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► **To cite this version:**

Albert Doja. Folkloric Archaism and Cultural Manipulation in Albania under Socialism. Boskovic, Aleksandar; Hann, Chris. *The Anthropological Field on the Margins of Europe, 1945-1991*, LIT-Verlag, pp.153-174, 2013, 978-3-643-90507-9. halshs-01219607

HAL Id: halshs-01219607

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01219607>

Submitted on 22 Oct 2015

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Published in:

Aleksandar Boskovic & Chris M. Hann (eds), *The Anthropological Field on the Margins of Europe 1945-1991*. Berlin/Münster: Lit Verlag, 2014, pp. 153-174.

Chapter 7

Folkloric Archaism and Cultural Manipulation in Albania under Socialism

Albert Doja

At the beginning of the twentieth century, scholarship on Albania promoted the idea that Albania and the Albanians were still at the stage of being ‘unknown’, the last ‘undiscovered’ region in the Balkans, so close and yet so far on the south-eastern ‘margins of Europe’ (cf. Herzfeld 1987). Orientalising and Balkanising images singled out certain seemingly ‘archaic’ phenomena which were labelled and reified as ‘Albanian’. They put emphasis on Albania’s so-called tribes and their primitive laws, archaic blood revenge, and the primitiveness and purity of the indigenous people.

This concern among native scholars for the identification of the ancient elements of Albanian culture, pursued both consciously and unconsciously, culminated in the stylised text of customary law (Gjeçovi 1993 [1933]) published by the Albanian Franciscans of Shkodra who had a clear social and political agenda. The Franciscans saw themselves as working toward an enlightened revitalisation of the Albanian nation. Their overarching goal and barely disguised objective was to provide Albanians with a national identity, and to strengthen and unify the nation. Their goal was not to record customary law, but to improve it.

The image of the Albanians at the beginning of the twentieth century was frozen until the end of the century, when the country opened again to foreign travellers. At the beginning and at the end of the twentieth century, the mountainous territories of northern Albania were exploited in very similar ways. Many Western scholars and journalists continue to flock to the highlands in search of what they imagine to be the distilled essence of the mountain spirit, a barbarous and splendid anachronism embodied in a primitive and fearless mountain people living according to an ancient code of honour enforced by ‘tribal’ law on the margins of modern Europe.

This kind of literature, as a pure construction and an act of ethnocentrism, created a certain stereotype, not only of ‘a land of the living past’ (Durham 1994 [1909]: 1), but also a mixture of exoticism and ‘Balkanism’

(Todorova 1997), partaking in the logic of many ‘nesting orientalisms’ (Bakic-Hayden 1995; see also Said 1978). The continued strength of such exoticism in Western scholarship during the twentieth century is striking: in the 1950s, Claude Lévi-Strauss had already bitterly deplored similar stances in *Tristes Tropiques* (1955). To borrow his terms, the literature on Albania represents another instance of the mistake made even within the profession of anthropology to believe that men are not always men, and that some are more deserving of interest and attention only because in the midst of Europe they astonish us by the apparent strangeness of their customs.

Anthropology emerged into modernity out of its exotic manifestation in colonial ethnology. The native ethnographies of central and eastern Europe also took shape in the historically-determined political, economic, social, and cultural conditions that accompanied the movements of national liberation to throw-off Ottoman, Russian, Prussian, and Habsburg overlords and establish independent nation-states. These conditions created a burning feeling of national resentment and a climate extremely favourable to the production or adoption of all-encompassing ideological solutions, which led the local intellectual elites to consider Romantic nationalism a viable strategy for overcoming the historical problems that faced their group (Greenfeld 1992). As a nationalist ideology, Romanticism started with German national resentment giving birth to pan-Germanism. Paradoxically, the threat stemming from German reactions induced a similar resentment giving birth to pan-Slavism. Other national elites reacted not only to pan-Germanism, but also to pan-Slavism; this was the case for developing forms of neo-Hellenism and Albanianism. Thus, a chain reaction of mutually imposed national frustrations and reactive exaltations were the driving force of the Romanticism that shaped ‘imagined communities’ and various forms of nationalism in the Balkans from the nineteenth century to the present.

The history of ethnography in Albania cannot be separated from the broader political and social context that generated widespread interest in the collection, description, preservation, and often exaltation of the ‘nation’. Early ethnography was part of a broader category of native studies, often referred to as ‘Albanology’. As is generally the case with native studies that also double as advocacy studies, especially throughout central and east European countries, Albanology has been institutionalised in Albania during periods when there was a felt need to confirm the nation’s existence or to assert the legitimacy of its independence or claims to territory (cf. Naumović 1998). Albanology, and ethnography specifically, has been a nation-building discipline par excellence because it has provided cultural and historic evidence of Albanian existence, distinction, and legitimacy in confirmation with ‘scientific’ ideals.

