# The Curious Case of Albanian Nationalism: the Crooked Line from a Scattered Array of Clans to a Nation-State[*]

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**Abstract**

Albanian nationalism has been largely studied by overlooking the state of art of theoretical discussions on nationalism, focusing merely on chronological narratives which after a point tend to replicate themselves. This paper embraces the modernist theories of nationalism in order to explain the emergence of Albanian nationalism and its consolidation during the post-independence period under the auspices of Albanian nation-state. Thus it rethinks many of the conceptual understandings which underpin Albanian historiography and have acquired as such an orthodox status within popular culture. We argue that Albanian nationalism can be better understood within a broader structural framework which restricted and enabled the political elites to construct an Albanian nation.

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## Introduction

Albania was the first nation-state with a Muslim majority to emerge in Europe in 1912. This structural component alongside with the great power politics/rivalry going on in the region after 1878 (the redefinition of Eastern Question after Russo-Ottoman War) and the reorganization and later the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, would define the main contours of the development of Albanian nationalism and respectively of the building of Albanian nation. Bearing in mind that nationalism in unindustrialized societies is considered a hard case to explain from the perspective of modernist theories of nationalism,[1] and even a phenomenon hard to take root in Muslim societies (with the exception of Turkish case which bears many common elements with Balkan nationalisms), Albania constitutes a not so well understood and controversial case, yet it is fruitful for understanding and explaining the protean nature of nationalism. The explanations for the emergence of Balkan nationalism in general and Albanian nationalism in particular that avoid theoretical debates on nationalism are generally viewed from an ideational perspective emphasizing the particular norms, values, culture and ethnic identity of Albanians while overlooking the very structures and generative mechanisms which enabled these ideas to be effective and gain prominence in the first place, not to mention the primordialist or perennialist view of the nation (which puts nation before nationalism) that permeates all the Albanian official historiography.[2] To put it shortly, the idea that

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[1]   See: Maria Todorova, "The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism" *Slavic Review* Vol, 64 No. 1 (2005), p. 144.

[2]   See: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, *Historia e Popullit Shqiptar Vëllimi I: Ilirët, Mesjeta, Shqipëria nën Perandorinë Osmane gjatë shek. XVI - vitet 20 të shek. XIX (History of Albanian People Volume I)*, Tiranë, Toena, 2002. The new publications are based largely on the historical works published during Hoxha's regime by removing the communist ideology while preserving the nationalist one. See: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, *Historia e Shqiperisë Vëllimi II, vitet 30 të shekullit XIX-1912 (History of Albania Volume II)*,

ideational/cultural factors or structures exhaust our understanding of the emergence and development of Albanian nationalism is generally taken for granted. While the first important attempt to deconstruct the dominant nationalist myths permeating Albanian historiography was carried out in 2002 by a range of distinguished scholars under the title *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, co-edited by Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd Fischer, the only detailed historical work which incorporates also the theoretical approaches of nationalism to explain the emergence of Albanian nationalism is the recent study of the French historian Nathalie Clayer.[3] On the other hand, while much attention is devoted to the emergence of Albanian nationalism, far less theoretical discussion exists regarding Albanian nationalism during the consolidation of the Albanian nation-state. This paper, attempts to rethink many of the nationalist assumptions taken for granted by Albanian historiography and studies about Albanian nationalism, and to further the critical range via a more detailed theoretical discussion and analysis of Albanian nationalism and its development under Albanian nation-state. At this point, the main problem we try to enlighten is that contrary to the widespread idea that considers nationalism to have been frozen and oppressed by the communist/socialist regimes in the Eastern Bloc only to burst fiercely with the fall of communism, Albania constitutes a good example to make sense of the symbiotic coexistence of nationalism with the communist ideology.

As such, this article has a twofold aim. First it aims to elucidate the grey zones caused by the simplistic, reductionist, and cultural explanations about nationalism in the Balkans which conflate the concepts of nations and nationalism. Second it aims to reveal the symbiotic coexistence between nationalism and communist ideology during Enver Hoxha's regime. To this end, by

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Tiranë, 8 Nëntori, 1984; Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, *Historia e Shqiperisë Vëllimi III, 1912-1944 (History of Albania Volume III)*, Tiranë, 8 Nëntori, 1984.

[3]  Nathalie Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit Shqiptar: lindja e një kombi me shumicë myslimane në Evropë (Aux origins du nationalisme albanais: La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe)*, përktheu Artan Puto, Tiranë, Botime Përpjekja, 2012.

embracing/utilizing the theoretical framework of modernist theories of nationalism, which emphasize structural political and socio-economic transformations as well as social engineering in explaining the emergence of nationalism and construction of nation, we will try to enlighten some important questions about Albanian nationalism and Albanian national identity. This task will be carried out by moving beyond the chronological narratives of Albanian nationalism. The research questions that guide our work focus on why and how Albanian nationalism differs from the general pattern of Balkan nationalism where it belongs, and why nationalism was not frozen during the communist regime but on the contrary was transformed into a national-communist ideology of power? The main argument which permeates this paper is that the emergence and development of Albanian nationalism especially after the foundation of the Albanian nation-state can be better explained and understood in a structural framework where the absence of a previous political and economic center, religious division, emerging new political elites/middle class interests and international factors have been decisive in defining the Albanian nationalism and social construction of Albanian nation.

## Theoretical framework: Modernist theories of nationalism and structural transformation

There is no disagreement that nationalism is a modern and secular ideology that resulted in the aftermath of structural socio-economic transformations taking place in the Western Europe of eighteenth/nineteenth century.[4] Yet many disagreements exist among the scholars about the timing of the nation[5] and its relationship with religion as the greatest institution of identity re/production in medieval times. These disagreements intensify when the case is to explain nationalism in regional contexts alien to conditions and transformations

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[4]  Benedict Anderson, "Introduction", *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan, London, Verso, 1999, p. 1.

[5]  See: Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, New York, Routledge, 1998; Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*, New York, Routledge, 2009.

which gave birth to nationalism and nation in Western Europe. To explain these differences which cannot be reduced to geographical terms (like Western and Eastern), we need a theoretical interrogation of such concepts as nationalism and nation.

The field of Nationalism Studies is relatively new and so are the theoretical debates associated with that. While one of the earliest theoretical works on nationalism is considered to be Hans Kohn's work, *the Idea of Nationalism*, which brought the most permissive distinction in the field, namely that of between Western or civic nationalism and Eastern or cultural/ethnic nationalism, the theoretical approaches which we call modernist theories emerged only in the 1980's. This late development is argued to have been a result of the natural place that the concept of nation had gained within social sciences. The discipline of sociology itself, according to Michael Billig, has been responsible for naturalizing and legitimizing the conceptualization of society as a nation,[6] not to mention the everyday practices of the state via its repressive (e.g. army, police) and ideological (e.g. education, church, television) apparatuses. The beginning of the 1980's saw the publication of some of the most crucial works of what is called today Nationalism Studies, namely the Ernest Gellner's, *Nations and Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, Erich Hobsbawm's *Invention of Tradition*, Miroslav Hroch's *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe* and Anthony Smith's *the Ethnic Origins of Nations.*[7] What is common to all modernist theories, which we must note differ among themselves on the emphasis they put on the factors/causes of nationalism, is the argument that nationalism and nations are a recent or modern phenomena associated with socio-economic and political transformations of the last two hundred years. Modernist theories of nationalism emerged as a counteraction to the general belief that considered nations and nationalism as a natural form of human society or being primordial, namely having an immemorial past and perennial/constant identity. Despite the

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[6]   Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, London, Sage, 1995.

[7]   Smith will be the founder of ethno-symbolist approach seeing nationalism mainly as a sentiment and culture as the key factor in explaining its attachment.

diversity inside primordialism (taken as an approach to nations and nationalism), they who defend a primordial or perennial view of a nation generally argue on the fixity, essence and naturalism of nations and nationalism. Broadly speaking they refer to common language, religion, region, culture, blood and ethnicity as the main factors that demonstrate the continuity and antiquity of a certain nation or nationalism. In addition, the antiquity of nation, golden age, superiority of national culture, periods of recess, and national hero themes are the main tools, which primordialists use as instruments to legitimize the "immemorial" existence of nations and nationalism.[8] Thus, from a primordialist/nationalist view the nation is considered as the Sleeping Beauty – to use Minogue's metaphor – who awaits a kiss to be aroused, and the nationalists are the prince who provide this "magic".[9] Hence the themes of national awakening/resurgence/renaissance or "Risorgimento" and the longing for a supposed golden age are common to most of the nationalisms.

On the contrary, modernist theories of nationalism, by historicizing the concept of nation and nationalism argued it was indeed nationalism that gave birth or constructed/invented the nations and not vice versa as is uncritically accepted by nationalists. Yet modernist theories differ among themselves regarding the emphasis they place on structural factors, be they socio-economic or political and instrumental, that caused and structured the emergence of nationalism and nations. However they are united by a structural account of the topic. Since a detailed account of modernist theories of nationalism exceeds the confines of this article, we will focus only on the main arguments that will be utilized to make sense of the emergence of nationalism in the context of the Ottoman dominated Balkans.

Ernest Gellner is accepted as one of the most important modernist scholars of nationalism to have explained the emergence of nations as a product of nationalism, which he

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[8]   Umut Özkırımlı, *Theories of nationalism: A critical introduction*, New York, Palgrave, 2010.

