



# *Kurbet*

the continuing journey  
of Albanians in Victoria



# Kurbet... A foreign land

In Albanian, the word *kurbet* denotes a 'foreign land' and is strongly connected to the long-standing practice of journeying to 'foreign lands' in search of work and a livelihood. The term also refers to temporary or extended residence in a foreign land – a sort of temporary exile – and eventual return to one's place of origin. Traditionally, only men of working age undertook *kurbet* and they were referred to as *kurbetxhi*.

This story traces the formation of the Albanian community in Victoria and the transformation of *kurbet* into a permanent place of settlement and belonging – a 'home'.

Although individual and small groups of Albanians had been journeying to Australia for many years, the beginnings of the present settlement can be traced to the arrival of a group of five men from the Korçë region of Albania. Bektash Muharem, Bejxhet Emini, Rexhep Mustafa, Musa Ibrahim and Riza Ali disembarked in Fremantle, Western Australia, on 29 October 1924. These pioneers played a crucial role in providing later *kurbetxhi* with assistance and camaraderie, laying the foundations for a supportive *kurbet* community.



Zymbyle and Selime Mehmet on their family's cotton farm, Biloela, Queensland, 1935. The family eventually settled in Shepparton, Victoria, early 1940s.  
COURTESY MARY MEHMET



Skender (George) Ismail manually ploughing his land at Launching Place, Victoria in the 1930s. The Ismail brothers bought their first farm in 1947 for £5000. The horses, Prince and Johnny were bought from the Geelong Cement Company after they were retired.  
COURTESY SKENDER ISMAIL



Celebrating Albania's National Day, 28th November. Perth 1949.  
COURTESY JIM EMIN



Rexhep Mustafa hauls sugar cane from his farm in Babinda, Queensland, 1955.  
COURTESY ANGLE MUSTAFA



Emin Mulla (second left) and his workers on his tobacco farm in Mareeba, Queensland, 1953.  
COURTESY RAHIME MEKA; NEE MULLA



Sabri Shemshedin's passport, 5 May, 1962.  
COURTESY ENVER SABRI

Sabri Shemshedin's Certificate of Entry in Australia, 1928.  
COURTESY ENVER SABRI



Nesim Ahmet and Besim Abedin established the 'George Brothers' carting business in the early 1940s, which helped expand their farming business in Shepparton.  
COURTESY RIDVAN (RIDDI) AHMET



Hand beaded coin purse given to then 17 year old Neim Abidin by his mother as a reminder of his heritage when he left Albania to come to Australia in 1928.  
COURTESY FEREDA BRAND PHOTOGRAPHER D LORAM



## Gur mbi gur bën mur – ‘stone on stone makes a wall’

(Albanian proverb)

Albanian migration to Australia before World War II consisted almost entirely of young single men journeying to different parts of the country. Some settled in Queensland, where a few earlier *kurbetxhi* had found work as farm labourers on cotton, tobacco and sugar cane farms. Others came directly to Melbourne or else moved here from rural areas. They worked on the docks and in manufacturing industries, or ran small businesses such as cafes, boarding houses, milk bars, fish-and-chip shops and fruit-and-vegetable shops.

As seasonal labourers, some Albanians found work on farms in Shepparton and in the Yarra Valley. Albanians from Queensland, Western Australia and elsewhere soon joined them, and in time they were able to pool sufficient resources to buy small farms of their own. Soon Albanians established market gardens and orchards in other areas around Victoria, such as Werribee and the Goulburn Valley. Theirs was a life of hard work and isolated existence, with rudimentary living conditions.



Suleman and Nezi Ymer and their children, Rushan and Jeanette lived on land bought with lottery winnings. Biloela, Queensland. 1928

COURTESY HANIFE YMER



Remzi Mulla and other family members grading tobacco in Mareeba, Queensland, 1953.

COURTESY RAHIME MEKA



The Ismail brothers tending to their market garden crop at Launching Place, 1947.

COURTESY SKENDER ISMAIL



Rexhep Mustafa, his son Angle and Zeqir Halim cutting sugarcane with knives, Babinda, Queensland, 1957. Zeqir Halim, who had arrived in Australia in 1937, returned to Albania in 1957. Angle Mustafa continues to maintain the farm.