Folkloric People's Culture Studies: Glorifying National Culture

Native Albanian scholars have long provided a unique view of Albanian tradition and folk culture in historical perspective, including material culture, social organisation, mythology and beliefs, and even some useful observations on social changes during socialism. Their researches are scattered in disparate publications or lost in the archives, as is the case with works on customary laws by Rrok Zojzi (see Bardhoshi, Kodra-Hysa, this volume) or on oral literature by Qemal Haxhihasani. Some works of the time have been republished in recent collections (e.g. Gjergji 2001, 2002, 2006; Ulqini 2003; Tirta 2003, 2004, 2007). It is difficult, however, for contemporary scholars to integrate these works with current anthropological questions and concerns. Although many of the earlier researchers explored Albanian issues in a relatively balanced way, their publications have been reproduced with little commentary, analysis, or revision. It is difficult to distinguish which of the older works is of continuing relevance because many of them were excessively empiricist and lack analytic depth, or even basic academic referencing standards.

In Albania, there was no equivalent to social anthropology before or during the socialist period; and this is still the case. The field has been dominated by 'national ethnography' as practiced by 'native ethnographers' (cf. Hofer 1968) and is known as studies of folk culture or better *people's* culture, to comply with both socialist era terminology and word-formation in English (as in 'people's democracy'). The standard term for ethnography in Albanian is the study of *kultura popullore*,¹ which is often rendered in English as 'studies of *popular* culture', and is taken to mean the totality of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images, and other phenomena that are deemed to be preferred within the mainstream of Albanian culture. This translation is mistaken however, and 'people-science' is undoubtedly more accurate. The concerns of the field have corresponded with folklore studies if we take folklore at its primary meaning as 'knowledge of the people' or the study of 'the whole of the people's traditions, customs and arts'. The institutional history of these labels is tortuous and becomes even more difficult when well-defined tracks for professional training are absent. In Albania as

¹ The term is closer in meaning to the French *populaire*, which according to *Le Grand Robert Dictionary of French* means something like 'relative to the people, which belongs to and is part of the people, emanates from and is spread among the people, speaks to the people and remains within their reach, which is created and used by the people and not by the bourgeois and high class', than it is to the English *popular*, which according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to what is 'liked, admired, or enjoyed by many people, held by the majority of the general public, carried on by the people as a whole, intended for or suited to the taste, understanding, or means of the general public'.

throughout eastern Europe, the study of *kultura popullore* has included investigations of material culture, folk art objects, oral traditions, myths, beliefs, customs, and the like. The shifting boundaries between folklore (focusing on oral traditions), ethnography (dealing primarily with customs and artefacts) and even physical anthropology (dealing with racial traits), should be seen as secondary divisions within a common project of national history.

Like national ethnography in other Balkan countries, including modern Greece (Herzfeld 1982), these studies were focused on the culture to which the researcher belonged. They celebrated a national model that is supposed to be deeply rooted in the past, uncovering an older and unsullied state of people's culture and people's spirit (*Volksgeist*), which inevitably gave these studies a nationalist orientation. In all cases, their methodology is based in folkloric data collection in the manner of German *Volkskunde*, which can be traced back to Herder's perspective on culture and other German Romantic reactions to the universalism underpinning French Enlightenment. As such, the field of people's culture studies in Albania can be viewed as a re-working of the German *kulturhistorische* school as part of a revitalisation movement; culture studies itself has served as 'a deliberate, organised, conscious effort to construct a more satisfying culture' (Wallace 1956: 265). In Albania, the role of national ethnography has been more precisely linked to movements of national awakening or 'rebirth' (*rilindja kombëtare*).

Much of people's culture studies in Albania, as elsewhere, is afflicted by what Roland Barthes called the 'virus of essence' (1993 [1957]). Such studies are conducted nation-wide and the village has always been the primary location of research, despite the tremendous impact of modernisation and the rural exodus that depopulated the countryside in the second half of the twentieth century. Social and economic change made it only more urgent to study the peasant milieu, now seen as the depository of a 'dying' way of folk life, customs, and communities. Even today, researchers focus on the urgent collection of traditions 'in danger of disappearing without leaving any trace' (Zojzi 1962: 7; similar statements are repeated in recent collections, e.g. Gjergji 2001: 26; Tirta 2003), paralleling the 'salvage ethnography' of colonial anthropology, in which 'old age', 'cultural isolation', and 'geographic remoteness' are deemed to reveal the embodiment of *shpirti popullor i kombit*, the 'national soul of the people'.

Following the tradition of many influential works of the interwar period (e.g. Çabej 1939), philological approaches to the study of the Albanian people carried higher prestige than other approaches, and were accompanied by greater professional opportunities. Institutionally, however, after a phase

within the short-lived National Institute of Sciences in 1940-44, people's culture studies were born in the aftermath of the Second World War and had a complex history under socialism. Following the reorganisation of the National Institute of Sciences in 1947 (see Kodra-Hysa, this volume), people's culture studies were recognised in 1955 under the auspices of the Institute of History and Linguistics. In 1960 people's culture studies became a body in their own right with the establishment of the Institute of Folklore. In 1979, this institute was transformed into the Institute of People's Culture Studies within the National Academy of Sciences that had been established in 1972. In 2008, the institute changed its name to the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies, and moved out of the Academy to be housed within a newly formed National Centre for Albanological Studies.

