Title
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Author(s)
Takeuchi, Keiichi

Citation
Mediterranean world = 地中海論集, 15: 1-18

Issue Date
1998-03

Type
Journal Article

Text Version
publisher

URL
http://hdl.handle.net/10086/14854
Some Considerations on the Albanian Settlements in Southern Italy

Keiichi Takeuchi

1. Ethnic Minorities in Italy

Where ethnicity, language and religion are concerned, Italy is generally considered one of the most homogeneous states in the world. In fact, according to a large number of estimates, ethnic minorities are consistently found to occupy around a mere two per cent of the total population of Italy. In present-day Italy, it is possible to distinguish some three categories of ethnic minorities as follows: 1. Foreign labourers, mostly originating from outside the European Community (Takeuchi 1995), who began to emigrate to Italy in the 1960s, and whose numbers have increased to a marked degree since the 1980s; 2. Linguistic minorities, which in Italy are minorities simply because, due to the resetting of the borderlines at the time of or since the unification of Italy, they were cut off from the country where their language was spoken by the majority; and 3. Linguistic and/or cultural minorities, the members of which had already become dispersed among the inhabitants belonging to the Italian language and/or culture before the establishment of the modern state of Italy. Even in cases where the ethnic minorities of this last category had once had a specific homeland, their cultural and/or political ties to the homeland had already been severed by the time they were incorporated into the modern state. To the second category clearly belong the francophone and occitant people at the border area with France and Switzerland, German-speaking people in southern Tyrol or Trentino-Alto-Adige and Slovenian-speaking people at the border with Slovenia. To the third category belong the numerous dispersed settlements in Southern Italy.

To the ethnic minorities of the second and third categories, Bellinello (Bellinello, 1991, 1996) applies the distinction made between "allogene" and "allogrotte". The "allogene" settlements roughly correspond to the settlements of the second-category ethnic minorities of my classification above, and the "allogrotte" settlements to the third category. The so-called Albanian settlements in Southern Italy typically belong to the latter category; they are historically defined as those settlements established by the Albanians or Greeks who fled from the Balkan peninsula, in consequence of the Ottoman advancement into the peninsula between the
fourteenth and eighteenth centuries, especially after the defeat of Scanderbeg in 1466. Many of the Albanian settlements still conserve their original language, Graeco-Byzantine rituals and customs. The definition of the so-called Italo-Albanians in modern Italy, who were originally inhabitants of Albanian settlements, is a much more complicated matter, and one which I shall examine in this paper. In any case, they belong to a category entirely different from that of the Albanian refugees arriving in Italy after 1991. To the third category, or the “allogrotte”, also belong the Catalan settlements located in the western part of Sardinia. Though they maintain that they now have a closer relationship with the Catalan region in Spain, than the Albanian settlements have with the Republic of Albania, the origin of the Catalan settlements in Sardinia is to be found in the Catalan colonisation of the fourteenth century, consequent upon the defeat of the Genovese by the Aragon-Venetians; for several hundreds of years the Catalans there have been politically, economically and culturally separated from Catalonia.

2. Italo-Albanians and Their Identity

Where the present-day Albanian and Italo-Albanian settlements are concerned, the Albanians are understood to be those people having the Albanian language as their mother tongue or one of their mother tongues. In this sense, there are, approximately, 3,150,000 Albanians living in the Republic of Albania, 2,000,000 in Kosovo of the former Yugoslavia, and 900,000 in Macedonia, Montenegro and other parts of the Balkan peninsula (Chiaramonte 1992). Besides these, there are said to be about 100,000 Albanians in about fifty municipalities in Southern Italy. Because of the lack of data with regard to either ethnicity or mother tongues, it has not been possible for the Italian population census after 1922 to come up with the exact number of Albanian-speaking people in Southern Italy; the round number of 100,000 comprises a rough estimate compiled by the Associazone Italia-Albania. Even when the Albanian language is used, it differs somewhat from the orthographised language spoken in Albania and Kosovo, while the Albanian spoken by Italo-Albanians differs according to area (Altimari e Bolognari 1986). The problems here are that there are a large number of Albanian settlements which have lost the use of the Albanian language, and that there are many people who identify with the Italo-Albanians or arbëreshë but who do not have the Albanian language as their mother tongue. In many Albanian settlements, the Catholic church practises Graeco-Byzantine rituals rather than Latin. There is a prevailing discussion as to whether the original refugee Albanians were Greek Orthodox, who afterwards came under the influence of Rome, or were Catholics residing on the Balkan peninsula. Historical evidence supports the latter hypothesis.