COURTESY ANGLE MUSTAFA



Rahime Meka (nee Mulla), stringing tobacco on the family's farm in Mareeba, Queensland, 1953.

COURTESY RAHIME MEKA



During World War II many Albanian men were rounded up and interned as enemy aliens at the Monto internment camp in Queensland, early 1940s.

COURTESY HANIFE YMER



Ramadan and Ferit Ymer in Biloela, Queensland in 1938. The Ymer brothers and their families moved to Shepparton and eventually settled in Melbourne.

COURTESY HANIFE YMER



## Friendships and mutual support

Members of the early Albanian community forged long-term and often life-long friendships with the non-Albanians they came into contact with. Despite the poverty and deprivations that were ever-present in Albania, friendship, respect and mutual support was part of the social ethos.

Centuries of exposure to and interaction with people of diverse languages and cultural backgrounds had prepared them well for the realities of living with difference and diversity in Australia. They were a 'worlded' people, who were prepared to work hard and adjust to the social, material and cultural circumstances of the places in which they settled.



Bahri Zylfikar (centre) digging irrigation trenches in Swan Hill, Victoria, late 1940s. He arrived in Australia in 1928 and worked in rural Victoria before settling in Melbourne.

COURTESY SAM BAHRI



Fezi Meka first worked as a farmhand on a farm in Healesville, 1953.

COURTESY FEZI MEKA



Suleman and Fezi Meka on their farm at Merrigum in the Goulbourn Valley, 1969.

COURTESY FEZI MEKA



Ferit Qazimi at his fish shop at Victoria Street, West Melbourne, 1955, being helped by newly arrived Fikri Taip.

COURTESY SHERIJE ABASI



Fatime Rustem feeding chickens on her family's dairy farm in Shepparton, 1960.

COURTESY SKENDER RUSTEM



Recently arrived Albanians celebrating 'Ditën e Flamurit' ('Flag Day', Albania's National Day) in Mareeba, Queensland, late 1950s. Of them, Riza Jakupi, Ahmet Hyska, Skender Resul and Enver Risilia, worked on tobacco and maize farms in Queensland and moved to Victoria in the late 1960s.

COURTESY SEZAR JAKUPI



Vasfi Hymer and Hysen Emin in their Sydney Road milk bar, c. 1949. Vasfi and Hysen had previously worked on farms in Biloela, Atherton, Queensland, before moving to Victoria.

COURTESY CAMILLE HYMER

## Escape to freedom

The Cane family – Ideal and Lume, their two children and Ideal's brother Hiqmet – fled Albania on 25 June 1983. It was a daring escape that took many months of meticulous planning, preparation and rehearsal, in circumstances that could have cost them their lives. In utter secrecy, Ideal had constructed a special folding ladder, which the family used to scale the electrified border fence that separated Albania from the rest of the world.

Born in a country in which the brutal Stalinist regime had outlawed all opposition, Ideal – who was known for his views opposing the communist regime – was imprisoned in camps, which, he says, steeled him for the daring journey he was to undertake. His father, Emin, had fled Albania in 1956, and after spending seven years in a number of western European countries as a refugee he migrated to Australia in 1963.

After a year in a refugee camp in Greece, Ideal and the family arrived in Australia on 6 July 1984. Following 28 years of separation, the family was reunited with their father. Without the daily terror that had been so much a part of their lives in Albania, the Canes rebuilt their lives in Australia.

In 1992, Emin Cane passed away and was buried in his *kurbet* home in Australia, without ever seeing his country of birth again.



Ideal Cane (middle) with cousins in Albania, 1956. Ideal's father, Emin, escaped earlier and was reunited with his family in Australia in 1983.

COURTESY IDEAL CANE



The Cane family find freedom. Ideal Cane, his wife Lume and their children together with Ideal's brother Hiqmet, Camp Lavria, Greece, 1983.

COURTESY IDEAL CANE



Ideal, Lume and their children at their home, Thornbury, 1985.

