bardhë* is reserved for Albanians, Greeks, and Slavs.

group known as Egyptian was referred to more commonly as *jevg*, and many Egyptians presently identify as *jevg*. I visited the national archives in Albania in search of more information about the history of this term. After combing through various documents for what seemed like months, I eventually came across a letter from 1930 from members of the *Kull e Hiri* neighborhood in Korçë, in southern Albania (see Hazili & Myftar 1930). Below I offer an excerpt from a letter written to the prime minister on behalf of a community that refers to themselves as *jevg*:

Zoti Kryeministër,

Të nënshkruarit e pleqësisë së lagjes Kull e hiri të Korçës, kemi nderin në emër të popullsisë së kësaj lagjeje t'ju parashetrojmë lutjen e mëposhtme: Me gjithëse elementi (Jevg) që përfaqësojmë, si nënshtetas Shqiptarë të bindur në urdhrat e Lart Madhërisë, Mbretit tonë të dashur, dhe ligjeve në veprim, jemi duke i dhënë shtetit gjithë taksat qeveritare, jemi duke marrë pjesë aktivisht në çdo lëvizje, si në votimin për anëtarët e Dhomës Legjislative, anëtarëve të Bashkisë dhe të Dhomës së Ekonomisë këmbëtare, dhe jemi duke shërbyer si ushtarë dhe paraushtarakë, dhe me një fjalë si ushtarë të bindur të Lart Madhërisë jemi gati të sakrifikojmë dhe jetën tonë për Mbret, Komb dhe Atdhe, dhe kështu si të tillë përbëjmë një pjesë të popullsisë Shqiptare, por mjerisht deri më sot popullsia jonë nuk është përfillur për asgjë, nuk kemi parë e dëgjuar që ndonjë nga popullsia e kësaj lagjeje, edhe pse të zotë të detyrës, të kenë marrë pjesë si nëpunës të shtetit apo të përfillen duke u marrë me një shërbim të pajtueshëm me zotësinë e tyre.

Kjo natyrisht na dëshpëron pa masë, mbasi me këtë vjen një mospërfillje e këtij elementi i cili është përbuzur në një klasë më të ulët.

Mr. Prime Minister,

The undersigned elders of the neighborhood “Kull e hiri” of Korça, have the honor in the name of the population of this neighborhood to pose in front of you the following inquiry: Even though we represent the Jevg [group], as Albanian citizens, obedient of the orders of His Majesty, our beloved King, of laws in power, we pay all taxes to the government, we are active at any movement, as in voting for the House of Lords, voting for the members of House of Laws, members of the Municipality and the Chamber of National Economy, we are

enrolled as military and paramilitary, in a word as obedient soldiers of His Majesty we are ready to sacrifice our lives for the King, Nation and Country, and as such we are part of the Albanian population, but unfortunately still today our population is not taken into consideration at all; we have not heard or witnessed anyone from this neighborhood, even those capable for the job, be hired as a State official or to be considered to hold a duty at the level of their capabilities. This, of course, disappoints us immensely, because through this comes the neglect of this element [that is, the characteristic of being *Jevg*], which is despised as a lower class.

This letter illuminates frictions of identity formation. It also sheds light on usages of the term *jevg* and those groups that were officially recognized as minority groups with protected rights. Included in the archive was a short response from the Prime Minister's Office that was only three lines and ended with the following statement: "There is no difference between your group and other Albanians" (see Hazili & Myftar 1930). With this response, we can see that members of the Kull e hiri neighborhood believed themselves to be *jevg* and thus different, but the Albanian State did not acknowledge this distinction. Considering the response from the Prime Minister's Office and my further research in the archive, the only minority groups recognized by the Albanian State, particularly right before and during communism, were those deemed either national or linguistic minorities: Greek, Macedonian, and Aramaic groups. This did not include Romani groups, the majority of which speak Romani as their mother tongue. Both Roms and Egyptians were consistently excluded from the status of "minority", and only recently with the 2011 census, were people able to select categories such as "Rom" and "Egyptian" on official documents<sup>30</sup> when denoting their ethnicity. As previously argued,

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<sup>30</sup> As mentioned earlier, there was much controversy surrounding the 2011 census in Albania, particularly with the category of "ethnicity." Though respondents were given the opportunity to select from categories that included Albanian, Greek, Romani, Egyptian, Macedonian, and others, there was also mention of a high fee of \$1,000 for anyone who marked a category that was different from an individual's birth certificate. In addition to the difficulties this posed for all respondents, it was particularly problematic for many Roms and Egyptians, because these categories did not exist as an option for ethnicity until 2011.

because Roms and Egyptians in Albania have historically occupied a precarious space in terms of nation, this notion of minority identity and recognition along the lines of nationality has been difficult to trace.

We know from scholars such as Stuart Hall (2002) and James Clifford (1991) that identity itself is unstable and conjectural. Identity is a category of practice (Brubaker and Cooper 2005). This letter poses numerous questions about identity, recognition, and representation. This community from Korçë self-identifies as *jevg*. They write that they are law-biding Albanian citizens who also consider themselves *jevg*. This letter illuminates the ways in which this community felt that their group was not represented in the ministry or other government sectors. They felt that this lack of representation was due to the fact they were *jevg* and considered “a lower class,” which is extremely important when drawing the connection between *jevg* and *Egyptian*, because the Egyptian community and political party of Tirana presently articulates similar sentiments.

The term *jevg* carries multiple meanings. Most times these meanings are associated with phenotype. An example comes from the Albanian novel *Jevgu i Bardhë* (‘The White Jevg’) (1989), which is the story of an Albanian war orphan who was raised with a *Gypsy* family (the text does not use terms such as Romani or Egyptian). After the war he was placed in a home for children but was unhappy there and eventually fled to rejoin the *Gypsy* family. This book’s title and narrative reveal the way in which the term *jevg* is racialized as non-white. Though the young orphan is a white Albanian, he ultimately chooses to live with *Gypsies*, where he feels a sense of belonging. In Albania, racial groups have not been sharply defined in the same way as other places like the United States, for example, but racialization processes like the one the novel depicts have existed and have shaped belonging. Furthermore, many aspects of Albanian society have been organized along these racialized lines.

The figure of the *jevg* has been constructed in additional ways. I once visited a dental office with Mira in Tirana. During checkout at the end of our appointment I realized that I did not have as much cash in my wallet than I previously had thought. I informed the dental assistant that I would go to the ATM and quickly retrieve enough money to pay for my services, but Mira insisted that we could put our cash together and come up with the amount that was owed. We both took all of our bills and coins out of our purses and together, had just enough for the fee. Mira laughed and looked at me, “*Jemi berë si jevg*” (“We have become like the *jevg*”), as she and the dentist both laughed. I asked Mira what she meant by this expression and she said, “You know, we are like them because they always spend all the money they have at one time.”

While having coffee with my friend Agim, a historian, I asked him about the meaning of *jevg*. He explained that it referred to someone who just spends all of their money; he said that they, “cannot save and do not know how to save or plan for a future.” His understanding of *jevg* was similar to Mira’s. Landi, another Albanian friend, once commented that, in his opinion, the term *jevg* previously had not been derogatory but rather, meant ‘handyman.’ “When I was growing up, every neighborhood had a *jevg* who could fix things or would have scrap material,” Landi said. “They also collected things that we did not need anymore.” The *jevg* becomes gypsy, dark-skinned, spendthrift, scraps collector, bad planner, and used clothes seller. A *jevg* is someone who resells clothes and at times, the person from which you secretly buy clothes, as my friend Besa once whispered to me inside of a cafe. A *jevg* might be the musician at a wedding or party because they are the “best musicians,” as is often exclaimed. It is important to explore these constructions of the *jevg* because in more recent years, the category of Egyptian has emerged from those who were and are considered *jevg*.

## THE EGYPTIANS

It is important to situate the conversation about Egyptians in Albania within a larger Balkan context, particularly thinking about the Egyptians in Kosovë and Macedonia. It is commonly thought that the term 'Egyptian' first emerged in the 1980s in the former Yugoslavia and Albania, and became more popular in the 1990s. A formal association was founded in Korça, in southern Albania, in June of 1992, followed by regional associations such as the Students' Egyptian Association in Albania, which was later united in the Cultural Association of the Egyptians in Albania "Nefreta" (i.e. Nefertiti). When I use the term 'Egyptian' I am referring to a group of individuals who trace their origins through Egypt, rather than India, and assert an Egyptian, African identity. Egyptians in Albania do not speak the Romani language (they primarily speak Albanian as their mother tongue). In numerous neighborhoods, you may find Roma and Egyptian families living together, and even those with mixed marriages, though Roms and Egyptians often claim to be separate groups.

In terms of everyday articulations in Tirana about Egyptians you may hear: "*Janë më të integruar*" ("They are more integrated"). People in Albania have long thought that there existed two types of *gypsy* groups: those that were more segregated and those that were more integrated. I once mentioned my ongoing research to a friend of mine while having coffee one afternoon. I explained to her the numerous ways in which individuals drew distinctions between Roms and Egyptians. I told her about my conversations with Egyptian families who begged and washed windows in Tirana. She interrupted me to say, "But those people who beg and wash windows, those are not Egyptians. They are all Roms." I told her that I had already had extensive conversations with many of the folks and that they identified as Egyptians, not Roms. "But they are *really* Roms," she said. "They just do not want to admit it because they are ashamed, but they are Roms." I asked

her if she had ever had conversations with any of the people in question but she quickly retorted that because they begged and often wore loud, mismatched clothes, they must be Roms. The Egyptians, according to her, were more civilized.

I retold this story to Xheladin Taço, a prominent Romani activist in Tirana and he chuckled. He said that my exchange with this friend reminded him of an incident that had just occurred earlier that year. Xheladin attended a conference at Tirana International Hotel with many elected officials and human rights organizations. The goal of the conference was to address socioeconomic issues affecting Romani communities in Albania, and to raise awareness about employment and housing conditions. During one of the presentations, one of the officials referenced Romani families who begged just down the street, and the need to develop programs that could provide assistance to them. Xheladin said that he spoke up and informed the larger group that in fact, the group that the speaker was referencing was Egyptian and not Romani. Xheladin says that some of the attendees were surprised at his assertion, but that most were incredulous, so much so that Xheladin suggested that they walk down the road and simply ask for themselves. During the break Xheladin lead a group outside and down the road towards two large families that were washing windows and begging. He asked the families how they identified, whether they were Roms or Egyptians and they proclaimed that they were Egyptian. One of the young boys (who appears later in this dissertation), Arben, seemed insulted that he would be considered Romani. None of the persons in either family spoke Romani and a couple even scoffed at the idea that some thought they were Roms. This is not unlike Fatmiri and his family, who were very quick to correct me when I asked if they were Romani. Fatmiri considered himself to be above Roms, and also considered his family's choice of begging to be a more suitable means of earning income compared to scrap collection. He also mocked the Romani language, *gabezqe* as he referred to it, and

emphasized that his family did not use “that kind of talk.” Another conversation from fieldwork with one of my neighbors went as follows:

My parents’ house is the first one that borders the homes of the Egyptians and divides them from those of the whites (white Albanians). All of the houses on the left belong to white people, and all on the right belong to Egyptians, and the Roms are found just a few meters away from the Egyptians. I have played with them as a kid and worked with them as an adult. They are clients of our business and we are clients of their business. It has been like this even when my great-grandfather was a kid, in that same neighborhood. The Albanian government helps the Roms and the Egyptians as much as they help other Albanians. But not all Roms receive help and many do not send their kids to school, because they do not register their children at the Civil Registration Office.

The Egyptian communities, on the other hand, they send kids to schools and follow the rules. They were discriminated in schools by students and teachers when I was a kid. They used to sit in the back and get called **bythëzinj** (‘black ass’), and yet they kept going to school. After school, the kids of the Egyptians worked with their parents to build their own homes out of clay, shaping bricks with their hands and letting them dry in the sun. The Roms kept living in shacks and begged but the Egyptians cleaned toilets for two cents and did not beg. We never saw the Roms of our neighborhood do what the Egyptians did, except for just a few ones.... When I was 13, the Roms that were my age were getting married for the second time. The Roms used to live four or five families in a single house and they partied almost every weekend, even on weekdays. They used to get drunk and fight each other. They bought the alcohol with the money their children had collected by begging. The Egyptians did not do this” (Fieldnotes June 2014).

I share these moments, as well as the subsequent sections, to shed light on the ways in which words such as *Rom*, *Egyptian*, *gabel*, and *jevg* signify, and how, in particular, they are tied to belonging, social class, space, and division of labor. Many Egyptians, like Fatmiri’s family, consider themselves to be better off than Roms, or at least of a higher social class. As I illustrated above, there is a common practice of differentiating between Egyptians and Roms as two kinds of *Gypsy* groups,: those that are more integrated and/or assimilated, and others that tend to be more isolated or separated. The latter group, however, is not only thought of as separated but also are labeled with

such terms as “wild,” “lazy,” “uncivilized,” and “unruly,” as can be seen with the comments from my neighbor. This type of labeling and grouping of Romani/Egyptian/Gypsy groups is evident in many places other than Albania. Alaina Lemon (2000) takes note of this type of categorization as a “clash between ‘culture’ and ‘wild’ gypsies” (61). Stuart Mann, a British scholar and writer, chronicled the same type of distinction between Roms and Egyptians in Albania. Though very dated, his early writings (1933) from central and southern Albania highlighted the ways in which Albanians differentiated between the two groups (note, Mann uses the term *Arli*, an older word that some Albanians use in place of *jevg* or *Egyptian*):

The Albanians make a sharp distinction between the Arli and the Roms. The Roms are called by the Albanians ‘Kurbat’, ‘Cërgëtar,’ (‘tent-dwellers’), and most commonly of all Arixhi. But they call the Arli ‘Jevg,’ ‘Magjyp,’ and (in South Albania) ‘Biçës. The Jevgs call the Roms ‘Tsikan’. They [the Jevgs] are a dark, reddish-skinned people, living in humble settlements in various parts of Albania. They stoutly deny any connexion (sic) with the Roms, and to call them ‘Tsikan’ is the worst possible insult. Their traditions seem to point to an African origin.... One theory (I forget whose) is that the Jevgs are descendants of Egyptian slaves who escaped from Greece and fled to Albania. They are clean, honest, hardworking, and fairly intelligent. Many of their children go to school, and I have had one or two of them in my classes at the Tirana Technical School. The men-folk are rather lazy, but practice smithery. The women work in houses as servants, or take in washing.... The women, especially, are very shy and avoid all contact with ‘Europeans’ and even Albanians. They are despised by the latter, but feel themselves (justly) to be above the Roms (2-3).

Mann’s writings provide another example of grouping the Egyptians and Roms as civilized and wild, respectively. My Albanian neighbor’s categorization of Roms and Egyptians overlaps with Mann’s analysis. The Jevgs, as Mann notes, deny any connection to Roms and consider them inferior. My ethnographic research points to the ways in which some Egyptians presently hold similar sentiments towards Roms, like

Fatmiri does. At times, Mann's writings are extremely problematic. He writes about Albanians, Roms, and Jevgs as primitive peoples. Moreover, he describes Jevgs as having, "high eyebrows converging toward the middle of the forehead and large eyelids, oval face, and small chin" as a means of trying to link their origins to Egypt; he goes as far as to write that, in his opinion, some of the Jevg women were "the living image of queen Nefertiti" (1933:3). Despite these flaws, his writings provide an additional account of the ways that the *Jevg* identity has been constructed as separate from that of the Roms.

Other common articulations about Jevgs and Egyptians include: the idea that "*You cannot trust those people, they'll say anything to get money from you.*" This type of sentiment is tied to the widespread idea that the majority of Egyptian and Romani peoples are street beggars who cannot be trusted. Another common articulation is that "*None of them know anything, they are not honest. They are one thing one day, a different the next.*" For many residents of Tirana, there is an inability to believe anything that Roma or Egyptian groups assert in terms of identity because they are often viewed as untrustworthy, which is tied to their insecure housing and the frequency with which they move around. Moreover, these terms such as 'Rom' and 'Egyptian,' especially in official contexts, have only recently entered the lexicon, and as such, many people respond to these words with uncertainty.