In many Albanian settlements, however, there also exist Catholic churches which practise Latin rituals. They offer services not only for newcomers but also for descendants of Latin farmers who had presumably been integrated into newly and officially created Albanian
settlements, especially in instances where the right to the establishment of settlements was granted to Albanian refugee warriors in the fifteenth century, such as in the cases of Palazzo Adriano, Contessa Entellina and Mezzojuso in Sicily. In some cases, such as Santa Cristina Gela in Sicily for example, while the inhabitants use Albanian in everyday life and strongly identify with the Italo-Albanians, the sole functioning church in the settlement involved practises only the Latin rituals. The practice of the Graeco-Byzantine rituals certainly constituted a strong source of the perceived identity with Italo-Albanians, but additional sources must also have existed, such as language and customs. It is necessary, moreover, to take into consideration the fact that in many Albanian settlements, Graeco-Byzantine rituals were restored only in the eighteenth century, following the hundred-year-long imposition of Latin rituals by pontifical inquisitors. This was particularly the case in Northern Calabria.

After the 1880s, almost all the Albanian settlements experienced a population exodus, mainly to the New World before World War II, and after World War II, to Palermo and Northern Italian metropolises. Nowadays, the largest conglomeration of Italo-Albanians is to be found in Palermo (about 15,000), and most of them frequent the Catholic church of S. Nicol dei Greci alla Martorana, which practises Graeco-Byzantine rituals. Where the type of church is concerned, a similar situation is to be found in Rome at the church of Sant’ Atanasio dei Greci al Babuino, and in Milan, the church of S. Maurizio, in Turin, the church of S. Michele Arcangelo, and in Cosenza, the church of SS. Salvatori. The longest list of Albanian settlements was compiled by Emanuele Giordano, priest of the Basilian order in Frascineto, in 1961, and published in the annual of the Touring Club Italiano. Enumerated in this list were ninety-five Albanian villages, most of which constituted independent municipalities, and of which only fifty-five were, according to Giordano, Albanian-speaking villages with a total population of 136,000; the remaining forty were Italian-speaking villages having a total population of 182,000. The population figures estimated by Giordano were based on the population census of 1951 when the total population of the Southern Italian villages reached its maximum in this century. The population figures for individual section of municipalities are not available to me, but I would say, roughly, that the total population of the ninety-five villages listed by Giordano decreased by 40% between 1951 and 1991. On the other hand, according to K. Rother (Rother 1966), the population of Italo-Albanians reached its maximum in the 1890s when it stood at 99,000; while in 1966, it stood at 92,000. Bellinello (Bellinello 1991) revised Rother’s estimate, and according to him, in 1966, there were some 110,000 Italo-Albanians, of which 90,000 were Albanian-speaking; and again, based on his own method of estimation, he determined that the Italo-Albanian population in 1988 was 104,000, of which 74,000 were Albanian-speaking.

Among the ninety-five villages listed by Giordano, there are some which the municipal authorities themselves do not recognise as being of Albanian origin. In Sicily, S. Angelo Muxaro in the province of Agrigento is said to have originally constituted a resettlement of Albanians from Palazzo Adriano (Bonasera 1965,1988), but there is no historical evidence
of its having done so, and most of the inhabitants themselves of this village are reluctant to admit the possibility of their being of Albanian origin. In the case of Bronte in the province of Catania, when the municipality (università) was officially established in 1520, as a result of the amalgamation of many small settlements, there must certainly have been some Albanian settlements included amongst the latter, but again, no historical evidence has been found in support of this assumption; and in fact, Petrotta has already denied G. Schirò’s assertion that this municipality is indeed of Albanian origin (Petrotta 1966, G. Schirò 1923). In Calabria, Serra d’Aiello, considered by H. Kanter (Kanter 1930) and Giordano to be an Albanian settlement, was omitted by Rother from his list of Albanian settlements in Calabria. Moreover, in the 1980 edition of the guidebook of the Touring Club Italiano, there is no reference to the Albanian origin of this village.