During the early decades of socialism the Herderian tradition of people's culture studies had another quite different tradition grafted on it. Under the label of 'ethnography', emulating Soviet *etnografiia* and following the logic of the latter's development and separation from *folkloristika*, as in other east European countries (cf. Valtchinova 2004), people's culture studies adopted a deliberately historical approach and privileged the search for origins, and for the most 'primitive state' of an object, practice, or ritual. Culture was conceived of as *etnokultura*, and emphasised a deliberately ethnicised concept of the folk, which merged into that of people and nation (*kultura popullore-kombëtare*). Ethnography was associated with an array of arts and techniques performed in order to transmit the stock of memory, knowledge, and practices through the generations. All were to be read as crystallisations of the past, with the material artefact coming to be seen as a direct testimony to primordial origins, thus functioning in a similar way to historical records.

Such studies tended to privilege and celebrate the material framework of 'people's life' over the verbal or spiritual dimensions of tradition. This corresponded to the axiom of the determinant character of the material world and of the labour value in Marxist social theory. In this way, the material culture of traditional rituals and customs was separated from 'spiritual culture', which was in turn separated from the study of verbal and musical arts, as distinct sub-fields of people's culture studies. These demarcations have obscured the structural and functional bases of cultural practices. A programmatic paper presented to the National Conference of Ethnographic Studies in 1976 (Uçi 1977), which can be considered to have laid down the main principles of the transformation of the Institute of Folklore into the reformed Institute of People's Culture, and perhaps the appointment of the author as its first official Director in 1979, was especially intended to show the effects of time and the changes occurring in social conditions and ways

of life under socialism. As stated by the soon-to-be Comrade Director of the Institute of People's Culture, 'a typical and very interesting renovation of folklore', considered to be 'a critical appropriation of people's cultural heritage motivated by socialist ideology', was the modification of its functions (Uçi 1977: 79-80). Although the people did not entirely lose a spiritual life, the religious, magical, and ceremonial functions of folklore were assumed to have 'atrophied', and to have been replaced by a sense of the decorative. Folklore was 'increasingly activated in the spiritual life of society with its artistic-aesthetic functions' (Uçi 1977: 79-80). Official studies of people's culture thus came to overestimate the purely material or artistic character and instrumental or aesthetic functions of symbolic forms and cultural practices, and to neglect the anthropological study of their semantic and functional values. This method erected an artificial division between research on artistic and oral traditions and that on social and cultural systems as a whole. Folk songs and other verbal forms of oral traditions or handicrafts and other objects of material culture had to be evaluated in artistic terms, while rites and many other practices could only be considered as vestiges and survivals of some folkloric institution. Recent reproductions of research conducted during the socialist era maintain these interpretive practices without revision (e.g. Gjergji 2006).

The dichotomies spiritual/material and ceremonial/artistic emerged in different forms, but the attention to 'survivals' was consistent with the nineteenth-century evolutionism of Tylor and Frazer as well as the folkloric paradigm of *Reliktforschung* in Europe generally (Bausinger 1993). The Albanian case was extreme in the extent to which symbolic forms and cultural practices were considered as isolated islands preserved from modernisation and contact with learned culture. Peasant culture was taken to reflect a primitive, initial state of things, which led to a burgeoning of detailed studies of various items of traditional culture, taken outside historical time. For example, the purported practice of *couvade* in which a man ritually simulated labour pains during a woman's birth, and the existence of 'sworn virgins' who take on male social roles and identities, were both characterised as vestiges (*mbeturina*) of a hypothetical matriarchy (Gjergji 1964; but see Doja 2005 for a critical reassessment).

Employing a historicising terminology, scholars of Albanian people's culture did recognise syncretic processes between various cultural and religious systems. While they were concerned to show the temporal depth of the phenomena they studied, they still avoided historical chronology. Quantitative calculation was replaced by a qualitative terminology: the labels 'pagan' or 'archaic' were (and remain) co-extensive with 'popular' or 'authentic'. In turn, the 'people' in *kultura populllore* slipped easily from conno-

tations of 'traditional' and 'archaic' into a political equation of the deliberately ethnicised concept of folk (*etnokultura*), which merged into that of people and nation (*kultura popullore-kombëtare*), increasingly associated with an additional socio-class understanding of the 'people' in contemporary socialist society leading to the creation of a 'socialist nation'. The task was always to assign cultural forms and practices a qualitative place in the process of historical becoming according to a vision which, evolutionary in its essence, at least sought to simulate the procedures of a method of classification. Skilfully arranged in the drawers of time where dates are irrelevant, they had no secret to reveal, and 'survivals' no longer had any function worth further investigation.