[9]   Kenneth R. Minogue, *Nationalism*, London, Batsford, 1967, p. 7; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983, p. 48.

considered to be a result of structural transformations taking place in Western European societies triggered by the industrial revolution. Gellner emphasized the distinctive character of modern society, and the primacy of social organization over ideas which he saw as a function of the former.[10] As Gellner puts it, "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist."[11] Yet for Gellner this was not because of the power of nationalism as an idea, because the idea of nationalism itself was a product and not the producer of modernity.[12] Nationalism treats the concepts of nation and nationalism as something inherent to human nature or as the very principles of social organization so obvious that they do not need a further enquiry or explanation. Thus in Gellner's words a theory of nationalism is built on the difference between nationalism as it sees itself and as it really is.[13] To explain nationalism Gellner focuses on the transition from pre-industrial (agrarian) to industrial society. Gellner ironically argues that, even though the self-image of nationalism stresses the folk, folklore, symbolism and pristine popular culture, genuine peasants or tribesman "however proficient at folk-dancing, do not generally make good nationalists".[14] Nationalism is not natural and must be taught, hence the central importance of literacy, language and educational systems for constructing and imagining a nation. For Gellner nationalism emerges as a social and cultural necessity of the highly mobile industrial society, which he stresses, produces uneven modernization. As such nationalism involves a

> generalized diffusion of a school-mediated, academy-supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of an anonymous,

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[10] John Breuilly, "Introduction", *Nations and Nationalism*, Ernest Gellner, Oxford, Blackwell, 2006, p. xxi.

[11] Ernest Gellner, *Thoughts and Change*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964, p. 168.

[12] Breuilly, "Introduction", s. xxi.

[13] Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997, p. 7.

[14] Gellner, *Thoughts and Change*, p. 162.

> impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomized individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of a previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves.[15]

In a nutshell, Gellner defines nationalism as a necessary product of industrial social organization which "is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national units should be congruent".[16]

While well-grounded for explaining nationalism and the birth of nations in the case of bourgeois/social contract based societies in the West, Gellner's modernist theory, as he himself realizes, falls short to make sense of how nationalism could emerge and develop in the case of undeveloped/backward societies in the Balkans.[17] Here undeveloped means the absence of a bourgeois society and of the political and philosophical ideas associated with it. Thus it is wrong to see the emphasis on the absence of a bourgeois society as economic reductionist, since it cannot be separated from its social relations and ideas intrinsic to it. For example, secular concepts like constitutionalism, liberalism, individual, human rights, private property, self-determination can only be understood in a society based on a social contract à la Rousseau or Locke. Thus, Gellner's analysis of socio-economic transformation helps us to define the main characteristics or structural limits from which Balkan nationalisms could emerge and therefore the distinct path that they would follow in the absence of incentives caused by industrial society (capitalism, democratization, print technology). As such Balkan nationalism must be put within the context of the dissolution of Ottoman Empire and society *vis-à-vis* industrial Europe and great power rivalry.

Balkan historians in the attempt to stress their respective national distinctiveness and vigor generally pay little attention to the structural constraints posed by the context of the Ottoman Empire/society during the emergence of Balkan nationalisms. We

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15  Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 57.

16  *Ibid.*, p. 1.

17  Gellner, *Nationalism*, p. 41.

should not miss the fact that nationalism was about transforming and reconstructing historically long-run macro (socio-economic, political and cultural) structures.[18] Balkan historiography generally considers the Ottoman Empire as the main cause of the backwardness of the region. The Ottoman Empire with her centralized regulatory power and distinct feudal (generally seen as Asiatic mode of production or oriental despotism) mode of production is argued to have impeded the emergence of a bourgeois class from the merchants in the long run and so ripped the region from the "natural" socio-economic transformations taking place in Western Europe.[19] Some historians, evidently nationalist, even argue that Balkans and Albanians in particular had a more advanced mode of production, or one close to that of their European counterparts (feudalism) before being occupied by the Ottoman Empire which enforced the *timar* system (the principal form of feudal land ownership in the Ottoman Empire).[20] The exact nature of the Ottoman mode of production is still a matter of dispute among historians and political scientists alike[21] and not part of this analysis, yet at this point we can argue that the imperial centralist authority, absence of a hereditary aristocracy and a bureaucracy based ruling elite made a qualitative difference from that of the decentralized political structure prevalent in Western Europe, impeding as such the flourishing of a new bourgeois class independent from state authority. From this standpoint the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire itself remained outside of the gradual socio-economic transformations taking place in Western Europe since the 1492

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[18] See: Gerard Delanty and Patrick O'Mahony, *Nationalism and Social Theory*, London, Sage, 2002, p. 56.

[19] Vera P. Moutafchieva, *Agrarian Relations in the Ottoman Empire in the 11th and 16th Centuries*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988.

[20] Korkuti *et al. Historia e popullit shqiptar*, pp. 330-332.

[21] See: Halil İnalcık, *The Middle East and the Balkans under the Ottoman Empire: Essays on Economy and Society*, Indiana University Turkish Studies, 1993; Çağlar Keyder, "The dissolution of the Asiatic mode of production", *Economy and Society*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1976; eds. Halil Berktay and Suraiya Faroqhi, *New Approaches to State and Peasant in Ottoman History*, New York, Frank Cass., 1992.

(the symbolic date of the creation of a world economy).[22] On the other hand, the Albanian historians' thesis of a more advanced mode of production before the Ottoman occupation is highly suspicious, because until the fourteenth century the mode of production and social relations prevalent in Albanian inhabited lands were part of the Byzantine system, which Ottomans adopted to a great extent. Indeed the similarity between Ottoman and Byzantine mode of production and social relations explains also the rather smooth transition from Byzantine to Ottoman *timar* system and rule in general.

Balkan nationalisms in general and Albanian nationalism in particular, as Clayer puts it, before being a danger to the preservation of Ottoman Empire, have been products of political transformations permeating the Empire.[23] One of the defining features of Eastern Europe's social and political structure during eighteenth/nineteenth century, as Czech historian Miroslav Hroch puts it, is that "an 'exogenous' ruling class dominated ethnic groups which occupied a compact territory but lacked 'their own' nobility, political unit or continuous literary tradition".[24] Hroch distinguishes three structural phases of the nationalist movements from their inception until their successful completion in Central and Eastern Europe. The initial or Phase A consists in the intellectual interest and scholarly inquiry of an awareness of the linguistic, cultural and social attributes of the particular ethnic group. No clear national demands (for independence) exists in this stage. The second period or Phase B concerns the patriotic activities of elites to "awaken" national consciousness among the ethnic group or the period of patriotic

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[22] Wallerstein considers Ottoman Empire as a classic example of a World-Empire "which used a redistributive/tributary mode, in which capital accumulation is not maximized, and in which the basic redistribution is a function of political decision", See: Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Ottoman Empire and the Capitalist World-Economy: Some Questions for Research", *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Winter, 1979), p. 390.

[23] Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit*, p. 638.

[24] Miroslav Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe", *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan, London, Verso, 1999, p. 80.

agitation. The final stage or Phase C denotes the transformation of nationalists movements from a narrow one restricted with political and intellectual circles into a mass movement.[25] In the Albanian case as we will see below, we can argue that Phase A, generally speaking covers the period from the beginning of the Reforms of *Tanzimat* or the publication of the first Albanian alphabet in 1844 as a symbolic date, until the collapse of the League of Prizren (1881) or the publication of Sami Frashëri's nationalist Manifest in 1899, while Phase B intensifies after the crushing of the League of Prizren by the Sublime Porte and especially after the Greek-Ottoman crisis in 1897. It continues even after the declaration of independence, because of the fragile or gelatinous state structure. The spread of nationalism to masses or the Phase C starts only with the establishment of a proper state structure and political stability after 1920.[26] It was due to a developed state structure and apparatuses in Hoxha's Albania and Tito's Yugoslavia that Albanian national identity spread both among Albanians in Albania and them in Kosovo, despite the differences in dialect and religion.[27] But firstly it is important to note the structural framework that conditioned these phases.

## The structural conditions defining Albanian nationalism

Nationalism in the Balkans can be argued to have developed under the following interrelated (political, social and cultural) structural conditions. First, it developed in the absence of a bourgeois/secular society or an emerging new class (third estate) who "set itself up against the old feudal ruling class and sooner or later proclaimed itself the representative of the whole nation".[28]

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[25]  Hroch, "From national movement…", p. 81.

[26]  This general periodization is also supported by the detailed research done by Natalie Clayer. See: Clayer, *Ne fillimet e nacionalizmit*, p. 137.

[27]  Miroslav Hroch, "National Movements in Habsburg and Ottoman Empires", *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly, New York, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 193.

[28]  For a further investigation on the implications of the absence of a bourgeoisie society in the process of nation formation see: Miroslav

Second, Balkan nationalities/ethnic communities were dominated by a ruling class of foreign nationality/ethnicity. Third, Balkan nationalisms primary source of tradition was folkloric and religious. Religious network here played the role of "print capitalism" and helped the spread of nationalism by providing the necessary infrastructure through which culture might be broadly shared.[29] In other words, Balkan nationalism though being a secular ideology in principle had to integrate religious tradition in its attempt to form a national unity from a society of peasants and tribes. Thus, organized religion became an important apparatus in the construction of new nations (with the exception of Albanian nationalism). Fourth, Balkan nationalism emerged as a political/cultural elite phenomenon, primary limited with the literate circles which were very narrow. Because of the weak secular education network in Ottoman Empire, the research on the culture and language of the ethnic groups was carried out beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire by French, British, and German scholars and primarily by the Christian members of the ethnic groups who could be in contact with these works and were more open to the influence of ideas from the Enlightenment and Romanticism, thus their understandings of ethnic groups' past and history was more prone to be based on romantic myths and misinterpretations modified by power conditions/elites interests.[30] Fifth, Balkan nationalism defined itself especially in the struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire, thus constructing the Ottoman as "the big other", or as the anti-thesis of what they wanted to be. National liberty since the beginning has had priority over individual liberties (much valued in patterns of civic

Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe*, Translated by Ben Fowkes, New York, Cambridge, University Press, 1985, p. 8.

[29] For the role of religious institutions in the development of a proto-national phase See: Michael Mann, "A Political Theory of Nationalism and its Excesses", *Notions of Nationalism*, ed. Sukumar Periwal, Budapest, Central European University Press, 1995, p. 45; For the importance of "print capitalism" in the emergence and spread of nationalism see: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London, Verso, 1983.