In view of all this, the difficulties inherent in the defining of the Albanian settlement are obvious; nonetheless, it is safe to assume that the number of Albanian settlements is far less than the number estimated by Giordano; some fifty only can be said to exist for a fact. The defining of Albanian-speaking villages is a much more difficult question. In many cases, only the older generation speaks Albanian in everyday life. It is true that at the beginning of this century, the Basilian order of Italy contributed greatly to the establishment in Italy of the orthography pertaining to the contemporary Albanian language in Albania, but it is necessary to note that the Albanian language in Albanian settlements in Italy has been maintained for centuries by the Italo-Albanians, the majority of whom, nonetheless, surprisingly continue to remain de facto illiterates with regard to the Albanian language. At present, an increasing number of university students are learning orthographic Albanian in Albanian courses at a number of universities in Palermo and Cosenza, for instance; and in many Albanian settlements, under the initiative of the municipal authorities, the Albanian language has begun to be taught in extracurricular lessons. Thus, in contrast to the decrease in the Albanian-speaking populations in Italy, the number of people literate in the Albanian language is on the increase.

3. Albanian Settlements in the Provinces of Palermo and Cosenza

The observations presented here are based on field surveys conducted in 1995 and 1996 in Sicily. Most of the Albanian settlements with which we are concerned are located in the province of Palermo, and all five Albanian settlements listed in Table 1 have been investigated in some detail. More than half of the Albanian settlements in Southern Italy are concentrated in Calabria, especially in the province of Cosenza. The Albanian settlements in the province of Cosenza are thirty-one in number, according to Giordano, and twenty-six according to Rother, as shown in Fig. 1, and of these settlements, I examine the thirteen municipalities shown in Table 2. The origins of all five of the Albanian settlements in Palermo are clearly defined by either royal recognition of the municipal statutes or the concession of perpetual
Table 1  Composition of the Active Population of Five Municipalities in the Province of Palermo

(Numbers in parentheses are percentages.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Active population</th>
<th>Active working population</th>
<th>Unemployed*</th>
<th>Population seeking jobs for the first time**</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Manufacturing industry</th>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Services including commerce and transport</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piana degli Albanesi</td>
<td>2,141</td>
<td>1,301</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>651</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>298</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(60.8)</td>
<td>(8.8)</td>
<td>(30.4)</td>
<td>(15.4)</td>
<td>(10.9)</td>
<td>(15.7)</td>
<td>(22.9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cristina Gela</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(66.3)</td>
<td>(17.4)</td>
<td>(16.3)</td>
<td>(12.8)</td>
<td>(11.3)</td>
<td>(8.5)</td>
<td>(18.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palazzo Adriano</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(58.5)</td>
<td>(19.3)</td>
<td>(22.2)</td>
<td>(35.2)</td>
<td>(18.8)</td>
<td>(9.7)</td>
<td>(19.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contessa Entellina</td>
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<td>498</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>95</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(60.6)</td>
<td>(18.0)</td>
<td>(21.4)</td>
<td>(51.8)</td>
<td>(5.0)</td>
<td>(24.3)</td>
<td>(19.1)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mezzojuso</td>
<td>1,192</td>
<td>605</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(50.8)</td>
<td>(15.9)</td>
<td>(33.3)</td>
<td>(42.2)</td>
<td>(7.4)</td>
<td>(19.0)</td>
<td>(17.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province of Palermo</td>
<td>448,635</td>
<td>280,321</td>
<td>54,590</td>
<td>113,724</td>
<td>30,683</td>
<td>37,974</td>
<td>36,246</td>
<td>84,416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(62.5)</td>
<td>(12.2)</td>
<td>(25.3)</td>
<td>(6.8)</td>
<td>(8.5)</td>
<td>(8.1)</td>
<td>(18.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Unemployed means those who once worked.
** Population seeking jobs for the first time corresponds to the unemployed younger population.
Source: Population Census of 1991

