

THE EUROPEANIZATION OF THE ALBANIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE IDENTITY DEBATE OF ISMAIL KADARE *VERSUS* REXHEP QOSJA

Lecturer **Hazbi LIKA**¹

Abstract

Debates and discussions on the national identity of Albanians, respectively the civil belonging of this identity, has its genesis since the period of the Albanian National Renaissance. At that period of time, the Albanian Renaissance's representatives faced the civil belonging's dilemma of the Albanian nation. This, because of the fact that Albanians had a nation, culture and language that belonged to Europe, but under five centuries of occupation of the Ottoman Empire were endowed with Oriental-Ottoman features and characteristics in many aspects of identity, culture, language, mentality, religion, etc. The western identity orientation of the Albanian renaissancers did not end the debate on Albanian civic belonging. Such debates continued throughout the twentieth century and continue to this day. Such is the debate between the most famous Albanian writer Ismail Kadare and the iconic scholar of Albanian culture Rexhep Qosja. This paper sets out and analyzes the views of these two predominantly Albanian intellectuals, the clash of these views, addresses the arguments of each and interprets them from a more objective perspective, including in the paper the views of other Albanian and foreign scholars and contributors to this cultural and identity debate that continues in Albanian society to this day. Being Kadare and Qosja the most influential intellectuals of the Albanian culture, the treatment of such a debate becomes of scientific importance.

Keywords: Albanian, national identity, culture, europeanization.

JEL Classification: H83, K10, K33

1. Introduction

In the 2000s, the politician and publicist Abdi Baleta, together with the historian, professor at the University of Tirana, Hysamedin Ferraj, were the first to appear in public and diversify the opinion of their colleagues, building another discourse about our historical identity. They defended their theses by strongly asserting that Albania was built on a historical land with an Islamic-Oriental base. There were sporadic reactions at the time, but since these two protagonists and those who opposed them did not have such a high public profile, many things were said in the newspaper "Rimekembja" that was little known, but widely read.

The debate did not get so big. When it seemed that this debate was fading, it suddenly flared up strongly at the moment when two high-profile public figures, one academic and scholar in Kosovo and Albania, the other the most famous writer of Albanian literature, strongly argued about historical identity of Albanians. This debate was provoked by the writer Ismail Kadare, when he wrote the essay "European Identity of Albanians" published by "Onufri" in 2006. Qose, the academic and scholar of the history of Albanian literature, had his response in the trilogy: "Neglected Reality"; "Ideology of Dissolution"; and "Delayed Truths," published by Toena in 2006. These essays provoked a wide public debate where the approach to Europe began to be thought more deeply and diversified, and in this logic, theories on the historical identity of Albanians would be enriched.

The essence of the debate between these two figures and those involved in it, is: Kadare's thesis is that Europe has a cultural identity of its own based on Western Christianity, and Albanians, in this view, are European.

Qosja claims that Albanians have deep roots in European Christianity, but Albanian identity is complemented for centuries by Eastern Christianity and later by the Islamic Religion. Kadare identifies our cultural identity only with Western European Christianity, while he sees Islam as a deformer of our cultural gene, as "a foreign body" that caused our organism just anomalies. Qosja finds the subject of historical identity composed of three components: Western Christianity, Eastern Christianity and Oriental Islam.

The essence of this debate took on media dimensions, involving many personalities of

¹ Hazbi Lika - lecturer at "Aleksandër Moisiu University" of Durrës, Albania, hazbil@yahoo.com.

Albanian history and culture and some politicians. Historian Kristo Frashëri rose above this debate by calling both incapable of giving scientific definitions on issues of identity, as neither one nor the other belong to this field.²

Kristo Frashëri, first of all, excludes religion as an important element of cultural identity and rarely accepts it as such an element. Only in cases when this religion reflects ethnic sentiments, such as to Poles and Irish, where being Catholic further complements their ethnic identity. In his controversy; "The shortcomings of the Qose-Kadare debate", Frashëri defends the view that the European continent does not have a defined cultural and civic identity. It consists of a variety of national, cultural and civic identities, none of which can represent the cultural and civic identity of the continent. Even in this case, the cultural and civic identity of each European nation is in relation to what would be the European cultural identity, as part of the whole.

In short, Europe as a continent has no real cultural and civic identity. If from this point of view we have to talk about a genuine European cultural and civic identity, - says Frashëri - we have to ask for this in the absence of a genuine European identity.

Pëllumb Xhufi, historian and diplomat, speaks about this debate. Although he is careful not to offend anyone, he actually attacks Kadare's opinion: "What I would expect most in such a debate would be for it to develop as far away as possible from ideas like those of Samuel Huntington, the author of the evil theory of the "Clash of civilizations," which for some has become the ideology of our days. It seems to me that to some extent, Kadare has also fallen prey to such ideas, so in his recent writings a kind of complex stands out, when with a well-intentioned passion he tries to discover the Christian roots of Albanians and, possibly, to cover any other root, "which is not in vogue" today."

Further, Xhufi again disagrees with Kadare's opinion, and does not consider it as Qose considers it: a neglected reality. But he advances more, defining it as a raped reality. "So, to say that Albanians have a Christian identity, turns violence against reality, because among them there are both Christians and Muslims, without forgetting the large number of non-believers (atheists).