Numerous Romani writers and community activists, as well as other social science theorists (Duijizing 2000; Mariashiakova and Popov 2013) argue that the self-identifying Egyptians are Romani separatists who choose not to identify as such and no longer speak the Romani language. Mariashiakova and Popov (2013) argue that scholars should recognize Egyptians as they self-identify *but* argue that Egyptians fall under the umbrella heading of Gypsy. In an ethnographic and historical study of Gypsies, Roma, and Sinti, they write:

Gypsies form a specific intergroup ethnic community which has no parallel among other European nations. The broader Gypsy community is divided into a widespread archipelago of separate groupings, split in various ways into metagroups, groups and subgroups, each with their own ethnic and cultural features. Sometimes these groupings are even opposed to each other and their problems are frequently completely different in nature and therefore cannot be generalized (2001b:33).

For Marushiakova and Popov, *Gypsy* is a very large and complex category. It is a broad term that encompasses both Roms and Egyptians. The authors also maintain that the emergence of the Egyptian identity as a specific community separate from the Roms, follows other Gypsy models of ethnic mimicry in the Balkans, that is, “an unwillingness to declare their own identity and an acquisition of a preferred identity” (2000:470). Their research on Egyptians in the Balkans links the Egyptian groups in Albania, Kosovë, and Macedonia with other groups such as the “Agupti” living in the Rhodope mountains of Bulgaria, where their origin is attributed to Egyptian slaves brought to the Balkans by the Roman soldiers (see Primovski 1955: 248 in Marushiakova & Popov 2013). By linking these groups, Mariashiakova and Popov attempt to show that the emergence of Egyptians in Albania is only indicative of a larger separatist movement of Romani groups who no longer want to identify as or be labeled as Roms.

Other theorists, such as Ger Duijzings (2001) and Eben Friedman (2007) subscribe to the idea that Egyptian identity became popular in the former Yugoslavia once the authorities provided an option for Albanian-speaking Roms to gain more political clout if they were not considered Albanian. As such, groups were attracted to the idea of being known as Egyptians. The Yugoslavian census was used to set ethnic quotas for jobs, housing, and political appointments. Some argue that due to the various inter-ethnic conflicts and competition within the former Yugoslavia, Albanian-speaking Roms

had an incentive to identify as Egyptian and thus receive more access to resources if they were not considered Albanian (Duijzings 1997; Friendman 2007).

Rubin Zemon, a historian and anthropologist from Macedonia who identifies as Egyptian, argues that Egyptians and Roms are two separate groups, each with its own distinct history. Zemon maintains that in order to understand the Egyptians and their experiences in the Balkans, it is important to look at early relationships between Alexander the Great and Egypt. He dates Egyptian presence in the Balkans as early as the fifth and sixth centuries. Many other researchers have written off his scholarship as “folk history” or “folk narrative”, but I think it is important to consider how people construct their heritage and what it means to be descendants of ancient Egypt and amongst earlier arrivals in the Balkans. Zemon (2001) urges scholars to distinguish Roms and Egyptians as two separate groups. He argues that Egyptians have a distinct lineage and arrived in the Balkans specifically as blacksmiths and ironworkers many centuries ago. He maintains that Romani peoples have their origins in India but at some point, they preferred to declare themselves as “Egyptians” for greater prestige in society, thereby hiding their Indian origin. He maintains that Egyptians trace their heritage and identity in Africa, whereas Roms are *really* from India. Because of this he urges scholars to be very sensitive with their use of terminology, and that conclusions have to be made very carefully, especially about the distinctions and historical uses of Gypsy and Egyptian. Zemon also discusses the ways in which many Egyptians are not yet conscious about their identity. His writings frequently refer to the global forms of discrimination against people of African descent, and he situates the plight of Egyptians in the Balkans alongside such experiences as the 1950s and 60s Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.

I share these perspectives to broaden the discussion of Egyptian identity. Rather than debate questions of a “real” or “authentic” identity, I think it is important to consider

processes of identity construction and racialization, and to think particularly about Zemon's notion of consciousness and what the process of Egyptian being or awakening looks like. It is also critical to remember that these articulations of being Egyptian are not necessarily new. According to Ger Duijzings, "Egyptians in the former Yugoslavia and Balkans did not appear out of the blue: there is a long history of 'Egyptian' presence in the Balkans, which has survived in locally and regionally defined identities" (2001:195). I argue that one of these regionally defined identities is that of the *jevg* in Albania, a group that I have shown is not a new identity formation. Not everyone in Tirana who identifies as *jevg* embraces the term *Egyptian*. And not everyone who identifies as *Egyptian* readily identifies as *jevg*. These terms are contested, rejected, and questioned. I offer the following stories from fieldwork:

### **Meet Idi**

"Do not call me Egyptian!" he yells. "You know that I am *jevg*." We are at a human rights training event with young men and women, all advocates and social activists in the Romani and Egyptian communities in Albania. While discussing my research project about Egyptians, Idi interjects with this statement. I turn and ask him why he does not like the term *Egyptian* and he asks me, "Tell me this, do I speak the Egyptian language?" He waits for an answer. "No," I reply, somewhere between a response and a question. "Exactly, I do not. What culture do I have from Egypt? What language? Where is the connection between Egypt and us? There is not one, so I am not Egyptian—I am a *jevg*."

As he says, Idi only wants to be known as *jevg* and rejects the term *Egyptian*. While I do meet others who articulate similar sentiments, Idi is extremely passionate about his identification as *jevg*, and even identifies as black, but he feels that he does not have any

actual connections to Egypt. This is a different way of articulating Egyptian identity, particularly when compared with the sentiments of the two brothers who run a clothing store near my apartment. They identify as *mullatë*, meaning half Egyptian, half white Albanian. “We are Egyptian, but we are all Muslim, and we are Albanian,” the older brother explains to me. When I ask about the term *jevg*, he scoffs and says, “Do not call me that. That term is reserved for those who dig in trash, who do not have education. They are a lower class of people.”

Conversations such as these reveal the ways in which webs of identity are entangled, and how these terms are multilayered and dynamic. The processes of identity formation are not simplistic. Idi does not want to be known as Egyptian because that identity seems too precarious. Instead he embraces *jevg* and takes pride in it, while the two brothers reject *jevg*, preferring to be known as Egyptian. The two brothers also emphasize their Muslim identity as well as the fact that they are Albanian. Their sentiments are not unlike those of many of my Romani and Egyptian interlocutors who do identify as Albanian nationals and at the same time, consider themselves to be Rom or Egyptian (or *jevg*), or *dorë e zezë* (‘black’). Though there have existed practices in which Roms/Gypsies/Egyptians have been racialized, I argue that there are now new affects of race and belonging that have manifested in the past 20—25 years. Duijzings (2001) and Trubeta (2005) maintain that this group of Egyptians has begun to develop a newly emergent national consciousness beyond local confines (see Duijzings 2001:195-196). I would like to add an analysis of racialization to that broader conversation, specifically a focus on the emergence of Blackness in articulations of belonging.

## Meet Sami

I watch Sami's youngest son dash into the small door beneath the stairs. He is always shy, quickly running away when I come by his door. Sami's family lives in the building basement beneath Mira's house. I turn my head to hear various neighbors yelling from their windows, shouting out Sami's name. This is his signal that they have plastic jugs or aluminum cans for him to collect. "Do not ever go inside their hallway if you're ever over *there*," Mira warns me. "If you do, you will not be able to breathe. The entire family wrecks—you can smell them from a hundred meters away." Sami's family collects trash and recyclables that they sell to a junk and materials guy. On average they might make about \$6 a day, \$8 on a good day. This is their main source of income. Because they keep most of their collections by the door, a distinct smell always lingers in the alley.

One night I meet Sami for coffee. He tells me that fifteen people live in the basement hallway, where they have been squatting for about twenty years. Immediately following the end of communism in 1991 his family lost their property to an Albanian family who claimed to be the original landowners. He says they were put out of their home by force but does not elaborate much as to how it happened. At some point they ended up in the *Shallvarë* neighborhood, in this building's basement. Sami is not very forthcoming with the details of how they arrived here. As he remembers, they were previously in one place and now they are in another. He tells me that there is not very much to the story. In the alley behind the apartment building people pass by and often yell out "*Romë*" or "*Gabel*" toward Sami's family. Sami tells me that he is not Romani, but that he is a *jevg*. "We are not Roms," he says, clicking his tongue. "We do not speak that *gabezqe*," he points out, reminiscent of Fatmiri's response. "My family is Egyptian."

We chat for a while longer about Sami's childhood and his experiences growing up in Tirana. At one point he suddenly stops talking and stares at two people who have just walked into the cafe. "Wait, stop a minute," he says, waving his hand in front of me. "Turn the recorder off," he says. I follow his instruction, unsure of what is going on. Sami paces along the balcony, his eyes focused on the young couple that is now seated beneath us. Sami makes a phone call but no one answers. He returns to the table. "That is my niece and she is here with a boy that is *dorë e bardhë* ('white') and I do not recognize him." Sami's phone rings and he quickly answers it. "O Ba, niece is here with a boy. He is *dorë e bardhë*. Do you all know about this?" I make the assumption that the niece lives with Sami's parents. "O, he is a colleague from work? I wanted to let you know that I saw her because I did not know who this was. Okay good, good, *ciao, ciao* (*Mirë, mirë, ciao, ciao*)." Sami ends the phone call. "He is a colleague from work," he says to me, as though I had not heard him on the phone and also, as though I, too, need to be reassured about the man that she is with. "What is *dorë e bardhë*?" I ask him. "Them, *Shqiptarët* (Albanians), they are *dorë e bardhë* and we are *dorë e zezë*."

#### **ON RACIALIZATION AND THE MEANINGS OF BLACKNESS**

As I discussed in the previous section, there is a great deal of friction, slippage, and entanglement around the names used for Romani/Egyptian/Gypsy groups in Southeastern Europe, as there is with any conversation around naming and labeling. Many Albanian dictionaries translate the English word *gypsy* as *jevg*, though as Marcel Courthiades (2000) points out, and as my ethnographic excerpts have illuminated, this is not a proper translation, as many Roms do not consider themselves *jevg*, and *jevgs* do not consider themselves to be Roms. Though there exist various names and terms for Romani, Egyptian, and Gypsy communities in Albania, most people in Albania would

term these groups as *dorë e zezë* ('black hand') while Albanians, along with small populations of Greeks and Slavic groups, would be considered *dorë e bardhë* ('white hand'). In the ethnographic vignette above, Sami refers to Egyptians as *dorë e zezë*, or black, while he refers to the young Albanian man with his niece as *dorë e bardhë*, or white.

While many researchers have addressed the subjects of nationalism and ethnicity in the Balkans (Bakic-Hayden 1995; Brubaker et. al. 2006; Green 2005; Schwandner-Sievers & Fischer 2002), very few have taken racialization as an analytic and ethnographic object. In my research I ask what role have race and processes of racialization played in the formation of Romani and Egyptian identities, particularly in Albania and Southeastern Europe? Or, perhaps another question to ask is: how are various Romani and Egyptian identities mediated through local constructions of race, in this case, constructions of blackness? I feel that this question has received little attention in scholarship about Romani groups, though scholars such as Ian Hancock (2010) and Alaina Lemon (1995; 2002) have written at length about the subject. Michael Stewart's 2013 article, "Roma and Gypsy 'Ethnicity' as a Subject of Anthropological Inquiry," details anthropological approaches to the study of Roma and Gypsy populations. In this article, Stewart writes about the ideological notion of "ethnicity" (2013:418) but does not clearly frame his use of the term. Readers can, however, infer from the article, that his use of ethnicity includes among other things, "way of life," "language," "religious practices," "customs," "maintenance of ethnic boundaries," and "shared action" (2013:419-422). Still, his use of ethnicity is rather nebulous, and often operates on the assumption that the reader already understands his framework. Stewart also notes the inability of "racism discourse" to adequately comprehend Romani livelihoods (420). I argue that these identities in Tirana, including Roms and Egyptians, are mediated through

local constructions of race, and the language of *dorë e zezë* and *dorë e bardhë* provides an example of racialized understandings of identity in Albania. This type of grouping illustrates the ways in which bodily features or assumed characteristics are used to mark certain persons or social groups (Cornell and Harmann 2007).

These categories of whiteness and blackness are important for analyzing processes of racialization, particularly in the case of Roms and Egyptians and the meanings of blackness. Very little research has been conducted on this subject, and some scholars such as Tracy Koci argue that these types of racialized identities do not exist in Albania. She writes, “The Roma in Albania have no political concept of themselves as ‘black’ (Roma) as opposed to ‘white’ (Albanians). Nor does the general Albanian population polarize the two groups in this way” (2001:391). Koci notes that this lack of differentiation is likely due to the “efforts to banish all reference to ethnicity and difference during the long period of Enver Hoxha’s rule” (2001:391-392). Numerous times in her work, Koci maintains that there is no political consciousness of blackness amongst Romani groups in Albania. I do not want to assume that terms such as black (*e zezë*) and white (*e bardhë*) operate in Albania or the Albanian language in the same manner as they would in other places, but these terms are very much present in Albania, and are readily deployed in and around Tirana as individuals and groups negotiate racialized identities. Though the communist party may have made attempts to eradicate racial logics and racialized notions of difference, my research shows that racialized identities were at play before and during communist rule, and take numerous forms in the post-communist period. Koci also writes about the lack of racial categories in formal political discourse, and while in Tirana it may not be common for politicians to refer to *dorë e bardhë* and *dorë e zezë* as formally recognized groups, these terms are circulating

more regularly. Moreover, numerous Romani and Egyptian actors employ these terms and the language of racial discrimination in their political demonstrations and protests.

I do not, however, want to imply that these terms, black (*e zezë*) and white (*e bardhë*) always have fixed meanings. In her study of Romani groups in Moscow, Alaina Lemon writes:

It is not my intent to transpose histories of slavery and repression on the American continents to Eurasia but to untangle how signs of “blood,” “blackness,” are used in Russia in specific ways to explain behavior, culture, and social position as biologically determined. Even relations of exchange thus become a matter of race. (1995:4)

Like Lemon, I highlight the unique constructions of blackness in Albania without necessarily equating the history (or present-day manifestations) of blackness in Albania with those in the Americas. Recalling my earlier discussion of Goldberg’s “racial regionalizations,” I also want to consider the many forms that blackness itself takes across both Albania and the European terrain. For example, the term ‘black’ in the United Kingdom can refer to all groups racialized as non-white (Nassy Brown 2005). Ian Hancock writes that in one dialect of the Romani language, Eastern Europe is referred to as *Kali Oropa* (Black Europe) whereas Western Europe is known as *Parni Oropa* (White Europe). He notes that these designations are due to the fact that the greatest concentration of Romani people is in Eastern Europe (Hancock in Guy 2001).

As an ethnographer I have also been racialized as *dorë e zezë*, particularly in Romani and Egyptian neighborhoods. I offer the following encounter from my fieldwork to consider yet another way that *dorë e zezë* manifests:

I first visited the Shkozë neighborhood with a group of community activists and my friend Shpresa, a young Egyptian woman who refers to herself as the neighborhood leader. “*Dorë e zezë* (‘black people’) suffer so much...I will fight

against racism for *us* as long as I am alive,” she iterates. Shpresa is married to a Romani man. As Shpresa introduced herself to me many of the nearby residents (Albanians, Roms, and Egyptians) began asking, “Is this your sister, Shpresa?” as they nodded and pointed at me. Because I had never met this woman before I laughed but soon realized that some of the inquiries were genuine. “Yeah she is my twin,” Shpresa retorted, laughing as she cocked her head back. “Look at how we have the same skin.” This became a regular occurrence throughout my fieldwork, and Shpresa would often say, “Well *we* are both *dorë zezë*, that is why everyone asks.” These types of articulations highlighted the ways in which Shpresa, and other Egyptians, understood blackness and otherness. One of her neighbors, who also identified as Egyptian, once commented, “We are all the same, all of us *black* people”, and made a circular motion that include me in his construction of *we* (Fieldnotes January 2014).