COURTESY IDEAL CANE



The Cane family reunited after 28 years of separation. From left to right: Hiqmet, Ideal, their father, Emin Cane, and Lume, Melbourne, 1984.

COURTESY IDEAL CANE



## The Velisha family of Werribee

Hivzi Velisha arrived in Melbourne in 1937, where he joined his three brothers; Nijazi had arrived in 1929 and Menduh and Abas in 1937. During Hivzi's journey to Australia, his father passed away in Albania. At the same time, his brother Nijazi was returning to Albania to bring out his wife and two children, plucking them from the turmoil of civil war that engulfed the country in the late 1930s.

Hivzi worked for two years as a farm labourer in Coldstream before moving to Werribee with his two brothers. They worked as farmhands for six years, including at Geelong, to which they commuted cross-country on bicycles. In 1945, the three brothers had enough funds to buy their own dairy farm.

In 1950, the three brothers married. Hivzi married Emine Ramadan, and his brothers married her cousins Gemaliye and Sherife, who came to Australia from Cyprus. Hivzi and Emine had three children and Menduh and Abas had four children each. As the family grew, the farm extended into growing vegetables. In 1953, floods destroyed their efforts, but through hard work they overcame adversity and prospered, becoming one of the leading fresh vegetable merchants in Melbourne, expanding into the international market.



The Velishas and their families. From left to right, Hivzi and Emine with their children Aishe and Esat; Menduh and Gemaliye and their children Suat and Fezi; Abas and Sherife and their children Veli and Subi. 1955.

COURTESY JEANETTE VELISHA



Hivzi (standing) and Menduh Velisha with a truck-load of lettuces ready for the markets. Werribee, 1949.

COURTESY JEANETTE VELISHA



Hivzi Velisha inspects a lettuce crop on his farm. Werribee, 1992.

COURTESY JEANETTE VELISHA



Like the Velisha family who used bicycles to travel from home to various farms for work, this bicycle bought in 1938 was used by the Ymer brothers as the only means of transport around the farming districts of Biloela, Queensland.

COURTESY HANIFE YMER PHOTOGRAPHER D LORAM

## The Muke family of Healesville

Mazllem Muke arrived in Victoria in 1948 as a displaced refugee in the aftermath of World War II. Initially he settled in the Goulburn Valley, working on the land for five years. Mazllem toiled hard to establish a home for himself and, in time, for his wife, Emine, and son, Kadi, who had remained in the then communist Yugoslavia. In 1953, Mazllem moved to the Yarra Valley in Healesville, where he bought a small farm and worked as a market gardener.

After a decade of separation, Mazllem was reunited with his wife and son in 1958, after the Yugoslav authorities allowed them to emigrate. They rebuilt their lives and established a successful farm, which they worked for many years. Kadi and his wife, Fatmire, have four children, all of whom are now married with families of their own and pursuing careers in various occupations.



Mazllem Muke with son Kadi (right) and Albanian friends, Healesville, 1954.

COURTESY KADI MUKE



Emine Muke picking beans on their farm, Healesville, 1959.

COURTESY KADI MUKE



Emine and Kadi Muke's original travel documents, c. 1957. Even though both were born in Prespa, Macedonia, former Yugoslavia, the document issued to them by the former Yugoslav authorities states that they are 'bez drzavjanstvo' (stateless), which effectively forced them into exile.

COURTESY KADI MUKE



Traditional Albanian wedding dance, Healesville, 1963.

COURTESY KADI MUKE



# The Sali family of Shepparton

Sabri Sali came to Australia from Albania in 1928, leaving behind his wife and six-week-old son. He worked as a farm labourer for two years in Western Australia, before the Depression made jobs scarce. On hearing from Albanians who had settled in Shepparton that he might find work in the area, he secured a job on an orchard at Grahamvale where he worked for seven years.

Eventually Sabri saved enough money to return to Albania, where he stayed for two years. But the difficult economic and political circumstances in Albania during the 1930s led him to return to Australia.