Table 2  Land Use of Five Municipalities in the Province of Palermo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total acreage (ha)</th>
<th>Sowed fields* (%)</th>
<th>Permanent pastures (%)</th>
<th>Arboriculture (%)</th>
<th>Woodland (%)</th>
<th>Others (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Piana degli Albanesi</td>
<td>4,528.15</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cristina Gela</td>
<td>2,901.73</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palazzo Adriano</td>
<td>7,470.84</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contessa Entellina</td>
<td>8,521.98</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mezzojuso</td>
<td>4,623.38</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province of Palermo</td>
<td>369,597.69</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*seminativo nudo
Source: Census of Agriculture, October 1990
Figure 1  Five Albanian settlements in the province of Palermo (Maps reduced from original topographic maps of the Istituto Geografico Militare in the 1980s made on a scale of 1:25,000)
leaseholds, 1467 for Palazzo Adriano, 1488 for Piana degli Albanesi, then called Piana dei Greci, and so on (La Mantia 1907). The arrival of the first Albanians must have occurred a few decades before the official establishment of each municipality. Palazzo Adriano, Contessa Entellina and Mezzojuso are considered to be of warrior origin (Kellner 1972). In fact, these three settlements all occupy strategic points where the historical north-south roads of Sicily bisect the east-west roads, indicating that under the rule of the Aragonese dynasty, Albanian mercenary warriors were colonised at the location of these points. Piana degli Albanesi was located on the vast estate of the Abbey of Monreale, which was left desolate in the wake of the plagues of the fourteenth and fifteenth century. The Albanians commenced to colonise this uncultivated land from the beginning of the fifteenth century, thus forming a typical Albanian settlement of peasant origin. Santa Cristina Gela began to be formed by peasants from Piana degli Albanesi at the end of the seventeenth century (concession of perpetual leasehold was granted in 1691), and the municipality therefore had to have been formed in the middle of the seventeenth century (Chiaramonte 1967). Historically, the most important Albanian settlement in Palermo was Mezzojuso (statutes of 1501) with its Basilian monastery attached to the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie; the monastery was famous for its printing of Albanian documents (Mandalà 1985). In Piana degli Albanesi and Mezzojuso, the usage of the Albanian language had ceased by the beginning of this century. This was mainly due to the fact that, from the very beginning, the Albanian settlements of warrior origin, included a high proportion of farmers speaking the Latin dialect.

At the present day, Piana degli Albanese, deeming the characteristics proper to Italo-Albanians worthy of a wider audience, sees fit to emphasise them, and consequently, is very active in promoting Italo-Albanian culture and in organising international conventions for discussions on the history of Italo-Albanians, as well as on ethnic and linguistic minorities. At the time of the advance of Garibaldi’s army in 1860, a large number of enlistees from Piana degli Albanesi had joined the Garibaldian troops (garibaldini albanesi), and since then, the village has served as a centre for the exaltation of Italian nationalism, or more precisely, Italian nationalism on the part of the Italo-Albanians, evinced on such occasions as that of the Italian invasions into the Balkans and islands in the Aegean Sea. In 1990, a bishopric was created at Piana degli Albanesi, and all five of the Albanian settlements in the province of Palermo have since then belonged to the diocese of Piana degli Albanesi. On the other hand, in the latter village, the process of social differentiation moved forward at a rapid pace following upon the unification of Italy, and agrarian disputes were rife at the end of the last century. After the agrarian reform of the 1950s, a large part of the agricultural land subject to extensive land utilisation, and in possession of absentee and resident landowners, was redistributed among the peasants, thus instigating radical changes in class relationships within the village. As it is, the political and economic elite of the village now consists of the upper strata of owner-cultivators and merchants and
professionals of owner-cultivator origin. Where Contessa Entellina is concerned, its warrior origins notwithstanding, the Albanian language continues to be actively fostered, along with the conservation of Albanian culture and language; indeed, it is only in this village in Sicily that all the traffic signs are written both in Italian and Albanian. Also worthy of note is the fact that intermarriage between inhabitants of the two villages of Contessa Entellina and Piana degli Albanesi occurred and continues to occur, with some frequency.