In this sense, one may wonder how to understand the alleged 'strong commitment to fieldwork' (Hann 2007: 56, n. 35) that is argued to have been conducted to a level of 'exceptional quality' (Bošković 2007: 16) in many former communist countries of central and eastern Europe, including Albania. Fieldwork is, in any case, not conducted according to the standards imagined by most professional socio-cultural anthropologists. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski insisted on the modern importance of fieldwork and displaced the Frazerian interest in survivals, they firmly believed that they had inaugurated a new epoch for the development of their discipline that would enable objective comparisons between human communities and the scientific study of culture and society. Indeed, the achievements of their revolutionary theory and method were basically a move away from historicism and folklorism towards social science, and helped established modern anthropology in the succeeding decades. By contrast, in their efforts to seize the authentic traditions of people's culture such as they were supposed to have functioned in a society of official ideology, Albanian scholars (like their fellows in other east European countries) were devoted to producing snippets of localised and historicised descriptions of primordial materials suited for folkloric archives. The uncritical juxtaposition of reported customs, artefacts, dresses, habitations, tools, utensils, songs, dances, rites and ceremonials, as exemplified by people's culture scholars, is hardly an exaggeration of what was once unforgettably denounced by Edmund Leach as the 'butterfly collecting' of older forms of anthropology which dealt with cultural materials as 'bounded and distinguishable as species types and classifiable as such in a kind of Linnaean taxonomy' (Leach 1961: 4). People's culture scholars in Albania as in other east European countries can freely be such "descriptive collectors of local butterflies", because they have been unable and unwilling to go beyond their own experiences and tolerate explanations that transcend their local setting. To date, my own book on Albanian age-grading practices (Doja

2000), is still dismissed in Albania simply because it raises larger comparative issues. As it has been reported to me, for my Albanian colleagues it is unacceptable to imply that 'the culture of our own great Albanian people looks African'. This might be hearsay, but it is indicative of how anthropology is taken to be in Albania.

The main objective of my work was neither to show the authentic and culturally specific 'Albanian' character of the data that I analysed, nor to show a similarity with data collected elsewhere in other cultures. Rather, my intent was to expose Albanian cultural data to a thorough analysis from the perspective of a comparative approach based on the best achievements of contemporary social anthropology. Driven by a comparative analytical concern, I wanted to shed an anthropological light on the specific features of Albanian culture that were still unexplored by Albanian studies. The theoretical objective of my work was to show that even the analysis of data from a particular culture, in my case Albanian, can reveal cultural diversity across human communities. In turn, through the comparative analysis of ostensibly similar cases across the world Albanian culture cannot be unique or exceptional in its achievements; nor can it be summarily described as either Western or Eastern; European or Other; or in hierarchical relations to African, Melanesian, or Amerindian cultures. Albanian culture is just as important as other cultures, without exception, to provide anthropological explanations on human history and society.

If anthropological analyses are comparative and cosmopolitan in nature, the subject matter of anthropology is only apparently the study of different customs in other cultures. Anthropology's main objective is to explain cultural diversity by means of the unified and common ways that humankind uses to produce culture, ideas, norms, institutions, and social behaviour. Only on that basis could anthropology legitimately make sense of specific cultural singularities in any given society, including the anthropologist's own society.

Clearly, the broad contrast between the comparative enquiries carried out by anthropologists in western Europe and the types of study carried out within disciplines devoted to the study of culture in eastern Europe have long been recognised and articulated (Hofer 1968; Halpern and Hammel 1969). Both traditions are profoundly political, but the political background to the growth of anthropology in an empire-building project differs radically from the political background to the development of culture studies in nation-building projects. Empire-building encouraged comparative and theoretical knowledge, while nation-building required descriptive and factual information.

Despite the great contrast in the methodological and theoretical scopes of anthropology studies and the study of people's culture, it is commonly maintained in Albania that the two traditions are essentially the same field. As elsewhere in eastern Europe, the differences are explained as reflecting temporal or regional variations within a single discipline. Since the beginning of the 2000s, many Albanian scholars naively expected that a mere change of terminology at the institutional level would suffice to overcome, or at least blur, the differences between the two disciplines. As in almost all other east European countries, 'anthropology' has become fashionable (Skalnik 2002). People with diverse education and training, including public intellectuals and media figures, have recast themselves as 'anthropologists' or 'culturologists' and pontificate about general theories of human nature, culture, and society. At the level of public debate, these 'anthropologists' have joined other scholars, writers, literary theorists, and critics in launching and conducting debates on Albanian 'psychology' and the 'national soul', mixing within their arguments statements about the glorious Albanian past, cultural heritage, folk culture, ethnic territory, and the importance of 'blood' or other racial traits. Within these debates only the invocation of 'anthropology' is new: questions of language, philology, folklore, customs, and traditions have long provided the core arguments for the great debate on modernity in Albania. As elsewhere in south-eastern and central Europe, broad public discourse on people's culture and folk ways of life has contributed to the essentialisation of national character and underwritten popular forms of nationalism (cf. Karnoouh 1990; Verdery 1991).