This usage of *dorë e zezë*, or blackness, here, is one that is more global and all encompassing of black people. It reminds me of a Balkan Egyptian symposium that was convened for all Egyptians across the region. One of the key elements of this symposium was a discussion of prejudice, and how to combat it. The program featured discussions of such events as the United States Civil Rights movement, and how figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., fought on behalf of all black peoples, including Egyptians in the Balkans. The leaders of this symposium situated their plight within a broader context of blackness.



Illustration 1. Balkan Egyptian conference on prejudice and discrimination, which features a Martin Luther King Jr. banner (Zemon 2001).

While there is a great deal of discussion about group boundaries and the question of Roms versus Egyptians, these brackets and boundaries are blurred, and the names become entangled under the category of *dorë e zezë*, or blackness. I will now share three ethnographic stories that speak to *dorë e zezë* in particular ways. Two of the stories come from Egyptian women, and then the third deals with a newly formed Egyptian political party in Albania. In these pieces I think about how blackness is operationalized and how people understand racialized identities. In the third section, which highlights a budding Egyptian political party, I examine the emergence of political mobility around the notions of what it means to be Egyptian, and what it means to be black. I then conclude this chapter with a discussion of race and belonging.

## Meet Flutura

“Egjiptianet dhe Romët të dy janë dorë e zezë.”

“Egyptians and Roms are both dorë e zezë (‘black’).”

“I am a *jevg* and I am an *Egyptian*.” We sit in the Shkozë neighborhood inside of Flutura’s family’s barrack as she explains this to me. Several of us sit inside, on top of thick blankets on the floor. A large pan of green peppers rests on top of the small orange table. The family passes around the pan, putting the peppers on bread and topping them with tomatoes. There are only two plates so everyone shares. Flutura has lived in this neighborhood for more than ten years. Her family used to live in a house in the Laprakë neighborhood of Tirana, but after the collapse of the regime, she says they were forced out of their home by *dorë e bardhë* (whites) who claimed the rights to their property. Within a matter of days, Flutura says that her family found themselves homeless, which is how they arrived in Shkozë. When I ask her what it is like to live in her community, she offers the following:

It is difficult! Can you not see this? Do you think that it is normal for us, for blacks, to have to live like this? Without bread and without any money? Where are our men supposed to go, out to steal everyday? They spend all day in the trash, gathering cans...is this life? Life is supposed to be lived like everyone else, having a job, having a house, your kids in school—that is life. But we live like animals. We are like animals compared to everyone else!

Flutura and her husband have five children. Her two brothers also live in Shkozë, as well as her youngest sister who is married to one of the neighbors. During one of our interviews I ask her what it means to her to be Egyptian and she looks at me dumbfounded and asks, “Well, how am I supposed to know the answer to that?” She continues, “We *jevg* people speak Albanian, not the Romani language. But my husband is a Rom.” When I ask her if she was aware of what it meant to be Egyptian while growing up, she tells me that she has always known that she was *jevg*. This was the term that her

parents used in their household, and this is how people referred to their family in their neighborhood. She says that more often than not, her family still refers to themselves as *jevg* or black, and only seldom does she refer to herself as *Egyptian*.

Flutura does not have a job outside of the home and never attended school. She says that racial discrimination is the reason why many Roms and Egyptians are not employed:

There is a lot of racial difference (*dallimi racial*) in Albania and our races are very segregated. The whites are preferred as employees over the blacks. But they do not realize that the blacks, we work harder than the whites (*jemi më shumë punto*). Blacks are able to do any type of work: We garden, we clean the road, we gather trash, we collect cans, we can do anything. Who is responsible for all of the gardening and landscaping in Tirana? It was blacks who did that years ago. The whites (*dorë e bardhë*) have not done any of that. Whites open cafes, become waiters, have big businesses, are drug dealers...they do the things that bring in big dollars meanwhile our people, the blacks, we do the work that really makes you sweat.

### **Meet Rudina**

“Nuk jam Egjiptian direkt nga Egjipti—unë jam Shqiptar por edhe Egjiptian.”  
“I am not Egyptian directly from Egypt—I am Albanian but also Egyptian.”

“Around here they call us the Barack and Michelle Obama of the ministry,” Rudina jokes. She is referring to herself and friend Danjel, who both work in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. Rudina identifies as Egyptian, while Danjel considers himself Romani. The two of them joined the ministry through a project that seeks to diversify its staff. As far as Rudina knows, she and Danjel are the first members from the Egyptian and Romani community to be employed at any of the national ministries. At the moment the Albanian state does not pay their salaries. These are ensured through an outside organization that funds the positions as part of the diversification efforts. Rudina

however, hopes that at the conclusion of this project, the two of them can be brought on as full-time staff members.

Though she has lived in Tirana for many years, Rudina is from Fier, a small city in southern Albania. When I ask her about her experiences living in Fier, she responds with the following: “I think that Fier has more racism than Tirana. Egyptians have been in Fier and all of Albania for a very long time. There are around 100 families that identify as Egyptian but we could officially recognize more if people were not afraid to be known as Egyptian.” I ask her what she means by people being afraid. “It is because of the fear of racism (*Nga frika e racizmit*),” she says.

Rudina feels that *jevg* is an offensive term, and that *Egyptian*, though newer, is the more appropriate term to describe her community. I ask her about her childhood and she tells me, “Well back then all I knew is that I was *jevg*. I asked my mother why we were called this term and at first, she told me that it was because of our color.” During her childhood, Rudina was teased with the word *jevg*, and friends’ parents would make statements such as, “All *jevgs* are dirty.” For Rudina, *jevg* carries negative connotations but *Egyptian* is more about heritage, pride, and where her people *really* come from. “Albanians do not know about the differences between us and Roms, and about our history. They do not want to know.”

Rudina says that there are both Roms and Egyptians in her family’s *fis* (family clan). This is due to practices of intermarriage. But Rudina does not prefer to use the terms *dorë e zezë* and *dorë e bardhë*. “Who exactly among us is actually white or black?” she asks me. Rudina believes that many Roms and Egyptians who feel the most discriminated against regularly use these terms. Rather than get into the question of color, she prefers the expression *dorë jonë* (‘our side’ or ‘our hand’) to encompass both

Egyptians and Roms. Despite this, throughout various conversations Rudina regularly uses the term ‘white’ (*e bardhë*) to refer to Albanians.

According to Rudina, the biggest crisis facing Albania is unemployment, and Egyptians and Roms are affected the most. “I feel bad for all of the people of color (*“njerëz me ngjyrë*) who go for interviews and cannot get jobs”, she says. She herself has experienced this type of discrimination firsthand. When she first applied for a job after finishing college, the owner of the company that was advertising positions looked at her and said, “I do not have a job for your kind.” Though Rudina initially says that she does not speak as much in terms of skin color, when I ask her why she thinks that the owner said this to her, she says, “It is not discrimination because of my ethnicity but it is because of my color.” Rudina says that while many Albanians may believe racial discrimination to be hidden (*të fshehur*), from her perspective, it seems that it is very pronounced (*të theksuar*).

### ***Partia e Levizmit dhe Integritetit e Shqiperise (The Party for Movement and Integration of Albania)***

All the political parties eat our money<sup>31</sup> (*‘hanë lekët’*). The white Albanians have political parties—they organize better than *us*. Roms and Egyptians, we only have *shoqata* (non-government associations). This is why we are forming a political force, a political party that will speak for the Egyptians, Roms, and all blacks in Albania.

I listen as Allaman describes an emerging political party and the upcoming meeting that they want me to attend. “We are forming our *own* party,” Shpresa adds. “We are tired of the white people speaking for us!” The two of them discuss the party’s various

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<sup>31</sup> This is a common expression in Albania, about the ways in which money can be eaten, particularly by power hungry politicians and the state. When Allaman uses the expression here, he is referring to the money that is earmarked for Romani and Egyptian communities (from such entities as the World Bank or the European Union) that the community ultimately does not receive; instead, he thinks many politicians use this money for other purposes or use it for personal gains.

strategies;, how they are trying to organize members from the major cities in Albania, and that it is taking a while to mobilize everyone, as only a few of them can travel from place to place. They also have to get enough signatures to submit paperwork to the state judge's office before the group can receive formal recognition. Though the group represents the interests of Egyptians, Roms, and those marked as 'black' in Albania, Allaman says that the group is comprised mostly of Egyptian activists who want to fight discrimination in the country. The leader of the party, Rivelino Çuno, says that there are close to 300,000 Egyptians in Albania. The 2011 census was one of the first to offer ethnic categories outside of 'Albanian' and 'Greek'. Official statistic for non-Greek minority groups in Albania, as calculated by INSTAT (Albanian Institute of Statistics) from the 2011 census lists are: 8300 people who identify as Roma, 3368 who identify as Egyptian, 2644 who marked 'other', and over 300,000 who stated that they preferred not to answer. These results are out of a total population of 2.8 million. What these figures indicate, and what my research suggests, is that there is a disconnect between census categories and people's lived realities of identity, race, and belonging.

The first meeting that I attend takes place in the *Kinostudio* neighborhood, an area affectionately regarded as the 'heart of Tirana.' We all gather in a courtyard behind one of the members' homes and I learn that this is only the third or fourth general body meeting. About 15-20 people are in attendance, mostly middle-aged and older men. And with the exception of Shpresa, all of the party members live in apartment buildings or houses, as opposed to barracks or shanties. The majority of the members are employed in some capacity, or retired, though many, like Allaman and Shpresa, are currently unemployed. Çuno, the leader of the party, is not present and instead, the Party's vice secretary leads the meeting. I am told that Çuno is currently on a trip in Elbasan where he is trying to rally support for the Party.

After introductory remarks, the floor is opened for general commentary. “You leaders are doing heroic work that is previously unseen in Albania!” a gentleman yells from the back of the courtyard. A round of applause follows this statement. Some of those attending for the first time introduce themselves. I hear comments such as, “No one realizes how big and poor we blacks are in Albania,” and “Politicians want to smile with *dorë e zezë* for an EU photo opportunity or for political gain, but then the next day they do not know you, they do not speak to you.”

Dashi, a younger member of the party, and self-proclaimed Egyptian activist, speaks up:

I visited one of *our* neighborhoods a couple of days ago and you would not believe the things I saw. People with major health problems, kids who were blind, no nutrition, people without homes, older women sick and begging on the streets. And, young boys accused of crimes all because they are Egyptian. We have to make a party that will speak for *us*. These politicians do not care about us, we have to do it ourselves!

More clapping ensues.

After an hour or so the meeting concludes and people begin to chat with one another and greet each other before parting ways. An older gray-haired gentleman in a brown sweater wants to know why I am attending the meeting. I explain my research project and he says to me: “You all in America need to light a candle night and day for Martin Luther King Jr. That is the kind of movement we want here in Albania.”

### **Blackness and Belonging**

I have shared these three ethnographic stories to offer examples of other ways in which blackness is configured, deployed, contested, and articulated. I also use these narratives to highlight the ways in which individuals and groups grapple with the category of Egyptian and what it means to be Egyptian. With Flutura, we are presented

with an Egyptian woman, who like Shpresa, is married to a Romani man. Both Flutura and Shpresa consider Egyptians and Roms to be part of the racialized group *dorë e zezë*, and they both employ the discourse of ‘black’ and ‘white’ to articulate racial difference in Albania. For Flutura, blackness represents someone who is hard-working. She feels that those racialized as black tend to work harder, “with more sweat,” than those racialized as white. And like Rudina, from the ministry, Flutura believes that the issues surrounding high unemployment in the Romani and Egyptian communities are directly tied to racial discrimination. For Rudina, blackness seems to manifest in terms of collective identity shared by Roms and Egyptians, though she claims that she does not regularly employ terms such as *dorë e zezë* and *dorë e bardhë*. Her use of *dorë jonë* (‘our side’), however, is one that shapes a particular Romani and Egyptian racialized belonging. Despite her reluctance to using the terms ‘white’ and ‘black’, her construction of identity is one in which certain groups, Roms and Egyptians, are racialized within a certain sphere of belonging (Roland 2013) whereas other groups, such as Albanians, are racialized outside of that realm. For the political party, though their group is predominantly comprised of Egyptians, many members consider their main mission intimately tied to the issues of those who are racialized as black, i.e. Roms and Egyptians. The sentiments echoed at the first meeting that I attended are very similar to those expressed in the letter from the *Kull e Hiri* neighborhood at the beginning of the chapter. And the gentleman’s remarks regarding Martin Luther King Jr. illustrate the ways in which some members of the group connect the Balkan Egyptian struggle to larger global questions of blackness.

These ethnographic stories illustrate emergent narratives of a racial consciousness. Earlier in the chapter I quoted Rubin Zemon, who argues that many Egyptians are not aware of their Egyptianness. Rudina’s and Flutura’s articulations of what it means to be Egyptian shed additional light on these processes of identity

formation. We also see these unfold in Allaman's questioning of what it means to be Egyptian and how to define that identity. At the same time, Idi rejects the identity all together. In all of this, members of the political party are mobilizing around both categories of Egyptian and black, in an effort to make socioeconomic change for Egyptians and Roms in Albania.

At times Flutura and others use *jevg* and *Egyptian* as interchangeable terms, though Flutura admits that she does not use the term *Egyptian* as much. Rudina, however, prefers to be known as *Egyptian*, and though she grew up with the term *jevg*, she associates it with negative connotations and dirtiness, similarly to the two brothers who passionately reject *jevg* and want to be known as *Egyptian*. In almost all of the ethnographic stories, though, we see times at which interlocutors speak in terms of black and white as broader constructions of identity, like Sami. This blackness is one that encompasses those who are racialized as *jevgs*, *Roms*, *gabel*, and *Egyptian*. With these ethnographic stories I have tried to show how these categories are not fixed, and that there is often slippage. As Lemon (2002) notes, racially grounded discursive practices of identification allow for a means to anchor certain identities, but people often have trouble anchoring those identities. These socioracial formations are processual and carry multiple meanings.

#### **ON AUTHENTICITY, BELONGING, AND PROCESSES**

I am often asked, "Are the Egyptians *really* a separate group?" I think it is important to listen to the ways that people self-identify and mobilize. Ethnographers need to pay attention to how discourses are differently formed, and in this manner, approach Roms and Egyptians as two distinct groups. I realize the political implications this has, especially for Romani groups that are organizing and vying for power across

Southeastern Europe. I am not saying that I just do not want to deal with whether this is *true* or not. What I am arguing is that the truth itself is immaterial to the lived realities of these groups, and that the construction of a truth is situational. Moreover, this chapter highlights some of the ways in which the identities are racialized but they are not fixed racializations. It is important to listen to how people articulate who they are and the ways they feel their lives may be impacted differently, thus producing varied lifeworlds. As an anthropologist I think it is important to address and approach people as they identify, especially when thinking about marginalized groups such as those discussed here and the numerous ways in which they are constantly rendered voiceless. Furthermore, I think that scholars need to pay careful attention to why and how a group such as this would want to mobilize under a new name or rather a rebranded identity.