As in the case of Piana degli Albanesi, in both Contessa Entellina and Mezzojuso, at the time of the agrarian reform in the 1950s, a large proportion of agrarian land was in the possession of big landowners. This was an important factor in the actual situation of agriculture: Italian agrarian reform aimed not only at the redistribution of agrarian land among the peasantry in order to create owner-cultivators, but also at the increase of agricultural productivity by means of land improvement; in order to achieve the latter, public works were called upon, for the construction of irrigation systems and terraces for orchards, vineyards and olive groves. While it is true that the public body for agrarian reform (Ente di Riforma Agraria) left itself open to accusations of extravagance, after forty years of work, the fact that agricultural productivity has greatly increased in much of the redistributed land is undeniable, especially where the extension of vineyards is concerned. All five Albanian villages in the province of Palermo are located in the interior of Sicily, hence in the economically marginal area of Southern Italy; but the economic situation is currently at its worst in Palazzo Adriano and Santa Cristina Gela, where the agrarian reform measures of the 1950s applied to only a very small portion of the land. The unemployment ratio is generally very high in Southern Italian villages, but this fact does not necessarily indicate the impoverished economic situation of the village since the unemployment ratio is proportional to the percentage of the working population in the total population; hence very often, it is the most deteriorated village, where the percentage of elderly people is high, that shows the lower unemployment ratio. With regard to the economic situation, it is worth noting that in Contessa Entellina, the percentage of the population engaged in construction is comparatively high; the greater part of the construction work involves the repairing and rebuilding of the settlement and roads destroyed by the earthquake of 1968. After that event, a huge income transfer from public and private funds was implemented by the central and regional governments and volunteer organisations for the purposes of reconstruction. The problem is the future of the small- and medium-size enterprises, which were not on the receiving end of the government contracts and are thus compelled to seek contracts outside the village.

The historical circumstances surrounding Albanian settlements in the province of Cosenza differ considerably from those of Sicily. The oldest settlements are located to the right of the River Crati in the mountains of Sila Greca. In Calabria, unlike the cases in Sicily, determining the founding of municipalities by means of records of official recognition by municipal states or the concession of a permanent leasehold is possible in only a very few cases. One of the latter is San Demetrio Corone, the central Albanian settlement in this area,
for the founding of which, the municipal statutes of 1471 provide evidence (Pitto e Tocci 1914). The name Corone derives from Koron on the Peloponnesian peninsula. In this area, there is also evidence of immigrants from the Balkan peninsula, who had been arriving from time to time since the end of the fourteenth century (Bellinello 1991). There is no doubt that, after the death of Scanderbeg in 1468, large numbers of refugee Albanians arrived in this area, since Scanderbeg’s daughter, Irene Kastrioti, was the wife of Pierantonio Sanseverino, a feudal lord of nearby Bisignano; Albanian settlements of this area must therefore have been of warrior origin, according to Kelner’s classification.

The second wave of Albanian settlements arrived in the area to the left of the River Crati, after 1479. In some cases, upon arriving, they commenced to occupy existing settlements, such as in the instances of Lungro and Civita, known under the names of Lungrium and Castrum Sancti Salvatore, respectively, in the mediaeval period. But in cases where they founded entirely new villages, the sites selected were sometimes more than 900 metres above sea level, such as Castroregio or Plataci, for example. As in the case of Piana degli Albanesi in Sicily, these settlements had to have been of peasant origin. And as happened in Sicily, in Calabria too, Albanian colonisation was conducted in deserted areas, after a plague had passed through (Belloch 1937). Even the site of Spezzano Albanese, a prosperous, agricultural and tourist town, located on the fertile alluvian plain of Sybaris at the periphery of the Duchy of Bisignano, in the fifteenth century (De Leo 1981), was formed of the marshland of the River Crati, where

![Image of Albanian settlements and topographic conditions in Northern Calabria](image-url)

Figure 2 Albanian settlements and topographic conditions in Northern Calabria (after Rother 1966)
malaria was prevalent. Each of these second-wave villages has its own legendary founding year, but no historical documents have been discovered to date, to corroborate the actual year of its municipal foundation.

