

Constructing Albanian Communist Identity Through Literature: Nationalism and Orientalism in the Works of Ismail Kadare

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Abstract: The communist regime in Albania considered literature to be one of the main ideological vehicles for the formation of the “New Albanian Man”. To this aim, a great part of literature in post-war Albania spoke of how not only did the Albanian people preserve their national identity throughout history, but also of how they fought on the side of European civilization and progress. In this process, a series of barbarian Others were constructed, because if national resistance and communism were to be linked together in a progressive tradition, then the Turks, counter-revolutionary social classes, capitalism and even “revisionist” betrayers of Marxism-Leninism represented the regressive tradition. By taking as a case study the literary works of Ismail Kadare, this paper argues that Kadare, in his depiction of the Turks as the Oriental other of the Albanian nation, employed the clichés and stereotypes borrowed from the European Orientalist tradition, in which the Turks largely are presented as the barbaric mirror to Europe. Later on, the danger coming from the “social-revisionism” of the Russian and Chinese communist states were portrayed in Kadare’s novels as the continuation of the “Asiatic threat”. The intended effect of Orientalism in Albanian literature was to emphasize the modernity of Albanian socialist society and to culturally justify the lonely road of Albanian communism.

Keywords: Albania, Communism Kadare, literature, nationalism, Orientalism

Introduction

The communist regime in Albania (1945-1990) considered literature to be one of the main ideological vehicles for the formation of the “New Albanian Man”. To this aim, a great part of literature in post-war Albania was devoted

to ideas such as how the Albanian people defended their country against foreign invaders and the oppressive classes, and how they were building the new socialist society, which was under an “imperialist-revisionist siege”. Especially in the period of nearly complete isolation from the outside world, from the year 1960 to the late 1980s, the regime emphasized the idea of resistance as the main trait of Albanian identity. Exemplary cases of this can be found in the literary works of the renowned writer Ismail Kadare. The subject of most of his novels and poetry published in the second half of the twentieth century is Albanian resistance to the Ottoman Empire and the Albanian communists’ resistance to “social revisionist” Soviet Union and China. By taking as a case study the literary works of Ismail Kadare, this paper argues that Kadare employed the clichés and stereotypes borrowed from the European Orientalist tradition, in which Asia is presented as the barbaric mirror to Europe. The intended effect of building a series of “Oriental Others” into his works was to emphasize the modernity of Albanian socialist society, and to justify culturally the lonely road of Albanian communism after 1960. If the communist regime was to be presented as the offspring of the national, European struggle for emancipation of the Albanian people throughout history, then the Turks, reactionary classes, as well as the “revisionist” betrayers of Marxim-Leninism were all part of barbarism, and belonged to the non-European side.

The following study is organized in three parts. The first presents the theoretical background informing this study. The main body surveys the Orientalist themes in the works Kadare published during communism. In the third section we discuss continuities and differences in Albanian Orientalism during the post-communist period and present the conclusions.

The theoretical framework

As used by Edward W. Said (1978), Orientalism refers to representations of “Oriental” cultures and peoples as “primitive”, “backward”, “barbaric”, “traditional”, “uncivilized”, “sensual”, “irrational” etc., found in works by Western authors (writers, travelers, politicians, academics, colonial authorities etc.) In other words, Orientalism is the body of knowledge produced in the West through which the Orient is constituted as the negative other of the Occident/West. Said’s work has generated a lot of discussion and criticism¹. In the wake of modernization, variations on Orientalism have been propagated within European countries and societies by political and cultural elites in the processes of constituting national identities and of building up support for certain regimes of power and types of social stratification. Scholars who have

¹ For summaries of debate on Orientalism see Alexander L. MACFIE, *Orientalism*, London/New York: Pearson Education, 2002; Ziauddin SARDAR, *Key Concepts in Social Sciences: Orientalism*, New Dehli: Viva Books, 2002.

been inspired by Said's work have revised his seminal study (1978) to fit various cases of otherness within Europe². Since "modernity" refers to a series of abstractions and extrapolations specific to the history of the West, in Eastern Europe (as in other parts of the world), the very notions of "Orient" or "East" denote absence, lack, and deformation.³ The concept of modernity itself deploys techniques of Orientalism, because Western Orientalism has been internalized by modernizing societies and has become part of the local discourses and identities. As Ussama Makdisi puts it, "in an age of Western-dominated modernity, every nation creates its own Orient"⁴. In this vein, studying the case of former Yugoslavia, Milica Bakic-Hayden developed the concept of "nesting Orientalism", referring to the construction of the "Oriental others" by the nations comprising the federation: Bosnian and Albanians were perceived to be more oriental than Serbs and Macedonians, while Serbs and Macedonians were deemed as Oriental by Croats and Slovenes⁵.