The rapid appearance of 'anthropologists' in the postsocialist period is eloquent testimony to the use of a disciplinary label as a device of distinction in an uncertain field of academic redistribution of power (cf. Bourdieu 1979). Like Moliere's *Monsieur Jourdain*, who suddenly realised that he was speaking in prose, many realised one beautiful day around 2008, when the Institute of People's Culture Studies also changed its name, that they were really anthropologists. Many of those who have re-identified themselves as 'anthropologists' without undertaking additional professional training believe that the merits of their work and collections will be positively re-valued in universal terms as representing the kind of 'ethnography' practised by anthropologists. Some self-proclaimed anthropologists take a more nationalistic approach, and claim that 'anthropology' has existed in Albania since the 'Dark Ages' of the Pelasgian-Illyrian period. Anthropology is thus reconfigured, not as an academic discipline, but as a mystical national ideology. This 'national anthropology' (*antropologjia kombëtare*) has protected 'our' people's culture from foreign assimilation and 'brought it safely through Illyrian-Albanian history to the global overture of democracy

and market capitalism today' (Kabo 2006). Statements like this one, that ascribe a protective role to the academic work of national anthropology is a direct continuation of the claim made during socialism that national studies existed to protect the people's culture from the class distortions of high culture and its alien exploitative and disruptive intentions.

Clearly, the problems of distinguishing variant approaches within anthropology and of distinguishing anthropology from other forms of cultural study is complex. Changes in a discipline's name do not necessarily reflect or engender predictable changes in methodological and theoretical orientations. Nor do decorative details, like our very claims in this volume that cultural studies in the Balkans can be characterised as an 'anthropology on the margins', resolve the differences between scholarly traditions that are produced by the deep interpenetration of politics and science. It is relatively easy to depict the different methodologies and approaches that distinguish academic traditions in different societies. However, it is much more problematic and important to reveal the different political, social, ideological, and cultural implications of various traditions. Culture studies that are oriented towards the search for authentic and ancient customs and values in the researcher's own society are particularly likely to be entangled with nationalism and totalitarianism. Although this entanglement can be inadvertent and unintentional, such folklorically-oriented research traditions often become, deliberately and intentionally, the prey and fuel of political ideologies stemming from nationalistic claims or totalitarian regimes.

The reception of Romanticism turned people's culture studies into a weapon of politics and national pride. The task of these studies is to enforce identity construction in three ways. People's culture studies provide proof of national cultural unity despite the existence of heterogeneous local communities. They insist on the uniqueness, superiority, prestige, and autochthony of the nation vis-a-vis rival neighbouring cultures. And, they locate, with varying degrees of success, the nation's essential continuity from antiquity to the present. In Albania as in other countries on the south-eastern 'margins of Europe' (Herzfeld 1987), these principles are at work in people's culture studies and throughout the historical sciences. Albanian people's culture studies are perceived primarily as a 'national' science that is supposed to uncover the *Volksgeist* and contribute to understanding Albanian superiority. The main studies of 'national' and people's culture in Albania are clearly caught-up in celebrations of the nation, and can be accused of being a 'nationalist discipline' as happened to *Volkskunde* in Germany and in folklore studies elsewhere (Emmerich 1968; Gerndt 1987; Dow and Lixfeld 1994; Lixfeld 1994).

If the principle of nationalism ‘asserts that political unity and national unity must be congruent’ (Gellner 1997 [1983]: 11), more than anything else the eventual social units of the socialist polity were to be compact and reasonably homogeneous, especially in eastern Europe and in the Balkans including Albania. Though practitioners have preferred to claim only the ‘salvage’ aspects of their research, their contribution to cultural engineering has been brutal and dramatic. In Albania, many people had to be forcibly assimilated to the cultural norms described as ‘Albanian’, if not expelled or killed, as elsewhere in the Balkans.

From the initial period of nation-building in Albania, through socialism, and into the postsocialist period, the most important ideological implication of people’s culture studies is that they are intricately linked to national politics. People’s culture studies function to explore and construct a particular vision of the self against the other, and facilitate their own subversion as scholarship into a political instrument of propaganda. At the beginning of the socialist period, communist leaders were initially hostile to this seemingly petit-bourgeois discipline, with its curious obsession for the preindustrial peasantry who were the supposed repository of the unsullied essence of the nation. Before long, however, communist powerholders concluded that such research was either harmless or useful in legitimating their own program.

Ideological Implications: The Construction of a People’s Culture ‘National in Form and Socialist in Content’

So far I have emphasised long-term continuities in Albanian people’s culture studies, which pre-dated and out-lived socialism. In this section I want to look more closely at the limited changes and innovations which occurred in the socialist decades. As indicated, researchers continued to deal with ‘the distinct cultural features of the people and their ethnic and national specificities’ (Zojzi 1962: 3). People’s culture studies extrapolated the past from the present, and re-constructed all the historical processes of cultural development from this retrospective prospective. During the socialist period, however, researchers were also charged with adopting a broader perspective on the study of socialist transformations and new ways of life, following the Stalinist concept of building a new people’s culture to be ‘national in form and socialist in content’ (Zojzi 1962: 9).

At the first National Conference of Ethnographic Studies, the Comrade President of the National Academy of Sciences described how people’s culture studies had to balance both nationalist and communist ideologies. Researchers, he said, had to ‘engage in the major processes of revolutionary cultural transformations’ and ‘contribute to the socialist emancipation of

Albanian society' by 'capturing those essential aspects (of class struggle) that assign the place and role of people's culture in the creation of the new socialist culture' (Buda 1977: 33-34). In other words, researchers should not merely collect traditions of people's culture, but they should seek to expand the collection of 'survivals'. These 'survivals' of the old ways were to be both studied and transformed in order to be used to construct the full hegemony of a new morality.