I judge, however, that Kadare's reasoning (my note) is only partially consistent with the truth. Despite good intentions, in a sense, they can contribute to take us away from reality, to aggravate us with non-existent complexes. For example like the Muslim component of our being, and ultimately the risk of orienting us in the right direction to false goals, such as those to put Albanians in a spiritual and cultural "purgatory", thus deserving of Europe, wrongly conceived as a Christian club. It seems to me that Prof. Qosja deeply knows and respects this reality, warning with patriotic courage and responsibility for the dangers that come with ignoring or distorting it."³

Luan Rama, writer, diplomat and politician, claims that religion has no important role in the formation of national identity nor determinant, but it is simply an element of the culture of a nation. "To say that the identity of Albania is related to Christianity, which means to the West, is not a wrong expression. It is even realistic and very historical. "It is different to say it is 'connected,' and it is different to identify with Christianity or another religion".⁴

Rama says that the history of Albania is related to Western Christianity, but not to be identified with Christianity. In a way, this also attacks Kadare's assertion.

Paskal Milo, politician and historian, participates in this debate and expresses his views on the issue. "As a historian, I value the national identity of Albanians, as a product of historical development. The Europeanization of a nation is obviously not determined by any religion, because ethnicity is determined primarily by the historical geography of a nation, by the historical location of this nation, by economic factors, by linguistic factors and certainly also by religious factors. But religion is by no means the only criterion or main indicator to determine the national or even European identity of a nation, in this case the Albanian nation. Albanians are a European nation in terms of their historical geography in the first place, but they are also a nation with oriental Islamic influences due to a very long or five-century occupation of the Ottoman Empire. We cannot undo this historical

² Kristo Frashëri, "The shortcomings of Qose- Kadare debate" published in the press, Year 2006.

³ P. Xhufi; "Tirana Observer" Newspaper, 2006.

⁴ L. Rama, Newspaper 01.05.2006.

fact. Whether we like it or not, these centuries have left in the consciousness and in the national formation of the Albanians an indelible influence, which has gradually decreased, but still remains a tangible reality".⁵

Arbën Xhaferri, a politician and political scientist, also becomes part of the debate and gives his opinion on national identity. He considers religion important for the formation of national identity. "People who do not have a national identity try to invent it through religion, politics or geographical affiliation. According to an unwritten historical rule, national identity forms the nation-state, while religious identity forms supranational states, the so-called integralist ones".⁶

Although he does not fully acknowledge it, he somehow acknowledges that religion itself has attempted to produce a certain national identity. "People who do not have a national identity tend to invent it through religion." With this, A. Xhaferri affirms that religion is a resource that potentially also produces national identity. Xhaferri further acknowledges that peoples have multiple identities, but in certain contexts the same identity prevails over other identities. "Every person and every nation has a set of identities: national, religious, regional, tribal, etc. The problem arises when the dominant identity that takes precedence over other sub-identities must be determined."⁷

Whereas the researcher, Ardian Klosi, is skeptical of the notion of the nation itself, considering it as an invention from above, a coded political message that has been taught to us through books and completely excludes the religious component as an integral element of identity. Man feels within himself the father and the mother, the language and the world of his childhood, the knowledge he has acquired and the world of dreams - he does not feel any "nation". The nation, as we know, is an invention of the 18th-19th centuries. It is therefore a unit that has been taught to us externally by ideologues, teachers and scholars, It is not natural internally. Well, the absurdity of looking for a religious component that goes as far as half of our identity as Albanians is clear, as Qosja implicitly and openly says."⁸

The researcher Aurel Plasari, in his work "The Abduction of Europe" claims that Europe has an identity of its own and connects this with Christianity in general. Plasari goes even further when referring to the poet and thinker Paul Valery in his essay entitled: "La crise de l'esprit" accepted to some extent as the European Manifesto. According to Valerie: "Europe exists where the influence of the Christian faith, of the Latin world and of Hellenic literature prevails".⁹

So according to him: neither the Greek world alone, nor the Latin world alone, without Christianity, could not constitute Europe.

Plasari does not leave aside without quoting the German poet, Goethe: "What unites Europe is culture and what divides it are political ideas." Plasari goes so far as to consider the founders of the United Europe as politicians and thinkers with Christian orientation and faith such as: De Kasperin, Adenauer, Schuman, Monnet, Speaak.

According to Plasari, "it is a fact that for centuries European culture has been inspired by the Holy Spirit and Christian spirituality. The fact that democracy according to the Bergsonian principle has an evangelical essence and has as its driving force its love."¹⁰

Plasari continues on the same line: "Europe is not just a geophysical construct, but first and foremost it is a cultural structure that is sacrificed by the evangelical spirit where it makes Europe have an identity of its own."¹¹

Plasari does not claim how our national identity relates to the history of Christianity and Islam. It only approves the hypothesis put forward by other scholars: "Christianity was made in Europe as a rejection of Islam."¹²

⁵ P. Milo, Newspaper.

⁶ A. Xhaferri "Shqip" Newspaper, 21.05.2006.

⁷ Press.

⁸ <http://www.shekulli.com.al/index.php...p;newsID=95597> (consulted on June 1, 2020). Interview with the publicist Ardian Klosi.

⁹ Aurel Plasari "The abduction of Europe", "55" Publishing House, 2005, p. 80.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 84.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 84.

¹² Ibid, p. 84.