The third wave of Albanian settlements occurred in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, sometimes in the shape of colonisation or resettlement from Albanian villages; there were many Albanian settlements of this category in the southern part of Calabria, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Active population</th>
<th>Active working population</th>
<th>Unemployed*</th>
<th>Population seeking jobs for the first time**</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Manufacturing industry</th>
<th>Construction</th>
<th>Services including commerce and transport</th>
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<tr>
<td>Acquaformosa</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>(4.9)</td>
<td>(9.7)</td>
<td>(16.7)</td>
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<td>Castoregio</td>
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<td>161</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(9.3)</td>
<td>(22.8)</td>
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<td>(30.1)</td>
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<th>Province of Cosenza</th>
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<th>33,922</th>
<th>68,309</th>
<th>36,402</th>
<th>20,803</th>
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<td>(23.1)</td>
<td>(12.3)</td>
<td>(7.0)</td>
<td>(13.0)</td>
<td>(16.3)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Unemployed means those who once worked.
** Population seeking jobs for the first time corresponds to the unemployed younger population.

Source: Population Census of 1991
Table 4  Land Use of Thirteen Municipalities in the Province of Cosenza

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Total Acreage (ha)</th>
<th>Sowed Fields (%)</th>
<th>Permanent Pastures (%)</th>
<th>Arboriculture (%)</th>
<th>Woodland (%)</th>
<th>Others (%)</th>
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<td>15.2</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
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</table>

*seminativo nudo

Source: Census of Agriculture, October 1990

Falconara Albanese, in the province of Cosenza, can definitely be included in this category. In the church register (registro ecclesiastico), of this village in 1670, most females were registered as Latins (lëtjnë) born in nearby villages, particularly Fiumefreddo. This indicates that in the second half of the seventeenth century, a large number of Albanian males, including colonisers from already settled Albanian villages, arrived here to found Falconara Albanese, which still maintains the use of the Albanian language (Altimari e De Rosa 1995).

The economic situation with regard to Albanian settlements in Calabria is comparable to that found in Sicily, as shown in Tables 3 and 4. Most villages are located in the somewhat marginalised areas having a high rate of unemployment, and where the percentage of the younger generation in the total population is low. While the percentage of the over sixty-five group in the total population is generally high, it is especially so in the mountainous areas; 29.2% in Castroregio, 21.2% in Civita and 24.6% in Plataci, in 1991. In Plataci, which is located at a higher altitude than Castroregio, tourism is developed to a certain extent and vacation houses are located there; hence this village has succeeded in keeping a number of younger people employed. In the villages where the people commute
Figure 3  San Demetrio Corone in 1957 and 1993
to work in Cozenza, the percentage of the population engaged in agriculture is comparatively low, in spite of the considerable extent of arable land, indicating that in these villages, many people engage in farming only as a secondary or part-time job. An extreme case is San Martina di Finita, where only 0.5% of the active population are engaged mainly in agriculture; in this case, it is necessary to take into account the fact that, besides large numbers of part-time farmers, a markedly large part of the arable village land is utilised by inhabitants of other villages located nearby. In the province of Cosenza, as in the province of Palermo there are considerable differences among the villages in the degree of extension where arboriculture is concerned; and as in Sicily, the differences generally derive from the differences in the degree of extension of the land redistributed among new owner-cultivators, under the agrarian reform measures of the early 1950s. Over the past forty years, as part of these measures, land improvement has been accomplished in most of the villages involved, such as San Cosmo Albanese and Vaccarizzo Albanese in the mountains of Sila Greca.

San Demetrio Corone and San Benedetto Ullano are two of the oldest Albanian settlements in the province of Cosenza, or historically, Calabria Citra; the two villages constituted centres of arbëreshë culture, and a seminary for the fostering of Graeco-Byzantine
rituals existed in San Demetrio Corone till the end of the nineteenth century (though it was temporarily located at San Benedetto Ullano) (Tavolaro 1935), when all the seminaries involved in Graeco-Byzantine rituals were integrated into the monastery at Grottaferrata. At the present time, the two villages are existing at the marginal subsistence level, with a high percentage of their populations consisting of older people of more than sixty-five years of age (20.4% in San Demetrio Corone and 21.5% in San Benedetto Ullano) and also with a high percentage of unemployed people. The cultural position of Lungro in Cosenza is somewhat similar to that of Piana degli Albanesi in Palermo. From the Risorgimento movement, there emerged many “nationalists”, in particular, large numbers of those referred to as garibaldini albanesi, at the time of the advance of Garibaldi’s troops; and in modern Italy, Lungro has since become the centre of Italo-Albanian culture, a position previously occupied by San Demetrio. Furthermore, in 1919, almost all the Albanian villages in the province of Cosenza and some Albanian villages in the provinces of Potenza and Pescara were incorporated into the diocese of Lungro (Meyriat 1960). From mediaeval times, Lungro was famous for its salt mines, which in the 1950s, employed about 700 workers. After the closure of the mines in the 1970s, a large Regional Hospital boasting 175 beds was built, and this indubitably brought about a remarkable spread effect on the economy of Lungro. In consequence of this, Lungro came to exercise a certain influence on the regional politics of Calabria.