[30] Hroch offers a very helpful comparative study of the defining conditions of national movements in Habsburg and Ottoman Empire, see: Hroch, "National movements…", p. 177.

nationalism in France and England). Sixth, the existence of the "*millet* system" enabled Balkan nationalisms to perpetuate this concept inherited by Ottoman Empire, for their respective irredentist/nationalist purposes, namely to homogenize the different ethnic groups sharing the same religious affiliation. Seventh, Balkan nationalisms constructed a virtual or metaphysical image of national borders while considering as a historical injustice the current borders defined in accordance with Great Power politics at the time, hence the existence of "greater" national projects become widespread in the Balkans.

While the conditions/features mentioned above do not exhaust the peculiar characteristics of all nationalist movements originating from the Balkans (including Turkish nationalism), they constitute the structural material at hand used by political elites to construct their respective nations. Even though from this stance, political elites interests can be viewed as the motor behind Balkan nationalism, their agential power have been restricted and enabled by the structural conditions mentioned above. As Hroch argues, "mass movement was possible only under several conditions, which were independent of the wishes of its actors, the 'nationalists'"[31] Nationalist intellectuals/elites could "invent" the nation only within certain objective preconditions (economic, political, linguistic, cultural, religious, geographical, historical), and their subjective reflection in collective memory. Thus the central question to answer is that why nationalist elites decided to persuade the members of their ethnic group to accept a new national identity? For Hroch, "this decision had to do with the identity crisis caused by great reforms and changes which put in question the old system of values and legitimacy, and eroded old pre-modern ties in patriarchal or late 'feudal' societies."[32] The argument put forward by Hroch for the small states of Central and Eastern Europe seems to hold true also for the Albanian case. Yet the Albanian case was in clear disadvantage compared to its neighbors as having neither a previous political center nor a written language tradition or

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[31] Miroslav Hroch, "From ethnic group toward the modern nation: the Czech case", *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 10 No. 1/2, (2004), p. 98.

[32] Hroch, "From ethnic group…", s. 95.

religious unity. This makes explaining Albanian nationalism even more interesting.

The objective/task to build a nation "from a scattered array of clans", as one of the founding fathers of Albanian nationalism Mithat Frashëri (the son of the distinguished Albanian nationalist and among the leaders of the League Abdyl Frashëri) famously proclaimed,[33] and whose majority were Muslims, constituted the main structural texture of the construction of Albanian national identity. Furthermore, the absence of a previous political center, the absence of a national bourgeoisie class, and especially the absence of a written language tradition enhanced the obstacles further. As Hobsbawm argues, apart of language, "religion and indeed almost everything else seemed divisive rather than unifying" in the case of Albanian nationalism.[34] As such Albanians enter the group of so called "nations/peoples without history", (a term first used by Engels to denote the Southern Slavs) namely "nations which had at no time in their pre-capitalist past been the repositories of an independent political formation".[35] Thus Albanian elites of the time had to invest extra efforts for "imagining" the Albanian community. And since imagining a nation passes through the spread of literacy and thinking profoundly in new ways, as Anderson famously put it, the development and spread of printed/written Albanian language and literature would become the cornerstone of Albanian nationalism and a guide for us to track its development. As Clayer argues, in the absence of a unitary religious network and a proper network of schools, so crucial for the spread of nationalism in Balkans, the press/printing (newspapers, periodicals, encyclopedias etc.) and book publishing would

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[33] Mithat Frasheri, "Çeshtje te independences", *Përpjkja*, No. 2 (1995) (reprinted from 1912), p. 95.

[34] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programe, Myth, Reality*, New York, Cambridge University Press, Canto, 2000, p. 53.

[35] Hroch, *Social Preconditions*, p. 9; For the concept of peoples/nations with and without history see: Charles Herod, *The Nation in the History of Marxian Thought: the Concept of Nations With History and Nations Without History*, Hague, Springer, 1976.

acquire a growing central place in the development of Albanian nationalism.[36]

The regional divisions also affected negatively the emergence of Albanian nationalism. The clannish/tribal divisions were dominant especially in the North and the social affairs were regulated according to personal relationships, kinships or rivalries. The most lasting regional and linguistic division was that between the *Gheg*s in the North and *Tosk*s in the South. For geographical, and historical reasons the latter have been more open to outside influences and hence more prone to social change while the former have preserved a strict traditional culture. Some nationalist writers went so far as to argue that the *Gheg*s, due to their historical closure to outside world, constituted the very linear and pristine descendants of Illyrians since the Homeric times.[37] In this divide – central Albania which consisted of *sandjak*s and the cities of Durres, Elbasan and Tirana, where the Sunni Muslims formed the majority – also constituted a closed region to ideas of nationalism and social change. Thus, the 19th century Albanian community can be seen both as regionally and sociologically divided. Internal isolation was furthered also because of Ottoman administration which divided the Albanian territories into four *Vilayets*: Kosovo, İşkodra/Shkodra, Monastir and Yanya. Although during the Ottoman rule, several regional re-divisions of Albanian lands were made, the latter did never turn into a single administrative unit.[38] The latter would become one of the central requests of nationalist elites. Thus, the absence of a single administrative, economic, cultural or religious center affected negatively the formation of a common community consciousness.[39]

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[36] Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit*, p. 138.

[37] See: Ismail Kadare, *Dosja H*, Tirana, Naim Frasheri, 1989; Ismail Kadare, *Eskili ky humbës i madh*, Tirana, 8 Nentori, 1990.

[38] Barbara Jelavich, *History of the Balkans: Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1983], p. 361.

[39] Pirro Misha, "Invention of Nationalism: Myth and Amnesia", *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Bernd Jürgen Fischer, London, C. Hurst & Co, 2002, p.36.

Albanian nationalism, considered as delayed or a "late comer" as such, is argued to have constructed a distinct character both by its adherents and critics alike. Yet while it is true that Albanian nationalism as a political movement emerged as a direct reaction not to the Ottoman Empire *per se*, but directed against neighboring states nationalist expansions like Serbia, Montenegro and especially Greece, it is also true that Albanian nationalism was shaped in competition with Serbian, Greek and Turkish nationalism. From this point of view Albanian nationalism is viewed as a defensive reaction toward the expansion of its neighbors. This point of Albanian nationalism is also shared by Turkish nationalism which Çaglar Keyder argues to have developed as a defensive ideology against the change of policy of the European powers supporting the separatist nationalisms inside the Ottoman Empire.[40]

Great Power rivalry has also played a central role in the development of Albanian nationalism and the birth of the first Albanian state, yet not adequately conceptualized because of the agential priority given to Albanian national movement and Albanian patriots who "fought with rifle and pen" and because of the ambiguity surrounding the imagination of Europe among Albanian elite of the time. On the one hand European Great Powers are portrayed as hostile to the Albanian national question, as was the case with Bismarck who during the Congress of Berlin of 1878 denied the existence of an Albanian nation behind a geographical phrase. On the other hand, Europe is portrayed as the destination or natural family of Albania. Despite the acceptance of the important role played by Austro-Hungary and Italy in the development of Albanian nationalism first by supporting Albanian cultural "revival" and after the very foundation of an Albanian state, the Great Powers' interests are not seen in a broader international and geopolitical context but as great evils impeding Albanian unification, that if absent Albanian lands would have been saved from partition. Furthermore the role of Great Britain is treated only as secondary at its best and as an obstacle to Albanian nationalist movement

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[40] Çağlar Keyder, "A history and geography of Turkish nationalism", *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey*, eds. Faruk Birtek and Thalia Dragonas, New York, Routledge, 2005.

at its worst. Whereas the very abandonment by Great Britain of the "Berlin order" (the balance of power policy to support the "sick man of Europe" against growing Russian influence after San Stefano Treaty) and encouragement of national movements has had a decisive role in the emergence of Balkan Wars/states in general and Albania in particular.[41] Not to mention here the role of the United States which has been considered as almost absent only to be rehabilitated after the end of communist rule, largely conceived in romantic terms, as a benevolent power who rescued Albania from European Great Powers appetites through the W. Wilson's Fourteen Points. Indeed, the US "open door" policy and support for self-determination facilitated the dissolution of world-empires, yet far away for benevolent reasons.

The Treaty of San Stefano which ended the Russo-Ottoman War and enabled the recognition of independence of Serbia, Montenegro, Romania and Bulgaria granted Russia a greater influence in the Balkans. Thus, Austro-Hungary and Great Britain intervened to balance the Russian influence by calling the Congress of Berlin. What is called as the "Berlin order" was based on a conservative outlook regarding the question of nationalism in the Balkans. Austro-Hungary fearing the growing influence of Serbian nationalism, decided to support the status-quo created with the Berlin order and the political existence of Ottoman Empire. On the other hand, the Russian Empire fearing the influence of liberal ideas about constitutionalism associated with nationalism, also supported the Berlin order as indicated by her signing of Mürzsteg Agreement (1903).[42] Austro-Hungary, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire had a common interest in following a conservative policy against nationalism and liberal ideas. It is a well known fact that the Ottoman Empire successfully managed to extend its life due to its precarious balance of power policy. The Ottoman Empire's attitude toward the Albanian question would change in accordance with political

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[41] See: Çınar Özen and Ahmet Tetik, "İngiliz Liberal Partisi'nin Balkan Savaşları'na Giden Süreçteki Etkisi"
(The Impact of the British Liberal Party on the Process Leading to the Balkan Wars), Paper presented at The Centenary of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913): Contested Stances Conference, 23-24 May, Metu, Ankara.

[42] *Ibid.*

circumstances, yet generally would be based on strengthening the loyalty of its Muslim subjects by presenting herself as the sole protector of Albanian lands against Greek and Serbian expansion.

As will be demonstrated in subsequent sections, the emergence of Albanian nationalism and development of Albanian national consciousness would be structured along the lines of the conditions mentioned above only to reach its mass expansion with the creation and consolidation of Albanian state.