Jürgen Habermas thinks quite differently. In his book, "Oh Europe", Habermas asserts: "Europe today does not have an identity of its own and calls in vain the efforts to create a common European cultural identity, as Europe has neither had nor does have a genuine identity of its own, and if that is what it wants to seek it today when aspiring to this great political project, this would be a semantic blackmail for a number of people who are on the margins of Western European civilization and expresses the belief that the United Europe can very much form a common European opinion and not a a single identity and this is impossible, as it lacks a historical basis."¹³

The scholar Ardian Klosi closely connects Europe with Christianity while placing the Roman and Byzantine empires on the foundations of Christianity.

And as a result, our Albanian history has deep roots in Christianity and presents our life on the road to the nation, as a long effort and battle in the name of Christianity. Skanderbeg and other martyrs who are better known as personalities of Albanian history and culture, are presented by Klosi as martyrs of the religious cause.

"Our national hero Skanderbeg has received August titles of four Popes in the long period of his resistance. A man who is proclaimed "Athleta Christi", after committing a ordeal of 25 years with his people in the name of a faith (not of a nation! My note) can not be born among a nation that is neither so, nor so, or both believer and pagan."¹⁴

In this article, Klosi debates with Kristo Frashëri as Frashëri calls Albanians more as pagan and considers Christianity only as an outer layer that has apparently covered an ancient Helleno-Illyrian civilization. Christianity for the Albanian people, according to Frashëri, is a worn garment that did not fit well with this people with an old Thracian-Illyrian-pagan culture. As if to say: a Christianity that is unique from all European Christianity.

2. Kadare's views on the debate on the European identity of Albanians

The two main protagonists who started the identity's debate were Ismail Kadare and Rexhep Qosja. The reason that Kadare defends the hypothesis for a European identity of Albanians, is that Kadare considers the identity given once and unchanged. "As stated above, nations differ neither in conquests nor in conversions."¹⁵

Kadare directly attacks Qose's hypotheses. According to Kadare, - Qose claims that Albanians belong only by half to the European civilization and they do not have to pretend to be European because "They belong to the Islamic civilization, no less than the Christian civilization." Kadare insists on his hypothesis: "The argument that this fate of the Albanians has been conditioned by various invasions, is completely inappropriate. Most countries of the continent, from Greece to the Baltic countries, have been occupied most of the time, but have not halved their identity. "No one can be so naive as not to realize that a divided identity is a divided nation, and the exclusion of half of our nation from European identity means exclusion from Europe."¹⁶

Kadare identifies these statements of Qose with the sayings of the Serbian Academy of Sciences that try to identify Albanians with Turks from Anatolia, with Muslims, to more easily justify in the eyes of the world the policies of ethnic cleansing. Here Kadare openly states that if we Albanians do not identify as European and rooted in Christianity, we are seriously threatened. This statement may be a politically correct or incorrect statement, but in terms of research it is too poor to meet the scientific consequence of identity. And in this logic, Kadare's assertion is a declarative style, holds populism and conjunctural utilitarianism, completely empty of scientific content. With a simple comparative logic by removing parallels in two times, (monism, democracy), Kadare, in the first (monism) seeks to eradicate every root that connects us to Western civilization, (see the quotations in the works above: "Broken April", "Doruntine", "Europe of kings" etc.

¹³ J. Habermas, "Oh Europe", translated from German, published in Skopje 2011, p. 110.

¹⁴ A. Klosi, *Christianity sui generis?* "Shqip" Newspaper-2006.

¹⁵ I. Kadare, *European Identity of Albanians*, Onufri, 2006, p. 51.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 14-16.

Nowadays, when Albania is politically oriented towards Western Europe, Kadare seeks to find the roots of our culture in the whole extent of European civilization. It places the customary code, Kanun, and Kreshniks Epic in the European cultural arena. "The Albanian customary code, the Kanun, together with the oral poetry, especially the Kreshniks Epic, is naturally part of the European epic areal." Kadare goes on: "in" Saxo Gramaticus" year 1200, one of the founders of cultural Europeanization, whole parts and especially 40 pages where the story of the blood feud of Prince Hamlet is elaborated, to remember the nodes of this code."¹⁷

Kadare, who once rejected everything European because such was the official position of Enver Hoxha, now seeks to connect the knots of our cultural identity with the European epic. And as a result, it produces very categorical definitions with antagonistic impetus to the Ottoman Empire and Islamic civilization.

Paradigms: "A five-centuries night, Asian spiritual aggression on European civilization, barbaric power aimed at escalating Western civilization, etc." diminish the research claim of Kadare's essay, because in simple logic of research, cultures and civilizations are not only exclusive to each other, but rather are raised and held as rejection and agreement with each other.

After placing the Kreshnik Epic in its entirety within the Balkan and European epic, Kadare naturally places our identity in the European cultural identity, and this identity of ours naturally stands above the three faiths and is naturally taking its place. "The identity of the nation, since then naturally took its place over the three main beliefs of the Albanians..."¹⁸

Such definitions may hold up to programmatic and populist rhetoric, but they immediately fall short in the face of research trials. I do not know of any serious scholar who has explored ethnic or European identities and did not have "headaches" because of religions. Also, I will never believe that future scholars will embrace European cultural identity and dare to leave out or excel on Christianity or Islam. Kadare also tries to express the nature of identity and its meaning, by equating it with gender: "Given this, one did not need a philosophy to understand that religions were different, but identity, like gender, always remained the same."¹⁹

Here Kadare relates ethnic identity and nation only as a gender link, as a genealogical construct, not as a social construct made in time, as a product of elites, or as it is commonly called political engineering.