For me the more pressing question is not tied to the authenticity of Egyptian heritage as much as it is about the motivations for identifying as Egyptian and black. I am interested in the construction of blackness (*dorë e zezë*) and how it signifies, registers, operates, and how people negotiate it. I argue that a theoretical framework of racial belonging helps to understand that which makes *dorë e zezë* possible. Belonging is relational; there is a sense of belonging at play even when identity itself is uncertain (Pfaff-Czarnecka and Toffin 2011). This notion of *dorë e zezë* deals with phenotype but also a type of black outsidership, an otherness that emerges in the ethnographic snapshots. These forms of racial belonging are loose and fluid, not rigid. While many Egyptians claim an identity and origin that are separate from those of Romani groups, members of both groups claim a belonging within *dorë e zezë* as a larger social group on the margins of Albanian society (Trubeta 2005). And even with the use of such terms as ‘black’ and ‘white’, many of these individuals, like Rudina, still consider themselves to be Albanian.

In her study of Turkish migrants in Germany, anthropologist Ruth Mandel explores the social constructions of the term *Ausländer*. Often translated as “foreigner”, Mandel maintains that *Ausländer* carries a deeper meaning and connotation of *not* belonging (2008:80). I feel that these emergent categories of blackness in Albania register in similar ways, carrying meanings that are more complex than the characterizations that define an ethnic group. “Belonging or belonging-ness,” Mandel writes, “[is] often inadequately glossed as ethnicity” (2008:207). I would like to consider Mandel’s use of belonging alongside L. Kaifa Roland’s framework of racial belonging to ask how *dorë e zezë* could be understood along these lines, asking, who gets racialized as insiders and outsiders (2013:414)? The notion of *dorë e zezë* is one in which Roms and Egyptians are racialized as black and as part of a collective belonging, but Rudina’s use of “*our side*” is another example that signifies this type of affinity and grouping. The notion of racial belonging, as Roland notes, allows scholars to think more about what constitutes a particular socioracial identity and group formation.

## Interlude: Guests

### BEANS

Field. Lima. Black. Charro. Red. Baked. White. Black-eyed. Salted. Boiled. I really like beans. My mom likes beans. My grandmother likes beans. In Mississippi we eat a lot of beans.

“What types of food does your mother eat?” Mrs. B asked me. “I will make every single thing that she likes.” “She is easy going and likes mostly everything,” I replied. Mrs. B did not like this answer. My mother’s visit to Tirana was a couple of weeks away but Mrs. B was already planning out every single cooking detail. “Tell me at least one thing that she would really like,” she pleaded. “*Byrek*,<sup>32</sup> definitely,” I said. “In fact, *byrek* with beans. She loves beans!” I said. “Beans? Beans?” She said the word several times. “I cannot make beans for your mother,” she said, laughing as she returned to the stove. “What do you *really* want me to make?” she asked. “Beans,” I said. “I really want you to make beans. We both love beans, all types of beans...” “But your mother is an important guest!” she said, interrupting me. “I cannot make beans for *her*.” “But why not? You asked me what she likes and I am telling you that she likes beans. They are one of her favorite foods.” Mrs. B seemed dumbfounded. “Let me make a different kind of *byrek* for her. Maybe one with leeks, or with spinach.” “No, she does not care too much for leeks but she would really like one with beans,” I said again, as Mrs. B protested my decision. “Please make the *byrek* with beans,” I asked. “No one makes it like you and trust me, she would really love them.”

“She does not want to make beans for you because in Albania, beans are a sign of poverty, and shame,” my friend Besa explained. “Under the regime, many people were

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<sup>32</sup> Traditional pie dish.

forced to eat a lot of beans. Beans are what you have when you do not have anything else. You cannot share beans with a guest.” “But you make some of the best beans,” I said to her. “I love the beans you made for me!” “*Pusho* (‘Stop’),” she said quickly. “Do not let other folks know that I made beans for you.”

My phone rang. It was Mrs. B. “Please Chelsi, tell me what your mother wants to eat when she gets here. Does she really want beans?” “*Për Zotën* (‘I swear to God’),” I say. She really likes beans. Mrs. B hung up the phone.

I once went to a restaurant and when it was time to order, the waiter asked, “What do you want to eat?” “*Fasule* (‘Beans’),” I replied. He laughed. “Ey,” he yelled back towards the kitchen, “This American wants beans.”

On the day my mother arrived we had a small party to celebrate my birthday. Mrs. B arrived carrying a large dish covered in foil. When she saw my mother the two embraced as though they had known each other for years. “I have told my mom that you are one of the best cooks in Tirana,” I said, as Mrs. B smiled. She pulled the foil back to reveal *byrek* made with leeks. Mrs. B dragged me to the corner. “*Për Zotën*, I tried to make it with beans but I just could not do it. I could not. “*Ju bëftë mirë*” (‘May the food make you well’).”

## COFFEE

I watch the waiter as he places the small cups on the table, side by side: two macchiato coffees, two ashtrays, two packs of sugar, and one check. “*Ju bëftë mirë*,” he says, as he walks away. Snatch! I grab the check before Mira does. “What are you doing,” she asks incredulously. “I am going to pay for the coffee,” I say, matter-of-factly. “I will pay for the coffee,” she insists. “I will pay for the coffee.” “No, I will pay for the coffee.” “*Për Zotën*, I will pay for this coffee!” “*Jo* (‘No’),” followed by a click of the

tongue, “I will pay for this coffee!” “I swear by my sister’s head that I will pay for the coffee,” Mira says. “I swear by my brother’s head that I will pay for the coffee,” I say in return. “You can get the next coffee,” Mira says, as she snatches the check from my hand. I have been waiting almost eight years to pay for coffee.

### **MIRË SE ERDHE (‘GOOD THAT YOU CAME’)**

Though I had only known Eni for a few weeks, she insisted that I stay with her family as I traveled to Southern Albania. We started our trip from Tirana around 3:00 arrived at Eni’s house shortly after 7:00. Her mother immediately came to the door, hugged me, and kissed me four times. I joined Eni and her parents in the living room for *muhabeti* (‘small talk’). Eni’s mom served us coffee and tea. Afterward, Eni’s father insisted that she treat me to another coffee in the center of town. When we returned to the house, the family had set up their bedroom for me to sleep in, and the three of them made pallets in the main room on the couch. I protested the sleeping arrangement but Eni’s mom insisted that I take my things to the bathroom and have a shower. When I got out of the shower, they had warm slippers and a sweater waiting for me. They asked me to join them in the main room where a neighbor had somehow configured CNN International so that I could watch “my people’s news,” as they said. The next morning, Eni’s mother prepared breakfast with meat, eggs, four types of cheese, milk, green tea, black tea, figs, kiwi, apples, oranges, and bread. While I was eating she draped two different sweaters on my shoulders because she said that I looked cold. When it was time to leave, they gave me a gift, an apron for cooking in the kitchen.

### **GËZUAR**

“*Hajde, gëzuar!*” (‘Cheers’) “Cheers to life. Success in school, your health, your family, to finding a good job, that you will find a husband, that you will have lots of

babies, health for everyone in your family, health for your friends, cheers to wonderful times and many more occasions together, cheers!” “If we are saying cheers to a husband, make them tall ones and good-looking, like the men from Kosovë!”

## Chapter Four. Sites of Racial Belonging and Marginality

“The lived experience of race has a spatial dimension, and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension” (Lipsitz 2007:12).

“What we are concerned with, then, is the long history of space, even though space is neither a ‘subject’ nor an ‘object’ but rather a social reality—that is to say a set of relations and forms. This history is to be distinguished from an inventory of things in space...as also from ideas and discourses about space. It must account for both representational spaces and representations of space, but above all for their interrelationships and their links with social practice” (Lefebvre 1991:116).

On the evening of February 20, 2011, many families of a Romani Community at *Stacioni i Trenit* (the train station) gathered together to celebrate the wedding of Elis Hysenaj. As is tradition in many Albanian Romni neighborhoods, most of the residents (close to 30 families) joined in for a night of music, dance, and celebration, in preparation for the formal wedding ceremony that was to occur the next day. Around midnight two Albanian neighbors, Besmir and Klodian Vladi, showed up to the festivities. This was not necessarily unexpected, as it was normal in many smaller communities for non-Romani neighbors to visit and join the wedding festivities (Likmeta November 2011). These two cousins, however, did not arrive to celebrate but rather, to cause commotion. They shouted numerous insults and obscenities at the families, and violently beat Xhevije Hysenaj, the mother of the groom. Additionally they set fire to part of the Romani settlement, and according to witnesses, threatened to burn all of the barracks and destroy the entire community if they did not leave: “*Do t’ju djegim barakat, do t’ju heqim qe këtu, do t’i zhdukim gabelet,*” (“We will burn all of your barracks and force you out of here, we will destroy the *gabelë*.”)<sup>33</sup> Members of this Romani community went to local police for help but the police did not provide protection or implement any sanctions, and

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<sup>33</sup> *Gabelet* is the plural form of the term *gabelë*, the pejorative term for Roms.

they later claimed that the Romani families were responsible for initiating the conflict (Likmeta March 2011). The Romani community at the train station felt that they had no other choice except to relocate, as many feared for their lives after this incident. Soon after the families left the settlement, the Vladi cousins returned to the burned area and destroyed the remnants of the camp.

Eventually word spread throughout the Romani and Egyptian communities of Tirana, and many human rights activists and media representatives became involved in the matter. This led to an investigation by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and ambassadors from the United States and the European Union (Likmeta November 2011), and due to this outside pressure and call for further inquiry, the Tirana prosecutors' office began an investigation. The Vladi cousins were arrested later that spring and charged with "damage to private property through arson" and "incitement of ethnic and racial conflict" [article 256 of Albania's penal code] (Likmeta November 2011). At the conclusion of the trial, however, Judge Shkelqin Mustafa ruled that the two defendants were guilty of the arson attack but not guilty of inciting racial or ethnic hatred. The judge claimed that race and ethnicity did not motivate the perpetrators' actions, but rather, it seemed they were simply upset at the loud music that was disturbing them in their homes. According to the judge's interpretation of the law, the crime of racial hatred can only be proven on the basis of "active actions that produce hatred between ethnicities and races through words or writing" (Likmeta November 2011). The judge further added, "This crime can only be consummated by disseminating pamphlets and holding public rallies that lead to hatred between races and ethnicities" (Likmeta November 2011). Besmir and Klodian Vladi were sentenced to six months and four months in prison, respectively.

Local prosecutors and human rights attorneys later appealed the ruling, and in August of 2012, the Court of Appeals decided that Article 265, which defines the crime of inciting ethnic and racial hatred, did apply to the case. At that point however, the defendants were long out of jail and were credited for time already served. Despite the Court of Appeals' ruling, the prosecutor did not appeal to the High Court and the case was eventually dismissed. By 2014 the area where the Roma families once lived had been completely demolished and developed into a new apartment complex. The municipality of Tirana is presently clearing the land behind the complex to extend a new roadway through town.

There are numerous issues tied to this story: racial events or encounters; relationships between Romani and Egyptian communities and Albanians; racial violence and terror; intersections of race, place, and space. In this chapter I address many of these, with my primary focus emerging from the last point about race, space, and place. I do so by investigating three particular sites of racialization: the community of Shkozë, the site of the boulevard (and the notion of lingering in the margins of the road), and the body as both a site of identity formation and ethnographic inquiry.

Recalling the housing protests from Chapter 2, in this chapter I delve further into a particular Romani-Egyptian neighborhood to consider in more depth the connections between race, space, and housing. Numerous scholars have studied issues of space and place within Romani communities, including Somersan et. al. (2007), who analyzed forced evictions in Istanbul. Focusing on gentrification, displacement, and the notion of being “on the edge of existence” (102), their study follows the Romani community of Sulukule and that community's struggle to maintain their neighborhood in the wake of urban renewal in Istanbul. Studies such as this shed light on the intricacies of gentrification and situate them within a global conversation about race, class, and

displacement.<sup>34</sup> In the first section of this chapter I use this type of study as a framework to take a closer look at the place of Shkozë and the lives of those who live there. The ethnographic stories about Shkozë illuminate the ways that blackness is racialized and spatialized there. The interlocutors in this section share stories about how they got to Shkozë, and about their livelihoods and their beliefs about *dorë e zezë* (blackness) and *dorë e bardhë* (whiteness).

The second and third sections pay attention to the space of the road, the racialization of the spaces of the boulevard, and the racialization of the body. Though I make the argument that the space of the road and the body are two distinct sites of analysis, they often overlap. And, as I soon demonstrate, many of the stories in this chapter come from the Shkozë neighborhood, so that all three sites intersect. Recalling the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Michel de Certeau (2002), and Henri Lefebvre (2004), I believe that it is critical to treat space as more than a backdrop, and that we need to analyze the intersections of practice, the body, and how individuals inhabit spaces in their everyday lives. In this chapter I explore the space of the road to think about racial encounters and eruptions in public spaces, as well as the temporality of begging in the road. I look at the way that blackness is racially and spatially produced and constructed. As an anthropologist I ask how many Egyptian and Roma men and women, *dorë e zezë*, develop their spatial imaginaries and how this space shapes their everyday lived experiences. What does this spatial imaginary look like? How does it shape a particular place, specifically a place that is marginal?

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<sup>34</sup> These types of studies are directly connected to other studies of race and space, such as the current conversation surrounding gentrification in Austin, Texas. For more see Tang & Falola 2016.

This chapter is also a closer exploration of the category *dorë e zezë* (blackness), in an examination of the ways that bodies and spaces are racialized, and the ways that race and space are embodied. This is not to argue that the same type of lens could not be used to explore *dorë e bardhë*; in fact, this chapter does consider the construction of white bodies but I could more fully explore the spatialization of whiteness and blackness in Tirana, which I hope to eventually do so. At the present moment in Tirana, however, there is urgent need for attention to the spatial production of race Romani and Egyptian neighborhoods. The Train Station and Selitë communities have been demolished by the city for road and housing expansions. The community at the Lake (*Liqeni*) also recently was demolished by the municipality. The *Breg Lumit* ('Riverside') community is currently fighting the city to keep their homes, an area that the city would like to clear to make way for new roads. These processes have rendered numerous Roms and Egyptians homeless, or indeterminately suspended in poorly supplied temporary relocation settlements. A large majority of these residents are continually wandering, a complex notion that calls attention to a constant friction: while the majority of Roms and Egyptians are seeking permanent housing, they regularly battle the assumed notion that they are nomadic because they are Romani and Egyptian. This chapter attempts to enter the folds in that friction, to consider the lives of those who desire to be in a better place and long for structured housing and regular employment.

This chapter began with a quote from George Lipsitz, who writes that “the lived experience of race has a spatial dimension and the lived experience of space has a racial dimension” (2007:12). My framing of three sites, the sites of Shkozë, the boulevard, and the body, are an entryway into thinking about these racial and spatial dimensions. This type of conceptualization of space allows us to think about the social construction of space, what Setha Low refers to as, “the actual transformation of space through peoples’

social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting into scenes and actions that convey meaning” (2000:127-128). I combine this focus on space with the voices and stories of these sites to explore the processes of racialization, belonging, and marginalization. How do people talk about marginal spaces? What do they do each day? How do they understand race? Belonging? What it means to not belong? This chapter is also an exploration of voices and stories. Unlike chapter three, which featured shorter ethnographic snapshots, this chapter weaves longer ethnographic narrative with shorter pieces in order to unfold scenes, memories, encounters, assemblages, frustrations, longings, gaps, and happenings. While I examine these three sites as distinct entities, I hope to show that it is important to consider the intersections of racialization, space, and the body, following along the lines of such theorists as Katherine McKittrick, who examines the bodily and spatial “multiscalar processes which impact upon and organize the everyday” (2006:7). Nirmal Puwar writes, “Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically and conceptually), circumscribed as being ‘out of place’” (2004:8). This chapter makes an effort to look at bodies both in and out of particular places, and particularly, tries to take a look at the practices of being in and out of certain places.