## The emergence of Albanian nationalism and the role of education and new elites

Albanian nationalism started as an elite phenomenon or as a "top-down" cultural movement. Thus it is important to highlight the fact that Albanian nationalism or Albanianism was first the idea of non-Muslim Albanian intellectuals living outside Albanian lands, especially in the West (Arbëreshi living in Southern Italy come to the fore) and in some of the political and economic centers of the Ottoman Empire like Janina/Yanya (present day Ioannina) and Istanbul.[43] Piro Misha, argues that initially Albanian nationalism's inspiration came from the European Enlightenment and different writings of Western scholars, travelers, poets etc. The latter had an important impact on the construction of Albanian national identity, since they "noticed the fact that the Albanians had a distinctive language and culture"[44] from that of the other people in the Balkans. This period is celebrated as "Albanian National Awakening" by Albanian historiography. In this context, the first thrust came from the Arbëreshi community living in Southern Italy since they fled their lands during the conquest of Albanian inhabited lands by the Ottomans in 15th century. The Arbëreshi – who (like Bishop Giuseppe Crispi, Vincenzo Dorsa and poet Jeronim De Rada) went in search for their roots and who were highly influenced by Romanticism which followed Enlightenment – were the first to popularize the thesis of "Pelasgian origin" of Albanians, an

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[43]  Misha, "Invention of Nationalism…", p. 33.

[44]  Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit,* p. 144.

ancient population predating the Greeks, developed especially by Malte-Brun and Johann Georg von Hahn (father of Albanian studies). Their works emphasized the ancient and autochthonous origin of Albanians based on the ancient character of Albanian language. Especially De Rada's folkloric works helped mythologizing the "golden age" of the struggle against the Turks (nationalist literature is inclined not to make any clear distinction between Turks and Ottomans). Additionally, the European romantic interest and concrete support for the Greek war of independence, created the possibility to discover also the Albanians, as was the case with Lord Byron who even considered Alexander the Great to be of Albanian origin.[45] This romantic wave stimulated several researches on the Albanian language and Albanians in general by Western researchers who utilized the data gathered by different people in close contact with Albanians, such as officials, military officials, administrators, diplomats, travelers, philologists etc.[46]

The developments in the 19th century Balkans had a broad impact on the emergence of Albanian nationalism. These developments, for the purposes of our study, can be collected under two broad titles: the domestic developments related with the Ottoman Empire's restructuration and the developments concerning nationalist movements of Balkan peoples. In front of the pressure/growing influence of Western powers, especially after the Crimean War (1853-56), *Tanzimat* reforms (1836-1878) aimed to save the Ottoman Empire from dissolution by modernizing its administrative apparatuses while preserving a static societal structure or aiming for the reproduction and not the transformation of the latter.[47] Ironically these very modernizing reforms associated with a growing network of public schools, and the first secular institutions of higher education in Istanbul would pave the way for the creation of a new middle class who would be the vanguard of nationalisms. Contrary to the expectations of the Ottoman ruling elite, to take Descartes the

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[45] Lord Byron, "Child Harold's Pilgrimage", XXXVIII, 340.

[46] Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit*, pp. 146-147.

[47] See: Çağlar Keyder, "The Political Economy of Turkish Democracy", *New Left Review* No. I/115, (May-June 1979), pp. 4-5; Şerif Mardin, *Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset Makaleler I*, İstanbul, İletişim, 1990, p. 178.

officer/soldier and leave Descartes the philosopher (willing to take over Western artillery techniques without the philosophy linked to them),[48] *Tanzimat* reforms triggered unintended changes in Ottoman society. The abandonment of the system of *timar*, the new opportunities created in trade, and further integration with Ottoman administration enabled the spread/expanse to urban centers of landlords (*Bey*s) thus bringing some important changes in the traditional Muslim elite class (landlords, ulema etc.) in general.[49] Beside the traditional Muslim elite and the Christian religious elite, since the nineteenth century a gelatinous "middle class" formed by a scattered Orthodox and Catholic merchant bourgeoisie emerged. This "middle class" which was in close contact with cultural and ideological developments in Italy, Austria-Hungary and Greece and was effective especially in diaspora (Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, İstanbul) would form the core as well as the sponsorship of Albanian nationalism alongside Italy and Austro-Hungary.

Besides this, the institutionalization of the system of millet, while dividing Albanians according to religious affiliations, enabled for the first time the production of a secular educated class. During the Ottoman rule the Albanians were not allowed to study in their language: the Muslim Albanians used to attend only Islamic schools, Catholics Italian schools, whereas Orthodox Albanians could go only to Greek schools.[50] As Faik Konica argues in 1877, only few Albanians could imagine that their language could be written.[51] Therefore there was no unified or standard Albanian alphabet until the Congress of Monastir in 1908. Here, after a virulent debate among Albanians (Bektashi Albanians like Frashëri brothers, Catholics and some Orthodoxes) who hold the Latin alphabet thesis and those who defended an Arab or

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[48]   Gellner, *Nations and nationalism*, p. 42.

[49]   Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit*, p. 35.

[50]   Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*, p. 85; See also: Akşın Somel, "Christian community schools during the Ottoman reform Period", *Late Ottoman Society*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga, New York, Routledge, 2005, pp. 266-267.

[51]   Faik Konica, *Parashtrese mbi levizjen kombetare shqiptare: Vepra Vol. 2*, Prishtina, Rilindja, p. 9 cited in Misha, "Invention of nationalism…", p.38. Konica was a Harvard educated prominent figure of Albanian nationalism and statesman.

Orthodox one (Sunni Muslims and some Orthodox Albanians), it was decided for the first time to use the Latin alphabet for written language and education.

In the 1840's the famous Greek school *Zosimaia* in the *Vilayet* of Yanya, was the sole secular high school institution in all the Albanian inhabited lands. In a time when illiteracy among Albanians was at the rate of 98%, and *medrese*-education was the only alternative, *Zosimaia* (which was the center of the Greek Enlightenment) turned into the cradle of Albanian "enlightenment"/nationalism as well, counting among its graduates such notable future Albanian nationalist intellectuals/publishers or prominent (Ottoman) statesman as Jani Vreto, Kostandin Kristoforidhi, Naim Frashëri, Şemsettin Sami Frashëri, Anastas Byku, Ali Asllani, Abedin Dino, İsmail Qemali (a high Ottoman official and one of the founders of Albania, he was the first Muslim student in *Zosimaia* in 1850) etc. *Zosimea* was the first destination of wealthy Orthodox families for their children, but also of the wealthy Muslim landlords of the Vilayet of Yanya who after graduation from *Zosimea* pursued higher education studies in the new secular institutions in Istanbul and served in high positions in Ottoman administrate. Secular education contributed to a significant difference between (wealthy or traditional elite) Albanians living in Yanya Vilayet and the others living in the Vilayet of Kosovo and İşkodra where *medrese* was still the dominant institution of education and religious carrier eclipsed the others.[52] In the attempt to somewhat contain the influence of *Zosimaia,* Ottoman authorities embarked on opening a number of high school institutions called as *idadiye* since 1882. This competition between Ottoman and Greek authorities on the school network in Yanya, as Clayer notes, contributed positively for the Muslim population of the Yanya Vilayet who became far more educated than Albanian Muslim population in the other Vilayets in the north, yet far less educated than their Orthodox counterparts.[53] Thus, during the period of 1909-1910 the young Albanians from the Vilayet of Yanya constituted the majority of Albanians studying in institutions of higher education in İstanbul. They

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[52] Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit*, pp. 90-91.

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

constituted 13 out of 19 students of the famous school of administration *Mekteb-i Mülkiye*, 24 out of 37 students of Jurisprudence school (*Mekteb-i Hukuk*), 25 out of 39 students of Medical school (*Mekteb-i Tıbbiye*), 6 out of 13 studying engineering etc. They were in minority only regarding their numbers in *medrese*.[54] Thus despite the antagonistic attitude of the Porte toward the Albanian language, which increased during Abdul Hamid II., the growing of secular higher education, i.e. the creation of Western type schools like *Mekteb-i Mülkiye, Harbiye* and *Tıbbiye* that were dominated by positivism and taught French, produced a new Western-oriented bureaucratic and intellectual elite. This new "middle class", although generally having its roots in traditional elite (possessing the capital of land), was distinguished primarily by its intellectual capital. Clayer, after stressing the difference between the old or "*Atik Mekteb-i Mülkiye*" and "*Mekteb-i Mülkiye-i Şahane*" of the Hamidian and Young Turk period after 1876, notes that "almost half the Albanian Mülkiyelis of the second phase had lived and/or studied in Yanya"[55] Albanian graduates of *Mülkiye,* even far from forming a unified group ideologically and sociologically, not only held high administrative responsibilities in the post-Ottoman Albania, but also some of them became among the most distinguished activists of Albanian nationalism and the modernization process. Among the most notable, Shahin Kolonja became the editor of *Drita* (*Light*) – the most important Albanian newspaper before the Young Turk Revolution – which linked Albanianism with liberalism, decentralization and anti-absolutism. Mehdi Frashëri a *Mülkiyeli* graduated in 1897 was among the main architects of the Western civil code introduced in Albania in 1928 and played an important role in the reform of Islam to suit a Western oriented Albania.[56] Other *Mülkiyeli*s like Rauf Fico and Xhafer bey

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[54] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

[55] Nathalie Clayer, "Albanian students of the Mekteb-i Mülkiye: social networks and trends of thought", *Late Ottoman Society*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga, New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 292.

[56] See: Nathalie Clayer, "Behind the Veil: The reform of Islam in Inter-war Albania or the search for a "modern" and "European" Islam*Islam in Inter-War Europe*", eds. Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germaine, London, Hurst, 2008, pp.116-117.

Villa would distinguish themselves as builders of the new Albanian administration in 1920's.[57]

Catholic Albanians, on the other side, also profited by the competition between Austro-Hungary (they were the first to permit Albanian schools) and Italy in attracting Albanian students in schools financed by their governments. Still it must be stressed that the education available to Albanians was not in Albanian but in the respective language of the schools sponsors. Italian missionary schools taught in Italian, Greek schools in Greek and Ottoman schools in Turkish. Education in Albanian was strictly forbidden by the Ottoman authorities, a decision backed also by the Greek Orthodox Church. Education in Albanian was considered to make people *kaurë/gavur* (infidel) and *mason*, meaning without religion by the mufti and Metropolitan bishop alike.[58] The first private school teaching in Albanian was opened on 7th March, 1887 in Korça – after the continuous effort by the Frashëri brothers in Istanbul. Yet this school and several others opened in this period had major difficulties in functioning – because of the local authorities and the fear dominant among the people and consequently closed down.