Scholar Ernest Gellner even calls the nation and its identity an imaginary community. To imagine the nation only as a genealogically related tree means to deny the national identity the three important components: the social, cultural and political component as the three main pillars where it is held firmly.

Kadare imagines identity embellished with metaphorical "whims", and lies in the delusion that "I found the missing thing with foolish figuration". "After the withdrawal of the Ottoman state from the peninsula, the war between the tired Albanian identity and its disgusting monstrosity seemed to end soon. Ottoman state no longer had the support of the occupying state, and the Albanian identity, as 'a lion untied by the chain', seemed that, with a leap, it could erase any obstacle that came in front of it."²⁰

Kadare's approach to identity does not fit the cold logic of a scholar to revive the roots of an ethnicity, but the revolutionary heat must be regulated to resurrect the "Shakespeareans of cultural revolution" once again and to suppress with iron and fire every old mindset and prejudice. Everything that comes from the Ottoman Empire is considered by Kadare bad, dirty, like dirty slag that we have to get rid of from our European body. He also calls the poetic product of that period (Bejte literature) as a "literary prostitution". According to him, this literature carries the spirit of the ugliest morality of Ottoman society, where the content of erotic lyrics contains sexual perversion by singing homosexuality and pedophilia.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 23.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 26.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 26.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 31.

The culture that comes from the Ottoman Empire has nurtured and justified the feeling of incest. Kadare has expressed these opinions in other works as well. "The literature of the Bejte people, a kind of mixed Albanian-Turkish dough, was finally broken, like a brick-and-mortar invention of the stately and monumental wall, albeit cold of the tradition of bilingual Albanian-Latin literature. This literature did not have even a bit of normal eroticism, but full of motives of idiots and hypocrites, but this work is more complicated. The so-called erotic literature, in a large part of it, was nothing but praise and praise for pedophilia."²¹

Kadare claimed that this literature as an aesthetic and artistic product of oriental culture, did not stick to the wall of Albanian literature. It was being broken like an adobe by the monumental wall of bilingual Albanian-Latin literature. Kadare is disgusted and polluted for everything that came from the Ottoman world. Even from literature, where Kadare knows better than anyone else, that literatures do not put walls with each other. They were not made to exclude and settle accounts with each other, especially when it is known that Bejte literature brought to Albanian literature special elements of Persian, Arabic literature, which had created a tradition in world literature. And for the sake of truth, Bejte literature was more diverse in subject matter than other previous literatures. Kadare disagrees with Qose and many other scholars who see Albania as a sandwich, a middle ground between East and West. In the logic of this attitude, he considers everything oriental that has fallen on the body of our culture to be dirty pollution, and as such, he must dig up this filthy slag to save our cultural identity as it is only European. As a result, he never agrees with Qose's opinion that Albania is a country that reflects the Orient and the West at the same time. "The completely wrong cliché, of imagining Albania as an intermediary country, a sandwich between East and West, a civilization neither so, nor so. In other words a country of nor-nor, does not do us any honor. First, because it is not true. Secondly, because to covet such a setting, is the same as declaring "half", which in Albanian among other things means "tarallak (idiot)". The idea spread here and there, and unfortunately supported by Qosja that: "Our historical destiny is destined to realize the mitigation of the contradictions between East and West" recalls one of the stains of Albanian history, the nightmare of communist Albania, ostensibly its planetary mission for the protection of Marxism-Leninism."²²

Oliver Schmidt, a scholar who is dealing with important aspects of our history, has published a book: "Albanians, a history between East and West." In the general view of this book, Schmidt sees Albania as made within these two civilizations and the history of the Albanians of relation through many documentary references as a story with the curvature of ups and downs, with its twists and turns in the whole spiral of history.

As a result, he also sees cultural identity as a product of this political behavior, within the framework of powers in an internal process of conservation and adaptation. Kadare, although a writer, identifies cultures with military ideologies. His approach in this essay to what he considers foreign is charged only with an exceptional spirit. According to him, a culture, in order to survive, must completely overthrow the rival in order to save itself, to triumph by exterminating the foreigner, to resurrect the Self by burying the Other.

3. Attitudes of Qose and Oliver Schmidt

Qose seems to easily attack Kadare's theses. Qose, despite the limitations in his controversies, lies in the logic of the researcher. Many of the exceptions are preserved. With the predispositions of the researcher he does not ignore realities that have violently or appropriately conditioned the cultural format of our identity. When he argues with Kadare, he quotes the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis. "Greece's position is truly tragic; the responsibility of today's Greece is overwhelming; it places on our shoulders a dangerous, difficult task. New forces are rising from the East, as well as new forces are rising from the West, and Greece always stands between these two impulses that collide and becomes even more the place of vortices. The West follows the tradition of logic and research, rushes

²¹ Ibid, p. 31.

²² Ibid, p. 56.

to conquer the world. The East, driven by terrible forces of the subconscious, also tries to conquer the world. Greece, between them, the geographical and spiritual crossroads of the world, has the task of reconciling these two great attackers again, achieving their synthesis. Will it be able to? "Holy fortune, terribly bitter."²³

Regardless of whether or not Greece can play the role of conciliator of these great invaders, the writer acknowledges the fact that various civilizations have crossed paths in the history of Greece. The paradigm: "spiritual crucifixion" means that Greek culture is conceived within these civilizations and is made as a synthesis of them.