The application of this ideological program was multifaceted. Those aspects of Albanian life which would seem exotic to an outsider, not only blood feud and customary laws, but also birth practices, cradle betrothals, marriage customs, inter-generational behaviour, and above all women's subordination, were the very traits targeted (with some justification) by the communist authorities as 'backward' and 'reactionary' customs (*zakone prapanike dhe reaksionare*) that needed to be eradicated. Tradition posed a serious obstacle to the creation of a desired socialist future, and it was not clear whether the force of tradition could be resisted along with other 'foreign reactionary and nihilistic influences' that threatened the establishment of socialism. Yet communist authorities were ambivalent in their critique of custom and tradition. They also considered that the traditions of the ancestors had to be cherished as symbols of identity for 'socialist patriotism and national pride', and allowed their study in the form of people's culture (*kultura popullore*).

As part of a socialist scholarly strategy of identity construction, customary law was recognised as a crucial element in Albanian history, even though it was obsolete and primitive according to communist ideology (see Bardhoshi, this volume). Of course, 'enlightened' members of rural society were considered to have long abandoned such an archaic way and adapted communist principles as their guide. The enactment of tradition as an integral part of village life was prohibited. In 1967, the Comrade Director of the Institute of History and Linguistics (where people's culture studies were based at the time) declared that customary laws were synonymous with 'ideological illness and cultural backwardness coming from the past, from which society could only recover with the strength of Marxist-Leninist ideology' (Kostallari 1972: 25). Following this declaration, people's culture studies was directed to systematically assist in bringing Marxist-Leninist ideology into practice.

By the late 1960s, the intensification of class struggle against reactionary and antiquated customs, religious prejudices, and old ways of living granted new tasks to Albanian people's culture studies. Researchers were tasked with 'directly contributing in the solution of the major duties set forth by the Communist Party toward the further development and intensification

of the ideological and cultural revolution in the country' (Dojaka and Gjergji 1972: 12). 'Urged to discover the historical roots and fight the reactionary philosophical foundations of corrupt customs that were holding back the development of society', people's culture scholars consciously 'focused their efforts in replacing them with new customs' (Dojaka and Gjergji 1972: 12).²

Albanian scholars contributed to an ideological, demagogic, and propagandistic process which I have described elsewhere as a process of state instrumentalisation or 'folklorisation of cultural traditions' (Doja 1998). There was a conscious, institutionalised selection, reconstitution, and promotion of certain cultural forms and practices, created in the official laboratories of people's culture studies in line with communist ideology. These selected traditions were disseminated in society as traditional and authentic people's cultural products and practices, to be incorporated in the contemporary socialist lifestyle and in the teaching of progressive socialist ethics.

Simultaneously, a 'censorship' was imposed upon genuine cultural traditions, as on all other aspects of social life (Doja 1998: 112). Only those practices and values considered interesting in terms of insularity and archival value were retained. These were subjected to multiple processes of selective updating and editing of their semantic and functional structures, in order to adapt to radically new requirements, mainly of an aesthetic nature. The national science was expected to contribute to the building of socialism and to play an active role in the aesthetic and moral education of the masses by the design and construction of a new people's culture. The new culture was to be 'national in form and socialist in content', according the Stalinist concept and very much influenced by the Chinese Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s, especially in so far as it was best expressed in the concept of the socialist 'New Man' (cf. Nikolla 2011).

Albanian scholars were urged to identify and recover those elements of Albanian customs, laws, culture, and arts that were believed to be very authentic, truly Albanian, and congruent with the new cultural norms and values. Social practices and cultural values that were not compatible with communist ideology, such as those related to private property, patriarchal attitudes, or religious beliefs and practices were to be considered 'inauthentic', 'alien', or 'disruptive' to Albanian socialist reality. These practices were to be removed from the realm of people's culture. Set apart as *zakone prapanike* (backward customs) that actually conflicted with communist morality by mirroring class interest or the world-view of a people living in darkness, these customs were further deemed to have entered circulation through

² Interestingly, the same statement is reproduced almost verbatim in recent collection (Gjergji 2001: 15), while nearly identical statements continue to be reproduced in other compilations (e.g. Tirta 2003).

foreign importation; to have originated from socio-economic conditions such as private property; to have been inherited from customary laws or the organisation of pre-socialist states; or to pertain to the bourgeois morals of exploiting and reactionary classes.

People's culture scholars were forced to reconfigure customary practices that were ideologically at odds with socialism, and official impressions of Albanian culture were heavily mediated by the 'domesticated' paraphernalia and often romanticised depictions of village life that were safely housed in the national museum and propagated in official publications and cultural activism. As stated by the future Comrade Director of the Institute of People's Culture, during the performance of folklorised activities, the performers were 'asserting their new personality as members of the socialist community, promoting the new aesthetic ideals and the new worldview and psychology, [and] embodying the transformations in the ways of life and the new higher artistic preferences' (Uçi 1977: 87-88).

