

# CALL HIM ISMAIL

## A POSTCOLONAL CRITIQUE OF ISMAIL KADARE

This Thesis submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts  
In  
English Language and Literature

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June, 2008

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Masters of Arts.

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June 2008

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# CALL HIM ISMAIL<sup>1</sup>

## A POST COLONIAL CRITIQUE OF ISMAIL KADARE

### INTRODUCTION

#### *THE PHENOMENON KADARE AND ALBANIAN CULTURE*

In this thesis I will attempt to analyze selected works of Ismail Kadare (b. 1936) and his presence in Albanian literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from a diverse post-colonial theoretical perspective focusing on the plots and themes of his best known novels, studies and poems. The first chapter of this thesis will focus on the dissidence of Kadare analyzing these aspects in his first novel, *The General of the Dead Army*<sup>2</sup> and in *The Winter of the Great Solitude*<sup>3</sup>, which was considered to be flattering the dictator Hoxha. The second chapter will focus on the important place Kadare gives to the Albanian myths and epic songs analyzing the poem *The Threat* and the novel *The Castle*<sup>4</sup>. The third chapter will focus on the dilemma ‘castle-bridge’ as an existential issue in Balkan analyzing the novel *The Three Arched Bridge*<sup>5</sup>.

The next chapters will attempt to analyze Kadare’s work after the fall of communism in Albania. The fourth chapter will analyze the identity issue of Albanians focusing on Kadare’s debate with the Kosovo scholar Rexhep Qosja and on the study *The European*

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<sup>1</sup> From an article of Dritero Agolli in the literary newspaper *Drita*.

<sup>2</sup> *Gjenerali I Ushtrise se Vdekur*, (*The General of The Dead Army*) was first published in 1963 in Tirana by ‘Naim Frasheri’, the official and single publishing house in the country at the time.

<sup>3</sup> *Dimri I Vetmise se Madhe*, (*The Winter of the Great Solitude*) was first published in 1969 in Tirana, Naim Frasheri publishing house.

<sup>4</sup> *Keshjtjella*, (*The Castle*) was first published in 1972 in Tirana by Naim Frasheri publishing house.

<sup>5</sup> *Ura me Tri Harqe* (*The Three Arched Bridge*) was first published in 1980 by Naim Frasheri publishing house.

*Identity of Albanians*<sup>6</sup>. The fifth chapter will analyze Kadare's in-betweenness chiefly focusing on his semi-autobiographical novel *The Shadow*<sup>7</sup>. The sixth chapter will analyze Kadare's anti-East position focusing on the many novels that had the Ottoman Empire and its invasion of Albanian territories for subject.

The number of studies on Kadare's work is limited due to the relatively late attention of the world toward the Balkans' culture. For this reason this thesis will rely upon few existing publications such as Shaban Sinani's *A File on Kadare*, Arshi Pipa's *Subversion toward the Conformism of the Phenomenon Kadare*, Ali Aliu's *The Balkan Myth in Kadare*, and, the expert of Albanian culture, Robert Elsie's studies. At the same time, this thesis will rely upon two works of Kadare, with which the writer unveiled the mystery behind his work, *Invitation to the Studio*<sup>8</sup> and *Dialogue with Alain Bosquet*<sup>9</sup>. In other words, this is an attempt to analyze Kadare's creative work in the light of his studies, what can be noticed by the extensive number of his books included in this analysis.

The reasons this thesis makes use of post-colonialist theory are many. The first is my personal belief that "We live in a postcolonial neocolonized world"<sup>10</sup> as Gayatri Ch. Spivak declares. Second, post-colonial literature is part of contemporary post modernist literature. Even though post-colonial movement came out as a response to colonization in the former colonized countries, it soon spread all over the world. Post-colonial movement was an umbrella to all oppressed societies, which endeavored freedom, independence and the cleansing of their culture from assimilation demonstrating features. A contemporary

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<sup>6</sup> *Identiteti Europian I Shqiptareve (The European Identity of Albanians)* was first published in 2006 as a recollection of a number of previous articles.

<sup>7</sup> *Hija (The Shadow)* was first published in 1994 by Onufri publishing house.

<sup>8</sup> *Fiese ne Studio, (Invitation to the Studio)* is a collection first published in 1990, in Tirana by Naim Frasheri publishing house.

<sup>9</sup> *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)* was first published in 1996 in Tirana by Onufri publishing house.

<sup>10</sup> Gayatri Ch. Spivak, *Outside the Teaching Machine*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 59.

writer, Kadare's declared goals are the same; to cleanse Albanian culture from the oriental features inherited from the Ottoman invasion and revitalize his country from communist oppression. Third, as the historian, Arif Dirlik suggests, the post-colonial exactly began when the third world intellectuals have arrived in first world academe<sup>11</sup>. Kadare is son of a Third World country –Albania- in Balkan that became the target of many invasions for centuries. He due to his work managed to reach international fame and literally arrive in First World academia, becoming honor member of *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, in France. From this perspective, the literal international acknowledgment of Kadare makes post-colonial theory a more appropriate and objective way of analyzing his work.

Ismail Kadare's importance, as a contemporary writer with a successful career including its nomination for the Nobel Prize and the Booker Prize awards, cannot be analyzed nor even understood without considering the cultural background he came from and the situation he attempted to write in.

In a study of 1945, unpublished until recently, Professor Eqerem Cabej analyzing the development of romanticism in Europe and later in the Balkan states that 'it started in this our peninsula after fading away in the West'. At the same time, the first chairman of Albanian Academia of Humanities and Science concludes that in general Albanian literature developed as 'a literature of emigrants'<sup>12</sup>. The experts in Albanian culture of the time considered this a spontaneous assumption of no importance besides its role in demonstrating the geographical starting point of this literature, the processes of developing it undertook, and its structuring criteria.

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<sup>11</sup> Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism In The Age Of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, Colombia: Westview Press, 1998), 329.

<sup>12</sup> Shaban Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, (Tirana: OMSCA-1,2005), Preface, V

In fact, this assumption could have led any careful scholar of this field to ask several questions. Which historical contexts made the creating of Albanian literature possible only outside the fatherland? Is this fact related with any detail of the Albanian ethnic-psychology, or everything can be explained with the cliché that ‘Albanians become famous only in foreign lands’? Is this phenomenon particular to Albanian culture, or can it be noticed in other literary traditions? Does the Albanian space limit the creativity of writers? And, inevitably the main question that arises, remains: is this whole question the issue of ‘metropolis culture versus the ghetto culture’? In other words, has Albanian literature encountered the fate of becoming the mere mirror of a dominating culture as a result of the great amount of literary works written and published by the Albanian scholars abroad?

A vast number of the major authors of Albanian literature wrote in other languages with the claim of expressing themselves to a larger audience, or to ‘launch’ Albanian culture to the world. It is not a secret that since the very beginning of the late Albanian Renaissance, most Albanian scholars of this movement created and published their works while being found abroad. Jeronim De Rada established a path for the Albanian Renaissance with his poetry, when living in Italy. The Frasheri brothers –Abdul, Naim and Sami- lived and worked in Istanbul while their works were published in Bucharest. Cajupi and Mitko collaborated in Egypt, where they were enjoined by Pashko Vasa. Faik Konica started to write in Brussels and later in Washington. Fan S. Noli created his most famous works while sojourning from one Western capital to another, after being sent to exile by king Zog I. Ernest Koliqi became a real master of letters after settling in Rome. Even later, after the foundation of the Albanian republic, Albanian literature remained ‘a literature of emigrants’, at least partially considering those writers that created abroad

such as Martin Camaj in Germany, Isuf Luzaj and Arshi Pipa in the United States and Resuli in Italy.

From this standpoint, the work of Ismail Kadare reshaped some essential concepts in the previous history of the Albanian tradition as ‘a literature of emigrants’, introduced postmodernism to the literature of his country, and shifted its position from a marginalized one.