Sabri, his wife Hyrie, seven-year-old son Aslan (Allan) and newborn son Selami (Sam) arrived in Australia in 1937 and immediately set about building their lives here. They worked hard and through the kindness of Mr McCormack, purchased the vegetable farm they were leasing from him, establishing it as an orchard. Sabri and Hyrie had four more sons: Avni, Haset, Hismet and Lytfi (Bill).

Unlike Sabri, whose education was limited by the harsh circumstances that shaped his life, his children Avni, Haset and Hismet completed university studies. As a close-knit, third-generation family, the Salis now operate successful farm, transport, fashion and property businesses. They are also proud of the endeavours of son, Avni, now a professor, for his achievements in the field of medicine.



The Sali family (from left to right) Avni, Sabri, Lytfi (Bill), Aslan (Alan), Selami (Sam), Hyrie and Haset. Their youngest son, Hismet, was born two years later. Shepparton, 1945.

COURTESY SELAMI (SAM) SALI



Haset Sali, left, with a farmhand, Pat Sloan, c. 1950.

COURTESY SELAMI (SAM) SALI



Selami (Sam) standing and Hismet at the wheel of a truck loaded with empty fruit boxes, 1957.

COURTESY SELAMI (SAM) SALI



The original family home on the farm in Shepparton, 1946.

COURTESY SELAMI (SAM) SALI



From left to right, Avni, Hismet, their mother, Hyrie and Haset. Avni and Haset appear in Australian Reserve Army uniforms, 1960.

COURTESY SELAMI (SAM) SALI



Wedding of Selami (Sam) and Nina Birangi in 1962. From left to right, Avni, Lytfi (Bill), Sam and Nina, Hyrie, Fatime (bridesmaid), Jenny Bektash (flowergirl), Haset, Aslan (Alan) and Hismet.

COURTESY SELAMI (SAM) SALI



A 1960 family portrait. Back row, left to right, Avni, Sam, Alan, Bill, Haset. Front row, left to right, mother Hyrie, Hismet and father Sabri.

COURTESY SELAMI (SAM) SALI



Sabri Sali having a lunch break from scaryfying with horses, 1959.

COURTESY SELAMI (SAM) SALI

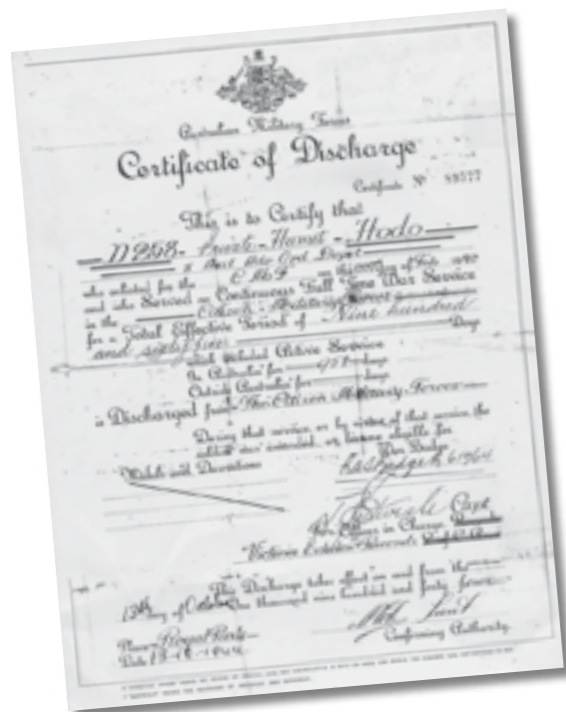


## Going 'home'

As the news of the possible outbreak of war in Europe reached Australia, many Albanian men returned to home to bring out their wives and children. When World War II began, some Albanian men enlisted and joined the Australian war effort, such as in the defence of Darwin and in the battlefields of Papua New Guinea, the Middle East and Pacific. Others, particularly in northern Queensland, were interned as 'enemy aliens' during the early 1940s, and were consigned to work on road construction or farms.

The conclusion of the war saw the establishment of a dogmatic and isolationist Stalinist regime in Albania. For Albanian migrants, communication with family and kin in the former homeland was restricted. Those who had returned to Albania in the immediate pre- and post-war years were trapped, unable to return to Australia. The tradition of arranged marriages with partners from Albania was also affected.