Folklore festivals, more than anything else, were straightforward celebrations of national pride. Festivals promoted the production and performance of theatrical cultural practices, which were to be applied throughout the nation to the detriment of local variation. Even when regional differences were showcased, such as in the annual folklore festival in the southern town of Gjirokastra, music, dance, and costume were wholesomely detached from any 'backward' practices that were prevalent in the areas which had produced them. The aim was to show the national character of communities according to a vision in which people's culture was central to all of life's activities, and in which men and women joined their strong, resonant voices together to develop a vibrant people's art. People's culture studies were brought to task in the organisation of festivals to provide pseudo-scientific rationalisations of this vision. Scholars outlined the criteria for reproducing traditional costumes; helped conserve and direct the evolution of dances; organised festivals; evaluated the social and cultural status of performers and actors; and produced descriptions of the performed traditions that were all aimed to track the so-called development of 'contemporary folkloric people's culture' (e.g. in: Uçi 1980). The task of people's culture studies and activism was to validate the officially enforced ideals and worldviews that were supposed to represent the positive changes in people's lifestyles that were accompanying the economic and political changes in the country (see Doja 1998 for further details). Or, in the language of the time, practitioners of people's culture studies were to 'ethnographically validate' the impact of socialist economic developments and 'the great transformations from tradi-

tions to modernisations in the ways of life in rural areas' (e.g. Gjergji 2002).³ In this way, people's culture studies were thus expected to contribute to an extremely important process of aesthetic and rational cultural 'cleansing' in the struggle against reactionary and evil vestiges of the past.

Ideological and political servility among scholars were enforced in many cases, transforming them into totalised subjects with virtually no scientific courage. Many of them were not as much concerned with the reception of their work in academic circles or in the larger public as they were concerned about the opinion of certain party leaders. In socialist countries, including Albania, the manipulation of the past and the present was the responsibility not only of politicians and official writers like historians, philosophers, and economists, but also of social and cultural scientists (cf. Tarifa 1996). Some practitioners of these studies would even adopt a very unethical behaviour, adjusting their findings to the official dogma of communist ideology and propaganda. Albanian farmers had, for instance, been dispossessed and were either 'proletarianised' by their entry into agricultural cooperatives, or 'urbanised' by their migration into the cities, or 'systematised' by other means of centralised measures. Nevertheless, the image of a 'virgin and non-capitalistic' people's culture was propagated by the state ideology and cultivated and administered by the practitioners of people's culture studies.

On the pretext of efficiency or, more simply, by absence of any genuine cultural and social project, such an industry of folklorism, as a pseudo-cultural project of reconstructions and modifications, generally reduced identity claims to a set of frozen values. Ultimately, the traditionalist approach deployed in Albanian studies reduced any attempts to explain people's culture into simple claims to identify its real or imagined roots, while the idealised conception of people's culture removed culture from history and from social life. Folk costumes, songs, and dances were promoted and folklore cultivated to give people a sense of their creative and authentic past, to construct a highly specific cultural identity, and to inculcate xenophobic and isolationist sentiments. Efforts within people's culture studies shifted to foster a sense of ethnic compactness and superiority against the identity of neighbouring Slavic and Greek cultures.

The new vision of people's democracy as a society without internal struggles required a new ideological model which could create an image of unity and homogeneity. This model was provided by national-socialism or the Stalinist concept that people's culture should be 'national in form and socialist in content'. In Albania, scholarly narratives on customary law and

³ This recently published reference uncritically reproduces work of the time without revision.

other traditions of people's culture were manipulated to justify the formulation of state policies in the 'ideological struggle against backward customs' and the adoption of certain political solutions leading in many cases to cultural, social, and economic disasters. Scholarly narratives justified both the disastrous collectivisation of land and livestock in the late 1970s and the generalised isolationist and autarkic paranoia in many realms of social life. More than other social scientific disciplines, scholarly research that justified such policies inadvertently supported the terrorist repression that Albanian and other communist societies witnessed.

Arguably, even though indirectly, people's culture studies must have mattered in an extreme, sometimes devastating way for many people, giving legitimacy and laying 'theoretical foundations' to policies of class repression, expulsion, and resettlement of 'backward' and therefore 'alien' people. As stated by the Comrade Director of the Institute of History and Linguistics (where people's culture studies were based at the time), data from the systematic investigation of old traditions and backward customs were 'used by party committees and organisations to improve the value and impact of ideological and organisational work of the party', because 'they provide a more solid basis to improve analyses and syntheses in the ideological party work with the people' and 'they definitely help party workers to better know the people and more easily convey the party line to them' (Kostallari 1972: 24). In this way, people's culture studies seem to have provided a theoretical foundation for the communist policy of hegemonic control over the whole population. In a more concrete way, these attitudes indicated elite distrust, and even their contempt, for all forms of cultural creativity produced at the level of basic social units which escaped their direct control.

In summary, the practitioners of people's culture studies were only too pleased to participate in advancing notions of authenticity and superiority of the socialist people's culture, which turned them often into prestigious bearers of 'authority'. As such, people's culture studies during socialism in Albania and elsewhere, like their counterparts in German *Volkskunde*, must be unhesitatingly indicted as nationalist and communist apologists for official policies. Unequivocally, Albanian studies of people's culture in the socialist period, based on their conservative national and political objectives, were highly disposed if not even predestined to be used and misused under communist rule as a national science that could systemically stabilise state control. That is why the story must be told of a profession which had proclivities that predisposed its practitioners to make compromises with the new power holders. Full acknowledgment of this fact can become another instance of coming to terms with the communist past.