Kadare often reaffirms: "Religions could be different, but identity, like gender, always remained the same." Here Qosja explodes with the arguments of the researcher and holds to his thesis that religion is not only an important part of identity, but there are cases when it also becomes its determinant.

Qose in defense of his arguments, refers to Huntington's hypothesis "Clash of Civilizations" where the next global conflict will line up groups by religious identities. He continues to attack Kadare in his approach to the concept of general and specific identity.

Here Qose possesses the most numerous research credits and elaborates his theory in the groove of theories that deal with the study of the connections of parts with the whole.

Here his assertion is held that "one possesses within oneself a multiple identity with multiple correlations."

In his essay, Ismail Kadare judges and makes generalizations about identity, not having in mind that we have a special identity and a general identity; personal identity and collective identity; conventional identity and new identity; historical identity and cultural identity; political identity and mental identity; religious identity and state identity. All these identities, which are more or less separate identities, of a narrower plane, are united in a generality, in a whole, which we will call national identity.²⁴

Qose tries to distinguish the European Union as a political concept and European identity as a cultural notion, and according to him, Kadare identifies these two concepts. "It is not difficult to see that he identifies the phrase European identity with the European political project, that is, with the European Union, as a community of European states and people on one hand, and with Christianity, on the other.

"Apart from the European political project, namely the European Union, Ismail Kadare identifies the phrase 'European identity' with Christianity." Kadare, it seems, does not hold the same standards in evaluating religions.

On one hand, he sees Islam as "a foreign body" in our culture, while he places Christianity at the foundation of European civilization, where even Plasari as we quoted above, sees cultural Europe erected in the churchyard. Qose does not leave Kadare "comfortable" even when he calls on geography for help to protect the European identity of Albanians. "Geography, the most stubborn thing in the world, proves first the Albanian Europeanization". Qosja reacts: "Why can it be said that way?" It can be said so, because there are many examples that prove the dethronement of geography in the realm of identity."²⁵

Kadare is right when he says that geography plays a role in determining ethnic identity, but - the most stubborn thing - is exaggerated here, when it is known that after the great geographical discoveries of Christopher Columbus and to this day, the geographical factor has significantly minimized its influence in the ethnic definition. However, examples are not lacking in both cases. Albanologist Oliver Schmidt has studied the history of Albania and has created his approach to ethnic Albanian identity. Schmidt brings many cases in favor of his hypothesis and thinks that religion is a very important element in ethnic composition. "Identity was determined primarily through faith, but awareness of language was also present. In conflicts, it was not ethnicity that mattered, but religion.

²³ Niko Kazantzakis: "Letter to El Greeko", translated by Miço Gubera, "Eugen" Publishing house, 2001.

²⁴ Rexhep Qose "Neglected reality". Toena, 2006.

²⁵ Kadare refers to Qose in the same book, "Neglected reality".

There were many Arvanites who took part in the Greek war against the Ottomans, who sent Albanian Muslims, but also Catholic Mirditors, to break this uprising."

Schmidt mentions several factors that influenced to bring Islam among Albanians. He openly opposes Elvia Çelepiu, who tries to elaborate on his thesis that Islam in the Balkans came in the form of Islam of the Mosque and the orders of the dervishes in the tekke before Constantinople collapsed. The main factors that lined up are: the weakening of the ecclesiastical hierarchy coming from both centers; Vatican and the patriarchates of Istanbul. Albanians, according to the documents that Schmidt tries to prove, have also converted to Islam through coercive forms, from the fiscal policies pursued by the empire towards the people of the Christian faith, and other coercive forms. "Indeed, there are many documents that show transient phenomena; "Often, only male-headed taxpayers have converted, and women have remained Christians."²⁶

And the author gives data from the books of that time that taxpayers recorded. Nevertheless, the Albanians kept secret the worship of Christian figures, and created holy places that turned them into places of popular pilgrimage. There are many Albanian historians who claim that Albanians have embraced Islam very superficially, while Hasan Kaleshi states that Islam is the national religion for Albanians as it protected them from Slavic assimilation.²⁷

There is ample evidence to suggest that pagan and Christian traditions have been more or less preserved, but always under the pressure of Islamic theology. In the areas where a 100% Muslim population currently lives, such as in the area of Kukës, Dibra, Has, and Mat, some special days are commemorated related to the Christian and pagan tradition, such as Schmeiter, Shenkolli, Shemraizi, and the Shëngjergji festival.

Highlighting Shëngjergj that is celebrated, the premises are decorated with flowers, branches, trees, others are just simply commemorated, with rituals in respect of trees. Even these data do not give us enough information to prove that Muslim Albanians really feel a secret respect for the Christian faith and pagan times, or just keep them as nostalgia for an old tradition that is going away? Schmidt disagrees with the opinion of those Albanian historians who in the name of modern Albanian nationalism, preach religious harmony among Albanians.

"Albanians have not been more, but no less religious or tolerant than other people of the Balkans. In the compact Albanian territories, religion was an essential feature of social difference. There has never been a supranational Albanian nation as a political or social actor before the 20th century, but undoubtedly, there have been forms of a sense of belonging to a common language. Before the 19th century, you can hardly distinguish ethnic tensions between Albanians, Greeks, or South Slavs. "The limits of this tension, for a long time, went along with religious affiliation."²⁸

Schmidt creates his approach to two terms: National Movement and Renaissance. He calls both more rhetorical inventions than historical realities. And this view is not only for Albanians, but also for Greeks, Montenegrins, Italians. According to him, this terminology does not prove historical truths but a political discourse in the new geopolitical contexts that were being created due to the weakening of the imperial power of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans.