We can also make the distinction between "external Orientalism", directed against what is perceived as other nations and societies, and "internal Orientalism", employed in the discourse of political and cultural elites in a given state or society within the framework of nation-building and modernization reforms, against social categories that are perceived as unfit or resistant to the projects for constructing modern national identities. External and internal Orientalisms, however, should not be seen as mutually exclusive, but rather as gradations of the same basic discursive strategy, by which even the victims of Orientalism(s) become victimizers of "Oriental others"⁶.

Within this theoretical framework, this article examines Orientalism in Ismail Kadare's literary works published during the communist period. While Kadare's works are an important case study for our purposes, this distinguished

² Edward W. SAID, *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978; Katherine E. FLEMING, *The Myslim Bonaparte: Diplomacy and Orientalism in Ali Pasha's Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; Katherine E. FLEMING, "Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography", in *The American Historical Review*, 2000, vol. 105, no. 4, pp. 1218-1233; Maria TODOROVA, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Larry WOLFF, *Inventing Eastern Europe*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

³ Ziauddin SARDAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

⁴ Ussama MAKDISI, "Ottoman Orientalism", in *The American Historical Review*, 2002, vol. 107, no. 3, p. 768.

⁵ Milica BAKIC-HAJDEN, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia", *Slavic Review*, 1995, vol. 54, no. 4, pp. 917-931.

⁶ E.g. on Orientalism in Israel see Aziza KHAZZOOM, "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel", in *American Sociological Review*, 2003, vol. 68 (Aug.), pp. 481-510; on Turkish Orientalism in the 20th century see Welat ZEYDANLIOĞLU, "The White Turkish Man's Burden: Orientalism, Kemalism and the Kurds in Turkey", in Guido Rings and Anne Ife, A. (eds.), *Neo-colonial Mentalities in Contemporary Europe? Language and Discourse in the Construction of Identities*, Newcastle upon Tyre: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, pp. 155-174.

author should not be taken as the sole creator of the Albanian version of Orientalism. Indeed, Orientalism has been fundamental to the modernizing cultural processes of forging a modern Albanian nation. It is true that being a developing, ex-communist country with a majority Muslim population, Albania has frequently been the target of pejorative stereotyping by Western travelers, politicians, literature and media⁷. Despite this, Albania has developed its own brand of Orientalism, because, since the end of nineteenth century, its processes of modernization have been framed along a West-East axis, with Albanians struggling to escape the consequences of the 'pollution' of their national "European" identity by a series of 'Eastern/Oriental others'. Starting with the National Awakening period (1878-1912), Orientalism became an essential tool in the struggle against the Ottomans and in the conceptualization of an ancient Albanian nation with "European roots"⁸. During the interwar period, when the new Albanian state embarked upon the nation-building process, the signifiers "Occident" and "Europe" in public discourse were associated with diverse political, social, and economic demands. Nearly all intellectuals active in public debates were "Westernizers", even those of left-wing sympathies, who otherwise were critical of bourgeois civilization and imperialism. Images of the Occident exerted a powerful attraction for interwar Albanian intellectuals, because it represented models of socio-political organization and ways of life they wished to establish in their own country⁹.

During the communist period, two main traditions of ideas fed the Albanian brand of Orientalism. The first was the tradition of a national struggle for liberation against the Turks. The official historiography asserted that the Turkish invasion had severed the links which Albanians had had with medieval Europe, thus impeding the "normal" evolution of Albanian society. The Albanian resistance to the Ottoman invasion led by 15th century prince Skanderbeg was an especially important theme, presenting Albania as the defender of European civilization. In the museum devoted to Skanderbeg in Kruja, built in the last decade of Communist rule in Albania, in itself a secular temple of Albanian nationalism¹⁰, there is a glass map that recounts the stages of Ottoman invasion in Europe. Beneath that, a thick black iron chain represents the

⁷ Gëzim I. ALPION, "Images of Albania and Albanians in English Literature from Edith Durham's High Albania to J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter", *BESA Journal*, 2002, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 30-44; Gëzim I. Alpion, "Western Media and the European «Other»: Images of Albanian in the British Press in the New Millennium", *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 2005, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 7-27.

⁸ Enis SULSTAROVA, *Arratisje nga Lindja: Orientalizmi shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja* [Escape from the East: Albanian Orientalism from Naim to Kadare], Tiranë: Dudaj/ Chapel Hill: Globic Press, 2006, 2nd revised edition 2007.

⁹ Enis Sulstarova, "In the Mirror of Occident: The Idea of Europe in Interwar Albanian Intellectual Discourses", in *Europolis*, vol. 6, pp. 687-701.