Recalling the discussion of Kathleen Stewart’s discussion of “other America” that tells the story of America itself, I argue that Tirana is a similar kind of a space that speaks to the larger story of Europe, or the Europe that Albania was imagined to become a part of at the fall of communism. The architectural legacies of the communist period, constant building, rebuilding, and building, the stories from migrant, the stories of being stuck in-between socialism and capitalism, in-between jobs, speak to processes of becoming and un-becoming, of certainties and uncertainties. What does it look like to probe these

textures of this precarity? How does it emerge at the intersections of race and space at these three sites? This chapter explores such questions to think about marginality and the livelihoods of those left “on the side of the road.”

I have chosen to center the voices of these particular sites because they served as primary sites of ethnographic study. I feel these stories are important for framing larger issues faced by Romani and Egyptian communities in Tirana. In this chapter I try to capture various ways in which interlocutors share or tell their stories. Here I engage with Michael D. Jackson’s (2002) framework of stories, in which he argues:

...In times of personal tragedy, crisis, and transition—sickness, death, birth, dislocation, divorce—it is not the legitimacy of science that we demand but the need for a sense of agency, voice, and belonging. And the answer to these existential imperatives is not science *per se*, but storytelling. It is the story told to a medical specialist or nurse, the story one tells oneself, the story one shares with those one loves or with whom one identifies, that keeps one in the world and allows one ‘to go on’(185).

This process of sharing stories is intimate, and these stories are critical, particularly for those communities often rendered voiceless or often silenced. As such, another goal of this chapter is to provide space for voices to emerge. I want to use this chapter to think more critically about the power of narrative, particularly channeling such anthropologists as Zora Neale Hurston and her method for capturing stories from the field.

Studies of distinct post-communist discourse can provide further ethnographic insight into the day-to-day experiences in Albania. Anthropologist David Kideckel’s approach to narratives focuses on the physical notion of “getting-by” (2008), and how this plays out in post-communist Romania. This type of framing is particularly useful for examining the narratives of post-communist Tirana, in particular, how those racialized as black are getting by. In doing so, I hope to draw attention to an embodied practice of

getting by that I conceptualize as lingering. This lingering, I argue, can be useful for understanding the strategies (Bourdieu 1977) of getting by, but also might be helpful for thinking about what it means to ethnographically study the body in space, to better understand the ways that certain bodies are racialized and spatialized. The following sections address embodied experiences of begging for money, and the ways that an analysis of lingering can shed light on the difficulties faced by those racialized as black. Finally, I hope to also draw attention to this lingering as both a temporality and a disposition to explore experiential aspects of marginalization.

#### **SITE ONE: SHKOZË**

This section looks closely at the Romani and Egyptian community of Shkozë, a small area in the margins of Tirana. I begin this section with results from one of the survey questions and then briefly discuss the area of the *lagje* ('neighborhood'). I then take a close look at a few families in Shkozë and analyze questions of race, space, and belonging.

One of the survey questions on race and belonging asked participants to indicate how much they agreed with the following statement:

Roms and Egyptians are poorer than others in Albania because of their own cultural practices and lifestyle.

The following are the approximate results:

I strongly disagree—5 percent  
I disagree—22 percent  
I agree—50 percent  
I strongly agree—22 percent

I use the results of this question to frame the discussion of this first site, the site of Shkozë. I begin this section with general writing about the place and then introduce key interlocutors and their stories. I locate these stories at the intersection of racialization and

spatialization, and use them to explore the lives of those who reside in Shkozë, those who yearn for better housing but are regularly told that they do not belong in the same type of housing as others in Tirana.



Illustration 2. A Romani and Egyptian neighborhood in Shkozë (Photo by author).

We arrive in Shkozë at the second to last stop on the *Uzina Autotraktore* bus line. You might refer to it as the “margins of the margin” (Somersan et. al. 2007:105). Passengers disembark from the bus. I stand in front of the six large apartment buildings, each of the square shaped structures featuring a white and pink-based color scheme. The colors are reminiscent of a mid-2000s project in Tirana to enliven the city with color, part

of Edi Rama's urban renewal project to get rid of communist style grey buildings and introduce bolder and brighter colors, shapes, and patterns. Rama, a trained painter, now serves as Albania's prime minister and actively champions the continuation of such projects and the development of roads, like those that are extending through former Romani and Egyptian neighborhoods. These projects are in line with renewal, rebirth, and development, a way to move Tirana one more step away from its gray communist clouds.

Chunks of garbage and crumpled paper clutter the muddy grounds. An older woman with a hacking cough is perched against a broken plastic table. There is not a division between Romani and Egyptian families. Most of the families identify as Romani though there are several couples in which one spouse is Romani and the other Egyptian. One could find Roms and Egyptians all over Tirana, but in many cases, there are certain zones or areas where there are Romani and Egyptian camps. Shkozë is one such site, among maybe 15 that remain in Tirana. Many such communities are being destroyed in the wake of urban renewal across the city.

I stare at the buildings and do a rough count of the windows and floors. With a quick estimation there are anywhere from 200 to 250 empty apartments, and space for at least 10–15 small businesses on the first floors. These apartments then, could potentially house at least 200 families and yet they are empty, and have been for close to six years now. The buildings, colloquially referred to as the "*pallati me ngjyrë*" ("the colorful buildings"), could house all of the families of Shkozë, and at least 150 other families.

Instead they emptily tower over the Romani and Egyptian poorly built shacks and barracks.<sup>35</sup>

I once visited the Shkozë neighborhood with a documentary crew from the United Kingdom. When I told the Albanian taxi driver that we wanted to go to the neighborhood behind the *pallati me ngjyrë*, he frowned at me and scoffed, “But why are you going there? Why are you taking the foreigners there?” I explained that the video crew was working on a project about Roms and Gypsies in Europe, and wanted to chronicle their experiences in Albania. “But why do they care about *them*?” he asked indignantly. “It is their own fault that they live there! And they do not even know how to live in houses and real buildings. They will bring everything inside with them, including their donkeys. They do not need houses!” His sentiments reminded me of my neighbor, who once commented, “There are different types of *them*, “Rom, Egyptian, *Arixhi*<sup>36</sup>...the *Arixhi* especially are the ones that move around a lot...*nuk rrinë dot në pallatë*” (“they do not know how to live in apartments or buildings”).

### **Afërdita’s Family**

Afërdita’s (Dita for short) barrack is positioned along the northeastern side of the neighborhood. I meet her inside, where she is sitting on the edge of the bed with her youngest daughter, who is around 14 years old. Dita identifies as Romani and is 42 years old. She and her husband have a barrack where they live there with their oldest son and

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<sup>35</sup> This is a term used by many Roma and Egyptian families to describe their tent-like dwellings, similarly built like shacks or shanties.

<sup>36</sup> The term *Arixhi*, discussed in chapter three, is considered a pejorative term by Roms and Egyptians. The word *Ari* in Albanian means ‘bear,’ and *Arixhi* is thought to mean ‘bear tamer’. Most Roms and Egyptians that I spoke with actively reject this term and a group is currently petitioning the national department of education to have the word removed from all textbooks. Many Albanians still employ the terms, particularly as a way to talk about Roms and Egyptians that they consider more nomadic and those who are often in the street or road.

his wife and two daughters, their youngest son and his wife, and their two daughters, one of which is 16 and soon to be married to a young man from the neighborhood. A total of nine individuals reside in the barrack, all sharing a pallet bed against the wall. Dita's daughter-in-law, Zamira, who is five months pregnant, is busy with the laundry for the day. I watch as she gathers dry items from the clothesline and hangs wet ones, her two young kids dirtying a new batch as quickly as she can wash them. Her oldest daughter is currently jumping in and out of a large barrel of rainwater. Dita's oldest son, Zamira's husband, is outside fiddling with the *motori*,<sup>37</sup> perhaps trying to fix it so that he can go in to town for scraps collection. Back in the barrack Dita is perched against the wall and smoking a cigarette, speaking a combination of Romani and Albanian. I ask her how her day has been and she gives me the usual response, “*U lodha shumë* (“The day has made me very tired”).”

Dita grew up on the outskirts of Tirana in the 1970s and 80s. She only attended school for three years because her mother passed away at a young age and her father sent her to live with other relatives. She began working in a factory before the age of nine. When she was about sixteen years old, her grandmother arranged her marriage with her husband's family, who at the time were living in Peqin, a village of Elbasan. Dita was sent there to live with him, where they stayed for a few years until moving back to Shkozë shortly after the collapse of the regime. Neither she nor her husband were employed at the time, but her husband did try to pick up a few odd jobs when he could so that they could afford to build their current barrack. Initially they paid a small fee to a landowner but at some point these payments stopped and Dita informs me that at the

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<sup>37</sup> This term refers to a vehicle that is like a cart or wagon with a motorbike attached to the front. Many Roma and Egyptian families use these vehicles to collect recyclables or gather large materials for resale (such as older large appliances).

moment there is no true property owner, or it is vague who that owner might be, though other groups in Tirana and Shkozë say otherwise.

Dita's family was among the first to arrive in Shkozë. When they got there in the early 1990s, the area now known as the *lagje* ('neighborhood') was a large vacant lot next to the slowly eroding tractor factory. She traveled there with her husband and then two very young sons. Originally their family was living with her husband's parents but the family only had one room and the space was extremely cramped with twelve people. "*S'munda të jetoja dot atje,*" ("It was not possible to live well there") she says. She tells me that initially there were only about five other families in addition to her own in Shkozë, totaling about 20--25 people in the community. "It was a more peaceful time," she recounts.

These days Dita collects recyclables and scraps for the family's income. "I work with cans, pushing around the wheels she says," nodding in the direction of a wheelbarrow leaned against her wall. On an average day Dita begins work around 5:00 or 6:00 a.m., dragging her wheelbarrow along the main road almost four miles to Tirana, returning home around 3:00 p.m., especially during the hotter months of the year. A good day yields about the equivalent of \$7.00 in income though sometimes she is able to make as much as \$10, depending on what she finds during her hunt. Sometimes she collects used articles of clothing or shoes that she brings home in a trash bag and rewashes and sells them to men and women who work in secondhand markets. At the current moment she uses an older, dingy baby stroller to gather items from dumpsters around town. "I work all around Tirana in the trash: Elbasan Road, Student City, the Pyramid...what else am I supposed to do?" she asks, as she shrugs her shoulders and looks down. "The work is not easy and it is not good but what are we going to do? It would be nice if the State would create jobs or find jobs for us...when we do not have work, people feel obligated

to steal. I work for one piece of bread—for one piece of bread my family suffers!” she yells. “But I am at peace,” she later continues.

I have pleasure, I am at peace with everything. I do not steal and I do not get involved with things like drugs. If I do not get food in my stomach then I will find other work. It is exhausting to live like this, with ten to twelve people in my family. I work with sweat, everyday! It is very difficult.

Dita says that though she is Romani, she sees no difference between Roms and Egyptians. “God made all of us the same, the *Rom* and the *Jevg*. There is no distinction between us.” Her family mostly speaks Romani at home but they also speak a significant amount of Albanian. And when she is working or collecting she only speaks Albanian. She commonly hears comments such as “*Ik moj gabele keqe!*” (“Leave, you bad [or foul] *gabele*”). When I asked her about relationships between Albanians, Roma, and Egyptians, she says that she believes the Albanian government tries to prohibit racism, and then references the times of Enver Hoxha when things seemed to be more equal. She also considers living in Shkozë to be a challenge. “It was very peaceful in the beginning,” she remarks. Despite the increasing chaos, she still feels that people in the neighborhood are cordial with one another and have good relationships. As to her biggest difficult or obstacle, she tells me that “Our main problem is that we, *dorë e zezë*, have always suffered...we have always lived in poverty. We do not have a prayer. What are we to do?”

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Zamira is Dita’s daughter-in-law, married to the oldest son in the family. She is a Romani woman, almost 22 years old, and she and Mario have two daughters, ages 2 and 4. When we first meet, she is pregnant with a boy, due in July. “Finally,” she exclaims, “I will be able to have a son.” She tells me that she had previously lost two babies, one due to miscarriage and the other a stillborn. When I ask about prenatal care she informs me,

“All that we manage to do is go to the maternity hospital when it is time for the baby to come.” Zamira grew up in the village of Peqin, outside of Elbasan, the same village where Dita’s in-laws live. She never spoke Albanian growing up and never received formal educational training, as her family did not allow girls to attend school (though her four brothers did receive a partial education). According to Zamira her mother did not believe girls should leave the house until they were married. She married Mario, Dita’s son, at the age of 14 and had her first child at 16, though their marriage was not arranged she says—it was a love marriage.

Zamira believes that many Romani families are currently living in poor conditions because they were coerced into selling their homes during the Ponzi or pyramid schemes of the mid to late 1990s,<sup>38</sup> and were convinced by creditors that they would receive a large return on their investments if they put up their homes. Instead, many families were left homeless and without any money. This, coupled with the increasing lack of jobs in small areas like Peqin and Elbasan, has caused numerous families, particularly Roms and Egyptians, to seek housing in camps on the outskirts of town and resort to can and scrap collection, as well as begging, occasional theft, and at times prostitution, as sources of income.<sup>39</sup> “People used to work in cooperatives,” she tells me, “during the time of Enver. But now that he is gone there is no work for us.”

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<sup>38</sup> Shortly after the fall of the communist regime, Albania witnessed significant economic turmoil due to a series of Ponzi or pyramid schemes, mainly from 1992 until 1997. Writing on this matter, anthropologist Smoki Musaraj writes, “Although the Albanian schemes shared characteristics with these other eastern European schemes, those in Albania reached an unparalleled level of penetration into the fiber of everyday life, and their political and economic effects have been arguably the most long lasting” (2011:85). The rise and fall of these schemes, and eventual mass bankruptcy, ultimately led to massive rioting and extreme chaos, during which time nearly 2,000 people were killed and the country nearly witnessed a civil war.

<sup>39</sup> Dita adamantly talks about the importance of can and metal collection as means of earning but many community members regularly whisper about her son and others who do steal. Others whisper about some of the women of Shkozë who engage in prostitution as a means of earning though no one wanted to have that direct conversation with me. A vast majority of families in Shkozë have at least one family member who does beg for money, even if only occasionally.

Zamira has lived in Shkozë now almost eight years. Her husband collects cans and other scrap metals. He is now working on rebuilding a motor truck so that he can collect larger amounts of material. The two of them primarily speak Romani together, and their kids only speak Romani—they do not know Albanian at all. When I ask her what it means to be a Romani woman, she stares blankly at me for a while and eventually responds, “But what am I supposed to say?” and laughs. Ultimately she tells me that she does not have a correct answer to a question like that. I ask her about her upbringing, whether she grew up in a Romani neighborhood. “There are many Roms in Peqin, many, many families.” When I asked about the differences between Roma and Albanians she answers matter-of factly, “Well, we speak the Romani language and *dorë e bardhë* (the whites) speak Albanian.” I asked her whether her family discussed Romani traditions and history while she was growing up, to which she says no. Her neighbor, Gresa, chimes in, “The Roms, we come from Romania,” she says, to which Shpresa, another neighbor interrupts and says, “No, Roms are from India.” Zamira, however, frowns at the mention of “India,” and responds, “No, not India,” clicking her tongue as she makes a face of disappointment. “I prefer to think of my people as being from Egypt,” Zamira says.

I ask her more questions about her family and kids. “My husband and I are both uneducated,” she says, “And my kids only want to eat and talk—where do they have a mind for school?” She explains that if there were a school near her neighborhood that taught lessons in Romani then she might be more inclined to send her kids to school. “When I was younger, I looked forward to attending school,” she said. But my mother did not let me go. And now, here I am, 21 years old and uneducated. So now people ask me if I will complete school, now that I am this old with almost three children?” I ask her why her mother did not allow her to attend school and she responds, “We have a tradition where young girls do not go to school. We stay at home and get ready to be married.” Her

brothers only finished a few years of school before they all began working, mostly at tasks like can collection because her family needed the money. Zamira has occasionally felt forced to beg. I asked her about her experiences in the road and whether she ever receives cruel treatment. She said that people often hurl slurs at her and she attributes this to her community's lack of education: "*Ne jemi pa shkollë,*" ("We are uneducated" [literal translation 'without school']).