Even Schmidt goes so far as to question a linear development of history from paramodern to modern structures of nationalism in other European countries as well. "The transition from religious, regional, local, social or professional self-understanding to a mass society of individuals whose primary point is ethnicity, i.e. common language and origin, ideally a nation-state of its own has not been developed mechanically."²⁹

The enlightenment of national consciousness has not proceeded linearly. From this point of view, Schmidt also looks at the Albanian National Movement called Renaissance. "Both of these notions, according to him, are problematic; "National movement" gives the impression of a linear development with a defined objective that includes broad measures, "Renaissance" to mean that the

²⁶ "Neglected reality, p. 131.

²⁷ According to O. Schmidt. *Shqiptarët një histori midis Lindjes dhe Perëndimit*, Guttenberg, Tiranë 2012, p. 133.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 133.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 152.

nation once existed, but ceased to exist. Both are not correct in the Albanian case; nor was there a homogeneous movement with linear development involving an increasing number of people with clear objectives, nor was there a political nation among Albanians before 1912."³⁰

Schmidt does not see the development of national ideas among Albanians as a response to economic and social modernity. In the Ottoman Balkans, technical innovations did not change anything in agriculture and handicrafts. Thus the impetus for a change in the group's consciousness was given by political and military events: the Tanzimat reforms and the Oriental crisis where the Ottoman Empire was catastrophically losing territory in the Balkans. Around 1850, they (Albanians) did not exist as a nation, but were sometimes seen by the Ottoman authorities as "Turks" (ie Muslims), "Greeks", (Orthodox) or "Latins", (Catholics) and that's how they felt the most."³¹

Despite these findings, Schmidt claims that national activists did not invent the Albanian nation out of nothing; Albanians were aware of their uniqueness in a different linguistic environment. Albanians were seen by foreigners, both in the Balkans and in the West, as a separate ethnic community. Schmidt relates the Prizeren connection as such; "The Prizeren League started as a supranational union of Sunnis. In the beginning, this League specifically demanded the non-invasion of the territories of the empire and the reintroduction of Islamic Sharia law, which the representatives of the few Christians (only 5 out of 38) accepted after exerting pressure on them. National ideas found a place in the League program later with the mediation of activists coming from Southern Albania. Until 1912, the national ideology found support only in the multi-ethnic region of Manastir and in a small group of educated Albanian Muslims."³²

Again Schmidt continues to stick to his thesis that the Albanian national ideology, after the 1900s was performed in non-Sunni communities. The Sunni community's ties to Islamic doctrine and the sultan's power had significantly weakened ethnic sentiment. The Catholic environment in Shkodra, the Orthodox and Bektashi in the South, created a healthy climate to promote the national idea. Even the alphabets used before 1900 were identified with the respective religious communities. The Arabic alphabet of the Muslims, the Greek alphabet of the Orthodox, and the Latin alphabet of the Catholics.

The 1908 Manastiri's Congress was held under pressure from the Muslim clergy and the Ottoman Empire, and under this pressure the Latin alphabet was adopted. These data prove that the groups in Albania at that time were identified more in the religious line than the ethnic one. A prominent figure of that period, Eqerem Bey Vlora, is a symbol of that man who harmonized within his personality, the Ottoman, the nationalist, and the intellectual with a western vision.

All these contradictions of the time held together in his figure. This person testified that the Albanian environment was developing its nationalism with these opposing feelings, to come to 1920 through a process of rejection and reconciliation intertwined.

According to Schmidt, until 1912, the Albanian environment in cultural and ethnic terms showed a map with divisions where religious aspirations often moved ethnic divisions, and after 1912 the barbaric threats and invasions of the Serbian Orthodox in the North, and the Greek's in the South, constituted more the ethnic Albanian unit. Although before 1912 Albanian groups were identified more with religious than linguistic and ethnic sentiment, after 1920 with the establishment of the first Albanian state began to constitute the ethnic elements of the modern Albanian nation-state on religious divisions.

Ahmet Zogu, an Ottoman nobleman from the Mati parish in 1925, heads the state to lead. Despite labeling by opponents; sometimes as a "gangster in boots" and sometimes as a "great reformer" of the oriental Albanian society, referring to the facts, as president and then as king, he took austerity measures and made demonstrative gestures to show that he was orienting the state and society from the West. After removing the Ottoman cover from the state, he began to improve elements of the content as well.

³⁰ Ibid, p.152.

³¹ Ibid, p. 156.

³² Ibid, p. 159.

Although that time he was persecuted with the given epithets; "Oriental unfaithful man (dallkawk)", "Anatolian ruler", "Asian despot", etc., he legally formed the state in a western way. From a cultural point of view he implicated secular theories of secularism in the functioning of the state. He proclaimed the constitutional monarchy giving it such a cautious legal performance that it looked only Western, regardless of the way it ruled. It abolished sharia as the normative legacy of the Islamic state with an Islamic foundation and replaced it with the civil code. Not in repressive ways, but with persuasive preaching he continued the work of removing the veils, and made symbolic gestures by exposing his sisters, no longer in all-Turkish dress, closed some Madrasahs, Orthodox and Catholic schools and increased state control over religious communities in Albania.

