Artan R. Hoxha. *Sugarland: The Transformation of the Countryside in Communist Albania*.

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In 1980s Albania, when I was growing up, the present looked dark, and the times were lean. A paranoid regime clung to power as the economy foundered. Children were sent to school with lunches that consisted of hard slices of bread topped with a layer of sugar and a sprinkle of olive oil. The sweetness of the sugar, back then, became associated with a collective sense of despair.

In *Sugarland*, Artan Hoxha takes the long view on this history by zooming into a place—Maliq—where imperial land reclamation projects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gave way, over time, to the frenzied industrialization drive in the post-1945 era. For generations of Albanians, the name Maliq became synonymous with the sugar coming out of the industrial complex inaugurated there in the 1950s, after the much-touted clearing of the nearby swamps. Hoxha ambitiously brings into conversation studies of environment and technology, theories of imperial disintegration and state-building, skillfully adopting microhistory as a way of illuminating the big structures of history. To Anglophone scholarship, the study adds a rich but largely unknown case study that speaks to scholars interested in bringing ecology into analyses of power relations after the Second World War.

It is not easy, when working on the modern Balkans, to sidestep the overwhelming historiographical focus on issues of ethnic identity and nationalism. Some authors (myself included) have chosen to do so by reaching out to international and global history and by deploying the tools of transnational history. Hoxha does something different. He patiently digs into the locality. He judiciously avoids the temptation to see Maliq only as a repository of planning models conceived elsewhere, though it certainly was that. This also makes *Sugarland* an innovative contribution to Albanian-language scholarship, where microhistorical approaches to the countryside—as angles into histories of modernization and governance—are almost nonexistent.

Sugarland sees in the reclamation and development of Maliq a good opportunity to stretch backwards conventional timelines of planning histories. The author systematically peels off the layers of earlier projects to reclaim the land, going back to the late Ottoman empire. Most of these schemes failed; some were later resurrected under different rulers. A vivid introduction brings the non-human element into the foreground of state-building history. More than a historiographical trend, this is an urgent present call. There have hardly been more serious problems in post-Communist Albania than disagreements over land redistribution, privatization, resource extraction, and environmental degradation. Hoxha's focus on the countryside, moreover, is especially welcome since that was where most Albanians lived. In doing so, the book raises the methodological challenge of studying non-urban places governed by self-declared modernizing elites who often looked down on rurality and peasant life.

Hoxha marshals an impressive source base to bring these threads together: official documents from state and party archives, contemporaneous illustrations, maps, geological data, as well as insights obtained via fieldwork carried out over many years. This also serves as an invitation for us to reflect on the regimes of temporality that shape the stories we tell. For

example, he does not assume that 1945 was a clean break, as postwar authorities framed it. The first chapter sets the reclamation of the swamp of Maliq against the broad sweep of late Ottoman administrations, the upheaval of the First World War, and the birth pangs of the Albanian state. He considers the modernizing ethos of the interwar elites and the appeal of a *dirigiste* approach to the economy. For some of the founding fathers of Albania, land reclamation became the face of state-building itself. But even though fascist Italy had already championed land reclamation (*bonifica integrale*) as a form of internal colonization by the time it invaded Albania in 1939, the reclamation of Maliq had not yet become reality.

After 1945, communist authorities decided to finally carry it out. Hoxha shows that the authorities recycled older plans and ideas, including from the fascist era. The second chapter gives a detailed rundown of the ups and downs of the reclamation process, a story of boundless optimism but also soul-crushing convict labor, deadly accusations of sabotage, and the introduction of Soviet blueprints and engineers. In so doing, Hoxha takes issue with James Scott's casting of "high modernist" states and their relationship to local knowledge. In fact, he writes, "there is no single way that states see" (103).

Touted as a tool for fighting inequality, the industrial transformation of Maliq in fact highlighted differences between town and countryside. To make this case, Hoxha considers the issue of women's integration into the labor force and the unevenness of education opportunities, as well as peasants' everyday tactics—including marriage choices—which they learned to deploy as a way of moving out of the village. This is the other innovative element in the study: Tirana, the capital city, is not the only modernizing reference point. The city of Korçë, in southern Albania, serves as the other regional center. Maliq thus emerges in a triangular relationship, offering historians a richer geography of power relations. Then, the study zooms even further out. The plan to build a sugar industrial complex is an opportunity to reach across the Cold War world (Ch. 4), shedding light on the contradictions of transnational exchange and a fascinating discussion (177–79) on how ordinary Albanians' conception of *bota* (the world), often framed in technocratic terms, in fact reflected profound national and geopolitical anxieties.