First, Kadare established the notion of Albanian literature as a productive ground within the Albanian borders and exceptionally in the mother tongue. Publishing in the mother tongue was almost absent in the work of the previous Albanian writers that achieved fame outside the borders. Many of the works of prolific Albanian writers that became bridges between their native and the foreign culture are not found in Albanian language; *Kamus-al-alam* (1889) and *Safahat* (1911) the masterpieces of Sami Frasheri and Mehmet Akif Ersoy, respectively, are two of several works of diverse writers who created abroad, inexistent in Albanian language. Kadare wrote exclusively in Albanian. He created new Albanian words from Albanian roots and rediscovered forgotten notions of the two ‘gege’ and ‘toske’ dialects to use in his work. *The Dictionary of Kadare’s Language*<sup>13</sup>, published recently is evidence to this.

Second, there is an evident distinction between his predecessors and Kadare if analyzed under the light of ‘fatherland –world’ antinomy. The previous writers lived and created all over the world, what provided them the chance to make use of the technical opportunities, offered them the language and other methods of expressing in those cultures, assuring them not only the means of expression, but at the same time greater

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<sup>13</sup> Natasha Sotiri, *Fjalor i gjuhës së Ismail Kadarese, (The Vocabulary of Kadare’s Language)*, (Tirana: Medaur, 2007).



affirmation. Ismail Kadare wrote all his works exclusively in his mother tongue within the restricted borders of the communist Albania. All the translations of his books are made from Albanian to other languages. There is no book of Kadare for which the local reader was supposed to attend to read in translation. Kadare himself has been convinced that his first audience was primarily the Albanian one. The one he wanted to make his voice heard and to reflect over its reality. Furthermore, with the ‘Kadare project’ the Albanian reader realized his position at the border of West Europe and how this affected their identity and culture. The goals of this project were the affirmation of Albanian culture and the demonstration of the strong immutable ties of Albanian identity to the European one.

A new characteristic Kadare provided Albanian literature with is the introduction of post modernism in all its aspects and especially the complex characters. His characters of different social classes, backgrounds and individualities held a mirror in front of the Albanian society and provided it with the ‘life vision’. Just like the genres they are tightly bound with, the prose characters in Albanian literature were quite a late feature. For a long time the monolithic characters found in Albanian literature were the poetical –epic mostly- ones, in their specific existence. As the Albanian novel together with other narrative genres experienced romanticism and sentimentalism at the same time, the characters that came along were concretizations of certain ideals and flat schematic structures such as the patriot endeavoring for freedom, the demonized enemy, the angelic woman, or the evil woman.

In the 1930s, the characters of Migjeni emerged. They were more of social beings than individuals. The main character of Migjeni's short story 'Luli i Vocerr'<sup>14</sup> (Little Luli) in his poverty, highlander temperament is a proper illustration to this:

...Nobody knows Luli, even his friends, who everyday play in front of him...When Luli enters the school garden he smiles, but says nothing to anyone. He walks slowly looking on his right and his left, but always walking till he reaches his (usual) place. He stands near the wall, puts the tiny fists in his pockets, turns his nose, reddened from the morning cold, to the sun..., and stares.

At the same period, Koliqi and Spasse, influenced by the literature of the countries they were living in, tended to experiment with modernism, bringing to light a mixture of the problematic self and the persona. Later on, social realism pretending to surpass the necessary developmental stages and to place the realistic critique in a different level, undertook steps of regress turning the new era in an epoch similar to neoclassicism. During this period, the characters 'the best pens' of the tiny country offered, in the most favorable cases were the projection of their ideals, if not the programmed androids of the commanded schemes. Nevertheless, all the characters of that period were led by social motives, while their psychological motives were mostly shadowed.

On the other hand, from his debut as a novelist with *The General of the Dead Army*, Kadare would start a revolutionary period for Albanian literature. He would turn to the critique of realism, just where Migjeni had stopped, enriching it with the real late modernist and postmodernist perspectives. Even though Kadare officially looked to have embraced the rules of social realism, he never obeyed its strict schemes. This literary orientation of his was a shelter, under which the models of the realism critique,

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<sup>14</sup> Migjeni, "Luli i Vocerr" (Little Luli), *Vepra*, (Tirana: Naim Frasheri, 1988), 152.

modernism and postmodernism could be safely developed. Kadare's characters were characterized by both the social and psychological aspects of the realism's critique as well as by relativist behavior of modernism. In his first novel he focuses on the thoughts of the general while carrying the bones of Colonel Z. in a nylon bag, just before dropping them half-accidentally in a stream:

There is nothing in the world as light as you are now. Six or seven pounds at the most. And yet you are breaking my back...<sup>15</sup>

The Kadareian character is marked by the period he belongs, his environment, and nation not to forget his existentialist features. His character is distant from the prescribed ideal seeking figure and lacks the over-sized confidence, which is a distinguishing trait of the social realism being. Kadare's character is the natural compound of the social determination together with the characteristic unpredictability of sub-conscience bearing individual. Even though the symbolic character is not totally absent in Kadare's novels, most of the times his protagonist is of a distinct individuality. Another element of Kadare's characters is his contradictory behavior, which shades the borders between the good and bad, as this excerpt demonstrates:

Later the incredulous smile in their faces turns into a wider smile, inside which there was the adoration, dangerous jealousy, the phrases 'oh you' and 'good for you that have your fun, good for you even for not confessing' etc, etc..<sup>16</sup>

In contradiction to the Albanian mainstream of the time, it is obvious that Kadare fully experienced the worldwide 20<sup>th</sup> century identity crisis, a fact demonstrated in his novels' characters: undecided protagonists, a small number of demonized ones, and almost non-existent purely positive ones. While some Kadareian prototypes, such as the

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<sup>15</sup> Ismail Kadare, *The General of the Dead Army*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001), 218.

<sup>16</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Hija, (The Shadow)*, (Tirana: Onufri, 2003), 19.

dictator, the victim, and the all- system-surviving-chameleon, return to his novels now and again.

Kadare attempted to depict and dig in the psyche of other nationalities, as well. Though, he remained distant to Eastern character and intensely worked over the Western European ones. In other words, all these together with the absence of the physical description of the characters, the rejection of the heroic being and the highly tragic satirized events and settings made Kadare the very first and probably the single Albanian novelist who embraced the postmodernist element during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The other principle of the traditional development of Albanian literature Ismail Kadare reshaped is the conception of Albanian culture itself. In many historical and literary studies in relation to the rapport between Albanian culture and the international one, in order to diminish its receiving role and emphasize its role as a giver, scholars have mentioned many famous figures of Albanian roots. They have traced the Albanian roots of several Illyrian saints of B.C.E., of widely-considered-to-be-ancient-Greek philosophers such as Aristotle up to august names of architects of the Middle Ages and their impact on Eastern architecture and with contemporary figures such as the drama actor A. Moisiu, the Belushi brothers of Hollywood, and the Christian saint Mother Theresa. Without demeaning their achievements and their positive image, nor attempting to downplay their positive impact on advertising Albania all over the world, it is essential to emphasize the distinction between Kadare and these other figures. If we consider not only their ethnicity, but the character of the cultural inheritance they gifted to their community, it's difficult to conclude that their impact in Albanian culture was of the same level with that of Kadare. There is no point in discussing the issue of what cultural

background the work of Kadare is, as it is exclusively Albanian in type, form, and material, while the same is not true for the roles played by Moisiu and the Belushi brothers, nor is it valid for the human mission undertaken by Mother Theresa. In the case of these international figures Albanians can only be proud of their origin and praise their value and impact in respectively German and American culture and Christian humanism.