In addition, the non-existence of a unitary religion was another element that had a broad impact on the delay of Albanian nationalism. While religion had an important impact on the development of nationalism in other Balkan nationalisms, as a factor of unification for the population, it had a divisive role in the Albanian case.[59] Albanians were divided into three religions: Islam, Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Muslims themselves were divided into Sunni Muslims forming the majority and Bektashism, which was a heterodox and syncretic order/sect and which harbored the first pioneers of nationalism among Albanian Muslims.[60] Ottoman authorities recognized Albanians through

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[57]  Clayer, "Albanian students…", p. 305.

[58]  Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmat*, p. 279.

[59]  *Ibid.*, p. 138.

[60]  Nathalie Clayer is considered as an authority on Bektashism studies. See: Nathalie Clayer, "Bektachisme et nationalisme albanais" *Bektachiyya*, cds. A. Popovic and G. Veinstein, Istanbul, ISIS, 1995, pp. 277.-308.

the "system of millet" (religious community) where they were divided according to their religious affiliations. Thus, Orthodox Albanians were defined as Greek, Catholic Albanians as Latin and Muslim Albanians were identified with Turks. The Porte insisted on this policy for preventing the emergence of Albanian nationalism but also revised it according to political circumstances. The Ottoman Porte with the advancement of Greek expansion begun partly to recognize the existence of a distinct Albanian "nation", yet restricted to religious affiliation. In other words in front of the Greek expansion of 1896 the Porte recognized and encouraged a concept of an Albanian Muslim *millet* while other Albanians belonging to non-Muslim communities were regarded as Greek or Latins. However, Albanian intellectuals of Bektashi origin would count among the first activists of Albanianism, alongside Orthodox and Catholic Albanians, since they were in close contact with Hellenism. The solution found to the "religious question" was expressed under the slogan "the Albanian's faith/religion is Albanianism". Yet this remains the most misused/misunderstood argument in all of Albanian historiography. This slogan extracted by a poem (Oh Albania !) of a Catholic high Ottoman official from İşkodra Pashko Vasa, was used by Albanian nationalists to denote the "particular" nature or the "exceptionalism" of Albanians as a rare kind of people who are very tolerant to matters of religion or indifferent to it, people who put national/ethnic identity before religion. However this nationalist "slogan" was not a description of the reality at hand, but a call to change the existing reality,[61] as the other verses demonstrate:

Albanians, you are killing your brothers,

Into a hundred factions you are divided,

…

And not look to church or mosque,

The Albanian's faith is Albanianism![62]

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[61] Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit*, p. 39.

[62] Translated by Robert Elsie, <http://www.albanianliterature.net/-authors_classical/vasa_poetry.html>(access date: 12 October 2014)

Regarding the nationalist movements in the Balkans, the Greeks, Serbs and Bulgarians, started rising up against Ottoman Empire for gaining independence since early in the 19th century. Yet Albanians instead of being inspired from their neighbors' movements "perceived them as a signal of danger" for their existence or autonomy.[63] Hugh Poulton argues that because the majority of Muslim Albanians in Ottoman territories had reached high positions in the Empire's administration and army, there was no such compulsive motive for creation of an Albanian national state.[64] But, the decline of the Ottoman Empire along withits neighbors' demands seeking to expand their territories on Albanian inhabited lands – especially Greeks and Serbs – triggered the Albanian elite to articulate the thoughts for autonomy for the first time. Therefore, according to Poulton, the Albanian nationalism emerged as a reaction to the claims of Serbs and Greeks over Albanian-inhabited territories.[65] Greek nationalism or Hellenism interestingly would have a deep impact on triggering Albanian nationalism, first as a common cause of a possible Greek-Albanian confederate and after as a counter reaction to Hellenism. It is not a coincidence that the most active region during Albanian national movement was the *Vilayet* of Yanya.[66] Shortly, "the process of nation-building and self-definition of Albanians as a community conscious of its own distinct identity in linguistic, ethnographic and cultural terms first resulted of an outside threat",[67] since the Ottoman Empire was in rapid decay and unable to protect any more the Albanian lands.

The League of Prizren is considered as a turning point in the development of Albanian nationalism since it represented the first

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[63] Lea L. Ypi, "The Albanian Renaissance in Political Thought: Between the Enlightenment and Romanticism", *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 21, No. 4, (2007), p. 666.

[64] Hugh Poulton, *The Balkans: Minorities and States in Conflict*, London, Minority Rights Publications, 1993, p. 57.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] Clayer, *Në fillimet e nacionalizmit*, p. 643.

[67] *Ibid.,* p. 34.

public exposure of Albanian nationalism as well as its point of transformation from a cultural movement into a political one. While this is a right account, it is wrong to ascribe to it a quasi-state attribute and monolithic cohesion as is largely done by Albanian historiography. The League of Prizren, was composed by such fervent Albanian nationalists as Abdyl Frashëri, who openly requested the integration of all Albanian inhabited *vilayet*s into a single one, the right to teach and learn Albanian, and the confining of military service for Albanians in Albanian lands (all requests these being rejected by the Porte, costing him along with other nationalist leaders the exile), but the League harbored also many conservative elements loyal to the Sultan who successfully instrumentalized his religious authority over his Muslim Albanian subjects. Shortly, the League did not represent a unitary stand. On the other hand, its importance in promoting the Albanian question especially (abroad) to Great powers by resisting militarily to the decisions of Berlin Conference, cannot be denied. The terminating by force of the League also contributed to the continuation of Albanian question "by other means". After 1881 Albanian elites intensified their efforts to spread the "national consciousness" among Albanians via a rich network of book publishing. Against the Porte's as well as their neighbor's insistence to divide Albanians according to their religious lines, for Albanian elites become crucial to overcome the religious division, by calling for the creation of an Albanian national identity based on "cultural and linguistic unity" rather than religious diversity. Religious unity resulted unpromising despite the early attempts of Şemseddin Sami and Naim Frashëri to promote Bektashism (because of its heterodox nature) as a "common religion" for Albanians.[68] The furthering of the political dimension of Albanian nationalism was stimulated also by developments that followed such as, the Greco-Turkish War of 1895-97, which demonstrated that the presence of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans was short. Albanian newspapers intensified in numbers after 1897. The nationalist Manifesto of Sami Frashëri *Shqipëria: Ç'ka qënë, ç'është e ç'do të bëhetë?* (Albania. What has it been, what is it and what will it be?') was published in 1899 right after the crisis mentioned above. From

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[68]   *Ibid.*, p. 640.

this date onward the crucial question for Albanian nationalists became how to avoid a situation where Albanian Muslims would be forced to leave their homeland and become *muhacir* (refugees) in Anatolia once the empire collapsed.[69] Thus the construction of a distinctive Albanian identity in order to legitimate a continued presence in the Balkans for Albanians (especially the Muslim ones) become the focal point of Albanian nationalism. The dilemma Albanian intellectuals faced was that while they were certain about the demise of the Ottoman Empire, they were also aware of the weakness of the internal organization in Albanian territories, thus the maintenance of Ottoman domination was seen as useful to resist the pressure from Balkan countries.[70] However the efforts by Albanian elites intensified to demonstrate the distinct Albanian identity and especially to attract the attention of the Great Powers by showing the European character of the Albanian nation. At this point the construction of the myth of Skanderbeg as the national hero of Albanians is important. Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg was a legendary commander and noblemen who successfully resisted the Ottomans for twenty five years (1443-1468). As Fatos Lubonja notes, the fact that Skanderbeg was born an Orthodox, became a Muslim and then a Christian again fighting under the flag of Catholicism (even declared as the Champion of Christianity by Pope Pius II) fit very well with the construction of Albanian national identity as essentially non-religious.[71] Moreover the myth of Skanderbeg served also another important function. In front of the Greek and Serbian threat and in the absence of the Ottoman Empire (as protector of Albanian lands) Albanian intellectuals needed to gain the sympathy and support of the West, and Skanderbeg was already also a hero of the Christian world.[72] By the same token, the theory of the Pelasgian origin of Albanians became prominent not only because it served to justify the ancient and

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[69]  Clayer, "The Albanian students…", p. 300.

[70]  *Ibid.*

[71]  Fatos Lubonja, "Between the glory of a virtual world and the misery of a real world", *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwander-Sievers and Fischer J. Bernd, London, Hurst and Company, 2002, p. 92.

[72]  *Ibid.*, p. 93.

autochthonous character of the Albanian nation, which made Albanians the only rightful owners of Albania, but also proved their superiority towards their neighbors and Turks as well.[73] According to this vision, Albanians were Europeans and defended Europe during their "golden age" under the leadership of Skanderbeg. The national poet Naim Frashëri would famously declare that for Albanians "the sun rises from the West". Both the myth of the antiquity of the Albanian nation and the myth of Skanderbeg intended to make Western powers aware that Albanians had a historical right to live as independent in their lands. This theme would permeate all Albanian publications in diaspora or inside Ottoman borders.

In this context, the Macedonian crisis of 1903-1905 triggered the creation of Albanian secret committees and the formation of guerilla bands. Simultaneously the increasing Turkish nationalism and the confrontation with the Young Turks over the questions of Albanian education and alphabet after the revolution of 1908, although many Albanians have supported Young Turk initiatives for constitutionalism at the beginning, contributed positively in increasing Albanian nationalism. This confrontation was also furthered by the attempt of Young Turks to articulate an Albanian nationalism based on Islam. When the Balkan Wars started Young Turks had already a weak position in the Balkans enhanced also by the continuous armed efforts of Albanian guerilla bands.