A small number of those who returned to Albania attempted to escape, but very few succeeded. Many families suffered terrible punishment and hardships in Albania for trying to escape or simply because of their links to the Western world.



Hodo Hamit's Certificate of Discharge from the army.

COURTESY VICTOR HAMIT



Hodo Hamit served during WWII with the Australian Military Forces in Darwin. Enlisted 22 February 1942 and discharged 13 October 1944.

COURTESY VICTOR HAMIT



Mehmet Osman Trungu and Ylmi Topi worked felling scrub in Western Australia, c. 1925. Ylmi Topi returned to Albania in 1949. The communist regime of Albania prevented his return to Australia

COURTESY EDMOND PERE



Siran Zenel serving with the Australian Military Forces in Darwin. Enlisted 24 February 1942 and discharged 6 April 1944.

COURTESY SADET BACE



Estref Shemshedin enlisted in November 1942 and served in Darwin with the 5th Battalion of the Scottish Regiment. He was discharged 15 March 1943.

COURTESY PETER SHEMSHEDIN



Sherif (Jack) Reese, (left, back row) with members of the 82nd Air Squadron in Japan. Jack enlisted on 3 October 1942 and was discharged on 11 November 1947.

COURTESY JAMIE REESE



Growing vegetables for the Australian Army on the Emin farm in York, WA, c. 1940s.

COURTESY JIM EMIN



Interned during WWII, (right to left), Vasfi Hymer Birangi, Gani Mehmet Floqi, Shaban Sali Suli, Servet Goskova, central Queensland, 1942. All of them eventually moved to Victoria.

COURTESY CAMILLE HYMER



Mustafa (James) Sheriff served in Papua New Guinea. He enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force on 18 August 1942 and was discharged 12 December 1947.

COURTESY SANDRA HARRIS



Muharem (Mick) Perona served with the Australian Civil Construction Corps in Darwin. He enlisted in June 1942 and was discharged on 9 December 1945.

COURTESY NIMET PERONA



A group of Albanian men at the 'Monto' internment camp for 'enemy aliens' in Queensland, c. 1940s. They were taken off various farms and interned as 'enemy aliens' during WWII.

COURTESY HANIFE YMER



Pacific Star medal issued to Mustafa (James) Sheriff for serving in the Pacific in WWII from December 1941. The ribbon colours represent: green and yellow – jungle and beaches of the Pacific, red for Army, dark blue for Navy and light blue for Air Force.

COURTESY SANDRA HARRIS



Muharem (Mick) Perona's Certificate of Discharge.

COURTESY NIMET PERONA



Albanians marching in post-WWII celebration march in Swanston Street, Melbourne, c. late 1940s.

COURTESY FIKRI TAIPI



## After World War II

Albanian migration in the wake of World War II is intimately connected with the turbulent political, social and economic conditions of the homelands: Albania, Kosova, Macedonia and Montenegro. Following the war, the establishment of a Stalinist dictatorship in Albania and a centralised communist regime in former Yugoslavia had profound and deeply tragic consequences.

A small number of refugees from Albania, and especially Albanians from the Prespa region in south-western Macedonia, were resettled in Australia. Sharing a common dialect – *Toskë*, one of the major southern Albanian dialects – and a long history of intermarriage and cultural exchange with Albanians from the Korçë region, they found a ready sense of community and solidarity with the early *kurbetxhi* in Victoria and elsewhere in Australia.

With mass migration to Australia during the 1960s and 1970s, the Prespa Albanians and those from the nearby villages of Këshavë and Ostrec formed a large proportion of the Albanian community in Australia, numbering 5401 in 1991. The majority of these mostly Muslim Albanians settled in Victoria, principally in Melbourne’s industrial, working-class suburbs of Dandenong, Footscray, Yarraville, Altona, St Albans, Preston, Thomastown and Lalor.