Epilogue

Anthropology also emerged into modernity out of its exotic manifestation in colonial ethnology (*Völkerkunde*), but it was tempered by the crisis of self-doubt that attacked it during the post-colonial era. Following decolonisation, the great majority of anthropologists discarded the notion of ‘primitivism’ constructed by their predecessors (Kuper 1988), along with the accompanying intellectual framework which had conceived the search for the essence of humanity as a search for what existed ‘originally’, ‘before’, under ‘primitive’, ‘savage’, or ‘non-modern’ conditions. In this way, they endeavoured to take anthropology towards new fields, leaving behind an association with colonial spaces that had so deeply marked the development of the discipline. The universalising of anthropology has been achieved by taking on board the implications of a more contemporary and informed philosophical epistemology that de-centred its original object.

If we want to definitely overcome ‘the definitional straitjacket that we inherited from this history which wedged anthropology between nationalism and primitivism’ (Pina-Cabral 2006: 665), a comparable transformation of the nation-building strand requires a more serious engagement with the Romantic debate on nationalism and its communist variations in eastern Europe, including Albania. Indeed, it is important to clearly show how the eighteenth-century Romantic legacy became corrupted in a variety of cultural and political ways by twentieth-century professionals. Only then can native micro-studies of people’s culture be integrated into wider regional histories and cosmopolitan theory. Unfortunately, Albania is not ready for this challenge. Since the political change in the 1990s with the collapse of socialism and the fall of the totalitarian regime, people’s culture studies have given no attention to the socio-cultural consequences of the rapid transformations that have resulted from democratisation and westernisation, despite the obvious importance of such contemporary processes.

Such issues have been approached by a new generation of scholars willing to draw on the theory and methodology of contemporary social sciences.⁴ An increasing number of their works, which must be examined elsewhere, has started to make an impact on Albanian and international academic opinions. Actually, studying ‘culture’ as things, artefacts, arts, and techniques, is no longer in favour. People’s culture studies – obsessed with the traditions, roots, and immutable structures of the national body and psyche – has started to leave room for a decisive turn to the present, with its

⁴ I have worked in close collaboration with many promising young anthropologists. Suffice it to mention Smoki Musaraj, Olsi Lelaj, and Sofia Kalo, who have been my assistants during recent years when I have taught anthropology in Albania.

multifaceted and multi-coloured realities and ongoing processes. Almost absent during state socialism, anthropological research on social change is poised to become one of the most exciting new trends. It is possible that this new research may also seek to shape a more general idea of a society in transition, starting from basic anthropological concepts like kinship and social structure, or clientele and patronage, to rural migrations and urban settings, the dynamics between the working and white-collar classes, new solidarities and public opinions, civic activism, and political parties.

The problem is therefore not that the discipline of anthropology is unknown in Albania, but that people's culture studies continues to reproduce itself in the socialist-era model. Influential scholars continue to re-publish their main works from the socialist period without revision (e.g. Gjergji 2001, 2002, 2006; Tirta 2003, 2004, 2007). Many others, as elsewhere in central and eastern Europe (Skalnik 2002), continue to speak from an uncritical national perspective. These scholars never miss an opportunity to proclaim the autochthony, antiquity, or uniqueness of Albanian customs and oral traditions, which are claimed to be Homeric in their style and actual descent. Fictional idealisations like Ismail Kadare's novel *The H-File*, might be forgiven for such excesses, but it is not possible to forgive 'scientific' works that mingle Odysseus, the Sirens, and Achilles' horses into an analysis of mourning lamentations, folk polyphony, and native ethnomusicology (Tole 2005, 2011). Other authors continue to selectively suppress and upgrade their material, clearly identifying themselves with Shtjefën Gjeçovi's tradition (1993 [1933]) and other 'enlightened patriots' whose 'sense of mission' drives them to promote a positive national image and to support an explicit agenda for strengthening the nation, the family, and occasionally the Church. This claim to be promoting a higher good is made, for example, by the authors of a spate of books that has been published on the supposed unwritten laws in adjacent northern and southern areas (Ilia 1993; Meçi 1995, 2002; Elezi 2002; Martini 2007). More seriously, current state policy has encouraged a rapid increase in the number of students seeking doctoral degrees, and these students are pushed to retain the old methods of their supervisors (cf. Stewart 2007: 41 in his comment to Hann 2007).

In the final analysis, the real weakness in folkloric studies of people's culture is not simply that it is oriented towards the past, but that it tends to isolate its subjects in 'cultural quarantine'; it denies universal cultural tendencies, the common traits shared with other cultures and societies, and in particular those of Albania's immediate neighbours. In this respect, not only has this stance run counter to the dynamic of intercultural exchange, but also counter to a dynamic approach to culture which, in remaining open to all

influences and all re-elaborations whatever their origin, would confront past and present, tradition and modernity.

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