The work of Kadare reached the cultural capitals of the world from Tirana. It developed as a national literature to reach the international arena later, regardless of the fact that he now lives and creates in Paris. Kadare's work became the new path of assertion of the Albanian culture. It managed to remove the complex of fatality resting above the Albanian skies, proving that the ethnic Albanian lands were not constraining; on the contrary, they were real inspiration muses. Kadare demonstrated that cultural capitals of the world could be 'invaded' not only by the mastering of their language and the manipulation of their history, but even by the translations of books written in the languages of some marginal countries. Kadare was not introduced to the world as a master of words- to learn later that he was of Albanian origin; the world accepted Kadare as the Albanian man of letters from the beginning.

Albanian literature and culture were unfamiliar to the world due to the political problems within the country for long centuries, what prohibited the few Albanian scholars give importance to the cultural affirmation. Even today, all over the world the Albanian folk ballads are known to be Serb, just because V. Karadzic<sup>17</sup> published them with such a claim after translating them in the most important languages of West. In the geo-cultural atlases of the Balkans the voices that belong to the Albanian world are emphasized by foreign specialists, while the Albanian scholars were mostly indifferent,

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<sup>17</sup> Vuk S.Karadzic, *Serbian Epic Poetry*, (1845).

not to count the times they reached the point of self-negation. With Kadare, for the first time, five centuries after Marin Barleti, the translation of the works of an Albanian author became an international reality and after a long time the main cultural metropolises started to take notice of what was happening in the eastern coast of the Adriatic.

Even though the reasons were never investigated, it is worth underlining that the triumph of Ismail Kadare in the West was meteoric; his works there were welcome and easily accepted. On the other hand, the triumph of Kadare in the East was rather late; it actually dates with the fall of the communist regimes. However, Kadare's international affirmation was what got the attention of the international academia and made it interested in the culture of the tiny country, opening the path for Albanian anthologies. The publication of an Albanian Anthology of Dr. Alexander Zoto in French<sup>18</sup> was a great event for Albanian culture. In other words, due to Kadare's contribution for the first time in the twentieth century the affirmation of Albanian literature became a cultural truth; it wasn't a sporadic event anymore.

The arrival of Kadare in the Albanian literary scene demonstrated that the relationship between the metropolises of culture and the peripheral cultures was not and cannot be established once and forever. Today is the era of the domination of the so-called cultures of margins over the metropolitan ones. After the affirmation of African literatures over the literature of their former colonizers and the revitalization of the Indian tradition, now is the turn of the Hispanic literature of Latin America, the Nordic literature of Scandinavia, and the literatures of many other small countries of the Balkans to be the centre of attention.

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<sup>18</sup> Alexandre Zotos, *De Scanderbeg a Ismail Kadare: Propos D'Histoire at de Literature Albanaise*, (Saint Etienne: Publications de l'Universite de Saint-Etienne, 1997).

With Kadare Albanian literature woke from its lethargic sleep and became an existing not to fade truth not only for the Albanian reader, but for the whole world. Starting with an individual the cultural affirmation of a country was achieved and this is probably the most important influence of this writer over his natal culture. So reconsidering Cabej's deduction, it is assumed that before Kadare Albanian literature developed as an inconsequential literature of sporadic successes outside its national borders. Many distinguished authors preferred another traditional background to the native one; some in order to make possible an easier self-affirmation, some claimed for 'the sake of Albanian culture' and others with the goal of demonstrating what Albanians were capable of. Despite the prominent difficulties this affirmation wasn't achieved before Kadare's contribution to Albanian literature.

To conclude, as the scholar J. Bulo emphasizes, Kadare's work strengthens the previous native tradition; the richness of Albania literature doesn't derive from the foundation of schools of thought, neither from genre distinctions. It is a personality tradition; with Kadare the Albanian literature carried on its traditional development as a literature of personalities and not as a tradition of schools<sup>19</sup>. The arrival of Kadare in Albanian literature meant the arrival of post modernist era in this European country with all its aspects of multi-faceted characters, psychological analysis, colorful settings, and unconventional style. Kadare's emergence in Albanian literature proved that the Albanian spaces are as decent as any other metropolitan spaces to encourage the creation of splendid literary works coherent in time and compatible in style with those produced by developed societies. At the same time, Kadare's presence in Albanian literature

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<sup>19</sup> Jorgo Bulo, *Ismail Kadare Dhe Vepra e Tij, (Ismail Kadare and His Work)*, (Gjirokaster: Universiteti Eqerem Cabej, 2006), 5.

powerfully falsified the suggestion that Albanian literature merely developed as a leisure activity of emigrants due to the infertility of the Albanian lands. His presence and his studies in fact suggested the opposite. His work supported the idea that the development of this literature as a literature of emigrants occurred due to the historical events the Albanian lands became location for; including the geographical position in the Balkans, the high number of invasions across centuries, Ottoman rule, the devastating politics of the neighboring countries, its multi-religious identity, and its communist regime.



## CHAPTER 1

### *THE DISSIDENCE OF KADARE*

In a movie which depicts Dimitri Shostakovich's visit to the United States, among many other curious questions, one of the journalists present there, asked: "Why did you remain alive?"<sup>20</sup> Kadare admits having been asked similar questions and having been judged many times by Westerns during the communist regime and after its fall. This cynical question- even in case when not verbally stated- was present in Westerners' perception of the communist east. Actually, it was quite familiar for many Eastern scholars. Eastern non-conformist artists and scholars like Shostakovich and Kadare had already been assigned the 'ghost' role, the role of the condemned awaiting execution and were supposed to reach oblivion –the righteous position of ghosts- as soon as possible. Kadare judges this question and the assumption it signifies as purely cruel. He contends:

Standing in a comfortable lodge watching people that are fighting savage beasts in an arena and telling off the fighters; at this specific moment, this one wasn't admirably courageous when confronted with the tiger, while that other acted cowardly in that his avoidance, which cannot be considered as totally correct and in compliance with norms. These suggestions are simply inhuman, using the most inoffensive term.<sup>21</sup>

There is no exaggeration in the writers' statement; these artists –no matter how different their vision was- were constrained to attempt to survive there, in the arena where the traces of fresh blood could be easily noticed. It was an arena, where nobody could predict from which gate the next hungry beast would come, and where most

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<sup>20</sup> The biography of the dissident composer of BRSS together with this excerpt can be found in: <http://w3.rz-berlin.mpg.de/cmp/shostacovich.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Kadare Ismail, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, (Tirana: Onufri 1999), 200.

spectators would follow the tyrant's example and point their thumbs down demanding the dissident's death, in order to save themselves.

Nowadays, especially in the developed countries, it is almost impossible to comprehend the creation of art and the production of literature under the pressure of a state's politics. The control of creativeness in closed societies reaches such limits which can be perceived only in the context of a general state of absurdity. The luxury of open societies, paradoxical as it might seem, can be a real obstacle for those who have known literature under the totalitarian regimes. For them, this literature tends to remain foreign, the others' property. In other words, they remain in the margins and are 'othered' by this international, mostly diversity-non-regarding-mainstream.

The strict control art endures in closed societies, as in the case of communist Albania, was of two types: official critique and office's critique<sup>22</sup>. Official critique was the institution which held the authority in judging art's compliance with the demanded aspects of social realism. The offices' critique was the expression of a general awareness of the state and party structures in particular. It was a structure built to apply another sort of control beside the 'legislative' official critique. It was a secret, non-declared, and unpublished form of control. Its services were exclusively directed to the leadership and aided this group in establishing and maintaining an attitude toward the subject. The parallel existence of these two forms of critiques was the essential binary upon which the stately controlled and totally enclosed society of Albania was structured.

In close societies, the common term 'literature as the state issue' defines the relationship of the writer with the regime, of freedom with sanctions, and of artistic power vis-à-vis the controlling one. This intricate relationship can be best analyzed by the

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<sup>22</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File one Kadare)*, 39.

relationship of established writers, such as Kadare, who refused to become a mere vocalist of commanded literature, and had a certain contact with the international literary community. Besides, Kadare's works hold the ability to affect the wider public, to critic the developmental path of Albania, and quite often to confront the followed politics.