Bahri Bregu’s mixed business in Fremantle, Western Australia, 1951.  
COURTESY LAURA HOUGAZ



Albanian community group outside Trades Hall, Melbourne, late 1940s.  
COURTESY AMDJE FERZULLA



Zeni Nuhiji (second from right) with other workers, at the Snowy River Hydro Scheme site in NSW, 1969. Zeni eventually settled in Victoria.  
COURTESY ZENI NUHUI



Albanians celebrating Albania’s National Day at Richmond Town Hall, 28 November 1965.  
COURTESY JENNIFER KALAJA



Zeni Nuhiji (left) boarding ship on 30 July 1968, in Genoa, Italy. Arrived in Melbourne on 29 September 1968.  
COURTESY ZENI NUHUI



The Goulbourn Valley Albanian community gathers for a celebration, Shepparton, late 1940s.  
COURTESY AMDJE FERZULLA



Metat (Mitch) Isuf, the first Albanian language teacher and his language class at the Albanian Mosque in Carlton, 1965.  
COURTESY JENNIFER KALAJA



To while away the hours during incarceration, this embroidered bag was made from a skirt by a young ‘returned’ Australian-Albanian woman during her detention in an Albanian prison. It was brought to Australia in 1980.  
COURTESY TIBET CURCIALI PHOTOGRAPHER D LORAM



# A 'communion' of Albanians

Despite or because of the difficult circumstances, Albanians in Australia set about creating a sense of community for themselves in their *kurbet* home. They maintained their distinct cultural heritage and language by building, in the 1960s, the first mosques in Victoria, establishing Albanian Sunday language classes, sports clubs, community welfare and religious associations, and by organising Albanian community events. Celebrations of the annual Albanian National Day, commonly referred to as Flag Day, and the end of Ramadan continue to be community focuses.

The community has established a number of soccer clubs across Melbourne, which provide major occasions for socialising and interacting with members of the Albanian and wider community.

Following the example set by the earlier generation, later migrants built places of worship where they settled, such as in Dandenong and Preston.



Albanian dancers performing at the National Day celebration, 2004.  
COURTESY SEZAR JAKUPI



Dance group performing at the 2004 Albanian National Day Festival, Footscray.  
COURTESY SEZAR JAKUPI



Albanian community gathering at the first Australia-wide Albanian National Day celebration at Footscray Park, 1994.  
COURTESY E.S. LLOGA



Albanian women, members of the Australian-Albanian Women's Association – Sherije Abazi (Left) and Fiqe Mustafa (Right), broadcasting on Radio 3ZZZ on International Women's Day, Melbourne, 1993.  
COURTESY AAWA



Moira Kelly (left), founder of Children First Foundation, Kilmore, with Shemsila and her mother, Afërdita, from Tirana, Albania, who was brought to Australia for urgent heart surgery, 2000.  
COURTESY AAWA



Members of the Shepparton Albanian Women's Committee serving traditional Albanian kafe (coffee) at the 2007 festival.  
COURTESY RAMIJE BESIM



Members of Melbourne's Albanian community watch a soccer game where Shqiponja (Albanian Eagles) played. Sunshine, 1970.  
COURTESY ASIP DEMIR



Albanians were keen soccer players and played for the Talbingo Soccer Club whilst employed on the Snowy River Hydro Scheme, NSW, 1970.  
COURTESY ZENI NUHUJI



Ridvan (Riddi) Ahmet (right) volunteers at the Shepparton Harvest Festival, 2005.  
COURTESY RAMIJE BESIM



Albanian Language class in Yarraville. Teacher Bahri Bregu was also an Albanian language broadcaster on Melbourne's Radio 3EA (now SBS) for many years.  
COURTESY LAURA HOUGAZ



The Albanian Australian Women's Association fundraise at Keilor Park in 1993 for the Good Friday Children's Hospital Appeal. Front to back, Idaet Abdullai (President) and Mediha Selmani.  
COURTESY AAWA



Morning tea organised by the Albanian-Australian Women's Association to raise funds for the treatment of cancer, 2005.  
COURTESY MEDIHA SELMANI



# Weddings

For Albanians, *kurbet* was inextricably linked with family and ensuring its survival and future. Being reunited with family members – with wives and children – or marrying women from the homelands and bringing them out to Australia to establish families remained a high priority. With the gradual arrival of women, Albanians in Australia were able to build their futures in their *kurbet* home.