### **Gresa's Family**

Kreshnik stands along the side of the road. His large wearable drum hangs from two ropes around his shoulders. Any more weight on it and his small frame will probably tumble to the ground. He sighs as his eyes scale the peaks that lead to Mt. Dajti. When he sees me get off of the bus he gives a big smile and starts to run in my direction. As he nears, I notice those fierce bluish-grey eyes of his, the type of eyes that make everyone say "wow" the first time they meet him. Kreshnik, 'Niku' for short, lives in Shkozë with his mother, Gresa, and his father and two brothers. He was one of the first kids to remember my name once I started visiting. "Chelsi!" he yells, as he approaches me, his younger brother Endrit following closely behind. Endrit is just finishing a *7 Days* croissant that someone has given him along the road. Residue of the chocolate filling lines his teeth and fingernails. I ask them about their day. "The same, *e mërzitshme,*" Niku replied. Boring that is; I chuckle slightly. This is his typical response. Niku spends many days at the top of the hill, playing his drum around the couple of cafes just off the main road. On some holidays and festivals, like Women's Day or the Celebration of Bajram (Eid), his older brother and a few of the other neighborhood boys join him and they all sing for money. But most days he plays solo, hoping to collect as many coins as he can, while his brother Endrit begs for food and money just a few meters away. Their

older brother usually joins their father on scrap metal collection excursions in Tirana. I once asked the family if the boys, all school-aged, attended school regularly, and their father, Flori, immediately said to me, “No. We do not meet proper conditions to send our sons to school.”

“My baby died.” These are the first words that Gresa spoke to me, the first time that we met in Shkozë. Shpresa added, “This is Gresa. Her baby just died. He did not make it through the winter because it was too cold and he was sick.” Gresa looked at me solemnly, her eyes blank as Shpresa explained what happened to her baby. “I am very sorry that happened to you,” is all I could muster in response. Gresa stood near me a while longer and then retreated to her barrack. As I visit the neighborhood more often, I build a relationship with her and her middle son, Niku. Originally from the southern Albanian town of Korçë, Gresa is 32 years old and has lived with her husband, Flori, and three children in Shkozë for about four years. They first arrived to the neighborhood because her in-laws, Flori’s family, lost their house in Elbasan. She never tells me how they lost it.

During one of our interviews I ask Gresa about her childhood, and how she found herself in the Tirana area. Gresa never attended school. “My father did not allow me to go to school because he said I was too beautiful,” she tells me. “‘You cannot go!’ he would say, ‘because all of the young men will tease and bother you.’” All of her siblings, however, went to school for at least a few years, though she and all of her sisters married young. I ask her how she first met her husband, Flori. She pauses and then asks me, “Can I speak straight with you here?” I inform her that she is free to discuss whatever she wants to. She leans in and softly divulges, “I have been married one other time before—to a man in Korçë.” She continues with details of that first marriage, an extremely difficult union she recalls, one that eventually ended in divorce. After the marriage was

over she traveled to Tirana with the help of a charitable organization. “After the divorce they did not want me...my parents did not want me at all. ‘Get out of here!’ my mother yelled at me. Go wherever you want!” Gresa says that the organization that helped her provides assistance for women after divorce, and that many of those women were Roma like herself. She has trouble remembering the exact name of the group during our conversation. She returns once again to the voices of her parents: “‘Leave!’ my dad shouted at me. ‘Leave now you whore!’” Tears moisten her eyes and cheeks, slowly taking over both her face and throat. Her voice quivers, lowering an octave with each statement. “Per Zotën” (“I swear to God”), she says, to further emphasize the validity of her story.

The women’s organization in Tirana provided shelter for Gresa and she was starting to learn a trade when she met Flori. He had just returned from Greece where he was attempting to seek work. After seeing her around the women’s center, he invited her out for coffee. Gresa said they had a few conversations, drank coffee, and discussed the possibility of getting married. She says she was initially hesitant as her plan was to escape to a place like Italy and start over, to forget all of the things that had happened in Albania. Instead, she accepted Flori’s marriage proposal. “We got married. But now I am suffering again, because of the suffering of my children here...we do not have anything here.”

Gresa is a Romani woman and mostly spoke Romani as child. She never received formal training in Albanian. Her husband Flori identifies as Egyptian and the two mostly communicate in Albanian, though Flori says that he understands some of the Romani language. I ask Gresa how she would describe what it means to be Romani. “It means that I speak the Romani language,” she tells me. “I have known all my life that I am Romani because we speak differently. Most of the people in my neighborhood did.”

Gresa's family identifies as Muslim. She says that she is a believer but does not regularly pray or attend services. When I ask her about her experiences at the mosque, she offers:

I have desired to attend mosque in the past, I really have. But for example, when I think about going, I remember that if I were to go to the mosque, it would not be a good experience because God does not desire us like this, as dirty as we are; with trash all around us, those bathrooms<sup>40</sup> full of shit. And they do not let you in the mosque in this type of condition. They want you to be clean, to please God (Interview with Gresa, June 2014).

These affects of dirtiness and cleanliness emerge regularly in my conversation with Gresa. In Tirana there is a lot of talk about filth and uncleanness of Romani and Egyptian communities, despite literature on Romani and Gypsy groups that have strict ideas about cleanliness and hygiene (Fonseca 1995; Hancock 2002). When Gresa uses the term 'dirty' (*i pistë*), she seems to reference both a physical filth but also, dirty in the sense of being dingy and unwanted, of being waste. Similar sentiments were present in chapter three and the discussion of Sami's family, whose house I was warned to never enter because of the trash and shit that you could smell meters away. There is much more that could be said about dirt and cleanliness, and I hope to be able to probe this more at a later point, but at this moment, I want to draw attention to ways that both Gresa and Sami's bodies are rendered dirty or unclean because of their inhabited environments or spaces. In Gresa's case, literal shit at times has formed the boundary of the neighborhood due to improper plumbing and disposal, and Sami's case, his basement apartment emits a foul smell from collected trash. And in both cases, there is a particular form of

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<sup>40</sup> In 2012 the Tirana Municipality constructed four bathroom stalls in the Shkozë neighborhood, two for women and two for men. Prior to this, many residents were forced to relieve themselves in badly constructed outhouses or near the river.

marginality and non-belonging shaped by these beliefs surrounding cleanliness and worth.

Both Gresa and her husband Flori are vocal about race in Albania. Gresa believes that those racialized as *dorë e bardhë* (white) regularly speak badly (“*flasin keqë*”) about Roms and Egyptians.

If we go to look for cans or to collect materials from bins,” she tells me, “they say bad things to us. They think they are above us. They have houses and apartments. We Roma people, we have umbrellas. They call us *gabel*...if Roms could get jobs like *dorë e bardhë* they would be able to move up, to do better.

Flori comments that in his opinion, there is absolutely racial division and discrimination in Albania. Flori, who is 34 years old, regularly participates in housing demonstrations, joining other Egyptian and Romani community leaders like Shpresa. He has spent 15 years in Shkozë and says that when he first arrived, he had nowhere else to go. “Life is extremely difficult when you do not have a house or a place to live.” During my visits to Gresa’s barrack I do not always get the chance to talk with Flori because he is often out collecting, but when we do chat, he regularly talks about racial discrimination, which he sees as a big social problem in Tirana. “It [referring to discrimination] has existed in Albania, before and now,” he says. On one particular occasion I was able to sit down with Flori for a more extended interview, which was cut short because he needed to help a neighbor with last-minute job that was going to pay money. During our brief conversation, however, I ask him, in his opinion, how could things be better in Shkozë, or in other words, what could be done to address social problems. He crumples his face in response and does not respond to my question. He is silent for quite some time. Shpresa, my research assistant, slightly rephrases my question, asking, “O Flori, in the event that it could be possible, how could things be better here for our community?” This seems to provide Flori with more clarity and he offers the following response: “As the days go on,

things are only going to get worse. No one ever asks about us, no one cares. It is because of racial discrimination. Now if we were *dorë e bardhë* ('white') then maybe they would care for us—then those in charge would ask about us.”

Flori's response to my question about a potential future revealed the ways in which he and I both envisioned a future differently. In this moment I took the question and its translatability for granted, and I also assumed that Flori even imagined a future, or imagined one in the same way that I could potentially do so. I share this particular encounter to call attention to both Flori's positionality and my own, as the outside ethnographer. I also, however, share this encounter to think more critically about temporality, and the intersection of temporality, race, and space. How is time shaped in particular sites like Shkozë? How does time shift or mutate for different bodies in varying contexts?

This question of temporality is important for understanding the site of Shkozë. From Dita's daily trudge into Tirana, to the entanglement of Gresa's past with her present, to the ways that Flori does or does not conceptualize a future, these components shed light on social processes of belonging in this site. Such notions, I argue, are beneficial for mapping the Romani and Egyptian community of Shkozë. Some aspects of these stories have focused on events or particular moments while others acknowledge segments of the quotidian. These voices illuminate the practices and politics of getting by, of making a way. They call attention to forms of gender, of religion, of education, of jobs and joblessness, of health and health disparities, of socioeconomic class, and how people earn, among other things. Their stories highlight multiple complex fragments of inequality and injustice. They also reveal the ways in which people talk about their circumstances. In the effort to map sentiments of belonging, it is important to note the comments about education from Zamira and Gresa, for example. These sentiments are

important because they underscore the intricacies and entanglement of race and belonging. The section opened with survey results, in which seventy-two percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Roms and Egyptians are poorer than the majority population because of their own cultural practices or lifestyle. Findings from the qualitative section of the survey reveal that many respondents cited a lack of education or schooling as one of these lifestyle choices. Both Zamira and Gresa share that their parents did not allow them to go to school, yet Zamira notes the fact that there is no Romani speaking school in Tirana. Because of this, she feels that she cannot send her two daughters to school to learn. Beyond this, as this chapter will later engage, there are numerous issues at hand with stigmatization, racism encountered at schools, and the notion of the extreme crisis mode that many Roms and Egyptians regularly highlight. As many people in Shkozë would ask, “How can you think about school when there is no house, no bed, no bread?”

The scenes shed light on the multiple happenings that weave together a complex social lattice. These stories point to ways that individuals are racialized as Romani and Egyptian, call attention to how individuals inhabit a particular place, and elucidate processes that shape marginality within that place. Examining these questions of race and belonging shed light on other aspects like gender and religion, and how they intersect. Below is one more story from the site of Shkozë.

### **Gjoni**

“This neighborhood is a catastrophe! If you are going to write something about it, it is a catastrophe here, everything is!” This is what Gjoni says to me during the first of many conversations about Shkozë. He tells me that he is pleased to give any interviews for my research but only if I document the catastrophes of daily life here.

Gjoni is 28 years old and has lived in Shkozë for over ten years. He first arrived from Bilisht, a city near Korçë in southern Albania. He is one of six children. Towards the end of the 1990s, a man claiming to be the property owner of his family's land forced them out of their home, without providing a clear reason or documentation to prove his property claim. His family moved around to a few places, and eventually, he, his mother, and his brother settled in a barrack in Shkozë. He was once married to a Romani woman but prefers not to speak much about this. He does inform me that he has a six-year-old son from that union, who visits the neighborhood from time to time.

I begin one of our conversations by asking him what life is like in Shkozë. He sighs, takes a step back, and extends his arm out as if to say, "Just take a look for yourself." I inform him that I can look around and form my own opinion, but I explain that I would like to hear his thoughts specifically. "Life is extremely difficult in our *lagje* ('neighborhood')," he begins.

People here are starving. We do not have anything to drink, not even drinking water. These are the most important things in life. We say around here, 'If you do not have bread and water, you cannot be in the proper mindset (*'s'ka asnjegjë në terezi'*).' There are many, many problems here for us.

Gjoni did not attend school and is unemployed at the moment. He does participate in advocacy projects for Roms and Egyptians in Albania, and like Shpresa and Flori, he attends housing protests. He has worked numerous informal jobs but says that those usually frustrate him because he is unable to find consistent work. He used to collect cans at one point but says that it was not profitable. When I ask him why he did not attend school when he was younger he says, "My family was not stable. We were forced out of our first home at the end of the communist regime and then forced out of our second home a few years later." He says that they wandered quite a bit and in his opinion, did not have an opportunity for schooling. Growing up his parents worked at the *tregu* ('market')

selling whatever items that they could, mostly secondhand materials. His mom, like many other Romani women and men, attended school for eight years (compulsory attendance under the regime) and then began work. His father only received three or four years of formal education.

“I am Romani,” Gjoni says, “Which is not a big deal...it simply means that I am Roma. And I am proud to be Roma—why not be proud?” Gjoni and his family speak Romani at home though he learned Albanian growing up from a friend who he referred to as *shoku im dorë e bardhë* (‘my white friend’). When Gjoni mentions the expression *dorë e bardhë*, I ask him to explain more about the relationship between *dorë e bardhë* and *dorë e zezë*. He tells me that there is some racial tension between the two groups. He offers the following perspective: “One type of racism occurs when they [*dorë e bardhë*] point and yell at us, calling us *gabel*. To me, when they say *gabel*, it is from a place of racism.” Gjoni also believes that many Roma and Egyptians experience racism in the workplace, especially when it comes to trying to obtain a job. He thinks that many people cannot get hired because they are Romani or Egyptian. He tells me that if the state would provide better job opportunities (such as clothing factories) and find a way to ensure that Roms and Egyptians could get hired, then they could better address unemployment disparities. “And then people would learn to behave better,” he adds. “They would not continue to make fun of others by calling them *gabel*.”

Gjoni is often unsure of many things: how long his family will live in Shkozë, how they will obtain food or water, whether their housing structure will remain intact through the next series of rainstorms, how his family will simply get by. I ask Gjoni for some of his thoughts on moving from one day to the next and he tells me: “*Kur s’kemi pulen do te hamë sorren—ashtu është punë e Tiranës*,” meaning, “When we do not have chicken we will eat crows—this is the work of living in Tirana.” Gjoni’s use of this

saying illuminates one aspect of his mindset and method of getting by, and how he negotiates the day-to-day living in Tirana. During our conversation he continues: “If I had a desire to leave, where else would I even go? I do not have much hope for the future but simply I hope that God elevates us in some way. That is all. I do not have any other hope. Simply I just want us to be elevated.” This desire to be higher is intimately tied to the longing of belonging, the notion of *mall* addressed in Chapter Two. Gjoni’s longing to be elevated is tied to the other forms of longing to be included, to be within, to be out of the margins.

I ask Gjoni what this elevation would look like. He names some of the things regularly discussed in Shkozë: better housing and more work opportunities, but he emphasizes the need to drastically change the current living conditions of the Shkozë community. “In your opinion, was there a time when things were better for Roma and Egyptians in Albania?” His answer is swift.

“Absolutely it was once better—during the time of Enver (*koha e Enverit*). He did not allow racism, therefore our lives were better. With Enver, everyone was on the same level; white (*të bardhë*) and black (*të zezë*) were treated the same in the workplace. We were all the same.”

Gjoni was born in 1985, the year that then dictator Enver Hoxha passed away. However, he speaks with such passion and certainty about Enver’s policies and disposition towards Roms and Egyptians, similarly to men and women from the protest scenes in Chapter Two. That same longing for a different time and place, a longing that is more often expressed as a retreat to the past versus a type of anticipation for the future, that longing infuses the everyday spaces of Shkozë.