In both *Invitation to The Studio* (1990) and in *Dialogue with Alain Bosquet* (1999), which are sorts of accounts that elucidate Kadare's inclusive works, the author extensively relates his desires and goals underlining the undertaken difficult mission of protecting the Albanian citizen and his mentality from the frequent brainwashing process, as well as being a pathfinder for change and democracy to his people. In other words, no poem, no book, no article, nor action of his can be regarded as a mere coincidence. All these reasons that made Kadare the metaphor of Albanian cultural identity of the last decades explain the existence and the artistic production under the regime's strict control as well as demonstrate the fate of the art of a twice-marginalized author. Kadare endured the marginalization of his country and of the international audience; as he is an exceptional case of survival under the communist regime despite his dissident works.

The genesis of Kadare's problems with the state was the publication of his first novel, *The General of the Dead Army* (1963) within the Albanian borders. The novel created upon the double binary of duty and loss is Ismail Kadare's meditation on the consequences of war, war's metamorphosing power, and its destructive impact. A huge impact able to metamorphose young man into bones, courageous combaters into deserters, precious arms into food, prostitutes into heroines but never a bloody bleached land into a foreign one.

The plot turns around an Italian military general- although his nationality is never directly stated- who is sent to Albania, about twenty years after WW II, to search for the

remains of those who lost their lives in the campaign. He, never given a proper name, is armed with the most modern equipments such as maps, lists, measurements, dental records, contemporary letters, and oral accounts; an obvious parallelism to his anticipators and the sophisticated arms they brought together with them when they arrived at the same shores in 1939. The general in the company of a mysterious priest tours the countryside organizing digs and disinterment for more than two years. As he tries to find the bones of the dead soldiers of his country in the sharp territory, he wonders at the sense of his task. He has to struggle with the Albanian rocky countryside, the rainy and windy weather, the laborers who work for him and suspicious peasants who watch their digging time after time; everything seems to him so impenetrable- so difficult to understand. His monologues and meditations being the core of the novel mainly turn around the strange costumes and traditions of this country pointing to the meaninglessness of the war notion. The general meditates:

"I have a whole army of dead men under my command now," he muses. "Only instead of uniforms they are all wearing nylon bags... At first there had been just a few sections of coffins, then, gradually, companies and battalions were formed. And now we are on our way to completing regiments and divisions. An entire army clothed in nylon."<sup>23</sup>

Despite the fact that this book depicts the effects of war in all its aspects and glorifies the Albanian traditions, it was condemned by the official critics for two features. The gloomy mood it depicted was quite opposite to the festive atmosphere of post-war social realism literature and it lacked a deliberate hater of the putative capitalist enemy. In the communist terminology, all these could be formulated as 'deterioration of the class

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<sup>23</sup> Kadare *The General of The Dead Army*, 128.

struggle’, a crime minimally punishable with the banning of the book, not to mention the fate of the writer. Nevertheless, the book that can be regarded of the same genre with some other literary masterpieces such as *Quietly Flows the Don* (1934) of Mikhail Sholokhov, the considered blasphemous work *Kaputt* (1944) of the Italian Cuerzio Malaparte, and the two American works –James Jones’ *From Here to Eternity* (1953) and Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) ‘managed to survive the banning with a forewarning’<sup>24</sup>.

This was probably possible due to the fact that the dictator Enver Hoxha in the 1960s was undertaking some very fraudulent actions in order to be applauded by the West after his breaking with the Soviet Union, after the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of 1956. After some fake attempts to establish cooperation with China (what at the end remained his single choice) to fulfill the communist veterans’ aspiration, he continued to demonstrate signs of slackening in his severe politics and a certain type of affection toward the West.

One of the mentioned signs was the mitigation of control over culture particularly over literature. Unfortunately, most of the Albanian authors of the time, especially the old generation, were not able to take advantage of this lessening of control or otherwise they were too afraid to, remembering the grave consequences their contemporaries had been subjected to, after 1945. The new generation, including potent writers such as Ismail Kadare, Fatos Arapi and Dritero Agolli attempted to profit from this relative lessening of control believing that it would continue and was only a prelude to the real imminent uncontrolled literature. So, considering this mitigation as true and inescapable for Albania, these writers published a considerable number of articles and books, where the

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<sup>24</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje Per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 185.

Stalinist control over the art and the writers, who produced in accordance to the commands of social realism, were pitilessly satirized and condemned. Dritero Agolli condemns the communist bureaucracy this way:

What's all the uproar?  
we can sit in the kitchen;  
The food smells good, we won't go hungry;  
If we are thirsty,  
we can drink;  
If our nails are getting long,  
we can cut them!<sup>25</sup>

This atmosphere led the less obedient surviving author of the social realism doctrine to dare publishing his second short novel, *The Monster*, in 1965 in the literary magazine. This work not only did totally oppose the commands and literary techniques of social realism, but at the same time it reflected the anxiety leitmotif of the political terror. The dictatorship immediately woke up from its lethargic sleep. *The Monster* was banned straight away. In this first direct struggle with the regime the writer Kadare failed, while *The Monster's* scandal affected the *General's* reputation, as well.

These events dating to the late 1960s, when the dictator Hoxha disappointed by the indifference of the West toward his actions and frightened by the last 'very democratic' developments there, decided to give up his desire to restructure his regime according to the Tito model. It was the time when the world was being shaken by a new generation that created a milder climate in the Western countries and in some countries of the eastern Block. The Shakespearian dilemma of existence 'To be or not to be?' had been

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<sup>25</sup> Dritero Agolli, "The Petty Bourgeois", Robert Elsie, *An Elusive Eagle Soars: Anthology of Modern Albanian Poetry*, (London: Forest Books, 1993), 47.  
<http://www.albanianliterature.com/authors3/AA3-02poetry.html>.

powerfully answered by the Beatles, with what later became a hymn of tolerance- ‘*Let it be!*’ In Europe, the massive manifestations of students and citizens (Germany and France) could not be regarded as sporadic and insignificant anymore. The civil rights of Afro- Americans in USA were not a mere blueprint issue of no practical basis any longer. Even though, J.F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. had been physically annihilated, their causes had succeeded. On the other hand, women had managed to obtain their rights, to enter most fields of social life, and to make their voice heard. The society’s maturity had reached the point of the Declaration of Helsinki’s Final Act, which placed the individual and his rights at the centre of attention. The whole world was being affected by liberalism, divergent with the Marxist centralism, still dominant in Albania.

The communist Albania was able to minutely participate the great restructuring, based upon tolerance. Ismail Kadare managed to become the icon of this new progressive generation of the 60s-70s within the restricted borders of his country, even though the communist dictatorship established an extensive relationship with China, and intensified state control over every aspect of life. It was the time, when the official critique turned the surveillance of Kadare’s person and his work into a frequent activity. *The Monster’s* dissident plot and consequently its banning, the publication of *The General of the Dead Army* in French, and the worldwide social movements, would deteriorate the relationship of Kadare with the ruling powers.

On one hand, these powers claimed pride for their ‘indispensable’ impact and endeavor in creating the path for the international affirmation of Albanian literature developed under the communist regime as never before. On the other hand, an intensification of surveillance of Kadare would be started, so that nothing disturbing for the ruling system could take place<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje Per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 38.

However, the novel that ensured Kadare the possibility to survive under the regime and still widened the gap in this relationship was the one considered flattering Enver Hoxha, *The Winter of the Great Solitude*. After being labeled a non-conformist writer, Kadare was aware that three were the choices in front of him in order to assure his position. The first was the alternative of conformism with the commands, the one preferred by most Albanian writers. The second alternative was the abandoning of literature in order to remain alive, while the third was the denial of conformism with the commanded rules accepting to pay the price of remaining different<sup>27</sup>.