Weddings are a highlight in the lives of Albanians. They are large events, typically lavish and culturally and symbolically rich. By tradition, marriage signifies a pivotal life event, a major life accomplishment. It also connotes a key change in social status and positioning for the young couple, as well as for their parents and grandparents.

The political situation in Albania from the end of the war until the 1990s severely disrupted the custom of finding marriage partners and arranging traditional Albanian weddings. Many Albanians in Australia sought marriage partners from Albanian enclaves of the former Ottoman Empire, including Yugoslavia and Turkey. Others sought Muslim partners from among other communities, or intermarried with members of non-Muslim communities in Australia.

With the collapse of the communist regime in Albania and the demise of former Yugoslavia, some second and third generation Albanians have resumed the custom of marrying Albanians from their former homelands.



Gurali and Ylldes Meka in Prespë, Macedonia, 1956.  
COURTESY YLLDES MEKA



Wedding photo of Ndreke and Prena Nedreka, Shkodër, Albania, 1930.  
COURTESY LEK NDRÉKA



The bridal party and guests at the wedding of Artemissia [nee Hari] and Pandi Thomas at the bride's family farmhouse in Bagnoo, New South Wales, 1944.  
COURTESY MUSEUM VICTORIA



Veli and Nazan Selmani (Nazan in traditional wedding dress) at their marriage in Melbourne, 1988.  
COURTESY NAZAN SELMANI



(Right) Handcrafted and embroidered silk wedding dress from the Strugë region, c. 1900. The dress was part of a trousseau of a young woman betrothed to be married. Due to tragic circumstances the wedding did not proceed. The dress remained unused and was brought to Australia.  
COURTESY E LLOGA

(Left) Traditional men's attire from the Korçë region of Southern Albania.  
COURTESY IDEAL CANE



Wedding of Gani Mehmet and Nancy Newing, Melbourne, 1950.  
COURTESY MURRAY MEHMET



Marriage celebration of Demir Isuf and Francesca Isuf at the 'Korçë' Café, 407 Chapel Street, South Yarra, 1956. Francesca was born in Calabria, Italy.  
COURTESY MURRAY MEHMET



Shemshedin and Turkan Sabri arriving in Sydney after marrying in Turkey in 1953.  
COURTESY ENVER SABRI



# Faith

The Albanian community was responsible for constructing the first Victorian mosques in the 1960s, in Shepparton and Carlton. These expressed the deep-rooted and strongly held sentiments of the community for a continuity between past, present and future. They also signalled, in concrete and visible terms, the Albanian community's transformation from a *kurbet* community to a settled community, which regarded itself as an integral part of Australian society.

Albanians of non-Islamic faiths, such as Catholic and Orthodox, found an established network of religious institutions available to them in the places they settled with their Muslim compatriots. However in the absence of Albanian churches and Albanian-speaking ministers, Christian Albanians struggle to maintain their unique heritage.

The common Albanian identity unites Muslim and non-Muslim Albanians. Their shared heritage is celebrated in community events, such as Albanian National Day, and major religious festivities as well as life events, such as weddings, births and deaths.



Official opening of the Albanian Mosque, Carlton, 1969.  
COURTESY ALI YMER



Meeting at one of the offices of the newly-opened Albanian Mosque in Carlton, 1969.  
COURTESY ALI YMER



The Albanian Mosque - Xhami Shquiptare, Carlton.  
COURTESY AAWA



Enjoying a coffee at 'Albania House' ('The Club') in Smythe Lane, Melbourne CBD in the 1960s. From left to right, Victor Hamit, Sali Gani and Islam Halim. Sali and Islam returned to Albania in 1976 and 1979 respectively.  
COURTESY VICTOR HAMIT



Nesim Ahmet, Sherif Islam and architect, Mr Shannon, discuss the plans at the site of the first Albanian Mosque. Shepparton, 1956.  
COURTESY RIDVAN (RIDDI) AHMET



Myrteza Adem addresses the official opening of the Albanian Mosque in Shepparton, 1960.  
COURTESY RIDVAN (RIDDI) AHMET