## SITE TWO: THE BOULEVARD

The green lawn of *Parku Rinia* ('Youth Park') is congested with families, small children, and the aroma of coffee. It is a Sunday afternoon, and one of the first truly warm and dry Sundays after a cold and wet winter, and a muggy spring. Purple, blue, and peach colored plastic chairs line the cobble stone walkway, special chairs for the summer season. People stroll throughout the park, making their Sunday *gjiro*.<sup>41</sup> Others are nestled into the chairs and tables at café *Taiwan*. Waiters swarm the area, quickly moving inside and out as they rush to place coffee orders and deliver everything from makiatos and frappes to juice and sparkling water. A young couple quibbles about which table they will choose, the man wanting to pick any open seat, the woman desiring a seat that will allow her to be seen. An older man rides his bike through the park with a small child perched on top of the handlebars, leaning back into his chest. The evening swells with *muhabeti* ('small talk'), laughter, and the clinging of ashtrays, as waiters hurriedly exchange clean ones for those filled with cigarette ashes. There is a large screen playing music videos. Popcorn vendors sell freshly popped bags for 50 lekë. The smells and sounds of crackling corn on the cob whisk through the evening air as toy vendors line the sidewalks and walkways, each trying to convince parents to purchase balls, toy helicopters, and pinwheels for their children. On the opposite side, older men are seated on benches trying to sell souvenirs, including heart-shaped Albanian flag key chains. A small girl with pigtails pushes a doll in a stroller. Various traces of cigarette smoke drift through the air.

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<sup>41</sup> *Gjiro*, literally translated as "lap", is an Albanian term for a daytime or evening walk. Many times, this practice takes place on the main boulevard of a city or town, and is a time when families and neighbors get together, have conversations, coffee, and *raki* (moonshine). Some cities, like Korçë in southern Albania, are known for having more a more festive *gjiro*, "With some of the most well dressed women in all of Albania," as one interlocutor once put it.

As I walk through the park I spot two families from the *Bregu Lumi* Romani community. One of the women, Mimoza, approaches me and we strike up a quick conversation, *muhabeti*. She points around the park as mentions her kids who are scattered throughout the area. “Just out to enjoy this day a little,” she says, as she begins to make her way back to her family. I meander through the park and chat with the popcorn guys for a bit. As I stop to talk I notice Mimoza’s daughter nearby. At first she seems to be playing a tag-like game with one of her relatives, but then she starts to skip along the walkway, weaving in and out of others along the path. She stops when a group of young Albanian boys stand in front of her. “Wow, what a *gabel* you are,” one of the young men exclaims. He laughs as he grips his football (soccer ball) in his right hand. “Look at her, a *gabel*!” he reiterates. The three or four boys walk away, as Mimoza’s daughter remains standing, silently, watching them laugh. Terms such as *gabel* and *jevg* are thrown out and tossed about. People like Mimoza’s daughter try to dodge these terms; they are slapped with these terms, they run from the terms that continually follow them, especially in spaces on the side of the road.

### **Along the Road**

On the first day that I visited a group of Egyptian families in the main boulevard, 14 year-old Arben walks up to me and says, “You are black (*të zezë*) like us,” as he touches his face and then rubs his palm against my forearm. His brothers and sisters crowd around us. They have numerous questions about where I am from, about my hair and my voice, and why I am in Tirana. They also let me ask questions. When I ask them if they know Fatmiri, the young Egyptian boy from the boulevard (see chapter three), Arben eagerly responds, “Yes, he is my brother-in-law.” “*Ne jemi jevgut*” (“We are *jevg*”), his younger brother adds.

Arben's aunt Flora, by way of marriage, comes over and motions for the children to scatter. We strike up some *muhabet* and when I ask if I could inquire about her daily experiences with begging in the road, she agrees to talk with me for a while. Eventually she and I begin to have weekly, and at times, daily conversations. At times we meet in the park and other times we have coffee together at nearby cafes. On one occasion she even invites me to her house to celebrate her birthday.

I learn that each day Flora's husband, along with Arben's dad and other uncles, search for scrap materials to collect and sell while the women, children, and sometimes grandmothers, come to the boulevard to wash car windows and beg for money. Flora is 28 years old. She has three children, all under the age of five. She is not originally from Tirana, but rather, grew up in Shkodra in northern Albania. When I ask her how she arrived in Tirana, she tells me that once she met her husband, they came to the city. I ask Flora and Arben's mother (her sister-in-law) how much money their begging and window washing yields on any given day, to which Arben's mom replies, "Whatever *lekë* (Albanian currency) or offensive slur the folks throw our way." Flora says she once tried sending her kids to school but they were not treated like the rich white (*të bardhë*) children. Because of this, she says she stopped sending them to school.

Flora often asks me questions during our conversations, questions that are more rhetorical, akin to a form of venting, such as: "You think we do not want help or that we do not want assistance? You think that we do not want schooling for our children? Do you think we *like* begging?" Flora voices these sentiments every time we talk, even those times we do not actively discuss school or state assistance. At times she is angry, pissed even. Other times her voice is more melancholic. "Do you think we *like* begging?" This type of oration and lamenting provides Flora a way to articulate her pain and share her

narrative. It is a way to respond to ideas and words that circulate about her and others who beg in the boulevard.

### **Elvana's Family**

Elvana's youngest son cannot see out of his left eye. The first time I see her, she is begging outside of a restaurant in the Bllok, and grabs at my leg to get my attention to see that her son's left eyelid is sewn shut. "Look at my son, *sa gjynah* ('what a pity')!" We have a few interactions like this before actually having our first conversation. The first day that we talk at-length, she has her two other children with her: a precocious eight- or nine-year old daughter who often roams the streets of the Bllok by herself in search of money and food, and her younger sister who is around four or five years old. The owner of the small café behind us comes out and mutters something about Elvana's children being troublemakers (*mistrec*). If they bother more customers they will have to move. Elvana says this happens from time to time, and it may mean that they move to the other side of the road or further down the street. The owner of the small store (*dyqan*) has not said anything about her family sitting there, a space that they have occupied almost daily for close to a year now. "People call us *gabel* but we are not Romani, we are Egyptian," she tells me.

Elvana lives in an area near Flora's family but even further away from town. She lives with her mother-in-law and three children. Her husband died several years ago and she has never had a formal job. Her mother-in-law does not work either. Each day one or the two of them come to the Bllok with the children, in hopes to gather enough money from begging. Elvana and her mother-in-law often hold the toddler boy on their laps and

plead with pedestrians to look at his missing eye and give money.<sup>42</sup> In one sense, the body becomes a spectacle while at the same time a site of racialization. Most pedestrians walk by Elvana's family without paying much attention. She often cries out at passersby, "O God will bless you if you help us," "It is such a crime to live like this." While she has a type of visual performance, her positioning in the road is both invisible and hypervisible; it is invisible in the ways that she is not acknowledged and yet hypervisible in the ways that she is scorned and ridiculed, as people call her black, throw water at them, or even on one occasion, burn cigarettes on her children's arms.

Elvana's begging practices and the showcase of her son's injury is tied to a strategy for her and her family to make sense of their oppression and suffering that is often invisible, though the use of her body and her son's body makes that suffering hypervisible at the same time. Elvana, like many Romani and Egyptian families in Tirana, lack power in other areas for earning and sustaining daily life and as such, the body is used in begging practices as a means for getting by. Elvana says that she manages to get through each day *me zor* ('with difficulty'). This notion of *zor* speaks to an uneasiness, a tension, a difficulty. This uneasiness is unwieldy and heavy, and at times feels inescapable. While Elvana seems to have a momentary routine, a space where she and her children sit and beg every day, this *zor* is precarious, producing a routine way of getting by but simultaneously shaping an apprehension and uncertainty of the future. I

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<sup>42</sup> I find it challenging to write about this ethnographically as there are many organizations and groups that aim to end children's begging. Many such groups, like The World Bank, criminalize children's begging and what they consider unfair practices for children. In particular there is harsh criticism for children that wash windows, like Arben and his siblings, and those children like Elvana's son who suffers from a disability. I do not want to take the approach that focuses on child exploitation but rather, I want to try and focus on the actual embodied experience of begging in this space of the road, though I admit that one of my ethnographic struggles, and perhaps gaps, is the (in)ability to engage all of these tensions.

argue that this same *zor* manifests in Shkozë as well as spaces of the Boulevard. It is embodied. It is carried. It also carries. It drives. It stunts. It impinges.

In mapping the sites of race and belonging, in taking a look at the textures of marginality, one thing that routinely emerges is the daily negotiation of this *zor*. I am not arguing that Roms and Egyptians are the only people who employ this term or frame their struggles in this way, but, I am arguing that this difficulty or hardship takes new forms as it pertains to processes of race and belonging. It is important to consider this notion of *zor* to understand how individuals inhabit certain spaces in Tirana, such as the sites of Shkozë and the site of the boulevard. Ultimately, these stories capture some of the ways that racialization and spatialization intersect. The voices heard in this chapter thus far highlight multiple complexities but they also shed light on the happenings of places and spaces of the mundane. It is important to think about the notion of *zor* when trying to map sites of racial and identity formation. In Chapter Two I discussed racial categories, and the fact that dissertation aims to uncover those categories, to map their operations, transformations, utilization, and creation. These stories, focusing on the intersections of racialization and spatialization, elucidate aspects of the racial formation process. I now turn to the final site, the site of the body, to further highlight the happenings and sites of racialization.

### **SITE THREE: THE BODY AS A SITE OF ANALYSIS**

In this section I explore race, embodiment, and the body as a site of ethnographic inquiry. I begin with a dissertation interlude in which I provide some musings on race and the body, particularly focusing on my personal experiences during an encounter. I follow this passage with a brief analysis of race, space, and embodiment before sharing ethnographic accounts.

### **Dissertation Interlude**

The body is a site of ethnographic analysis. My own body is monitored, surveyed, mocked, examined, criticized in such a way that speaks to the ways that individuals react to, interpret, and consume my black, female, overweight body. And at the same time, this process forces me to reflect on the ways in which I, the ethnographer, examine bodies as sites of analysis in my studies of racialization and embodiment. I share the following encounter from the spring of 2014:

Nini sent me a message with a flyer, announcing a talk by the U.S. Embassy at her university. The talk was to feature a guest speaker for Black History Month. I was hesitant to accept her invitation to the event. A few years ago I took part in a few of these events and felt like an embassy token minority, often hearing statements such as, “Now that you are here in Albania, who better to speak during Black History Month?” Nini really wanted me to attend the presentation, and while I was reluctant, I agreed to join her. I ultimately concluded that any discussion of race could provide beneficial insights into my own research.

I met Nini at the gate to the university, running late as usual. She was not bothered by the delay, just quickly greeted me and grabbed my hand to lead me to the classroom. We chatted a bit about her husband and she asked me questions about my family. As we entered the building we ran into a few of her students who immediately stopped talking once they saw me. “*Mirë mëngjes,*” (‘Good morning’) I said to them as we walked towards the stairwell. As we began to climb the stairs I heard them ask Nini,

in Albanian, “O teacher, who is this woman and why is she here?” to which Nini responded, “This is my friend Chelsi. She is a social anthropologist from the United States,” as we continued up the stairs. At this point one of the young women replied, “*O? Sa bytha, të hëngsha bythen!*” (“Oh what an ass, I could eat her ass!”). She said this while laughing and nodding towards my buttocks, moving her hands like she wanted to grab them. I paused on the steps and looked back as Nini glared at them and said, “*Kini kujdes se kjo di shqip shumë mirë*” (“Be careful because she knows Albanian well”). The students stopped laughing, their giggles trickled away as they were unsure of what to say next. Nini grabbed my hand as she instructed me to continue following her upstairs.

### **The Body in Space**

It is a busy morning as people quickly stride along the Lana River. The sidewalks narrow as we approach the *Bllok* and eventually the main boulevard. Bodies are close to one another, mimicking the cars lined bumper to bumper on the road. Informal salesmen and saleswomen crowd the area near the park, along with several men with body scales. For about fifty cents a person can stand on the scale and find out their weight. Many people walk hand in hand or arm in arm; an older couple guides one another with matching gaits. While stopped at a crosswalk the woman in front of me recognizes a family friend and they exchange four kisses. The first woman greets the second with typical questions: How are you? How is your family? How is work? Are you tired? That last question, are you tired (*u lodhe?*), could perhaps be better translated as, “have you become tired [or worn out]” or “is life tiring you”. To the last question the second woman answers, “Not very much” (*jo shumë*), which I have learned does not necessarily always

convey the truth. “You look thin,” the first woman says. “Have you lost weight?” “Maybe some,” the second woman says, seemingly flattered. “Good for you,” the first woman responds. The light turns green and everyone continues to the other side.

The physical intimacy between bodies is juxtaposed with this verbal one as well. People publicly consume the body and regularly offer commentary on bodies in space. This last section takes a closer look at the body in an effort to explore the relationship between racialization, belonging, and the body. Didier Fassin writes, “Racial embodiment cannot be reduced to skin color: it involves the thickness of the body” (2011:427). This “thickness” of the body includes the sites and sights of the body, the smells, the gait, discussions of the body, ideas projected onto the body, the rhythms, sounds, and touch of the body. In the next two stories I take a look at the thickness of the body in an effort to think about some of the ways that bodies are racialized in Tirana.

### **Not really ‘dorë e zezë’**

The historical experience of race corresponds to the way people, both individually and collectively, make sense of and give shape to events and situations through which they are racialized and racialize others. (Fassin 2011: 429-430)

It is raining. The steady drops splash the hot concrete and slow traffic along the Boulevard. I sit on a park bench at *Parku Rinia*, chatting here and there with Arben. He and two of his sisters are out today, only washing windows occasionally, much of their work halted by the rain. Flora sits with her young baby at the corner of the Boulevard and river road. Her oldest child is across the street with two other cousins, standing along the river, going up to vehicles at each red light to smile and ask for money. “*Vajzë ime e madhe është dorë e bardhë* (‘My oldest daughter is white’),” she says to me. She then leans over and whispers, “I am not really *dorë e zezë* (‘black’). I am *dorë e bardhë*. My parents are *dorë e bardhë* but right now I am married to a man that is *dorë e zezë*.” She

pauses. When she continues she nods towards her daughter and says, “She is white. Her dad was white but he died. My current husband is black and my daughter thinks that he is her father though he is not.” I shake my head, indicating that I both understand and will not say anything to her daughter. “People treat me like I am *dorë e zezë*,” she says, and then continues:

They yell that at me on the road, saying dirty things like, ‘*Të djefsha racen*’ (essentially meaning “shit on or damn your race of people or fis”<sup>43</sup>) or, ‘*Ik moj jevgu!*’ (‘Leave, jevg!’). They curse at us because they think that we are *dorë e zezë*. But I am not *dorë e zezë*, I am *dorë e bardhë*.

Because Flora is in this place of the boulevard and regularly begs with family members who are Egyptian, she is read and labeled as *dorë e zezë*, even though she does not have darker skin compared with other Egyptians. Terms such as *dorë e zezë*, *jevg*, and *gabel* are shifting terms (Lemon 2005), so that they do not necessarily indicate “black” looking people or those with darker skin, but also for those who may occupy certain spaces or positions, such as begging in the road, or being married to someone marked as black, as is the case with Flora. Her body in a certain realm is read as *dorë e zezë*, as *jevg*, even though she herself identifies as *dorë e bardhë*, or a person with “white” skin. This is one such example of the ways that categories of both blackness and whiteness become defined, as people are marked and labeled based upon practices, and the spaces that they inhabit. Flora’s appearance and spatialization become signifiers of belonging to blackness (Roland 2013) even though she herself identifies as white.

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<sup>43</sup> *Fis* is the Albanian term for kin or familial clan.