Albania become an independent state in 1912 but only in theory and not in practice. The Ambassadors Conference recognized Albania as an independent state in July 1913 by granting the status of a principality and giving Prince Wilhelm Von Wied the crown of Albania. The approaching of the First World War, on the other hand, triggered the Great Powers of the time to consider Albanian lands as favor in exchange for support for their Balkan allies. The secret treaties between the fighting Great Powers and

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[73] Noel Malcolm, "Myths of Albanian National Identity: Some Key Elements, as Expressed in the Works of Albanian Writers in America in the Early Twentieth Century", *Albanian Identities: Myth and History,* eds. Stephanie Schwander-Sievers and Fischer J. Bernd, London, Hurst and Company, 2002, pp. 76-77.

their Balkan clients had tragic consequences for Albania. After the World War I Albania's independence was reasserted/re-recognized by Great Powers. This decision was affected also by the Woodrow Wilson's "self-determination" policy, which simultaneously opposed the secret bargains denounced and published by the Bolsheviks.

## Interwar Albanian nationalism

The political turmoil lasting until 1920 (when the first Albanian parliament/National Council met), enhanced also by the continuing Italian occupation and border disputes with Greece and Yugoslavia, impeded the development of domestic organization. The period between 1921, when the first elections were held, until 1925 was dominated by internal instability and a frequent change of governments. In 1924 Albania also witnessed a so-called short lived "June revolution or bourgeois-democratic revolution", or *coup d'etat* led by the Harvard educated Bishop Fan S. Noli who reflected the interests of a heterogeneous coalition constituted mainly by a weak bourgeoisie/middle class,[74] generally Western-educated and idealist/liberal in orientation, seeking to make structural social changes (like agrarian reform) and by conservative elements sharing only the opposition against Zogu government. Noli was supported also by some Northern (Gheg) leaders/chiefs like Bajram Curri, because they opposed the Ahmet Zogu's (then prime minister) attitude toward Kosovo and his affinity with Serbia. Yet the total absence of (political and financial) support from a Great Power and the lack or failure to create an organized military force, not to mention the impotence of an peasant society for social change or the lack of thrust from below, made this attempt unsuccessful. Noli's insufficient experience in Albanian politics and his decision to recognize the Soviet government, are argued to have

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[74] The grande bourgeouise and the haute bourgeoisie never existed in Albania. So it is more meaningful to see this "revolution" as rooted into the idealist ideas of a petite bourgeoise which constituted also the backbone of Albanian nationalism.

accelerated his rapid decline.[75] Shortly, the search for social democracy in the context of the rise of fascism in Europe and the Balkans (monarcho-fascism) was the central determinant in the failure of the so-called "June Revolution". On the other hand, the existing international and domestic context was convenient for coming to power of an authoritarian tribal chieftain/leader who possessed military force and support from a neighbor state like Serbia. What is more important is that Zogu had behind relatively the most compact class at the time, that of the traditional landlords/landowners (great *Bey*s) who strongly opposed any social change that would jeopardize their socio-economic status inherited by the Ottoman Empire.

Once Zogu seized power in 1925, he centralized authority and in 1928 ended the short experience with a republic by declaring himself King of all Albanians (despite this declaration Zog made no irredentist claims in practice toward Serbia or Greece). Zog (after self-declaring himself King his name shifted to Zog) undertook several reforms aiming to modernize the medieval Albanian society: continued the opening of Albanian schools, put religion under the state jurisdiction, implemented Western civil and penal codes and extended state authority through all the Albanian territory. The adoption of a civil code in 1928 and the decision not to have an official religion contributed much in the secularization of public life. Zog also managed to preserve a stable political environment by embarking on an increasing authoritarian rule. However Zogu failed to modernize the country since he did not distract himself from the conservative class interests that were against structural social change, as was the case with the land reform. Indeed Zogu's rule can be seen as a direct expression of traditional landlords/landowner's interests.[76] Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu who was the Turkish ambassador in Tirana (1934-1935) during Zog's reign, mentions continuously the "nationalist" arguments of the Albanian ruling class and

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[75] See: Robert Austin, "Fan Noli, Albania and the Soviet Union", *East European Quartely* Vol. XXX No. 2, (June 1996).

[76] Jelavich, *History of the Balkans,* p. 181; Bernd J. Fischer, "Albanian Nationalism in the Twentieth Century", *Eastern European Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter F. Sugar, Washinton D.C, The American University Press, 1995 p. 36.

intellectuals that portrayed the Ottoman rule as an Asiatic yoke, while stressing the conservative nature of the Zog rule by mentioning the execution of a young Albanian teacher (charged with anti-government complot) who had written a book about Ataturk and his revolutionary reforms.[77] Since he could not force feudal Muslim landowners for land reform, Zogu turned toward Mussolini's Italy for economic and financial aid. Yet this aid would be used mainly according to Italy's strategic purposes, building roads and bridges for the Italian military by ignoring Albania's pressing needs.[78] Therefore this aid would result in the establishment of a clientelist foreign policy and growing domestic intervention to be completed with Albania's total annexation by Italy in 1939.

According to Bernd Fischer, it was King Zog (1928-1939), an authoritarian nationalist and pragmatist (e.g. he ceded Monastir of St. Naum to Serbia for its support) who dominated the inter war Albanian politics first as prime minister, then president, and then after 1928 as King Zog, and who made possible the creation of the Albanian national consciousness and national state in the modern meaning.[79] This development is congruent with the modernist argument which states that the widespread national identity among the masses is best realized under the conditions of a modern bureaucratic state which provides a communication-intensive network for creating the individual as citizen. Now Albanians were taught in the schools about their "golden past" under the leadership of Skanderbeg, the dark age under the "Ottoman yoke" and the Movement of National Awakening, all described through the lenses of nationalism. Thus it was in the period after 1920, or more exactly after 1928, when a concrete Albanian state apparatuses was created that, despite all its limits, due to a standard secular educational network across

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[77] He never mentions these arguments as openly "nationalist". See: Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Zoraki Diplomat*, İstanbul, İletişim, 2012, pp. 76-78.

[78] Fischer, "Albanian Nationalism…", p. 37.

[79] Bernd J. Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania*, Bradenton, East European Monographs, 1984, p. 306; Bernd J. Fischer, *Albania at War, 1939-1945*, Indiana, Purdue University Press, 1999, pp. 6-7.

Albania, the construction of an Albanian national identity was made possible. As Clayer argues, education is an important tool in the nationalization of society.[80] During this time government also issued many scholarships for Albanian students to study in the West since there was no institution of higher education. Yet despite the aggressive initiatives in education illiteracy remained at the rate of 85 percent until 1939. Thus (with the exception of nations without states which are themselves a product of modernity) in the Albanian case, only after the foundation of a state can we speak of a properly conceived nationalism and national identity. The Albanian partisans and other groups who would fight in the national liberation war were all nurtured in these very schools.

## Post-War national-communist synthesis and the consolidation of Albanian national identity

Enver Hoxha's dictatorial regime, in the aspect of the development and consolidation of Albanian nation-state and national identity can be seen as a continuation of Zogu's nationalist program. As Bernd Fischer states, despite the radical Stalinist orientation of Albania, nationalism continued to be the principal focal point of Albanian politics.[81] Yet first it is important to note the difference between Hoxha's and Zogu's nationalist doctrine and nineteenth century Albanian nationalist movement. While the latter was directed to construct an Albanian national identity and then gain political independence from the Ottoman Empire preserving an idealist component in all its development (an example of state seeking nationalism), the former turned into a clear political doctrine for justifying and executing power, or a state-led nationalism to use Tilly's words.[82] John Breuilly, another modernist scholar argues that nationalism is at the last

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[80] Nathalie Clayer, "Education and the integration of the province of Gjirokastër in interwar Albania", *Albania: Family, Society and Culture in the 20th Century*, eds. Andreas Hemming, Gentiana Kera and Enriketa Pandelejmoni, LIT Verlag, 2012, p. 97.

[81] Fischer, "Albanian Nationalism…", p. 25.

[82] Charles Tilly, "States and Nationalism in Europe 1492-1992", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Feb., 1994), p. 133.

instance or above all a political movement seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalist arguments which basically refer to a political doctrine based on three central assertions:

1. There exists a nation with an explicit and peculiar character.

2. The interests and values of this nation take priority over all other interests and values.

3. The nation must be as independent as possible. This usually requires at least the attainment of political sovereignty.[83]

And since power in the modern world is principally about control of the state, Breuilly maintains, nationalism refers to the objective of obtaining and using state power.[84] In this context the Second World War would play an important role in justifying and facilitating the road to power for communists. For neo-Weberian modernist scholars like Charles Tilly and Michael Mann the ability to make war is central in the process of state making. In other words the ability to organize, collect taxes, centralize etc. brings political institutionalization which is crucial for the modern state apparatus.[85] Albanians did not fight in the Balkans War for their independence against the Ottomans. Nor did they fight in the name of the Albanian nation during the First World War when Albania was invaded by various armies. Thus the Second World War constitutes the turning point in Albanian nationalism, since it was the first war in Albanian history where Albanians fought in the name of Albania and managed to build an effective organized army, although one designed to fight a guerrilla war reaching approximately 70.000 partisans by late 1944. The anti-fascist National Liberation War was considered above all as a "patriotic" war (echoing Stalin's Great Patriotic War). Nationalism here was important both as an instrument for mobilizing masses and as a feeling of solidarity beyond *esprit de corps*. Yet what caused the main illusion in Albanian historiography for considering communists as non/anti-

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[83] John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 2.

