International Migration, Social Demotion, and Imagined Advancement
Erind Pajo

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An Ethnography of Socioglobal Mobility
emigrantève
Acknowledgments

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Erind Pajo

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Chapter 1
International Migration as Socioglobal Mobility

Contemporary migration involves a dramatic paradox. Much of what is considered international or transnational or labor migration today transforms people of a wide range of social standings in the countries from which they migrate into laborers at the bottom social ranks of the countries towards which they migrate. We read in the papers of Russian one-time doctors, for example, and of Czech one-time managers, who, as immigrants to the United States, clean Wal-Mart stores for seven nights a week; we learn that Chinese one-time professors and one-time senior executives maintain casinos and bathrooms in Connecticut, that Armenian one-time engineers pump gas in New York City, that Vietnamese one-time medical doctors become census-takers, that Ethiopian one-time engineers sell candy in San Francisco.¹

Yet the swelling millions of people who migrate internationally every year do so voluntarily.² In fact, as the borders of the countries that attract international migration become increasingly difficult to penetrate, the dire determination of would-be immigrants to reach their desired destinations comes to the fore quite stirringly. It was not uncommon over the last decade to hear of would-be immigrants locked in cargo planes or ships or trains for days or even weeks on end, with no food and no water, just to physically make it to the other side of the border that divided the world in which they were from the world in which they wanted to be. With some regularity, we also hear of those who, desiring to slip undetected through the ever less yielding border controls, squeeze their physical selves into the inner tubes of truck tires, stow themselves away in airplane wheel wells, or walk through deserts for days. Several thousands of such would-be immigrants died while attempting to reach the United States and the countries of the European Union in the last decade alone.³ Yet the global number of people who long for a chance to get to the West is

¹ Similar cases are reported with some frequency in various American local papers—or can be found live at a gas station, restaurant, or coffee shop near you. The examples I cite here come from the Associated Press (2003), The New York Times (Greenhouse 2003), New York’s Daily News (Beale 1996), and The San Francisco Chronicle (Hua 2001; Costantinou 2004).
² The No-Nonsense Guide to International Migration (Stalker 2001) estimates that two to three million people migrate internationally every year.
³ It is difficult to calculate with any degree of accuracy the number of those who have died over the course of their attempts to migrate without documents to the West. The No-Nonsense Guide to International Migration (Stalker 2001) quotes data from the United States Immigration and
believed to have only increased since the 1960s, especially after the early 1970s and again in the 1990s.4

Why do millions of people from a range of social standing in many countries all over the contemporary world yearn, in effect, for a chance at domestic servitude or for toiling in sweatshops and restaurants? Why do millions of would-be migrants so desire to be in the United States or in the European Union, where, as it is widely known, regardless of who they are when they start their journeys across international borders, they end up at the bottom and earn their keep by cleaning dishes and homes and offices, by shining shoes and waiting tables, at wages that are often but a fraction of those in the legal labor markets? What is the contemporary global appeal of a life lived sometimes quite literally under used cardboard or in drainage culverts?5

### Down and Under as Economic Advantage

The social decline that international migration brings about escapes notice in the destination countries, by and large free-market liberal democracies that regardless of their geographical location are colloquially referred to as “the West.”6 The way we see it, international migration is rooted in an individual migrant’s economic advantage.7

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4 According to the International Labour Organization, “the rate of growth of the world’s migrant population more than doubled between the 1960s and the 1990s” (ILO 2002); see also Sassen 1988; Habermas 1998; cf. Castles and Miller 1998.

5 See, for example, the numerous cases documented photographically by Don Bartletti. One of Bartletti’s photojournalistic projects, “Enrique’s Journey,” which was awarded a Pulitzer in 2003, can be viewed on the Los Angeles Times website, latimes.com/news/specials/enrique.