Kadare might have comprehended the danger of conformism with the barren genre of commanded social realism, after the publishing of the novel *The Wedding*, at the beginning of 1968. This novel relates the story of a young peasant girl, which is rescued from a traditional arranged marriage by her friends in the factory. There, she meets and finally marries a man she loves, thus breaking the traditions. In this novel emancipation has been parallelized to socialism as commended. The heroine referring to her father claims:

He wants to give me a half-lit nook and the solitude of subjugation to a forty-year old man I have never seen. He wants to deprive me of my bobbed hair, clean underwear, wall bulletins, books and songs, and in their place to give me a black kettle, a lash rope to haul firewood, filth, and beatings. He wants to snatch away socialism from me.<sup>28</sup>

The plot and motives of this novel were totally compliant with the commanded literature of the communist regime. Even though the work was later rewritten and published in several languages, the BBC transmitted it in the form of radio-drama, and it

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<sup>27</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 35.

<sup>28</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Dasma (The Wedding)*, (Tirana: Naim Frasheri, 1968), 178.



was probably its dissemination in Albania that assured *The General of the Dead Army* the communist regime's visa to go beyond the state's boundaries, Kadare perceived that the works written in accordance to the state commands were the weapons that would kill the author himself. As the second alternative was another type of suicide for the writer, Kadare preferred the last alternative. He agreed to pay the non-conformism fee<sup>29</sup>, high as it was.

Actually the fee was the price that everyone that had dared to be born and wanted to survive as an independent individual under such a severe regime, had to pay. According to the unwritten rules every writer regardless of the genre was required to mention and celebrate the communist party, praise the communist regime, or at least demonize capitalism and American imperialism. For an exceptional freedom to write, the fee had to be exceptional, too.

The 600 page long novel *The Winter of the Great Solitude* is the fee Kadare planned to pay<sup>30</sup>, in order to continue his work under the communist regime. However it still remains an endeavor to contribute in the melding of the regime, if not a desperate attempt to crack it. After the relative freedom of the previous years, due to the warming relationships of Albania with the Popular Republic of China and the publishing of *The General of the Dead Army* in France, Kadare found himself under the strict surveillance of the dictatorship. Regardless of the fact that he was the author of three published poetry collections and two novels, one of which had been banned, Kadare was exceptionally the most confirmed writer in Albania and was at the beginning of an international career; facts that would make more difficult his direct public punishment. In the instinctive quest

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<sup>29</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 40.

for a starting point for his next work, which could not possibly be as demonstrative as the previous one considering the revised situation of Albania, Kadare selected the unhealed one-decade-old-wound of his country and of the dictator Hoxha- the distancing of Albania from the communist Empire of the Soviet Union.

The plot of *The Winter of the Great Solitude* turns around the retirement of Albania from the socialist camp, in 1961. After the agreement Khrushchev signed with the United States pointing to a thawing of hostility between the Superpowers, and his secret speech condemning Stalin's violence in the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party, Enver Hoxha denounced the leader of the 'communist empire' for having manipulated the norms of Stalinism<sup>31</sup>. While in the West's eyes Khrushchev had achieved the merits of the hero of the first opening of the East, Hoxha accused him of having betrayed the ideals, a fact his intransigent personality (and the country he represented) could not easily swallow. This historical 'divorce', considering the submissiveness of the other represents of the communist countries, has been narrated in the first part of the novel. The cold solitude in the title points to the solitude of Hoxha in the conference, but mostly to the solitude Albania was supposed to endure in the future. In his last speech in the conference Hoxha declares:

Our single crime is that we are a small party from small and poor people, which according to comrade Khrushchev must only applaud, approve, and not show any different opinion. Continual repressions, armed threats, troops, navies, descants that come down from the sky as angst, apocalyptic images: Bulgaria of a Russian mentality, Hungarian speaking Czechoslovakia, alarms, blockades, famine, lies, lies like big spiders, the queue at the bread shop.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Hoxha Enver *Vepra*, (Instituti i Studimeve Marksiste-Leniniste, 1975,) Book xix, 374.

<sup>32</sup> Kadare Ismail, *Dimri I Vetmise se Madhe*, (*The Winter of the Great Solitude*), (Tirana: Naim Frasheri, 1981), 182.

The second part narrates a more alarming domestic picture. The tiny country interrupts every sort of relationship with its huge provider. Without being able to comprehend the situation, the assembly presents in Albania are asked to vote their confidence in the dictator Hoxha, while the citizens are forced into a process of ‘brainwashing’, quite opposite with the previous one. The interruption is followed by an enormous number of reforms, during which the Soviet Union is demoted from the position of the ‘friend nation’ to the position of the ‘degenerated enemy’. Kadare depicts the suffering within the country as non-stop propaganda. He narrates:

Inside the bus the people stood as immured by the restrictions. From the windows covered with steam the big letters of the placard “WHAT DID YOU DO TODAY AGAINST THE BLOCKADE” were distorted.<sup>33</sup>

The main character of this book, besides the interpreter Besnik, who is the eyewitness of this new craze and many times serves Kadare as his personal voice, is the dictator Hoxha himself. Kadare, differently from what has been widely suggested, did not attempt to serve the portrayal of the dictator Hoxha flattering and cajoling him as the trend of the time demanded. Neither did he endeavor to demonize this leader. Kadare admits to have loyally reproduced all the original reports maintained during the meetings between Khrushchev and Hoxha in Moscow and the archived documents of the international communist counsel:

Paradoxical as it may seem, even today, if those documents are read, the insincere Hoxha encompasses sympathy and seems to be in the side of the historical righteousness toward the sincere Khrushchev, who despite being aware of the other’s intentions has no arguments to contradict his decision to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 575.

leave the communist camp beside 'the loyalty to mother Bolshevik party', that Hoxha was betraying.<sup>34</sup>

So, more than trying to provide a portrayal of the dictator, the writer attempted to choose one of the most 'heroic' episodes of Enver Hoxha's leadership: the decision to leave the odious union. Underlining that this 'solitude' was honorable for him and for his country and depicting Hoxha in the image he had pursued to achieve in the eyes of the Western world. During the narrated private meeting with Khrushchev Hoxha meditates:

...Khrushchev and Malinkovsky had whispered to each other: if we only could build a submarine base near Butrint<sup>35</sup>, Greece would be ours. E. Hoxha had been stunned. Since the 1940s the relationship between Albania and Greece had remained totally cold. Nevertheless, when he heard the words "Greece would be ours." he felt his own body shaking...<sup>36</sup>

After undertaking the step of walking out of the socialist camp, Hoxha awaited to be warmly accepted like Tito in the 1948. However, the West so willing in forgiving Tito's crimes and declaring him a hero of liberalism, regardless of the fact that his prisons were full of political dissidents, was indifferent to Hoxha's decision. Considering the jealousy of the Albanian dictator for Tito, noticed even in his clothing style- Kadare depicted Hoxha in the image of the soft dictator of Yugoslavia, the adorable pal of Europe, whose single concern were his people: the dandy Tito. Kadare seem to have considered this book as a hope of providing the dictator Hoxha with a new smoother more liberal image, a mask-image Hoxha had desperately wanted to obtain.

The book is served with a particular determination and a constant refusal to romanticize the reality. The dominance of a total awareness suggests the reality of the

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<sup>34</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 41.

<sup>35</sup> An ancient city in the south of Albania, near the Ion Sea.