¹⁰ Egin CEKA, "Muzeu kombëtar dhe muzeu i Skanderbeut si institucione të religjionit civil shqiptar të komunizmit" [National museum and museum of Skanderbeg as institutions of Communist Albania's civil religion], in *Purpërkja*, no. 21, pp. 121-147.

“Turkish yoke”. The caption on the panel reads: “The Turkish invasion of the fifteenth century represents a second stage of the Arab invasion [of Europe] of the eighth century. Just like in Poitiers ... this time a danger threatened the whole of European development as well.” “European development” is presented as an internal, continuous feature of the continent, independent of what happens in other regions of the world. Outside the circle of civilization roam the barbarians, i.e. Arabs, Mongols and Turks, who, from time to time, turn into a threat to European civilization.

The second tradition of Albanian Orientalism is located in the Albanian version of Marxism-Leninism. Marxism, like other major European doctrines of 19th century, was Eurocentric, and considered historical progress to be an intrinsic feature of West European societies. According to Marx, the historical progress of non-European societies as they emerged out of the vicious circle of feudalism, or ‘Asiatic mode of production’, is made possible by European intervention: from the outside, Europeans will lead the way towards socialism.¹¹ The Bolsheviks in the Soviet Union boasted of being a Europeanizing force amidst the Asiatic masses of Russian peasants, while Lenin and Trotsky considered Peter the Great to be their direct predecessor. The modernizing and Euro-centric outlook of Marxism-Leninism was an integral part of the official ideology of Albania during communism. The communist regime was legitimized not only as the entity which accomplished the program of National Awakening, but also as ruling the only country in Europe which was a true socialist society. According to communist leader Enver Hoxha, Albania was showing the whole world how right Marxism-Leninism was, serving as a model for the other states of Europe:

We are the only country in Europe and the only communist party fighting heroically and successfully resisting this great pressure which is exerted day and night. All the former communist parties of Europe, including that of the Soviet Union, have betrayed Marxism-Leninism, the cause of the proletariat, the revolution and their own peoples. They betrayed the cause of socialism and turned their countries into capitalist countries. The Party of Labor of Albania did not betray it, it stood its ground fearlessly, unyielding it defends socialism and upholds its principles, its own country and the revolution¹².

In the name of class warfare and in the name of constructing a new progressive and revolutionary society, the communist regime in Albania tried to morally and historically condemn the big landowners and clerics of previous eras. In the official propaganda, the beys and Muslim clerics (imams and dervishes) were called Turkish collaborators. They were portrayed as not being true Albanians, but ignorant and despotic figures who lived, talked and

¹¹ Edward W. SAID, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154; Alexander L. MACFIE, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-95.

¹² Enver HOXHA, *Selected Works*, vol. 4. Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1982, pp. 789-790.

behaved like the hated Turks among the peasants, the later representing the oppressed but authentic Albanian people. Thus, the almost racial divide between European Albanians and Asiatic Turks was used internally to distinguish between the historically oppressive classes and the exploited masses of peasants and urban poor.

Totalitarian regimes which aim to completely transform the consciousness of the people exert a heavy control over cultural institutions and the arts. Albanian communists were effectively in command of artistic output, which was classified as belonging to the socialist realist school. The aesthetics of socialist realism were indistinguishable from politics and the class warfare waged by the regime. One of the main art critics of the period wrote that “we see and look for beauty as an aspect of the socialist life that we are building in our country, as a part of the new economic and political relations, as part of the transformational work of our people”¹³. On the other hand, ugliness was to be found predominantly in the previous periods of Albanian history and in contemporary bourgeois societies. As the same critic put it, “proletarian art, by being realistic, cannot ignore the ugliness which rules in bourgeois society, and cannot ignore its emergence in socialist society, where it comes from the old social relations, or their leftovers, which are an inheritance of the past, and also come from the pressure put by the capitalist and revisionist world on our country”¹⁴.

Literature was central to the arts during the communist period, and the most successful writers of the period formed a living pantheon sanctioned by the state. Ismail Kadare was a member of the cultural elite. The *Albanian Encyclopedic Dictionary* called him “one of the most distinguished representatives of Albanian socialist realist literature”¹⁵. Kadare gained his reputation as a writer because of his talent and the principal themes in his works. His historical novels cover key periods in the medieval and modern history of the Albanian people, and his work as a whole forms an artistic narrative of Albanian national identity. Kadare’s novels portray the pre-Ottoman medieval period, Skanderbeg’s uprising against the Ottomans, the Ottoman period, independence, the partisan Liberation War against the fascists during World War II, the construction of the new socialist society, as well as the split with the Soviet Union and China. The dominant motif in most of his historical works is the resistance of the Albanian people throughout their history.