6 Though a great many international migrants never reach the United States, the European Union, Canada, or Australia, it can be plausibly argued that in today’s world international migrants typically head for countries that resemble the West more closely than do the countries they leave behind. According to the United Nations Population Division, in the year 2002 migrant stock comprised 8.9% of the population in the world’s “more developed” regions, versus 1.5% and 1.6% respectively in the “less developed” and “least developed” regions (UNDESA 2002).

7 A revealing example of the way in which we perceive international migration, one that materializes the otherwise metaphorical “seeing,” is the visual representation of immigration to the United States in American popular magazines. Analyzing the covers of several such magazines since the mid 1960s, Leo Chavez (2001) argues that, in the United States, the discourse of immigration is a discourse of the nation. The remarkable selection of visual material Chavez reproduces in his book shows also how the images of immigration that feed on popular sentiments—and that in turn also shape those sentiments—typically depict immigrants as drawn towards the United States by prospects of indisputable economic advantage.
Our media’s representations of international migrants’ social trajectories must reflect with some accuracy the ways in which we all, neighbors and scholars of migrants, or migrants ourselves, tend to think about international migration. Even though the common demotion of immigrants can now be seen in feature films,\(^8\) we continue to assume that contemporary international migration is driven essentially by a nebular blend of the need and desire for “more money.” True to the perspectives from which we commonly view international migration, the media portraits of the individuals, who, as international migrants, undergo dramatic social demotion, focus on their bravery and their profound determination to make it to the country of their dreams despite the typically tremendous hurdles that mark their lengthy ways. These portraits do not really question why an international migrant ventures to leave his or her past in the first place, or how an immigrant’s present fulfills his or her dreams.

The absence of reflection on the lot of the immigrants as human and social beings cannot be blamed on their invisibility. As “immigration,” conceived of as a political “problem,” moves towards the center of numerous contemporary discourses, immigrants are becoming increasingly visible in both Europe and the United States. Instead, the absence in our culture of genuine sociological reflection on international migration as human mobility can be traced to the commonsensical belief that international migration has simply economic roots. In fact, the popular understandings of international migration and of the economics of the contemporary world appear to be trapped in a closed conceptual circle. One can easily see how myriad cultural representations of the wealth disparities between the countries towards which people migrate and the rest of the world from which they come, feed the general sense that the most profound reason for emigration is nothing but the material poverty that, in this same understanding, characterizes the countries where immigrants come from. Given the cultural visibility of what are technically called “differentials of income” between countries, it is virtually never doubted that international migration brings to individual immigrants shockingly more money than what they could possibly have in the countries they leave behind. In fact, much of the media reporting on international migration can be seen as simply supplying individualized examples to our dominant imaginary about the immigrants’ eventually being better off.

Scholars attribute this effectively hegemonic vision of international migration as a move prompted by the prospects of relative economic advantage to the perspectives of especially those economists who have traditionally considered rational choice and maximization of economic benefit as the core grounds for nearly all individual decisions. In the early 1990s landmark review of the “inherently contradictory” theories in the then “segmented” field of the study of international migration,\(^8\) A Nigerian one-time doctor who randomly drives taxis in London after night shifts at a hotel reception desk is the central character in a recent production of the BBC, Dirty Pretty Things (Frears 2002), which proved to be of quite mainstream appeal. Unfortunately, the film assigns the transformation of the one-time doctor into a hotel receptionist and taxi driver to the lot of a refugee, the genuine hero who, unlike many of the other immigrants with whom the plot of the film involves him, has had to escape what shattered his family. As an artistic portrait of contemporary international migration, Dirty Pretty Things reaches the coda when the Nigerian one-time doctor, once he can, decides not to remain in Britain—a move perhaps not typical of contemporary immigrants.
international migration,\textsuperscript{9} Douglas Massey and his colleagues\textsuperscript{10} assigned to neoclassical economics the vision of the individual as a rational maximizer of income (Massey et al. 1993). From the perspective of neoclassical economics, international migration represents a response to the differences in wages and in conditions of employment between countries, and

the simple and compelling explanation of international migration offered by neoclassical macroeconomics has strongly shaped public thinking and has provided the intellectual basis for much immigration policy

(Massey et al. 1993, 433).