<sup>36</sup> Kadare, *Dimri I Vetmise se Madhe, (The Winter of the Great Solitude)*, 175.

pitiless century and the danger of the national issues of the time. On the other hand, the accused seems to be all types of communism; the Khrushchev's communism for not being as pure and utopian as Hoxha's communism, and Hoxha's communism, which was depicted as the mere dictatorship of an ignorant proletarian able to express itself only in the darkness of unawareness while people were seeking for its restructure. Paradoxical as it might seem this work demonstrates Kadare's faith in the alleviation of the dictatorship in Albania. Profiting from the fact that Albania and the BRSS had become enemies, Kadare attacked the enemy state pitilessly. As this enemy state was the fatherland of communism, this was a pure cruel attack of the bedrock of communism. By assaulting it he attempted to abolish the communist notion dominant in his country. Ignoring the personal motives that might have led the dictator Hoxha to rebellion against the communist block, Kadare attempted to make it the first step of a new era for Albania.

Kadare's indirect suggestion for a new relative loosening of the stranglehold, an alleviation that would lead to eradication of communism was soon comprehended by the dictatorship. On the other hand, the indifference of the West together with the establishment of friendly relationships with the Popular Republic of China as an economic necessity, were facts that had negated and distanced Albania from the opportunity of opening up. Under the influence of the Maoist Cultural Revolution, which had begun in China, the public response to *The Winter of the Great Solitude* was harsh. The mask-project had hurt the Hoxha's face. The dictatorship immediately perceived the danger of this work, while all its mechanisms especially the official critique, asked for the arrest of the writer<sup>37</sup>. Probably, because the arrest of Kadare meant the banning of the book, the only novel with Enver Hoxha as a main character-not to forget the sympathetic

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<sup>37</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 205.

depiction of his-, because of Kadare's international fame, and because Hoxha's desire to look liberal in the eyes of the West without being so, Kadare was required to rewrite the novel which was later published with the famous title *The Great Winter* and focused more on interpreter Besnik's inner world than on the historical issues of the time.

Kadare's punishment was postponed to the autumn of 1975, when Kadare published the poem 'Pashallaret e Kuq' (The Red Pashas) in the literary journal. The official critique declared the poem to be 'a call for armed rebellion' against the state, exiling the writer to a provincial town for some years 'in order to be reeducated with the help of the simple citizens', and withdrawal of his right to publish for a certain period<sup>38</sup>. After this period, Kadare's work totally turned into the depiction of a timeless imaginary Albania and had the aim of leading the Albanians into a decisive change together with the acclaim for his fatherland culture all over the world.

In conclusion, the novel *The Winter of the Great Solitude* was what saved Kadare from conformism, and thus procuring him the opportunity to continue to create in the communist Albania. Still it was this novel that procured him the most problems with the regime. In other words, the restriction and censorship in totalitarian regimes are so imperceptible for the new generation or the individuals enjoying the real freedom and democracy that the wide public tends not to regard it as possible to be survived, if able to comprehend its existence in the world of the absurd and paradox. This desperate attempt can be valued and understood only from a postcolonial perspective, which takes in consideration the terror of the oppressing power, which in Kadare's case was communism. So, in the West, those artists' endeavor in creating a symbolically different work from the commanded genre under such a pressure many times is not considered as

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 239.

important as it actually is. By attempting to produce real art, not accepting to be part of the communist conformism, and trying to feed the Albanian reader's dream of a different Albania, Kadare succeeded not only to maintain alive the hope of democracy, but also to affirm his country due to his writings. His work, most of the times not regarded as dissident and controversial enough toward the regime in the West, actually was quite rebellious and unorthodox considering the circumstances. Besides, Kadare's work gains a greater importance considering his ability to survive and create authentic art in such a situation. Furthermore, Kadare's importance lays the foundation of the imaginary literary bridge he built for the Albanian people.

## CHAPTER 2

### *THE CASTLE MYTH*

Shtateqind vjet kam per te t'i djeg kullat,      for seven hundred years I will burn your towers<sup>39</sup>  
Kam per te t'i vrare qente shtateqind vjet,      I will kill your dogs for seven hundred years  
Keshtu Mujo me modesti pat' deklaruar,      thus, with modesty, Mujo had declared  
Ndersa Eposi hynte ne shekullin e tete...      as the Epos<sup>40</sup> was entering the eighth century...<sup>41</sup>

In *Dialogue with Alain Bosquet*, Kadare, asked about the relationship of his works with each other, maintains that most of his novels had a short story or a poem that would be published in any of the literature journals or magazines as a precursor of the to-be-written more expanded fiction. This shorter work would be a mean of measuring and a period of preparation for both the dictatorship and the public in his country<sup>42</sup>. This work would hit the 'leaking' parts of the regime in an indirect way and would evaluate the chance of the successor work to be published, while the public would be warned and mentally trained for it.

No other motives better than the Balkan myths, their timeless antiquity and the illogical hyperbolized events would create that state of fear, suspense, and gloominess so essential in condemning the regime and would become a shelter to hide from this same regime for the writer himself. Considering the unsuccessful attempt of *The Winter of the Great Solitude* to make a factual difference using the contemporary events and political background, Kadare preferred to place his successive novels written under the communist

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<sup>39</sup> In Albanian the word 'kullat'- towers has been used intending 'the house or residence of a certain family, especially the palace of any noble family.

<sup>40</sup> Mitrush Kuteli, *Tregime te Mocme Shqiptare, (Albanian Ancient Tales)*, (Tirana: Naim Frasheri, 1965). This is the collection of the Albanian ancient legends –epic songs- collected and retold prose. Mujo is one of the two main heroes of these legends.

<sup>41</sup> Ismail Kadare, 'Kercenimi' (The Threat) *Pa forme eshte qielli, (Formless is the Sky)*, (Tirana: Onufri, 2005), 193.

<sup>42</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 32.



regime in the deep past of mythical existence. So, quite many times did Ismail Kadare turn to dig deep in the Albanian roots and come up with a new work that not only denounced the severity of the totalitarian regime in Albania, but at the same time aided the country isolated in the unchanging times of an enclosed structure create a fragile non-punishable boundary with the contemporary world. At the same time the myths, the legends and the ‘glorious history of our people’ (in Enver Hoxha’s words) needed to be purified by the communist inclination as the first Albanian solid state and nationalism needed to be defended as a remaining firm truth even when freed by the shell of the regime. Kadare, utilizing the ancient Albanian myths and legends, created those multi-faceted successful works of his such as *The Castle* (1972) and *The Three-Arched Bridge* (1980), to which the quoted poem was surely a precursor.

This stanza designed as an oath made by one of the main heroes of the Albanian legends -as Mujo was- probably pointing to that episode of the epic song when Mujo warns his Slav (Serbian) enemy after this kidnapped his wife, stands for much more than the pure rage of a loving husband. It shows the ongoing troubles between the two populations- Albanian and Slav- of the Balkans as a rigid historical truth that is supposed to continue for a long time. As inferred by Kadare in *Three Elegies for Kosovo*, the Albanians and the Slavs fought each other when no greater enemy had attacked them and allied when attacked by a different power<sup>43</sup>. This suggestion emphasizes the everlasting rivalry to become the dominating power in the ‘world’s knot’. Nevertheless, the Albanian ‘*bessa*’, as a promise larger than life and human existence, has been emphasized, too.

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<sup>43</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Three Elegies for Kosovo*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2004), 118.

The stanza, short as it is, manages to touch the issue of vengeance and blood feud popularized and somehow legalized by the *Kanun* of Prince Leke Dukagjini<sup>44</sup>, who lived during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This sort of legislative code based on the collection and modification of the previous laws has been applied in Albania, especially in the Highlands, ever since, especially when the Constitutions of the fragile Albanian states failed to fulfill their duty. According to this *Kanun*, the blood feud can be carried on for forty generations- with a rough calculation for about one thousand years. In this case, ‘Mujo’s modesty’ is explained.