Although in public Kadare conformed to the tenets of socialist realism, in private he managed to write subversive and hostile works against the communist regime, some of which were published after the fall of communism¹⁶. As

¹³ Alfred UÇI, *Estetika, jeta, arti* [Aesthetics, Life, Art], Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese e Librit Politik, 1973, p. 30.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

¹⁵ *Fjalori enciklopedik shqiptar*. Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, 1980.

¹⁶ For instance, Kadare wrote the novel *Hija* (*The Shadow*) in the 1980s, but did not submit it for publication because it was openly critical of communism. He managed to smuggle the

such, his works have been highly acclaimed both during and after communism. For example, one critic writes that “every page of Albanian past and present has its echo in Kadare’s works. His work is an artistic encyclopedia for the fate of this country. It is a document of greatness, pride, wisdom and stoicism for those who are known as the sons of the eagle”¹⁷. Another important reason why Kadare is held in high esteem is that he has gained international fame. In Albania, he is often seen as a representative figure of national culture and, why not, of Albanian genius. In the following section of the article we will examine in detail how nationalism and Orientalism blend together in the works Kadare wrote during the communist period.

Nationalism and Orientalism in Ismail Kadare’s literary work

The image of Albania standing alone against the tempests of the times is present in most historical novels and poetry written by Ismail Kadare from the 1950s to the late 1980s. One may find in his novels a series of “Oriental others” against which Albanian identity is revealed, an identity formed around the motif of resistance. The first is resistance against “the Turk”. In his works, Kadare delineates five moments in the Albanian relationship with the Turks. The first one is the moment of anguish: the first encounter with the Turks, who were a menace not only for Albanians, but for the whole of Europe. In this respect, pre-Ottoman medieval Albania is represented as a “normal” feudal society at the edge of Europe, keeping continuous relationships with the rest of the continent. The Turks, recently arrived at the borders of Albanian principalities, want to turn this European world upside down. A character in one of Kadare’s novels, a Catholic Albanian priest, looks in terror at the territory held by the Turks across the border and tells himself with abhorrence: “A few steps away from me begins what they call the Islamic realm. A few steps away Asia begins”¹⁸. Albanian identity is at a crossroad, caught between the currents of East and West.

In a similar speech given to an audience of medieval Albanians, Stres, the main character of another novel, *Doruntine*, echoes the words of the priest: “In a climate of worsening general conditions in the world, in this time of trials, horrid crimes and disloyalty, what will be the face of Albanian man? Will he become one with the evil, or will he face it? In a word, will he be disfigured

manuscript of the novel out of country ,and deposited in a safe with instructions for the novel to be published at a time when it would not endanger the life of its author. *Hija* was published in Albania after the fall of communism.

¹⁷ Tefik ÇAUSHI, *Eros: Dashuria dhe seksi te Kadareja* [*Eros: Love and Sex in the Works of Kadare*], Tiranë: Ombra GVG, 2004, p. 214.

¹⁸ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 8* [*Literary Works, vol. 8*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 221.

and adapt to the masks of time, in order to survive, or will he keep his face unchanged, but risk drawing into himself the wrath of this time?"¹⁹. Stres was referring to the Turks advancing from Asia, threatening the European medieval world, but the Albanian readers in 1979, the year the novel was first published, could easily make the connection with their present: a year before Albania had officially broken all diplomatic relations with its last communist ally, China.

The moment of Ottoman invasion is portrayed as the starting moment of the "Asianization" of Albania and the Balkan Peninsula. In a poem about the defeat of the Balkan Christian coalition at the hands of the Ottomans in the Battle of Kosova (1389), Kadare writes: "Alas, the Balkans dawned as Europe and set as Asia"²⁰. Through the above mentioned character of the Catholic priest, Kadare presents the Turkish invasion as arresting the development of Albania according to European History. This is what is written in the diary of the priest about certain Albanian princes who became vassals to the Turks:

The Turk did not touch them. Nothing had changed, except one thing, which seemed small, trivial... It had to do with the date at the top of letters. Instead of the year 1379, they, in accordance to the Islamic calendar - and this was one of the few demands of the Ottomans - had written: hijri 757. They were so miserable! They had turned the clock back six hundred years and still laughed and joked. What a horror!²¹

Next comes the moment of uprising, Skanderbeg's period, best captured by Kadare in the novel *Kështjella* [The Castle], which tells about an Albanian castle surrounded by an Ottoman army. One unnamed Albanian fighter, who in the novel is the narrator of the Albanian side of the story, at one point stands at the walls of the castle, looks down at the enemy camp and says: "Below us lies Asia with all its mysticism and barbarism. We looked at that dark sea and thought that that was their world, their way of life that they wanted to bring upon us, along with the chains of servitude"²². This topic parallels the self-image of communist socialist Albania in the twentieth century: a castle surrounded by capitalism and revisionism. This was continually repeated in the speeches made by communist leader Enver Hoxha:

We must always bear in mind that the strategy of the capitalist, imperialist, social-imperialist and revisionist states has been constantly against Albania.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

²⁰ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 1 [Literary Works, vol. 1]*, Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 320.