Predictably, theoretical frameworks about virtually anything are sooner or later challenged, and some are eventually revised or replaced by alternatives. As Massey and his colleagues thoroughly discuss, the neoclassical economics model for making sense of international migration has drawn elaborate competition. Various alternative frameworks have taken issue with neoclassical economics’ model for international migration and redefined several of its dimensions. Both the macro and the micro versions of the neoclassical economics model, for example, are founded upon a conceptualization of the individual as the maker of the decision to migrate internationally. This vision of the individual as the one who assesses the condition of the labor market in his or her country of origin, compares it to information about the labor conditions in a targeted country of destination, and so decides to emigrate, has been revised by “the new economics of migration.” Focusing on the “pull” dynamics, this competing school views the larger collective of the household, rather than the individual, as the entity that makes the decisions about international migration (Massey et al. 1993). A different focus on the “pull” is central to another influential perspective, the “dual labor market theory” associated with the work of Michael Piore (1979). In this framework, international migration is attracted by advanced industrial countries, the high wages of which represent structural needs for labor (ibid.; see, again, Massey et al. 1993).

Yet none of our theoretical perspectives on international migration questions international migration’s economic advantage (see also Massey et al. 1998). Significant as various perspectives’ corrections and revisions to the neoclassical economics model are, the alternative frameworks for understanding international migration leave intact the neoclassical economics core notion of international migration’s economic advantage either to the individual who emigrates or to the immediate family or kin unit to which he or she is seen as belonging. And this reveals the sheer centrality to the field of migration studies of the sentiment that “first money comes, then people follow.”

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\textsuperscript{9} The sense that studies of international migration were incongruous was shared also by others in the early 1990s, albeit perhaps less emphatically (e.g., Portes and Rumbaut 1996; cf. Massey 1990). This situation has changed; there appears to be some agreement that, at present, the study of migration might even constitute a subfield within the social sciences (DeWind 2000).

\textsuperscript{10} At the Committee on South-North Migration of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population Problems.
Articulated in the raw in the neoclassical economics model for understanding international migration, and otherwise not contested, the idea of economic advantage remains as accepted—indeed as fundamental—in scholarly work as it is in popular visions of international migration and in migration’s coverage by the media. And this is not just the case within the disciplinary boundaries of economics or economic sociology. The inveteracy of conceptualizing international migration as driven by the prospects of economic advantage can be particularly striking in sociocultural anthropology, given the tradition, from Bronislaw Malinowski (e.g., 1922) to Eric Wolf (1982), of recognizing native economic systems as genuine alternative equivalents to Western capitalism, and of attempting an appreciation of the less-than-universal appeal of money (e.g., Bohannan 1959).

As tradition has in recent years become a topic of discussion among those anthropologists who work on international migration, their debates have mostly revolved around certain aspects of the history of anthropology’s engagement in its study. The prominent stance that anthropologists have traditionally shunned the study of migration was articulated recently in Caroline Brettell’s authoritative review of the field (Brettell 2000). Substantiating and furthering one earlier critique of anthropology’s “sedentarist bias” (Malkki 1995), Brettell recounts the omission of migration from Margaret Mead’s 1930s work on rural New Guinea, a relic from a time when anthropologists did not consider migration a legitimate topic of study, and one that has also been cited in Nancy Foner’s more recent overview of the study of migration in anthropology (Foner 2003).