Kadare’s anti-hero is never the individual; it is a power, a suppressing difficult-to-be-defined energy. It is the character of any oppressing rule and especially the totalitarian regime in the Albania of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This poem is not an exception; even here Kadare is positioned against this ‘undefined’ oppressor with all his being. Mujo becomes every single enraged man, who had suffered injustice and swears rebelling and revenge. Furthermore, the name Mujo is among those 1000 Albanian words and proper names that have derived from the Illyrians<sup>45</sup>. In the ‘gega’ dialect of North Albania the term ‘muji’ means month, while it entered the official lexicon as ‘muaj’. Month is the symbol of the passing time, which in this case defines those times and generations that don’t forgive and that are not going to bear the created situation anymore. The message is clear; not even the history of the eras will be forgiving toward the oppressor of Kadare’s motherland, whoever it is.

The punishment is cruel and becomes even more pitiless when structured in Kadare’s style. It reminds the reader of Prometheus’ punishment which was executed every day

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<sup>44</sup> Shtjefen Gjecov, Anton Logoreci, & Martin Camaj, *The Code of Leke Dukagjini*, (Tirana: Gjonlekaj Publishing Company, 1998), 191.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Elsie, *The History of Albanian Literature*, (Peje: Dukagjini, 2001), 52.

from the beginning. Except while Prometheus' punishment was a physically painful one, Mujo swears a terrible 700-year-long spiritual chastisement that consists of the destruction of the two things that in the Balkans define a man as such. The killing of the dogs means the execution of the loyal companion, of the silent faithful friendship, and of the obedient safeguard. Nonetheless, the lethal line remains the first one. According to the ancient Albanian tradition the towers signified the castles where the natives got shelter, when attacked by any power of invading intentions. The castles meant life. The higher the towers were, the thicker their walls, and the longer they stood, that bigger was the hope of surviving. The burning of the towers is the destruction of the last shield, the extermination of the offspring, and the extinction of the coming generations; the burning of the towers can be considered an old-fashioned genocide.

Consequently, this poem points to the century -long traumatic dilemma shared by all the populations of the Balkans; 'the castle versus the bridge' This dilemma that had an existential character made the people of the Balkans reach our era with the historical conclusion that both bridges and castles, even if they are not equally crucial for the generation's survival, are symbols of resistance, hope, and continuity. A bridge or a fortress, the hand of amity or the dueling sword, the opening or the isolation, the firm way or the thick-walled tower was the dichotomy that has engaged all the Balkans' people for centuries. It was difficult to choose between the two.

The towers of the castle have always meant existence just like the bridges and the number of their arches. However, even a short analysis of the map of the historical places of Albania would be more than enough to reveal that, the number of castles on this territory is much higher than the number of bridges. This is due to the tragic historical destiny reserved for this peninsula. This dichotomy has been a question mark in the

Balkan folk songs, as well as in the minds of the writers of this region, especially in Ismail Kadare. So, he depicted Muji's oath as exclusively ancient Albanian, while concealing the other side of the Balkan dichotomy in this poem. The absence of the bridge is suggestive in relation to the circumstances of the isolated Albania of the time.

Just like the morality of a person, which cannot be defined only by what he does, but by what he doesn't agree to do; the ideology of a writer, also, cannot be defined only by what he writes, but even by what he leaves out of his works.<sup>46</sup>

Kadare did not totally exclude the bridge myth from his work. *The Three Arched Bridge*, one of his most successful novels actually focuses exclusively on the bridge myth. He just respected the Albanian forced-preference for the castle and gave a detailed portrayal of this mythical reality in all its suppressive walls and tyrannical being in *The Castle*.

In all traditional cultures of the people of south-eastern Europe the castle and the bridge are two prehistorically traced memories and two literary symbols in most cases canceling each other, but both requiring human sacrifice, the immuring. Differently from the ancient Greek myths, where human-sacrifice was offering to the gods and bore war scopes- like the Iphigenia motive- human-sacrifice in the Albanian tradition is tightly related with life and existence.

The dilemma 'a castle or a bridge' can be regarded as the indication of a sophisticated culture and of the spiritual power of the people that endured its burden. Doubtless, it has been difficult to choose between the opening symbolized by the bridge and the isolation of the thick-walled-fortress due to the gloomy horoscope the world history reserved for

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<sup>46</sup> Arshi Pipa, *Subversion toward the Conformism of the Phenomenon Kadare*, (Tirana: Phoenix, 1999), 51.

the Albanians. The West, so lavish in East's perception and the Orient, so exotic in West's eyes transformed this corner of the Balkans' into a bridge-castle, what also can be noticed in the Albanians' lost struggle for a pure belonging showing –academically 'natural' defined- identity.

This multi-faceted identity, heredity of this crossway geographical position, has been demonstrated in the traditional folk culture, as well. Whatever the tremendous reality acquired has been constructed and has been sung in the epics. Quite often the Albanians have built bridges and offered human sacrifices to them, but when the winds of fear coming from distant lands have blown they have locked themselves in the towers of the castles in the bases of which laid the immured human. The retraction that pointed to the castle constructions and the awaking that needed bridges required long historical periods: “... for seven hundred years I will burn your towers/ I will kill your dogs for seven hundred years...”

In the ancient Albanian ballads, the immuring in the bases of any eminent construction has been regarded as the ‘maintained *bessa*’, as the ‘self-negation’ or even as the ‘inauguration ritual’. According to the statistics of some folklorists, who base their work on the classification of the immuring ballads, there are 150 registered immuring legends bearing constructions, of which 90 are related to castles and only 60 of them are related to bridges<sup>47</sup>. A population that concludes in his poetical mentality, that it should sacrifice more for the walls than for the passages suffers from the self closure deliria, or suffers the sequences of an unfortunate history. As it is widely agreed that the Albanians have periodically been forced to surrender to retraction, the impact of the potential ‘group

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<sup>47</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 52.

agoraphobia' is excluded. An attempt to clarify this assumption is made in the two novels of Ismail Kadare, *The Castle* (1972), and *The Three Arched Bridge* (1980).

The relationship between the towers and the bridges in the immuring ballads, at the same time are expressive of the dichotomies 'fatherland –world', 'ethnic- mankind', and 'own-other' that have disturbed the Albanian conscience at all times. This assumption would be valid only if we would attempt to analyze the immuring ballads under the light of their preconditions. The immuring is part of the antediluvian Albanian folk tradition just like it is part of all Balkans' ancient traditions. The diversity stands in the choice the generations inherited. The facts that the human-sacrifice in the ancient Greeks is undertaken at the beginning of a combat, that the human-immuring at the Romanians is related with religious temples, or that the predominant immuring ballad of the Albanians is related with the construction of a castle cannot be regarded as a coincidence.

The Albanian immuring ballad<sup>48</sup> is related to the Rozafa castle, located in a North-Western zone of Albania and whose ruins point to a pre-Christian antiquity. In this ballad, analysts would be able to trace the submission to destiny, the acceptance of self-sacrifice (Rozafa, who doesn't rebel to the immuring), the 'bessa'- both in its non-maintained (by the first two brothers, who revealed their secret to their wives) and maintained version (by the third brother who didn't tell Rozafa that they would put in the bases of the castle the wife who would bring the food the following day), the epic heroism of the third brother, the crime of immuring (executing) a young mother, the death (as a beginning more than as an end), and the life after death (of mother Rozafa, who asks to have one of her breast left outside in order to feed her baby). Overall, the ballad for the castle of Shkodra, the city Rozafa castle belongs to, points to the mentality

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<sup>48</sup> "Rozafa Ballad", <http://www.shkoder.net/shqip.asp>

of the prehistoric people who wanted the soothing of the land with human-sacrifice before injuring it with deep foundations that would make possible the safe standing of the castle. It is a sort of agreement with the land of the fathers in which one side will build the castle, while the other one will make it stand. This assumption points to that period of history when the land was considered a mother that when enraged, could give unexpected reactions. Only after this period of self-recognition and the period of differentiation between the two sides of the dichotomy 'self and other', the dilemma 'castle or bridge' should have become a puzzling issue.