## **Zamira's Baby**

Zamira is the first person awake each morning in her barrack. At eight months pregnant she rises before the others and gathers milk or yogurt for breakfast if the family has food to eat. She tries to find enough for all ten people but sometimes she manages just enough for her two young daughters and herself. Other times they wait for her mother-in-law Dita or another family member to return with money so that they can purchase a few groceries. After she takes care of food, she washes clothes with water from the spout down the road. She washes all of the clothes in the house. As she saunters down the road she feels the stares of passersby, those who watch her lug water back to her neighborhood. She says there are many people who see her and take pity, whispering comments about Romani women who are “always pregnant” and “do not know how to practice self-control with their bodies.” This is Zamira's fifth pregnancy and she regularly holds her stomach and says, “This one will be a boy—I know it.” She tells me that after giving birth to two daughters and having a miscarriage and a stillborn, her husband and his family are anxiously awaiting a son. I ask her if she has sought prenatal treatment or further follow-ups about her previous complications, and she tells me that she has not. “Who would help me?” she asks. Zamira is not fond of hospitals or medical facilities but she also has an extremely difficult time getting to one and receiving regular medical treatment. During a conversation with several women in the neighborhood, many expressed their dislike of doctors, as they were often turned away from hospitals, which they believe happens because they are *dorë e zezë*. Zamira says that at the maternity hospital, she just shows up when the contractions begin and checks in for delivery. She spends a few days there once the baby is born and then returns home. The trip to the maternity hospital is quite the physical journey and she hopes that when it is time to go her husband will have fixed their *motori* (motor bike) because if not, they may have to

rely on two buses and there is no guarantee that they will have the fare or that she will even be allowed on the bus once her water has broken. With the exception of getting water, she rarely leaves the neighborhood. Each time I greet her and ask how she is doing, she tells me that she is very tired, exhausted (*u lodhe shumë*). She lingers in the precarious state of expectation and trepidation.

Zamira goes into labor on July 30 and gives birth to a stillborn baby boy. Shpresa rushes to the maternity hospital when she learns of the news and quickly makes arrangements for a burial. She contacts representatives from the municipality and obtains a very small box to serve as a coffin. She then contacts the cemetery and has the body buried. Zamira spends the night in the hospital for observation; her husband and in-laws stay at home to greet visitors who want to extend their condolences. The deaths of her three children, her physical limitations in getting medical attention, and the fact that she is forced into a space without access to more privileged spheres, are all directly tied to the intersection racialization and spatialization. Didier Fassin writes that “The body is precisely where the three dimensions [‘reality,’ ‘experience,’ ‘expression’] are articulated: the violence of racialization is exerted, experienced, and performed through the body” (2011:428). Zamira’s body is a site of this violence. I recall Gresa’s first words to me when I met her in Shkozë: “My baby died.” Gresa’s body, too, as well as the Shkozë neighborhood, is a site of that racial violence. Zamira and Gresa’s bodies continually carry the scars, fragments, and memories of loss, painfully revealing the ways that racialization are marked upon their bodies. The bodies of their babies articulate and perform the experiences of racialization.

## **Lingering in the Margins**

Shkozë, the boulevard, and the body, all become sites of racialization. An exploration of these sites sheds light on the notion of *zor* and the practice of what I call lingering. Here, lingering is a form of orientation in-between: in-between housing, in-between jobs, in-between events, in-between socialism and the present moment. Lingering is a form of movement between loss and anticipation in everyday life. I argue that this lingering is a register of crisis and can draw attention to larger questions of race, space, and temporality in the post-communist landscape, including the ways in which certain bodies are in crisis. The bodies racialized as *dorë e zezë* linger in these sites shaped by racialization, marginalization, and exclusion.

Much of the writing of this chapter has focused on what it means to get by in these sites, but what does it look like to try and conceptualize a lingering with *zor*? Bodies in particular linger with this difficulty, with this struggle, while the *zor* itself lingers. On the one hand this notion of lingering with *zor* can be understood in terms of a temporality, but on the other hand, it is also about a physical disposition; about the ways that the body is formed and is a site of formation in certain spaces. This lingering is experiential. Perhaps one way to view it is through the lens of habitus (Bourdieu 1977). In this way, lingering as a disposition is shaped by certain structures and practices of the everyday. People are racially and spatially placed according to certain societal beliefs, which are continually produced and reproduced (Bourdieu 1977:170).

## **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

The ethnographic data of this chapter sheds light on processes of racialization at three specific sites. Using these three sites of Shkozë, the boulevard, and the body, I have explored these social processes of belonging and marginality, as well as pondered issues

of embodiment. I argue that this analysis of racialization and spatialization sheds light on a particular temporality that I conceptualize as lingering, a lingering that is done with *zor*.

Many of the men and women who lived in the fire-damaged neighborhood by the train station are now lingering, actively looking for housing and places to resettle. Some of them went to the Selitë neighborhood that has now been demolished by the city municipality. Others have remained stuck in former military settlement for over two years, lingering in the precarious system of citywide temporary housing. This concept of lingering helps to analyze the movements and practices of individuals like Flora and Elvana who spend a majority of their time in the road, but lingering also encompasses a particular temporality of getting by, that folks like Gjoni, Dita, and Gresa experience as well. Though the families of Shkozë desperately seek better living conditions, they are simultaneously forced to advocate for their current shacks and barracks, in an effort to maintain some sense of stability in the spaces of anticipation and wait. Meanwhile, the empty apartment buildings continue to stand tall, empty, overshadowing them all.

## Interlude: Voices

How do ethnographers hear and understand the voices of those from the field? This interlude features some of my experimental ethnographic writing in response to this question. I pay attention to language and the interplay between the written and oral. I recall the writings of Zora Neale Hurston and how she captures this interplay in her ethnographic writings. Reflecting on my fieldnotes, there are many instances in which my translations from Albanian to English are translated into Black English vernacular, as this is both how I heard and remembered individuals speaking. It is also how I understood certain vocal performances. In this interlude I try to capture a particular exchange with Black English vernacular.

When considering this decision, I thought to myself, “Can I do this?” Am I *allowed* to present dialogue in this manner? What does this type of translation do for ethnography and the ways in which we present that which happened? Is there a certain rule of translation that requires ethnographers to employ a certain “standard” English model? How is this type of translative move tied to racialization and the ways in which individuals are racialized, particularly considering my argument that Roms and Egyptians are racialized as Black? For me, I think that Black English vernacular illuminates certain affects and vibrations. Any kind of translation can be read as a violent act, so why would “standard American English” be considered any more appropriate than Black English? Geneva Smitherman defines Black Language or African American Language as, “A style of speaking English words with Black flava (*sic*)—with Africanized semantic, grammatical, pronunciation, and rhetorical patterns” (2006:3). I want to use this particular interlude to get at the interplay between words and expressions, and I argue that the choice of translating into Black English is one way to highlight a certain

rhetorical performance. “Standard American English” is only considered standard because, “It derives from the style of speaking and the language habits of the dominant race in United States society” (Smitherman 2006:6). Considering this though, two tensions still remain: the question of violence, and translation as a violent act, and secondly, what this type of translation does to the voices of interlocutors from the field.

Shpresa did not answer the first time that I called her. I hung up the phone and immediately called her back, surprised at how quickly I learned this common practice. Many friends here will call me multiple times until I answer, and I at first found this pestering, but now I find myself doing it. Shpresa answered the second time in a low voice and told me that she was busy at court, but that she would be at the *lagje* (‘neighborhood’) in about 30 minutes. I asked her if everything was okay and she told me that she had a problem that she would explain later. After hanging up I decided that her version of 30 minutes was more akin to an hour, so I searched for a cafe near the bus stop.

The bus was *plot* (‘full’) as usual as it wormed its way towards the stop. This has to be the most crowded bus in all of Tirana. Somehow I squeezed onto the last step at the back door but then two women came behind me and started yelling for us to move in even further. I was sandwiched in between passengers, stuck on two different steps with my head pressed into someone’s shoulder and someone’s elbow pressed into my neck. Several stops later the crowd finally began to disperse and Shpresa appeared behind me. “Wow!” she marveled, “*c’fat kemi* (‘what luck we have’)!” Turns out I had correctly interpreted what she meant by 30 minutes. The *faturina* (bus fare collector) finally made his way to the back to get our money, and when he saw Shpresa and then saw me, he asked her, “Who is this, your sister?” People often ask this when they see the two of us together. Shpresa is Egyptian and like me, has darker skin. I guess this is enough for folks

to think that we are sisters. The *faturina* was shocked when I jokingly responded, “Yeah, sure, she is my sister.” “O! She speaks Albanian?” he asked, speaking to Shpresa and not me. “She does,” Shpresa responded. “Ask her yourself.” “Where is she from?” he asked, continuing to speak to Shpresa. “I am an American,” I responded. “*Amerikane?* Well how about we get together, you and I, so that *I* can get to America?” He grinned loudly. Before I could answer Shpresa looked at him, dumbfounded, and yelled, “Stop it (*Pusho*)! She is married to a *real* businessman, a prosecutor...she ain’t got time fa you!” Shpresa continued to check him. “What she look like being with a man like you, who work on the bus? Her man is a lawyer! Stop it!” Shpresa’s emphasized the last syllable of lawyer, which in Albanian is *advokat*, with a sharp “t”. “Nah go on, *ec* (‘move’)!”

## Conclusion

An earlier question from Chapter One asked, what can ethnography in the margins of Europe tell us about processes of racialization and their significance in constructing identities?

One of my main goals in this dissertation is to highlight why studies of racialization and belonging matter in research specifically about Southeastern Europe. In this dissertation I illustrate the ways that Albanians, Roms, and Egyptians employ race and racial discourse to articulate aspects of identity formation. I also highlight the ways that particular racial formations are increasingly salient in Tirana, especially as they are tied to discrimination, housing, and notions of place. Through ethnographic analysis, I have tried to shed light on issues of marginality and belonging that speak to broader discussions of inclusion and exclusion across the European terrain.

This dissertation began with the story of the television interview on *Wake Up Tirana*, a story that highlights a recurring tension about the ethnographic study of race and racialization. Many of the show's staff wanted a clear and precise answer as to whether or not I considered Albanians racist, despite my attempts to explain my research differently. To some extent, I was also concerned with whether at the end of the show, people would think that I was labeling Albanians racist. These tensions around race and racism emerge throughout the dissertation and are tied to the discussion of racialization and the cultural forms of belonging. Hospitality plays a key role in understanding these cultural forms and what it means to respect guests. As a guest in Albania, one might frequently hear the expression, "*Mos u mërzit!*" "Do not get upset," or "Do not be bothered or uncomfortable," or "Do not get bored!" It is at once a statement, command, concern, check-in, and plea. People are acutely attuned to a person's feelings and

temperament. There is a particular investment in the well being of the guest, and it is performed in numerous ways. As such, one often-repeated narrative of Albanian belonging is intimately tied to the ways that foreigners and guests are treated, which directly shapes the reaction to discussions of race.

The focus on racial belonging illuminates this tension that is present throughout the dissertation, both in public discussions about my research, but also, in the actual ethnographic study of racialization and racial belonging, that is distinct from the study of racism. With this dissertation, I have aimed to think critically about the ways that racialization happens, about the cultural forms of belonging, and the sites where these processes intersect and unfold. The dissertation interludes serve as a lens for examining some of these intersections. The focus of this dissertation is less about the causes of racism and more about these racialization processes. As I have previously argued, processes of racialization take different forms everywhere, and yet, they are shaped by broader global identity formations and structures. I use these chapters to explore scenes and sites of racialization and identity formation in Tirana that draw attention to overlapping local and global formations and racial projects. I engage these manifestations through the ethnographic study of the affects of racial belonging, the examination of racial categories and discourses, and through an exploration of race, place, and temporality.

As this dissertation reveals, the language of race has become increasingly meaningful for Roms and Egyptians in articulating identity and also naming discrimination and exclusion in Albania. One of the key aspects of my research is tied to racial categories, particularly around notions of blackness. In addition to the discussions of chapters three and four, I want to offer an excerpt from an essay written by Olsi, an interlocutor and Romani young man from Tirana:

Two things define me as a human: my name and my skin color that puts me in the 'box' of Roma minority. Sometimes I think that even animals are treated better in this world...I live in Albania, an ex-communist country where the education for Romani community is a 'taboo'. The majority, or as we call them *Gadje*, are not used seeing educated Roms, with a bachelor's, master's or a Ph.D. degree. They [stereotype of] Roms as beggars, tin-collectors, or fortune readers. I always thought that Roma are not even allowed to dream. On the other side, with my classmates I always hear their dreams how the majority dreams about the black music, the black President Obama, or other black stuff, while in reality Roms are called *Gabel*, the *nigga*, in Albania...they are denied even sometimes the ability to dream. Dreams are delicate and can die so fast, because they need solid food, they do not have the ability to live just by oxygen. I have a big dream, that one day I will strike the wall of discrimination and stereotypes in front of me, until I break it down, and take my plans forward to show the world that Roma are not supposed to or destined to have their dreams ruined, but they are worth being treated better than animals. I found the secret of how to cook the solid food for the dreams not to die while striking the wall that the majority has built in front of us. This food is called education, its ingredients are, studying hard, being patient, and not giving up your dreams, if we can mix these three ingredients in a proper way, then we will have the strength to break that wall down. I can break a piece of this long wall and pass the borders to fulfill my dreams but this is not enough. All Roma in Albania need to use the solid food that gives us the strength to break down this wall and walk towards our dreams. Sometimes I thought that Albanians are robbers. They can rob everything out of me, but not my dreams, they are locked in the drawer of my Roma mind and no one knows where the key is.

Very few scholars have analyzed Romani and Egyptian communities alongside notions of racialized blackness, yet this ethnographic research points to the ways in which members of these groups identify as black, and further, like Olsi, frame their experiences with this racialized discourse. While I used chapter two to explore the notion of the "niggers of Europe" and how a white Albanian employed that language to articulate marginalization and social exclusion, it is also important to draw attention to the ways that Roms and Egyptians use this type of language to name their experiences and identify with a particular understanding of what it means to be black.

Recently, within the last six months, the Tirana municipality demolished two Romani-Egyptian communities, *Liqeni* and *Breg Lumi*, in order to expand a major road in

the city. The discussion of Romani expulsions is not new, and such scholars as Ian Hancock have written about the ways in which various Romani settlements have been systemically destroyed by state-ordered decrees (1997). I highlight these recent incidents to emphasize the need for more racial analysis, particularly around the experiences of those racialized as black in Tirana. Many of these families were forced out of their neighborhoods without much notice, and without formal support or compensation. This forceful removal and eviction is shaped by processes of racialization that value some lives as less than human.

The discussion of temporality emerges frequently in this dissertation, particularly around the notions of longing and lingering. Temporality is critical for thinking about the forms that longing takes, and intense desires for another time, whether that time takes the form of a past or a future. In chapter two, I map sentiments of longing, particularly the deep desires for social inclusion. This longing also captures a desire to retreat to a past. I have tried to show how these forms of longing manifest in discourses of race and belonging. As chapter four also shows, it is important to also consider temporality alongside racialization and marginalization to explore the inability to imagine a future, as Flori illustrated. This also allows me to consider the notion of lingering, a particular practice, and perhaps also a type of temporality that is shaped by racial belonging. Throughout the dissertation there is also a question of European futures, and what it means to imagine and yearn for that time.

Two limitations of the dissertation include the subjects of gender and religion. I recognize the analytical and theoretical gaps in these areas. An example includes the ways in which the discussions of race and racism themselves are gendered, particularly tied to the various conversations with men who frame racism as the inability to date and/or marry a woman who is racialized as other. This type of sentiment manifests often

throughout the dissertation, and deserves more attention. I also need to consider more carefully the role of religion in shaping various identities, particularly as I study processes of identity formation both in Albania as well as Europe broadly. Future writings need to include in-depth discussion and interrogation of these concepts.

In the wake of the recent *Brexit* vote, and the ongoing precarious migration, resettlement, and dislocation, there is an urgent need for more attention to matters of race, identity, and marginality. I argue that a slowed ethnographic mapping of these registers, such as the one presented in this dissertation, provides one way to expand conversations on raciality. This research, particularly in the contexts of marginalization and place, are increasingly pertinent for the study of racialization and how it shapes spaces of belonging, non-belonging, inclusion and exclusion. This research is critical for understanding the ways that people are racialized, spatialized, and valued, or not, which has implications for larger questions of racialization, belonging, and identity formation in Europe.

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