Leo Chavez, on the other hand, has seen endurance in the anthropological engagement with international migration, and has recalled the interest Franz Boas showed in the physical transformation of immigrants in the United States (Chavez 2003). This stance is shared by Nina Glick Schiller, who, in arguing that “ethnography is … the most appropriate methodology for the study of transnational migration” (Glick Schiller 2003, 100), admonishes those who do not acknowledge the heritage of ethnographies of migration, including

the anthropologists who write as if the ethnographic study of migration, complex societies, and transborder processes is something new to their discipline (Marcus 1986; Rosaldo 1989). In fact ethnographers of migration have long maintained a creative tension with certain mainstream currents in anthropology and sociology and offer a critique of both (Glick Schiller 2003:101).

While the history of the study of migration in anthropology might thus be a matter of some disagreement, general agreement exists on its increasing prominence since the 1970s and especially in the 1990s and after (Foner 2003; Brettell 2000; di Leonardo 1998). The canonical interest in culture, and more recently on identity as a dimension of culture, appears to have predominantly focused anthropologists on the “cultural” intricacies that migration brings about in the communities from which migrants originate as well as in those to which they come. Besides generating a wealth of documentation of and keen insights on the lived experiences of international migration, anthropologists have also engaged the various theoretical perspectives on the workings of contemporary migration (e.g., Mahler 1995; Levitt
2001), and they have done so to the degree that anthropology is presently considered a prime disciplinary setting for such discussions (Brettell 2000).

As their interest in migration has grown, anthropologists, sociologists, and other scholars who share the ethnographic methodology and its related perspectives have conducted research on both ends of migration, and a number of recent studies have covered within the same framework more than one migration or re-migration routes or more than one destination of migration.11 This encouraging trend fits well with the—by now central—conceptual framework of transnationalism, which was initially formulated by the anthropologists Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc.12

Yet even though the question of why people emigrate has legitimately been seen as underlying such works, and even though ethnographers approach this question from an angle that is distinct from that of the economists (e.g., Brettell and Hollifield 2000), the view that economic advantage lies at the roots of international migration remains unquestioned by this scholarship. Anthropologists may have not felt so strongly about the explanatory frameworks of push-pull economics as to extensively engage in illustrating them through ethnographic investigations. But neither have they felt so particularly opposed to the economic models of push-pull as to take issue with them. Despite their contribution to understanding complex cases of international migration, and despite the notable novelty of the paradigm of transnationalism, contemporary anthropologists appear to engage exclusively those dimensions of international migration that are secondary to the allegedly fundamental economics of push-pull. The focus on specific dimensions of the experience of international migration that ethnographic work typically adopts has often resulted in adding particulars to, and in effect reinforcing, the view that income differentials and economic advantage drive international migration. The focus of some outstanding work on remittances, for example, also implicitly emphasizes the superiority of the migrant’s economic condition in the country of destination over his or her economic condition in the country of origin.

One singly unusual stance has been the recognition, by Maxine Margolis, of the decline of Brazilian immigrants in New York City in a paper published in the year 1990 under the veracious title “From Mistress to Servant.”13 Typical among the Brazilian middle-class émigré’s Margolis interviewed in the late 1980s were a one-time chemical engineer who drove a cab in New York City, a one-time accountant who earned his living waiting tables, a one-time psychologist who catered food, a one-time journalist who cleaned apartments, and a one-time teacher who washed dishes. Other one-time professionals in Margolis’s paper sold books in the streets of New York, rain or shine, and shined shoes.

“From Mistress to Servant” displays remarkably the tension between what an ethnographer draws from the field and what can be articulated in the terms made