²¹ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 8 [Literary Works, vol. 8]*, Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 230.

²² Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 4 [Literary Works, vol. 4]*, Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 51.

Even more so, now and in the future they are and will be hostile to our country, as the only country where scientific socialism is being faithfully built according to the great Marxist-Leninist principles²³.

Like Skanderbeg 500 years ago, Albania was rejecting and opposing Asian barbarism, even if the latter was now wearing the mantle of the first and greatest revolutionary state in the world. By upholding the true principles of Marxism-Leninism, Albanian communists were showing to the whole world that they were continuing on the path opened by European Enlightenment and the Russian Revolution. In 1965, Enver Hoxha would proclaim:

Our small people, with its glorious past, which astonished the whole world by defending European civilization for 25 years from the Ottoman hordes under our legendary hero Skanderbeg, after getting rid of invaders during the World War II, under the guidance of the Party of Labor is now working for the prosperity of the country²⁴.

Skanderbeg's resistance is followed by half a millennium of Ottoman rule. For Kadare this is the moment of darkness, which he illustrates using the story of Haxhi Milet, a messenger from Istanbul who brings half a million chadors and veils to cover up the body and faces of all the women and girls in Albania. In an essay centered on the motif of resistance in Albanian folklore, Kadare claims that

The Turkish invasion is the biggest material and spiritual catastrophe for Albanians in our entire history. It is the heaviest drama ever experienced by the Albanian. It was not only the invasion. It was much more, much deeper, much graver, and much more irreparable than that. The whole world was overturned, with its castles, borders, freedom, economy, worldview, language, mores, and art. It was the apocalypse in the exact meaning of the word²⁵.

Kadare sees nothing positive in the cultural influences from the Ottoman period. He borrows the Marxist vocabulary of base and superstructure to characterize the Albanian-Turkish cultural relations of the time: Turkish culture acted as part of the superstructure of invasion, while the Albanian people developed its folklore to resist foreign Asiatic influences.

His poetic world was a powerful defense against the Islamic superstructure, against that unparalleled cultural barbarism, obscurantism and Oriental

²³ Enver HOXHA, *Selected Works*, vol. 6. Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1987, p. 730.

²⁴ Enver Hoxha, *Letra të zgjedhura 1* [Selected Letters, vol. 1], Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1985, p. 129-130.

²⁵ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 12* [Literary Works, vol. 12], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, pp. 146-147.

ignorance that plagued our country like a scourge... Never before has our people been in such a different spiritual and ideological world, which was incredibly alien and remote. The art of this world, its philosophy, songs, verses, melodies, costumes, colors, spirit and everything else was unacceptable to the Albanian people, all these were hostile, pale and on a lesser level than the Albanian world. It was only natural that Albanians would strive to erect an impassable spiritual barrier between them and the invader²⁶.

The moment of dawn in Kadare's historical works can be traced to the novel *Pashallëqet e mëdha* (*The Great Pashalics*). The central topic is the last days of Ali Pasha, the famous ruler of Southern Albania in late 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. To a large extent, Ali Pasha followed an independent political course from the sultan, until the latter got alarmed at the pasha's intentions and sent a large army to crush him. In his novel, Kadare has Ali Pasha dreaming of being a new Skanderbeg for the Albanian people. But in the eyes of his people, over whom he ruled as a cruel despot, he could not be that leader they were waiting for.

And people murmured that Skanderbeg was one of the greatest men of European Renaissance, not only because he was a great strategist, but mainly because he undertook a new kind of action in his time: the successful uprising of a state against a super-state. And this, according to them, was not only a big idea, but a universal one. By contrast, he, Ali Pasha, had risen up against the sultan emperor not for a great idea, but for material interests and misty ideas²⁷.

According to Kadare, although Ali Pasha desired independence, he was not ready to abandon his Oriental ways, he only thought of himself alone and wanted to be an Oriental ruler of Albania. That is why the Albanian people did not support him, and left him to face the sultan alone. If Skanderbeg was determined to stand up for European civilization, the same cannot be said of Ali Pasha, who, in Kadare's portrayal of him, remains until the end a part of the Orient.

The last moment of Albanian-Turkish relations portrayed in the works of Kadare is the moment of deliverance. At last, Albania wins independence and the patriots carry out the last fight against the pro-Turkish faction, which is portrayed by Kadare as anarchic, Islamic, backward and sexually perverse. This Albanian Oriental faction, composed of the dregs of society and supported by dervishes, want to keep Albania in Asia and put a stop to its embracing Europe²⁸.