In so many things that Schmidt mentions about the Albanian environment it shows that until 1912 the map of Albania in the Balkan environment was configured more with the lines of religious division than ethnic. This conclusion shows that religion has been an essential element in identifying ethnic groups. The aim of this study is not to verify in what forms religions have spread in the Balkans and mainly in the Albanian environment, but to prove that religion is or is not an element of ethnic identity. And these data provided by Schmidt, come as evidence that the nation is a nineteenth-century invention that was implemented by political means from above, certainly based on ethnic sentiments overcoming religious differences.

4. Conclusions

If we look carefully, the panorama of debates to formulate national identity in this chapter, in the period that includes the democratic transition where it begins after the 1990s onwards, shows two different and often contradictory lines. One line is defended by Kadare, almost alone, Plasari is approaching to some extent. The other line, Rexhep Qosja, is coherent in his hypotheses and in some things approximates to most of the colleagues who participated in this debate. Essential in this division is that Kadare and Plasari equate Europe with Christianity. Plasari ends it here, while Kadare advances further by identifying our national identity with Europe due to its deep roots in Christianity. Qose and his colleagues who took part in this debate acknowledge the fact that our national identity has deep roots in Western Christianity, but the content of our identity has been complemented through Eastern Christianity and the Islamic religion. They argue this with the fact that the 500-year Ottoman occupation is a historical reality and reconciled Albanians with Islam. To deny this, according to Qose, is "Neglected Reality", while other colleagues called it "Violated Reality". Plasari considers Cultural Europe only as a rejection of Islam, and according to him, both classical and modern Europe have been erected inside the churchyard. Kadare perceives Europe built on the foundations of Western Christianity and specifically as a rejection of Islam, but Kadare goes even further, calling our people as a purely European people that has remained such only as a rejection of Islam.

Kadare, when writing his philological essays before the 1990s with research premises, whether as literature or as an essay, did not find any thin thread connecting our nation with Europe, and even more with Western Christianity.

Kristo Frashëri is not held in any group, as it excludes religious elements in defining ethnic identity. The approaches we offered in this study showed that in the formation of national identities, several factors have a determining role; historical, linguistic, geographical, etc., but it is difficult to find ethnicity with cultural identity, to have reached the borders of the national without passing the test of religion. All other factors can be mistakenly misunderstood or exaggerated in their evaluation, but only religion is difficult to ignore. Especially when religion is the religion of emperors and has created cultural imperialism within a dimension of time and space by rising as a secular ideology with a civic mission.

Thus, Western, Eastern Christianity, as well as Islam, regardless of how they arose, origins, etc., have historically retained the power of civilizations³³. This means that these civilizations, from

³³ Wendt, A., 'Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, p. 402.

the cultural point of view (not always, because they have protected the ethnicity from assimilation), but in general, have shown unifying tendencies to "subdue" ethnic differences, so religion has aimed more to weaken the nation state and build integralist states, or suppress nations to become international.

From the political point of view, they have communicated humanity with their own way of administration, while from the social point of view, they have instructed the social behavior towards that system of values or anti-values that they have raised themselves or sold as their own. Seen in this perspective, man as an emotional, mental and social subject, was the cultural product of this environment and its whole meaning, i.e. sensory and mental understanding of the world, would be confined within the doctrinal inquisition of religion. In the periods when religion dominated the whole hierarchy of values, it is not that religion preached only the spirit of God on earth, but also created social cohesion by consolidating religious ethnicities with sociological premises. This power was possessed by a civilization when it arose as such, as the usurper of all the components of human life. Seen from this point of view, where should Albanians have kept it when they met Christianity and later Islam? According to Kadare before the 1990s and some others who adhere to this theory, the Albanians were "Konstandin" (the character; "Doruntina") isolated in the mountains to preserve national identity outside the intoxications brought by foreign urban cultures.

According to this theory, only the virgin life of our mountains became the cradle where he raised and educated the values of our national culture. After the 90s, Kadare came up with another theory, completely opposite to what he had preached until yesterday: simply European nation. And specifically a writer who has always promised a philological standard in his work, empties all this knowledge by going over 500 years of Albanian history, just to find Europe through Christianity. So, according to Kadare, Albanians are European, because they have deep roots in Western Christianity. How does Kadare himself overturn this theory that had invested all his philological knowledge before the 90s? Kadare begins to rebuild national identity by keeping to today's political conjunctures. Given that before the 90s Kadare had incomparable protagonism with his colleagues in preaching the historical identity of Albania, of course according to the official discourse, today he has lost that status of protagonist. He believes that he alone would regain this protagonism to become the vanguard of today's official discourse by sticking our nation in the head and head in Christianity only through the rejection of Islam. And according to this theory, Albanians will deserve Europe only when they return to their historical identity.

This will be achieved when they "wash away" the great historical sin in a spiritual and cultural purgatory to deserve the European Political Family. This "Family" itself, is primarily an exercise in pursuit of economic and material interests. Kadare is in a way right when he says that our nation has remained such only through the rejection of Islam, as Albanians have also rejected Islam and Ottomanism as a culture and political system, as an imperial power is usually initially rejected, but the doctrines they study the formation of nations, respectively their identities, is generally guided by a theory; nations are formed through a sociological, relational process, which means taking and giving. Ethnic identities are raised only in relation to others, whether they are close or opposite, as a rejection and acceptance of each other.