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12 E.g., Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Szanton Blanc, Basch, and Glick Schiller 1995.
13 For all the valuable insights it may promise, the study of downward mobility tends to attract little attention in the social sciences. I know of only one book-length ethnography explicitly devoted to downward mobility, Katherine Newman’s Falling from Grace (Newman 1989).
available by the dominant theoretical paradigms and popular sentiment. Although Margolis has the merit of putting the name of decline to the transformation of status that Brazilian immigrants undergo in New York City, she funnels her ethnographic findings into conclusions that reproduce the usual view of international migration as a move of economic advantage. Margolis appears uncomfortable with the popular views of migration as escape from poverty and recognizes, very insightfully, that Brazilians “who have difficulty feeding their children are unlikely candidates for emigration to the United States” (Margolis 1990, 217). Yet she concurs with her informants as to the reason they state for their emigration—that being in the United States allows them to earn money in a solid currency which translates to a great deal in Brazil. Margolis argues that despite their talk about their presence in America as just temporary and a means for earning US dollars, most Brazilians are in America to stay. On the other hand she resolves that the Brazilian migration to the United States is explained by the context of Brazil’s momentarily volatile economy and the hyperinflation of the late 1980s. In a strained conclusion, Margolis asserts that the reason why highly educated Brazilians “cope” with their demotion in social status is the higher income that they can earn in the menial jobs listed above or in New York City’s nightlife entertainment scene.14

In assigning the reason for the Brazilian migration to the United States to Brazil’s 1980s moment of economic instability, Margolis’s interpretation resonates with the sociological explanations of international migration developed under the inspiration of the world-systems perspective (Wallerstein 1974, 2000) by Alejandro Portes and John Walton (1981) and by Saskia Sassen (1988), among others. Critiquing the push-pull model as an essentially post facto explanation for international migration (cf. Portes and Bach 1985), and focusing instead on the imposition of structures of the capitalist economy all over the world, this framework conceptualizes international migration as an outcome of the economic and social disruption caused by the global spread of Western capitalism. Colonization forcefully drew people of different economic systems into one system and made wage laborers out of former natives. But rather than converting the colonies into full capitalist systems, colonization only created economic enclaves that functioned in dependency to and were exploited by the core capitalist economies of Europe. Although the postcolonial era did see economic shifts in the global capitalist economy, one of the consequences of the global liberalization of finance was the intensification of the dependency of the former colonial economic enclaves on forces beyond their control. And this is how large numbers of people in formerly non-capitalist economic systems, who during the colonial era had been proletarianized and whose livelihoods had come to depend on cash wages, by the 1970s were increasingly left without work, thus forming a global pool of unengaged labor, available and ready to migrate to other countries.15

14 Margolis has elaborated on her positions further in her later ethnography Little Brazil (1994), as well as in its revised update, An Invisible Minority (1998).

15 This view is evoked also in more recent writing on pressures for emigration (cf. Habermas 1998).
The intellectual merit of such sociological positions, as well as their conceptual advantage over the push-pull model of neoclassical economics, lies in great part with their historical grounding, especially with the recognition that had already occurred earlier in anthropology, that at one point in the not very distant past, money remained meaningless to “the natives” outside of the capitalist economic system. Still, by focusing on the disruption of the non-European socioeconomic systems, the sociological frameworks of accounting for international migration in terms inspired by the world-systems theory appear as if seeking to relieve the economic push-pull models from the historical evidence of their incapability to account for international migration.

Focusing on how a range of formerly colonized countries entered a stage of economic compatibility with European capitalism, disruption frameworks show how, at present, people all over the world have in effect been brought into the same leveled field in which one or another of the economic pull-push models does finally explain international migration. Albeit through the initial use of force, money eventually became meaningful even to those people to whom it did not mean much before. And as soon as that was the case, international migration could and can be accounted for by the economics of push and pull: once the livelihoods of the former “natives” depend largely on cash, higher wages necessarily attract migrant laborers from regions where wages are lower.

The Meaning of Migrants’ Money

Can relative economic advantage explain the paradox of international migration’s social demotion? Can the prospects of possessing more money account for the dire determination with which international migrants pursue their decline abroad?