²⁶ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 12* [*Literary Works, vol. 12*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 14.

²⁷ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 9* [*Literary Works, vol. 9*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 103.

²⁸ Ismail KADARE, *Viti i mbrapshtë* [*The Dark Year*], Tiranë: Onufri, 2003 [1985].

The Ottoman Empire represents the Other for Albanian national identity, the Oriental mirror of the one of the oldest European nations. In this respect, Kadare's historical novels lie within the Orientalist tradition started by the Albanian National Awakening. But, to his mind, the Ottoman Empire is the quintessence of Asiatic despotism and barbarism. As part of an imagistic strategy similar to that of nesting Orientalisms, Kadare uses the Ottoman Empire as a mold for representing the Soviet and Chinese "revisionists". Orientalist tropes are employed in Kadare's major novels to portray Khrushchev's Soviet Union and Mao Tse-Tung's China, where both leaders are held responsible by Enver Hoxha for adulterating the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism, whose only true bearer in Europe Albania remained. By betraying Marxism-Leninism, the "revisionists" have turned away from the path of reason, Enlightenment, and progress, and have become backward. To communist Albania, the pressure exerted by Khrushchev to follow his new political course looked no different than the threats of previous empires, which the country had survived. No surprise then that, to the poet, the sickle on the Soviet flag resembles the Turkish crescent²⁹. Indeed, in the novel *Muzgu i perëndive të stepës* (*The Twilight of the Steppe Gods*), based on his own experience as a literature student in Moscow, Kadare narrates in the first person how the whole atmosphere in the fatherland of socialism betrays a return to Oriental despotism. The dawn of day in the first and biggest socialist country seems to be the beginning of Oriental darkness, which the narrating student, Kadare's alter ego, calls by the Turkish word *aksham*, meaning "evening" (*aksham* is the Albanian spelling of the Turkish word *akşam*):

Aksham, - I thought, - what a marvelous word! Tonight is just *aksham*. It is not evening, nor *soir*, still less *vechar*, but it is *aksham*. *Aksham* over the frozen Russian steppes, over the telephone of the night-watchman, over the cities, kolkhozes, the memories of the civil war, snow, over the Soviets of the sixteen republics. *Aksham* over the most expansive state in the world³⁰.

Similar tropes are employed by Kadare in his novel about the Albanian-Chinese political rift, *Koncert në Fund të Dimrit* (*The Concert at the End of the Winter*). One of the central characters is Mao Tse-Tung himself, who, together with his wife, Jiang Qing, is planning the Sinicisation of the whole world, so they can become its rulers. Maoism is presented by Kadare as the opium that will intoxicate the peoples of the world. As long as Albania stands as the only European ally of communist China, the couple plans to use it as a base to make Europe's brain drowsy, i.e. the locus of the world's reason; "If you

²⁹ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 2* [*Literary Works, vol. 2*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 214.

³⁰ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 10* [*Literary Works, vol. 10*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 263.

benumb Europe, then you have benumbed the whole world. The brain of Europe is the worst”³¹. Mao wants to succeed where the Ottomans had failed. Albania would be “the first European country to be Sinicised”, to be followed by other countries, and this would be the “first colossal victory of Asia over Europe. The millennial revenge”³². If one looks for a Marxist reasoning or strategy in this plan, one searches in vain, because the true inspiration for Mao is not Marx, but Genghis Khan. His intention is not to build something new, but to destroy, erase everything that European reason has created³³. But Enver Hoxha, the protagonist of the novel, unmasks Mao Tse-Tung’s evil plan and saves the country and the whole of Europe from the threat coming from Asia under the guise of the Maoist revolutionary doctrine. Albania was once again serving Europe by keeping Asian barbarism at arm’s length.

The internal Orientalism in Kadare’s work is present in the passages where the author tries to give his readers the impression that the landowners and Muslim clerics collaborated with the foreign enemies of the people, and that they were reactionaries who opposed the historical progress that communism stands for. The beys in his novels despotically rule the peasants, while Muslim clerics are ignorant bigots. In the novel *Kronikë në gur* [*Chronicle in Stone*], which is about the life of an Albanian city in the midst of World War II, one dervish, Ibrahim, sees from the top of a minaret the partisans entering the city and screams “I don’t want to see communism”, then tries to blind himself with a nail. Some people passing by climb the minaret and manage to stop him, but not to bring him down. He stays there and starts to sing an old religious hymn³⁴. To give another example of how Kadare intertwines different motifs in his narrative, there is another meaningful episode, in the novel *Nëntori i një kryeqyteti* (*The November of a Capital City*). At the center of the novel is a company of Albanian partisans during the battle for the liberation of Tirana in November 1944. At one point, they are attacking an immobile tank, which the German soldiers have turned into a makeshift bunker to control the main streets of the city. In the middle of the shooting, one of the partisans, Sherif Golemi, thinks that the bunker resembles a crippled bey in his village who terrorized everyone in his household with a long cane decorated with Arabic inscriptions. Whenever the tank shoots against the partisans, Sherif imagines the crippled bey striking with his Arabic cane³⁵. With this image, Kadare combines the war of liberation with class warfare against

³¹ Ismail KADARE, *Koncert në fund të dimrit* [*Concert at the end of the winter*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1988, p.124.