This sociology dominates as a historical phenomenon, so it is difficult to believe that Albanians are a special case, as the history of the emperors is not only their history, but is also related to the colony and both the colonizer and the colony, in different ways, are influenced to each other.

I did not bring the panorama of debates here to compare who is closer to the truth about the historical identity of Albanians, Kadare or Qose with others, but to serve my research that our ethnic identity has become and continues to be rebuilt as interpretive subject. This identity has been and continues to be subject to constant pressure, influence and modification.

Formed and reformulated conjunctively, it is formulated and reformulated in the line of dominant dominant discourse, and this way of making identity easily builds the assertion that the nature of identity is not a given pattern once and for all, but in perpetual change. So identities, not only are the product of environmental circumstances, but change significantly through sociology. It

is therefore easy to assume that identity is not really what it is, but how media and technology shape it in practice concretely.

The line of liberal constructivism has questioned whether identities can exist anymore through constant change and transformation. Constructivism above all affirms that "identities are the basis of interests" and therefore the presentation of identities seems to be a multiple and contingent contextual construct. And in the logic of these concepts, I see some major flaws in the thesis of Plasari, Kadare and those who adhere to this theory by putting forward these arguments.

First, the concept of identity, according to them, attempts to define identity only within the structure of formal discourse. This way of looking at identity from them, analyzes identity insofar as identity is related to the state, sovereignty, the perspective of integration within the European political project, while Kadare before the 90s sought the identity of Albanians in the perspective of ideological doctrine. It "formalized" identity only within the ideological interpretation and specifically followed the curve of the official policy line of the time. This way of making identity is held to certain political interests and conjunctures, but it may be necessary to ignore realities and historical events that weigh heavily on the construct of identity. What happens to the nation's historical identity when ideological doctrines fall? But when the classical state takes the full form of the modern state, is it the same meaning and perception of the nation? What about when national sovereignty is transferred through a legal proceeding to supranational institutions? But if the European political project fails, can our national identity be maintained in this way after the EU? Aren't they realities where they prove that historical events that produce ethnic identities are formulated and reformulated within a utilitarian project?

The second: Plasari, Kadare approach does not take into account the historical whole that is conditional in the formation of ethnic identity, but starts from preferential systems and only from those that are officially approved. This kind of approach is deficient as it does not address identity making through a process of change and conditioned through historical continuity, but fragment this process through rejection. By their logic, identity making does not contain within itself the analysis of change and the circumstances that condition this change, and consequently explain why identities change.

Third: The way identity is presented within a stabilized and stable plane, in fact does the opposite; methodologically jeopardizes the stability of identity, as it removes the elements that hold within it the analysis of change. On the other hand, this fixed thing ignores the controversies and processes that influence one identity to become another, as if to say the alienation of identity. An identity cannot be given once and for all, but is subjected to a process of transformation through rejection and acceptance in a social context. Thus, the adherents of the theory of "pure identities" who consider identity as an "exogenous constitution", as self-possession, as a natural embryo, where the nation has developed its body and limbs only within this naturalness, when they assume the nation only as genetic structuring and not as a social and cultural construct, out of zeal ostensibly to embrace the romantic doctrine of the nation, significantly damage the historical content of the latter. And worst of all they fall into unstable and completely opposite interpretations of themselves. To illustrate concretely; yesterday, these, our national identity are linked to internationalism, and this connection lasted as long as the century kept the international spirit alive. Today, some of them who do so yesterday, "dare" to interpret the nature of our identity only within the European political project, and naturally this kind of interpretation will last as long as the lifespan of this project. They, too, extend so deeply the line of interpretation in Christianity through the exclusion of Islam, and surely this discourse of theirs will stand, as long as secularism keeps the spirit of religion alive.

Fourth, why the theory of "pure identity" is so easily attacked is that external reality, however authoritative and dominant it may be, even though it has been decisive in defining the nature of identity, this reality can no longer be outside our perceptions. We raise an understanding of a human event through perception, and we seek to negotiate that understanding in order to make it accessible to others. So a meaning after being systematized through a discourse, organizes it and puts it within a categorization and through power, media and technology we seek to make it credible in a public

opinion with as large an audience as possible. Thus finally in the light of these theories we come to the conclusion that ethnic identities are meanings obtained perceptually and as such are intersubjective notions and in permanent intransigence.

Bibliography

1. Frashëri, K., “Të metat e debatit Qose- Kadare” botuar në shtypin e kohës viti 2006.
2. Habermas, J., “Oh Europe”, translated from German, published in Skopje, 2011.
3. Kadare, I., *Identiteti evropian shqiptarëve*, Onufri, Tirane, 2006.
4. Kazantzakis, N., “Letter to El Greco”, translated by Miço Gubera, “Eugen” Publishing house, 2001.
5. Klosi, A., *Krishtërim sui generis?* Botuar në gazetën shqip-2006.
6. Qose, R., *Realitet I shperfillur*. Toena 2006.
7. Rumelili, B., ‘Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding the EU’s Mode of Differentiation’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2004.
8. Schmidt, O., *Shqiptarët një histori midis Lindjes dhe Perendimit*, Guttenberg, Tiranë 2012.
9. Wendt, A., ‘Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics’, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2.
10. Xhaferri, A., gazeta shqip; 21.05.2006
11. Xhufi, P., Gazeta Tirana observeishen, 2006.