Examined on the level at which it is lived, in migrants’ everyday existence, the notion of economic advantage loses much of the universal appeal it exerts upon our commonsense and scholarly frameworks for understanding international migration. On this level, income differentials between countries, for example, appear blurred at best: immigrants often earn wages that are well below the legal minimums established in immigration countries while suffering the economic weight of legal and other expenditures intrinsic to their immigrant existence. Even remittances, which from above might look like undisputable proof of immigration’s economic advantage, are just the opposite on the ground level: by decreasing the disposable income of the immigrant while increasing the disposable income of those who did

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16 The very idea of the hungry and miserable savage has been long debunked in anthropology by evidence of the well-fed pre-colonized humans who spent significantly less time in labor than most of us do today in the most developed countries of the West. I am indebted to Mike Burton for this insight and for the reference to Paul Bohannan’s 1959 paper, “The Impact of Money on an African Subsistence Economy.” See also certain writings of Marshall Sahlins (e.g., 1972, 1963, 1958), as well as Karl Polanyi’s earlier references to anthropological research (Polanyi 1944).
not emigrate, remittances typically reverse the differentials of income on both ends of international migration.

But even if immigration’s economic advantage were to be proved beyond any doubts, a reflection on its meaning would only accentuate international migration’s paradox of willed demotion. A broad and historical consensus exists in social and economic thought that, once the basic necessities of life have been provided for, the essential function of money is as a means to achieve one or another form of social distinction. In assigning the drive of capitalist accumulation to the Protestant ethic of hard work that aimed at divine recognition, Max Weber argued in effect that, in its entirety, worldly economic striving sought the establishment of individual distinction (Weber 1905). The sentiment that wealth wields little meaning outside of a social context was also articulated by Thorstein Veblen’s less subtle notion of “conspicuous consumption” (Veblen 1899). The consensus on the social function of economic power is in fact so sweeping as to include not only the related sociological thinking of Georg Simmel (e.g., 1978) and the social critique of Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., 1984, 2000), but even such diverse political and philosophical stances as the mundane pragmatism of Alan Greenspan and the socialist idealism of Karl Marx. Years before becoming the chairman of the United States Federal Reserve, Greenspan elaborated on the premise that gold stabilizes a national currency because it symbolizes luxury (Greenspan 1966), while Marx, in theorizing the logic of capital as accumulation for the sake of accumulation, implied the value of money to be a relative rather than an absolute measure (Marx 1976; cf. Harvey 1999).

If international migrants pursue money for the same social function everyone else pursues money for, social thought to date concludes that the view of international migration’s economic advantage is inherently contradictory. Counterintuitively, in light of the social demotion that much of contemporary international migration involves, the logic of economic advantage would make sense only for what we call “forced” migration—when the alternative to emigration, remaining in the country of origin, endangers one’s physical existence, and the alternative to social demotion is an end to life. This evokes again the paradox of willed pursuit of social demotion through voluntary international migration. While the logic underlying the vision of economic advantage might, perhaps ironically, help us theorize refugee flows, how are we to account for the “labor” migration that is clearly not escape from famine or war? How are we to understand the one-time Russian doctor who willingly demotes himself into a janitor in the United States? How to explain that the numbers of those who willingly pursue similar paths of demotion are at present growing all over the world? How does the prospect of drastic decline in status, even when paired with relative economic advantage, account for those who audaciously face death itself while attempting to make it physically to the West?

Socioglobal Mobility

To understand international migration’s paradox of willed pursuit of social demotion, this book takes the ethnographic route of exploring the everyday existence and the words of some of those who have pursued their decline by migrating
internationally. To learn why people cross the borders of nation-states in spite of the social demotion that awaits them, and why they willingly remain in their demoted positions, the following pages focus on a byword for the global condition of heightened emigration pressures as well as for the dramatic decline many international migrants undergo—the outcome in Greece of the Albanian emigration that started in the early 1990s.17

To the Albanians of Greece, “emigration” happens because, quite simply, Greece is “better” than Albania. Furthermore, Italy is better than Greece, Germany is better than Italy, and America is the best country of all. And a country’s being “better” or “worse” in this global hierarchical order essentially means that different countries territorialize different degrees of fulfillment and of morality and allow for different degrees of individual achievement. Paradoxically, seeing like the Albanians of Greece—as well as like the rest of the Greeks and perhaps the rest of us—people irredeemably belong to countries. The “emigrants,” as the Albanians of Greece refer to themselves after well over a decade in Greece, cannot escape their condition of economic and social inferiority quite simply because they are Albanians, not Greeks.