4. Conclusive Remarks

The Italo-Albanians, or arbëreshë, clearly constitute an ethnic minority in Italy. However, the problems pertaining to the case of the Italo-Albanians differ greatly from the problems pertaining to other ethnic minorities in the modern nation state. Where the former are concerned, there have been no tensions or conflict such as have often occurred between other ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority. The consciousness with regard to arbëreshë was formed within the Risorgimento movement, or in other words, the idea of arbëreshë was inseparable from the idea of the Italian nation state; hence it was that, notwithstanding the existence of contrasts or tensions within the Italo-Albanian community, its collective arbëreshë consciousness strengthened at the moment of the upsurge of Italian patriotic sentiment. Arbëreshë culture definitely contributed to the establishment of the orthography of the contemporary Albanian language, but after World War II, with the decrease in the population of the Albanian settlements in general, and in particular, the decrease in the number of Albanian-speaking people, Italo-Albanians ceased to exercise any cultural or political influence on Albanians on the Balkan peninsula and other diasporal Albanians outside Italy.

In contemporary Italy, the growing emphasis on the movement for the strengthening of the Italo-Albanian identity, and the conservation of the Italo-Albanian culture has gained
momentum over the past few decades. This is primarily due to the strengthening of the movements pertaining to ethnic minorities in the contemporary world, and in fact, in Calabria and Sicily, a large number of international conferences have been held to date, centering on the topic of linguistic and ethnic minorities. In some instances, the Italo-Albanian minority is treated at the same level as other ethnic minorities in Italy, consisting of people who have immigrated into Italy over the past two decades, such as foreign labourers (Giacomarria 1994). Certainly, a number of Italo-Albanians, recently settled in big cities, can be found in somewhat marginal circumstances similar to those of newly arrived foreign labourers living in the inner city areas. But it is ever essential to take note of the particular historical context of the different phases through which the Italo-Albanian identity or arbëreshë consciousness has passed. After World War II, Italo-Albanian intellectuals and Italian students of Albanian language and literature studied in Kosovo, and after 1991, in the Albanian Republic.

In the summer of 1991, immediately after the collapse of the socialist regime in Albania, Albanian refugees arrived at the Adriatic coast packed into boats of all shapes and sizes. Prior to their later decision to deport the refugees back to Albania, in response to pressure from other European Community governments, the Italian government had allowed some 35,000 Albanians to settle in Italy. Many of these latter were Muslims and their language differed to a certain degree from that spoken by Italo-Albanians; nevertheless, many Albanian settlements in Southern Italy, including those which had already lost the use of the Albanian language, established a network through which they collectively decided to accept Albanian refugees into their communities. The number of Albanian refugees accepted into Albanian villages in Southern Italy may not seem very large when set against the total of 35,000, but the circumstances of the villages themselves have to be considered. For instance, five municipalities of the province of Palermo, with a total population of less than 15,000, took in 850 Albanian refugees; this, considered in the light of the marginal subsistence level at which the villages in question existed, must have been a considerably heavy burden. In a certain sense, the phenomena of this show of ethnic solidarity, involving the refugees and their hosts, has its curious aspects; for, where the inhabitants of the Albanian settlements in Italy were concerned, the prime reason for their hospitality lay in their belief that their own ancestors had also arrived from the Balkan peninsula in the legendary past, some three to four hundred years ago. It is thus possible to explain this “curious” solidarity in terms of the particular character of Italo-Albanian identity.

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