³² *Ibidem*, pp. 55-56.

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 123-124.

³⁴ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 5* [*Literary Works, vol. 5*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 203.

³⁵ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 6* [*Literary Works, vol. 6*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, pp. 15-18.

the old classes. Both the Nazis and the beys are oppressors of the people. The instrument and the symbol of the despotic and patriarchal crippled bey is the cane, while the Arabic letters on it remind the reader that the class of landowners belongs to the Oriental world. The destruction of the “crippled” enemy tank means the destruction of the old world and the building of a New Albania.

In his major novels, *Dimri i madh* (*The Great Winter*) and *Koncert në fund të dimrit* (*Concert at the End of Winter*), Kadare has the survivors of the old deposed classes, talking among themselves, express the hope that the “revisionists” would win in the struggle. A character in both novels, an old woman called Nurihan, who in the previous social system had been a rich lady from a powerful family, blesses Siberia³⁶ and the Gobi desert³⁷ for generating the Eastern wind that will sweep out the Albanian ruling communists. Paradoxically, the members of the former bourgeois class are among China’s fervent supporters. This is explained by the character Ekrem Fortuzi, who has learned the difficult Chinese language: “A West in socialist clothes would be truer to us... Maybe we would not like the West any more, we now are old and we have changed, we are not fit for authentic Europe... Our only chance were the Chinese”³⁸. With this turncoat travesty of the old classes, Kadare hints at the idea that the communists in Albania are defending the true European civilization, whereas the old classes, who had served the Turk before and now sided with the “revisionists” communist elites in the Soviet Union and China, betrayed the cause of world revolution.

Kadare’s work proves that Orientalism was present in the intellectual output during the communist regime in Albania. Of course, the ‘imperialist West’ remained a much despised entity in official communist discourse, but one could find in the latter positive references to European enlightened revolutionary traditions, a heritage the Albanian communists claimed to belong to. If, in the national resistance tradition of Albanians, Communism and revolution was progressive, then the Turks, the Soviet and Chinese revisionists, and the representatives of the old classes were the enemy and they were often portrayed using Orientalist strategies and themes.

Discussion and Conclusions

Intellectuals in different periods of Albania’s modern history have conceptualized the modernization of Albania as an escape from the East and a movement towards the West/Europe. During the National Awakening, the “significant

³⁶ Ismail KADARE, *Vepra letrare 7* [*Literary Works, vol. 7*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1981, p. 25.

³⁷ Ismail KADARE, *Koncert në fund të dimrit* [*Concert at the end of the winter*], Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1988, p. 310.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 652-653.

Other” of Albanian national identity became “the Turk”, the barbarian and Asian invader who was to blame for the regress that the ancient European nation of Albanians had undergone under its rule. In the interwar period, when the Albanian state achieved a relative stability, the intellectuals called for overcoming the effects of Oriental rule. They identified the struggle for the modernization of the state and society as a struggle between “Occidentals” and “Orientals.” Communist Albania presented itself as a modernizing country that had radically broken with past class society. Despite the fact that the “West” was the bourgeois and imperialist world, the Orientalist strategies served the purpose of ‘othering’ those elements of history, especially in the Ottoman period, against which to create the image of the “New Albanian Man.” Along Albania’s lonely road towards socialism, Orientalism proved to be a useful cultural strategy to be employed against Russian and Chinese revisionism, as was the case with the literary products of Ismail Kadare. While Communist Albania was on the same track as European Renaissance and Enlightenment, and moving ahead towards the future, Russian and Chinese communists were regressing towards the Oriental despotism of the past.

Since the democratic revolution of 1990-1991, Albanian identity has been reshaped by the work of intellectuals in the new context of transition to capitalism and liberal democracy. In contemporary discourse, the transition is believed to include the period between the fall of communism and the integration of the country into the European Union (EU). In the dominant political and intellectual discourse, integration in the EU is considered as a *telos* of historical progress, a view that is also encouraged by the EU bureaucracy in Brussels.