The book repeatedly draws lines between Maliq and other places around Europe and the world. Hoxha casts his historiographical net widely, nodding to historians of economic development and the global Cold War, numerous theorists, and varied studies of the Balkans, Europe, even Central Asia. This gives the book a heavy academic scaffolding, which is intellectually rewarding but also has the disadvantage of interrupting the narrative due to the shifts in the focus. It is an understandable move. Scholars of remote places have always been expected to connect their work to bigger fields, regardless of whether these fields (and their scholars) engage with them at all. Still, the story of Maliq—and the reduction of the scale in the era of global history—is fascinating on its own terms, regardless of whether it can be expected to illuminate all kinds of "trans-European and global interactions" (193).

After the break with the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, and the ups-and-downs of the relationship with China in the 1960s and 1970s, Albania's establishment sought a path to economic self-sufficiency. Hoxha shows how a militant regime nevertheless sought ways to maintain connections abroad. He also pushes the story forward in time, in the fifth chapter, past the collapse of the communist regime, to the chaos of privatization and the fierce competition over land and natural resources. It remains a steep challenge to write the 1990s based on archival research, and the last chapter reflects the difficulty. Earlier on, the book is sharp when critiquing assumptions about borrowing developmental templates from abroad, but it is less critical with the assumption that the 1990s can be principally explained via borrowings *from the west*. Hoxha writes about "partisans of shock therapy" (223) yet also acknowledges the important work of the sociologist and political scientist Besnik Pula, who has argued, instead, that the later restructuring of post-communist economies is to be explained by earlier financial linkages and processes in the 1970s–80s. Former communist countries did not have the same starting points in the 1990s. Just as with 1945, there was no zero hour in 1991 either. Were the 1990s, then, not a reflection of the persistence of elites,

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structural constraints, and patterns of thought that predated the arrival of western ready-made formulas? In pushing the Albania-as-microcosm approach in the broader context of eastern Europe, is there not a risk of misreading the story of collapse and post-communist rearrangement?

That the opportunity to have these kinds of debates even exists is thanks to the painstaking work and scholarly dedication made evident in *Sugarland*. Such is the richness of Hoxha's account that it manages to speak articulately to a wide range of readers. Its present political resonance is also clear. Hoxha writes about how "development remains an elusive target that keeps slipping away, leaving behind amputated projects, unfulfilled expectations, and continuous disillusionment that is often accompanied by fresh dreams" (245–46). Just look, once again, to Maliq. Recently, Albanian newspapers reported that the former industrial base there has been granted to the company of a colorful businessman. The government-approved contract is for twenty years, at the price of *a single euro.* As in the now-forgotten past, reactions to Maliq's latest proposed transformation reflected one's political standing and perspective on the present. Some Albanian outlets quickly raised suspicions about the deal, signed in a country where land and resources have been stolen or handed out via sweetheart deals, and where the fruits of economic growth are felt so unevenly. Others rejoiced. After decades of painful neglect, the promise of development and jobs.

Natal′ia Mitsiuk, Natal′ia Pushkareva, and Anna Belova. *Chelovek rozhdaiushchii: Istoriia rodil′noi kultury v Rossii novogovremeni*.

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Chelovek rozhdaiushchii: Istoriia rodil′noi kultury v Rossii novogovremeni (A Person Giving Birth: The History of Birth Culture in Modern Russia) is authored by leading women's and gender studies scholars in Russia today: Natal′ia Pushkareva, Professor and Head of the Women's and Gender Studies Department at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Russian Academy of Sciences; Anna Belova, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of General History at Tver′ State University; and Natal′ia Mitsiuk, Associate Professor of the Department of Philosophy, Bioethics, and the History of Medicine and the Social Sciences at Smolensk State Medical University. These scholars examine the transformation of birth culture in Russia from the eighteenth until the early twentieth century. They research an impressive variety of sources, including but not limited to medical books and speeches on obstetrics and gynecology, ethnographic accounts of peasant birthing rituals and practices, scientific journals such as *Russian Doctor* and the *Journal of Obstetrics and Women's Diseases*, state and provincial archival materials, legal documents, and material artefacts connected to pregnancy, childbirth, early motherhood, and infancy. They also investigate both published and unpublished "ego-documents," primarily of the nobility. These documents, and the authors' analysis of them, convincingly demonstrate how the development of obstetrics as a science,