[84] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

[85] Mann, "A Political Theory of Nationalism…", pp. 47-48.

nationalists was their relations and attitude regarding the second most important and well organized resistance group during the war, namely the National Front (*Balli Kombëtar*) and the question of Kosovo. With King Zog escaping without resistance, the Royalists (the Legality group), lost all their credibility, despite the symbolic resistance done initially by his supporters like Abaz Kupi when Italy occupied Albania. Thus National Front, led by the prominent nationalist intellectual Mithat Frashëri, was the main rival of the communists. First, by calling the members of National Front as nationalists or with a pejorative term as "Ballist", it is wrongly implied that the Communists who were their political rivals were not nationalists. Indeed nationalists like communists opposed King Zog and were fighting for a liberal democratic republic after the war. What divided them was not "nationalism" but their respective social bases and above all their alliances and methods to gain power. Initially the communists' ranks were mainly composed of the young from urban centers and of Western trained intellectuals, while the National Front founded in 1942 had its larger base in rural Albania and was especially linked to traditional landowners. As such the latter were more cautious regarding the reprisals of fascist and Nazi forces that would negatively affect their peasant followers, therefore being less active, while the former considered the reprisals against peasants as an opportunity to strengthen their ranks with rebel peasants, and thus they behaved very aggressively toward invaders.[86] Another crucial importance was the Yugoslav assistance given to communist forces in organization and leadership. Albanian Communist Party was formed in 1941 with direct Yugoslav assistance and managed to spread rapidly among the young and progressive intellectuals. Communists formed the most well organized armed resistance in the field attracting also the attention and aid of England which considered them as the most effective operating group. On the other hand, the National Front made a strategic error in collaborating with the occupying forces and as such lost their credibility. The National Front was accused of being nationalist because of their insistence on Kosovo issue. The territory of Kosovo was deliberately incorporated to Albania in 1941 by Italy

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[86] Jelavich, *Balkans*, p. 274.

in order to gain the Albanians' support for their war against Greece. From here originates the term "Greater Albania" which was an Italian enterprise to gain mass support of Albanians.[87] On the other hand, under the pressure of Yugoslav emissaries and also for pragmatic reasons, communists like Zog before them did left the issue of Kosovo to Yugoslavs and to be solved after the war. The concern about political survival had priority over the "national question". Thus only if we would wrongly reduce nationalism to irredentism, Hoxha's regime would appear as the oppressor of Albanian nationalism. With the declaration of the Peoples Republic in 1946, Hoxha's close relations with Yugoslavia until 1948 and the harsh persecution of "nationalists" that followed suggested that Hoxha was anything but a nationalist. To begin with, persecution and liquidation of political rivals were not confined just with the so-called "collaborators" or ideological rivals, but encompassed as well Hoxha's own close collaborators and communists of all sorts opposing Hoxha or simply having different visions. Hoxha's regime, far from ruthlessly oppressing nationhood and nationalism institutionalized them altogether and went further than any previous attempts in "institutionalising territorial nationhood and ethnic nationality as fundamental social categories".[88] But why did Hoxha, a trenchant Stalinist, resort to nationalism? Indeed, the fusion between communism and nationalism was a general trend of Eastern communist regimes resulting from structural conditions rather than from individual characteristics of communist leaders.[89]

Besides the fact that the international conjecture, which was central in leaving Albania to Communists as indicated by the Percentages agreement, the very absence of a previous civil society or a hegemonic rule facilitated the communists' takeover.

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[87] Fischer, *Albania at War*, p. 71.

[88] See: Rogers Brubaker, "Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism", *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism,* ed. John A. Hall, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 286.

[89] See: Tchavdar Marinov and Alexander Vezenkov, "Communism and Nationalism in the Balkans: Marriage of Convenience or Mutual Attraction?", *Entangled Histories of the Balkans: Volume II*, eds. Roumen Daskalov and Diana Mishkova, Leiden, Brill, 2014, p. 469.

In other words, communists had hardly a social basis in a highly rural society and where not for the "Yalta agreement" which left the region under the Soviet's range, Albanian communists could hardly seize power with the same facility as they did.[90] Yet the war had destroyed or discredited traditional ruling classes which had either collaborated outright or had done nothing for the resistance.[91] Hoxha was quick to confiscate private property and wealth, eliminate the landowning class, and nationalize all that remained from undestroyed capital. Being suspicious of human capital trained in the West, as he himself was, he tried to eliminate their influence and create a loyal elite trained in the Eastern Block. Moreover Hoxha's military victory (both Albania and Yugoslavia were the sole countries in Balkans, to be "liberated by their own forces", meaning they were not "liberated" by the Red Army), the military power he possessed and the postwar political vacuum created in Albania elevated him to the sole serious competitor for state power. The National Liberation War would create a source of legitimacy as well as a repertoire for myth making and symbolism so important for constructing a new golden age, a rebirth of the nation by fighting. While the heroic Battles of Scanderbeg were legends heard in schoolrooms during Zogu's time, the national liberation war was something concrete felt by the whole society. Beyond this, the National Liberation War would create an important impetus for the legitimacy much needed in pursuit of the radically new reforms that would happen in Albania.

Albanian society in the post-Ottoman period did not experience any radical transformation regarding its social strata, i.e. no agrarian reform was undertaken for the reasons mentioned above. With the communist takeover Albania would enter a period of radical structural changes that will affect deeply all its socio-economic, political and cultural strata. Zygmunt Bauman, argues that the communist regimes of Eastern Europe pursued industrialization instead of socialism and emancipation and made

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[90] For this structural condition build in Yalta Conference see: Immanuel Wallerstein, "Globalization or the Age of Transition? A Long-Term View of the Trajectory of the World System", *International Sociology*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (June 2000), pp. 251–267.

[91] Fischer, "Albanian Nationalism…", p. 41.

the ruling party a self-perpetuating establishment while trying to atomize civil society, the source of corrective criticism.[92] Crampton also notes that the communist parties of the Eastern Europe were apparatuses for running states and controlling societies, which did not represent sectional interests, but imposed them.[93] Communist Albania would constitute the most extreme version of the general pattern defined above. As Bauman maintains, in these communist regimes, the peasantry was invited to realize the Marxist revolution, and ironically they were the same peasantry "whose disappearance Marx counted among the main conditions for anybody to enter the realm of socialist reason".[94] From this perspective it is not difficult to understand that nationalism would constitute the primary ideology of cohesion in post war Albania, since its appeal was greater than communism or liberalism associated above all with the development of capitalism. While communism and liberalism had not a social base in Albania, nationalism was the only modernizing ideology with roots in the past, helped also by the state-led policies of the Zogu regime. No proper working class existed, and capitalist relations were only in their infancy. Indeed Albania hardly fit the Marxist description of a society ready to herald socialism. Nothing resembling even close to Manchester and Lancashire existed in Albania. Albania was the sole country in the Balkans in 1920 where a Communist Party was absent, only to be formed in 1941 with Yugoslav assistance.[95] To put it shortly, socialism in Albania arrived before capitalism. This is a structural contradiction that in itself would form the structural impetus for building Marxism-Leninism on Albanianism. The questions confronted by the Communists who seized power in Albania were never been considered by Marx and as Bauman rightly notes were incompatible with the Marxian notion of

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[92] Zygmund Bauman, *Socialism the Active Utopia*, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1976; See also: Dennis Smith, "Zygmunt Bauman", *Fifty Key Sociologists: The Contemporary Theorists*, ed. John Scott, London, Routledge, 2007, p. 20.

[93] R. J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century and After,* London, Routledge, 1997, p. 246.

[94] Bauman, *Socialism*, p. 77.

[95] Jelavich, *Balkans*, p. 183.

socialism as the (final) act of human emancipation.[96] Thus it is not a surprise that Hoxha followed the Stalinist road to use state power to build and impose the new social forces and relations from scratch. What Hoxha really realized during his rule was national liberation and the preservation of national sovereignty (helped also by the relative stability of bipolarity), while he caused severe damage to human liberation as envisaged by Marx and interpreted by Western Marxists. Moreover, he saw the latter as more dangerous even to the capitalists themselves since they constituted the main alternative from inside to his dogmatic version of Marxism and as such became more oppressed and severely punished than other opponents.[97] What took place in post war Albania as such was a modernizing revolution from above, partial industrialization, urbanization and a nation-building process whose ideology became national-communism.

All the intellectuals or professional "articulators" of postulates and peoples' interests who rose during Hoxha's regime had a nationalist and materialist worldview. Yet because of the common sense nationalism acquired in Albanian society, it is commonly overlooked. Hoxha spoke in nation's name and demanded that citizens identify themselves with that nation and subordinate other interests to those of the state identified with the Party. All the ideological state apparatuses worked to naturalize the national unity gathered around the Party-state. As Katherine Verdery puts it, "the monolithic Party-state produced a monolithic Nation."[98] Hoxha himself considered the "monolithic unity" of Albanian people/nation one of the greatest achievements of the Party.[99] In order to make his power appear natural and legitimate, Hoxha's regime gave a lot of importance to indoctrination through the education system, which served not simply to prevent the "wrong" information from reaching

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[96]  Bauman, *Socialism*, p. 77.

[97]  See: Fatos Lubonja, *Second Sentence: Inside the Albanian Gulag*, Translated by John Hodgson, New York, I.B.Tauris, 2009.

[98]  Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu's Romania*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991, p. 315.

[99]  Enver Hoxha, *Laying the foundations of the new Albania*, London, Worker's Publishing House,1984, p. 5.

individuals, but it also ensured the provision of "correct" information in appropriate ideological form.[100] According to Robert Elsie, the literature and especially the Albanian historiography written during communism "conveyed a simplistic and uncritical account of events, conforming to the needs of communist and nationalist ideology in Albania, i.e. a small revolutionary people struggling for freedom against a series of evil invaders and foreign occupants."[101] The Albanian people's history was seen as a deterministic, teleological evolutionary development culminating with Albanian communist nation-state. Under the label "Albanian people" was implied a notion of a fully-fledged nation with an unchanging essence. At this point it is worth returning briefly to the myth of Skanderbeg. Hoxha retook the myth from the nationalist pantheon of the 19th century and reconstructed him as the titan of the "peasants" who struggled for the Albanian motherland (nation) in the 15th century against the invaders (Ottomans) outside and their renegades inside the country. Hoxha even purified Skanderbeg of his religious identity, and he neglected Skanderbeg's close relations with Catholicism and as well his vassalage to the Kingdom of Napoli.[102] This myth alongside the others (religious indifference, constant struggle for liberation, monolithic unity etc.) produced during communist rule were incorporated into official history, literature, art and even in folk songs to make these myths appear more natural. As Oliver Schmitt puts it, "Skanderbeg became the symbol of a regime that was isolationist, atheist, paranoid and xenophobe..."[103] It is a well known fact that after Hoxha broke with the Soviet Union in 1961, he justified this break not only on ideological grounds, namely the defense of true Marxism-Leninism, but also as a

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[100] For the role of indoctrination in totalitarian regimes see: Michael Rush, *Politics and Society: An Introduction to Political Sociology*, Essex, Pearson Education, 1992, p. 77.