Myrteza Adem and R. Sherif Islam lay the foundation stone of the first Albanian mosque in Victoria. Shepparton, 1956.  
COURTESY RIDVAN (RIDDI) AHMET



This trowel was used to lay the foundation stone of Victoria's first Albanian Mosque in Shepparton in 1956.  
COURTESY RIDVAN (RIDDI) AHMET



This three hundred year old hand-written Quoran originated from the *Silvi Xhami*, Oher, theological school. Brought to Australia in to save it from certain destruction during Albania's communist regime, it was donated to the Shepparton Islamic Society in celebration of the opening of the first Albanian Mosque.

COURTESY RIDVAN (RIDDI) AHMET



Many discussions occurred over a cup of coffee which was made with beans ground in this traditional brass coffee grinder used by members of Albania House, aka 'the Club'. As a meeting place for Melbourne's Albanian community it was where the idea to build the Carlton Mosque emerged.

COURTESY FEREDA BRAND PHOTOGRAPHER D LORAM



Mother Theresa meeting with members of the Albanian Catholic Society, Fitzroy, 1974.

COURTESY LEK NDEKA PHOTOGRAPHER D LORAM



## Recent arrivals

By the 1990s, Albanian community networks were sufficiently established to assist the approximately 4000 Kosovar refugees during their evacuation to Australia in 1999. Around 500 people were able to settle in Australia permanently, with Albanian cultural, sporting and religious associations providing primary assistance with resettlement, predominantly in areas where Albanians reside.

The end of communism in Albania in the 1990s has enabled families separated for almost half a century to reunite. Sponsored migration programs in rural areas, such as one established in the Goulburn Valley in the 1990s, assisted the reunions of small numbers of Albanians with their families and close relatives.

Albanians – usually adult children or descendants of Australian-Albanian citizens – stranded in Albania after World War II have been able to claim and be granted Australian ‘citizenship by descent’ and return to Australia. Small numbers of Albanians have also been allowed to migrate under Australia’s skilled migration, refugee and humanitarian programs.



Albanian Kosovar youth from the Bandiana ‘Safe Haven’, Albury-Wodonga, with members of the local community, 1999.  
COURTESY NURIJE ALIM



Kujtim Dragoti an occupational trainee from Albania, trained under the special ‘occupational trainee program’ established by the Goulburn-Ovens College of TAFE in 1994. Shepparton, 2001.  
COURTESY MERUSHE ASIM



Nelson and Admir Limllari from Pojan, Albania, who were granted Australian citizenship by descent. They now run their own painting and decorating business in Melbourne, 2002.  
COURTESY MERUSHE ASIM



Dr Fatmira Pojani arrived in Australia in 1997 and studied at Deakin University’s Warrnambool Campus. She currently works as a Senior Medical Resident at Melbourne’s Western General Hospital, Melbourne, 2005.  
COURTESY FATMIRA POJANI



Albanian Kosovar refugees at the Portsea ‘Safe Haven’, Mornington Peninsula, 1999.  
COURTESY VEKIJJE CER



Albanian Kosovar refugees in the dining hall at the Puckapunyal ‘Safe Haven’, 1999.  
COURTESY HASHIM QORRI



‘Life goes on’ - two young Albanian Kosovar couples from Bandiana ‘Safe Haven’, Albury-Wodonga, married during their sojourn in Australia. The weddings were organized with the support of the local community, 1999.  
COURTESY NURIJE ALIM



The first group of ‘Occupational Trainees’ from Albania receiving their certificates from local Federal Parliamentary representative, the Hon Dr Sharman Stone MP, who worked with the local community in establishing the training programme, 2003.  
COURTESY MERUSHE ASIM



## Acknowledgements

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Front cover image:

The Sali family (from left to right) Avni, Sabri, Lytfti (Bill), Aslan (Alan), Selami (Sam), Hyrie and Haset. Their youngest son, Hismet, was born two years later. Shepparton, 1945.

COURTESY SELAMI (SAM) SALI

Exhibition dates

19 November 2007 – 24 February 2008