The majority of public intellectuals have been looking at European integration of Albania within an identitarian framework. They describe Albanians as an ancient people of European stock who have always wished to be a part of Europe and Western civilization. The blame for Albania’s exclusion from Western development for many centuries is laid upon a number of “Eastern” others, both outside and inside Albanian society. Ottoman rule is still taken as the most “Oriental” period of the country’s history and serves as a standard against which to judge the subsequent history of the Albanian state. In this respect, contemporary Albanian Orientalism is the continuation of that of previous periods, but with the important difference that the Communist period is included in the category of “East” as well. Now the ‘East’ is the thread that links the Ottoman Empire with the failed communist modernization of the country. The Turks, Russians, Chinese and Albanian communists are treated together as part of an “Eastern” front that has striven to detach Albania from the West.

Another distinctive feature of contemporary Albanian Orientalism is the emphasis on Islam as a new danger, reflecting the global atmosphere created after 9/11 and the “war on terror”. During Communism, Islam, alongside Albania’s other religious traditions, was considered as a tradition of bigotry and as a propagator of ignorance, against which communism had to educate

the atheistic “New Man”. Only after the fall of Communism did Islam assume the role of the substitute “Other” with which Albanian society had to struggle. Although freedom of religious practice has been re-established in Albania, still a major part of intellectuals consider Islam, with its public rituals and practices, as strange, exotic, “Asiatic”, ignorant, backward, a breach of secularism and religious tolerance, and for some, even as a possible bridge for bringing terrorism to Europe. They argue that, at a time of ‘clash of civilizations’, Islam is pulling Albania toward the East. Some intellectuals often describe Islam in Albania as the religion of invasion, based on the fact that the Islamization of Albanians occurred during Ottoman rule. By insinuation, the “true” religion of Albanians is thought to be Christianity, especially Catholicism, mainly because, in their eyes, it links Albanian history and culture with that of Western Europe.

This concern with the “Eastern” identification of Albania was raised once more in the recent polemic between two of the most distinguished Albanian intellectuals, writer Ismail Kadare and Kosovar writer and scholar Rexhep Qosja. The polemic in press articles lasted for several months in 2006, and nearly all public intellectuals of Albania, Kosova, Macedonia, and the diaspora got involved. All this started when Ismail Kadare expressed his concern that, just as Albania was signing the opening of the Association and Stabilization Agreement with the EU, some intellectuals, among them Rexhep Qosja, were talking about Albanian identity being divided in half between West and East. The truth, according to him, is that “Albanians are among the oldest peoples on the European continent, a founding people within its frame”³⁹. According to him, the Ottomans wanted to destroy the European culture of Albanians, because their aim was the destruction of all of Europe, but they did not succeed⁴⁰. The Oriental culture of the invaders could not erase the essential Europeanism of Albanian culture. On the contrary, the Albanians, together with the other Balkan people, were the agents of Europeanizers in the midst of the Ottoman Empire: “Destiny demanded of the Balkan peoples, among them the Albanians, without they or Europe being aware of it, to be Europe’s commandos at the heart of the Ottoman world. As such, they have always been, albeit painfully, at the roots of Europe”⁴¹.

Contemporary Albanian Orientalism, as is the case with Orientalism in general, is based on binary, homogenizing and essentializing concepts that cannot serve to adequately understand the complex political and social dynamics of Albania, and offers but a poor understanding of the contemporary world context. After a long isolation, Albanian society is open to a myriad influences, something which was unimaginable two or three decades ago, when official doctrine froze cultural and ideological issues in a fixed state.

³⁹ Ismail KADARE, *Identiteti evropian i shqiptarëve* [The European Identity of Albanians], Tiranë: Toena, 2006, p. 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 24-25.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

Orientalism cannot provide an answer to the challenges of a globalizing world, given the fact that an opening towards a part of the world and a hermetic closing towards another part is simply not possible. It is true, as explained above, that Orientalism is a constitutive part of imagining Albanian modern identities, but, as Michel Foucault reminds us, to live in modernity must mean, especially in the case of intellectuals, ascribing to an ethos or “philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and at the same time the historical analysis of the limit imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them”⁴². Emancipatory work in the cultural sphere means engaging the boundaries of existing national and other collective identities in order to enlarge them towards more inclusive communities.

Albania provides an interesting case for the study of Orientalism, because it proves that Orientalism is primarily a cultural discourse that persists in various contexts and has neither fixed geography, nor any fixed subjects and objects. Edward W Said originally meant Orientalism to be a representation of the colonial peoples by European powers, an academic knowledge and cultural imaginary interlinked with systems of colonial domination, but he warned that Orientalism is not synonymous with colonialism. It can also be employed in the absence of colonial experience even within Europe, as Balkan nesting Orientalisms attest, or it can be used to designate groups or traditions within a state or society. Indeed, the only stable features of Orientalist discourse are the two opposing signifiers, “West” and “East”, around which a series of other binary oppositions are arranged.

⁴² Michel FOUCAULT, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, vol. 1, New York: The New Press, 1997, p. 319.