[101] Robert Elsie, "Book Review: Miranda Vickers. *Albania, a Modern History.* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1995)", <http://www.elsie.de/pdf/reviews/ R1999VickersAlbania.pdf> (access date: 02 November 2014)

[102] Lubonja, "Between the glory…", p. 94.

[103] Cited in Fatos Lubonja, "Nga nacional-komunizmi në nacional-evropianizëm " *Korrieri*, 5 February, 2009.

"defense of Albanian independence from the threat of Soviet social-imperialism".[104]

Albanian historiography was conducted under the lenses of a bizarre mixture of nationalism with an even more bizarre sort of Marxism. In this light all the National Awakening movement of the 19th century was rewritten to support the new dogma. Because of Marxist-Leninist prejudices all the traditional landowners class and elites during the 19th century were seen as great obstacles to Albanian nationalism, while at the same time the Frashëri brothers and Ismail Kemal, to name just a few, who came from rich landowner or merchant families, were praised as big national figures, through neglecting their social roots. Albanian nationalism was seen as emerging from the particular freedom loving characteristics of Albanian people, in other words, Albanianism was seen as a product of the Albanian nation, which had preserved its essence unchanged since immemorial times, despite unnumbered foreign invaders and cultural exchanges. It is not difficult from here to discern the core nationalist arguments about the primordiality and perennial existence of a nation. As such, Albanian "communist" historiography contributed much in making the notion of nation an ahistorical concept. Moreover, the obsession with peasantry led Albanian historiography (which tried to prove Hoxha's truths instead of searching for the "truth") to see peasants as a revolutionary element in Albanian history. They went so far as to describe as "revolutionary" and progressive (anti-feudal) what in fact was a reactionary Muslim uprising (known as Haxhi Qamili uprising). It occurred in central Albania, and it was directed against Prince Wied in 1914. The rebels requested a return to Ottoman rule or at least an Ottoman Prince to lead Albania instead of a Christian Prince, the use of Ottoman Turkish as the national language, and the use of the Ottoman flag. Indeed, this uprising was motivated mainly by the fear of peasants that their lands would be taken by the new government.[105]

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[104] Lubonja, "Between the glory…", p. 96.

[105] See: Robert Elsie, *A Biographical Dictionary of Albanian History*, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2012, pp. 376-377.

It was this very Albanian historiography which would play an important role in nurturing also Kosovar Albanians nationalists, who learned about the pride of Albanian nation mainly through the textbooks prepared in Albania due to the institutional facilities (Albanian University in Pristina was opened in 1968) provided by Tito's Yugoslavia. As Poulton and Vickers argues, the "adoption of the basically Tosk literary Albanian by the Gheg-speaking Kosovo Albanians paved the way for Albanian cultural penetration into Kosovo".[106] The standardization of Albanian Alphabet and language in 1972 as the unified literary language (*gjuha letrare*) of Albania and of Albanian speakers in Yugoslavia, was among the major achievements regarding nationhood and national identity construction. As such Albanian Kosovar elites would have a similar concept of Albanian nation and nationalism, not shared with the same enthusiasm by Albanians with a more traditional formation living in Kosovo and especially in Macedonia and who had constructed a more "religious" concept of Albanian nation undivided clearly by their Muslim identity.

The relationship of the communist regime with religion, on the other hand, not only reveals important features about the combination of nationalist and communist ideologies, but also exposes the crucial role it has played in strengthening the totalitarian control. Hoxha radicalized *in extremis* the famous nationalist slogan of the 19th century stating that "the religion of Albanians is Albanianism". From the nationalist perspective he considered the three religions in Albania as "alien agents" brought by invaders to Albanian people, thus Albanians had to purify themselves from these alien *relics* of the past. He also from a Marxist perspective, claimed that religion was the main reason for the backwardness of Albanians in general (the opium of people) and particularly guilty for the place Albanian woman occupied in society.[107] The main thing responsible for this backwardness naturally would be Islam as the religion of the 500 years of "Turkish yoke". Thus when the campaign for liberating

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[106] Hugh Poulton and Miranda Vickers, "The Kosovo Albanians: Ethnic Confrontation with the Slav State", *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, eds. Hugh Poulton and Suha Taji-Farouki, London, C. Hurst Company, 1997, p. 150.

[107] Crampton, *The Balkans*, p. 161; Lubonja, "Between the glory…", p. 95.

women was launched during the so called Cultural Revolution, there was a simultaneously organized assault on religion.[108] Hoxha's ban on religion was based on the continuous attempts dating back to the 19th century to neutralize the cultural and political legacies of religious cleavages. Thus Albania's historical past was purified from religion. Therefore even the medieval Albanian (religious) writers/bishops were seen only as great "patriots", denying their devotion to faith.[109] Fatos Lubonja reveals the curious symbiosis between the communist and nationalist ideologies by analyzing the "religious" aspect of nationalist-communist ideology presented as "just, harmonious and complete" (as Lenin considered Marxism to be) and its "theoretical" aspect claiming that the belief to this ideology was based on scientific knowledge.[110] It is worth quoting him at length:

> Marxism-Leninism was not simply a religion, not even a "laic religion". A formal feature distinguishes religion from ideology: the structure of the act of faith. Believing is an act that stands above rational knowledge. Marxism-Leninism presents two characteristics usually encountered separately but are found closely bound together in that ideology. It is simultaneously a religion and a theory that has been rationally reasoned and that purports to be scientifically proved. Thus it also pretends to satisfy man's thirst for knowledge... Marxism-Leninism pretended to provide a full scientific explanation of history as well as natural and spiritual phenomena.[111]

To conclude Hoxha transformed Albania into a "Red Monastery". Total isolation strengthened the myth of the "exceptionalism of the Albanian nation".[112] Albanians were made to believe that they

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[108] Fatos Lubonja, "Historia dhe nacional-komunizmi si fe shteterore" (History and the national-communism as a state religion), *Korrieri*, 9 February 2009.

[109] Lubonja, "Between the glory…", p. 95.

[110] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[111] Fatos Lubonja, "Privacy in a Totalitarian Regime", *Social Research* Vol. 68, No. 1 (Spring 2001), p. 243.

[112] Fatos Lubonja, "Demet e izolimit kulturor" (The damages/harms of cultural isolation), *Korrieri*, 12 February 2009.

were special because they were not religious, that they had "Albanianism" as their faith, and that the Albanian nation was solitary on its right road to Marxism-Leninism and was also alone among the evils (Western imperialism and Eastern revisionism).[113] At the end of the day late communist Albanian society was far more nationalist than communist in any sense possible.

## Conclusion

Bertolt Brecht once argued that "If there are obstacles, the shortest line between two points may be a crooked line"[114] This statement expresses in a laconic way the crooked itinerary of Albanian nationalism as already mentioned in the title of this article. Indeed no straight lines can be drawn regarding the emergence of nationalism outside Western Europe. Albanian historiography and nationalists may be right to stress the great disadvantages faced by the Albanian nationalist movement during its genesis and post-independence stage as well, yet their explanations for its success attributed to the inherent patriotic feelings or Sisyphean or Promethean endeavor of Albanian nation are at best wishful thinking.

A close analyses of Albanian nationalism from the perspective of modernist theories of nationalism which emphasize the socio-economic and political structures and conditions and innovations related with them in explaining the emergence of nationalism and the subsequent building of nations, reveals the process of Albanian nation building and the construction of the modern Albanian identity as a product of controversial political elites interests, struggle for independence, social engineering and Great Power rivalry situated in particular political, social and cultural conditions. Thus, contrary to the widespread accounts and beliefs found in Albanian historiography which regards Albanian nationalism as a direct (sentiment) product of the particular

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[113] *Ibid.*

[114] Bertolt Brecht, *Life of Galileo*, scene 14, 1955, quoted in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, London, Zed Books, 1993, p. vii.

cultural and ethnic/national identity of Albanians described in essentialist terms or as the culmination of their constant struggle for liberation, or as it is in other accounts that stress subjective factors (intersubjectivity, norms, symbols, myths), this paper argued that Albanian nationalism can be better understood and explained within a broader context that exceeds Albanian "exceptionalism". Albanian nationalism emerged and developed first as a reflection of an emerging new "middle class" in Albanian territories of late Ottoman society. In this light, while we emphasize the structural similarities of Albanian and Balkan nationalisms, we acknowledge the distinctiveness of Albanian nationalism resulting from the absence of a previous political center, from the absence of religious unity, and from the Albanian elite's solution to this problem, namely the exclusion of religion from Albanian national identity. On the other hand, Albanian political and cultural elites and intellectuals were not totally free to construct the Albanian national identity. Yet this restriction did not spring from historical ethnic and cultural facts as would be argued by ethnosymbolists, but from some socio-economic and politic structural conditions, like the absence of a previous political center, the absence of a bourgeois society or full-fledged middle class, and the domestic transformations permeating the late Ottoman Empire. The social composition of patriotic and nationalist organizations revealed the emergence and development of Albanian nationalism which began as the idea of non-Muslim elites in close contact with Western ideas and especially Greek nationalism. Albanian nationalism as such emerges as a product of deep transformations permeating late Ottoman society and a reaction against irredentist claims by their neighbors. Finally we focused on the dynamics of Albanian nationalism in the light of state led policies. Here we argued that state authority with its ideological and repressive apparatuses has been central to the production and reproduction of Albanian national identity. In this light, Zogu's regime, and to a greater extent state-led nationalism of the communist period consolidated Albanian nationalism to the degree that it would be seen as natural even in the post-communist period. Moreover we argued that the fusion between nationalism and communism was not simply an individual choice by Hoxha but resulted from structural conditions, namely constructing socialism before developing capitalism.