To the extent that the experience of the Albanians of Greece is part of a contemporary social and cultural reality that reaches beyond the physical boundaries of their world, and to the extent that my ethnographic conclusions can be generalized, this book holds that the essence of contemporary international migration lies with the articulation of the social in terms of the international. Social status in our time’s world seems to be a matter of envisioning society and of envisioning the world as much as it is a matter of territorial presence; hence contemporary international migration might be driven by the social desire to advance from a location envisioned as low in the international hierarchy towards one envisioned as higher. Social status is at the same time a matter of territorial belonging, and that typically makes international advancement impossible.

In short, rather than as a move of economic advantage, contemporary international migration might be best understood as socioglobal mobility.

17 Fieldwork took place in Athens in the summer of the year 2000 and over most of the year 2002; the ethnography that follows was written between 2004 and early 2007.
Chapter 2
A Preliminary Portrait of the Albanian Emigration

What makes the contemporary Albanian emigration an ideal case for investigating the paradox of willed pursuit of social decline through international migration can be seen, in a way, as a matter of numbers. Over one-third of all teachers and more than one-half of all Albanians with graduate degrees have left Albania since the early 1990s to become mostly unskilled or low-skilled laborers in Greece, Italy, and other countries in the West. The Albanian case also marks a pinnacle of the global increase in emigration pressures, which are otherwise not easily measured. At least one-fifth of the country’s population must have emigrated during the 1990s, making the Albanian emigration perhaps the world’s proportionately most massive volitional migration (see Table 2.1). What is more, it is generally thought that throughout the 1990s, as hundreds of Albanians perished while trying to penetrate the mountainous border to Greece or drowned in the sea while trying to make it to the Italian shores.

1 Jamaica appears to be the only comparable case: 77% of the college-educated and about 33% of high-school graduates have emigrated (Stalker 2001, 104).
2 The Albanian emigration has been thoroughly undocumented, so its statistic descriptors are fragmentary and often span wide ranges (e.g., IOM 1999). It has been suggested, however, that at least one-fifth of Albania’s 1990s populace, and likely one-fourth or even more, has emigrated since the early 1990s, bringing the relative demographic weight of the Albanian emigration to over four times the average figure for the other countries of post-socialist Eastern Europe (Misja 1998).
3 No comprehensive numbers exist on these deaths and not much public notice is made of them, for they are generally considered misfortunes that concern only an individual and his or her relatives. In fact even the family of the deceased may often not know what has happened for a long time. During my fieldwork in Athens, for example, I observed that the very visible Albanian-language weekly Gazeta e Athinës repeatedly printed notices by relatives of missing emigrants who sought information about where and when an individual—always a man, and typically in his late teens to early forties—might have been seen last. Such notices usually included a photograph above a brief description of the route the missing emigrant was known to have used, the cities in Greece he was known to have worked in, and the Greek name by which he was known there.

A notable exception to the customary tacitness surrounding the attempts to emigrate resulting in death was the publicity of the drowning of 83 Albanians as their ship was allegedly capsized by an Italian naval patrol in April 1997, which became a politicized event (Pajo 2001). Since then the government of Albania has declared time and again that the smuggling of people has been “successfully” interrupted. Judging from reports in the Albanian media, however, up until the year 2003 the traffic route from Vlorë to Bari must have remained as busy as ever, sending a steady flow of Albanians and others to Italy. Out of fear of the Italian border patrol, smugglers are nowadays