The immuring ballad- Rozafa ballad- is one of the three most famous Albanian ballads together with the recognizing ballad and revitalization one that have come to us from the pre- Christian period. Nevertheless, the immuring motive can be found even in the building of new cities and bridges in the oral tradition of Albanian people. Pendant between the castle and the bridge, vacillating between the two, the Albanian folk epic songs demonstrate the historical ups and downs of this territory. They show the conditioned choice and the wavering between conflicts and cooperation, communication and abhorrence, as well as the opening for harmony and the self-isolation of surviving. The difficult historical background of the Albanians has been shown in their oral tradition, too. The historical contexts have directly proven the tragic reality that has intensified the immuring in castles in relation to the immuring in the bridges. The recurring attacks have acquired all attention to be given to the castle construction, while the new friendships or the 'migrating nature' of the Albanians has required the bridges. Other factors such as the utilitarian aspect of the construction have also affected the ratio between castle and bridge construction.

Another curious fact is that the building of castles is mostly located in the West region of Albania, on the shores of the Adriatic Sea, from where the enemy of the pre-Ottoman-invasion period was supposed to come. This assumption is supported by the numerous castle ruins in this region of Albania, even though it is acknowledged that the earlier settlements and first Albanian towns were situated in this same area. The Western coastline at the time was considered a permanent danger by the Albanians, just as it was emphasized in their ballads, what is explained by the high number of castle ruins, as well. This fear was justified by the many Roman attacks, as well as by the Illyrian-Roman war and continued its effect till the medieval ages when the Albanian lands were invaded by the Eastern non-Christian Ottomans.

Another reason the immuring in the castle is more common than the sacrificing at the foundation of the bridge is that the castle, besides being a symbol of endurance against the invasions, is an indicator of the sedentary -stationary- being of a population and its strong ties with the fatherland. Similarly, the construction of bridges suggests the need to expand and migrate. Castles are constructions that point out the existence of an urban community as they cannot be built in a short period. Furthermore, only an established community can offer the human as a sacrifice for the castle not only for its role as armor toward the outer forces, but for its impact in arranging an urban stable community. This fact points to Albanians' autochthon presence in their legitimate territory.

The immuring ballad makes word of 'three brothers' who lived nearby and wanted to make a standing fortress<sup>49</sup>. 'Brotherhood' in Albanian stands for much more than for the denotative meaning of the word. The mainly orally transmitted Albanian history often

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.,



makes word of the brotherhood of co-combatants, the brotherhood of families, and the 'bessa' based brotherhood of leaders of principalities<sup>50</sup>.

The castle as a notion of existence of enduring traditions, as the establishing and shaping forms of the urban life, as the complementation of always surviving under pressure, as a symbol of war and abhorrence can be found even in those limited work of literature written in Albanian and for Albania. In *The Surrounding of Shkodra* of Marin Barleti in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and in all following works the immuring and its ballads are depicted as exclusively related with the construction of the castles or with the building of city walls, which are a kind of fortress, as well. This is supported even by the second legend in relation to Shkodra Castle launched by Barleti in this book:

The name Rozafa(t) derives from the composition of the nouns of Roza , an unknown woman and her brother Fa. The two built the castle in ancient times to get protection by the invaders.<sup>51</sup>

In other words, in contradiction to other civilizations, for which the castle-isolation is a late one belonging to the post-nationalist period, the castle-isolation was previously generated within the Albanian culture. The five-century-long Ottoman invasion intensified the Albanian's belief of existing only within their shutters. This belief was petrified during the last century.

Additionally, when considered from a universal perspective the castle notion was established during the Cold War by the so-called 'iron shutter'; the figurative name of the border created between 'the state blocks', the Berlin Wall. Eventually, it can be concluded that for the Albanian this construction had a double effect. The Berlin wall was a separating curtain from the other part of the world, added to the castle notion

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<sup>50</sup> Sh. Gjecov, A. Logoreci, & M. Camaj, *The Code of Leke Dukagjini*, 198.

<sup>51</sup> Marin Barleti, *Surrounding of Shkodra*, (1504), <http://www.shkoder.net/shqip.asp>

existing within their conscience. It was later followed by the imaginative wall built between Albania and the Eastern Block this country was supposed to belong to, creating a triple-walled border between Albania and the world and dividing this population in two.

Ismail Kadare, who claimed to have undertaken the difficult mission of writing the account of the historical fate of his people, showed an uninterrupted interest in the role of the castle over the ethnic mentality. Also, he was concerned with the tragic-fatal effect the dilemma of choosing between the bridge and the castle had upon the Albanians. In his work Kadare constructed fortress-individuals, fortress-states, and fortress-communities. The symbol of the castle is present even in his earliest works, such as the ‘*Poeme e blinduar*’ published in *Enderrimet*<sup>52</sup>. A sort of castle was even the wooden horse of Gent Ruvina and his constrained friends in the banned novel of 1965 *The Monster*. A giant castle was even the pyramid of Cheops in the later novel with the same title. The restriction tower of Gjorg Brezftofti together with many other towers of this type, used by the highlanders of North Albania to get shelter when involved in blood feuds and the ethnographic house of prince of Mirdita, Gjonmark, related in details in the novel *Broken April*, were all survival fortresses. The *Dream Palace* sections have the shape of fortified towers. Its coldness, the thick wall, and many corridors point to this:

He wandered the corridors in a state of bewilderment...He walked on for a long time, hoping to meet someone from whom he could ask the way. But there was no one in sight. Sometimes he would think he heard footsteps ahead of him, around a bend in the corridor, but as soon as he got there the sounds would seem to recede in another direction, perhaps on the floor above, perhaps on that below....

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<sup>52</sup> Ismail Kadare, “Poeme e Blinduar”, (Fortified Poem) *Enderrimet, (Dreams)*, (Tirana: Naim Frasheri, 1957), 37.

On he went. The passages seemed alternately familiar and strange. He couldn't hear so much as a door being opened. He went up a broad staircase to the floor above, then came back again and soon found himself on the floor below. Everywhere he met with the same silence, the same emptiness.<sup>53</sup>

Even the author's laboratory described in details in *Invitation to the Studio* has its hidden annexes that have not brought in light, as they had been restricted in the heart of a fortress<sup>54</sup>. The basements and the cellars of the autochthon houses of Gjirokastra in *Chronicle in Stone* (1978), the scary and forgotten villa of the ex-minister in *The Concert*, and the military base in Pasha Liman of Vlora in *The Winter of the Great Solitude*, are only some examples of the castle symbol in Kadare's work. All of them can be considered as a direct allusion to the isolated Albania of the time. What officially had been named 'deliberate endurance', in fact was a euphemism to avoid the true meaning of isolation of the castle motive in his work.

The symbol of castle is one of the oldest in the traditional folk culture of the Albanians. Still, it occupies quite an important place in the international literature, too. After the Cronin's *Citadel* (1921) and Kafka's *Castle* (1926), *The Castle* of Kadare has achieved an admirable international fame. It is widely known that Kadare's novel was baptized with this name as a result of the absence of the main character. This was a first event for the slowly-developing Albanian literature. The castle can also be regarded as the personification of the missing protagonist, what might have led the author to entitle the final publishing in French *Les Tamboures de la pluie* (*The Drums of Rain*).

Kadare was aware of the essential importance the notion of castle had in the conscience of his people when he wrote *The Castle* in 1972. This novel dates with

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<sup>53</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Palace of Dreams*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998) 17-18.

<sup>54</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Ftese ne Studio*, (*Invitation to the Studio*), (Tirana: Naim Frasheri 1990), 233

Kadare's decision to turn to the historical novels, finding this a safer genre after the Cultural Revolution imposed from the Albanian collaboration with the People's Republic of China.

*The Castle* that reminds the reader of Dinno Buzzati's *Il Deserto dei Tartari* (1940) is a story of Albania's struggle against the Ottoman Turks in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, during the period of the glorious Gjergj Kastrioti Scanderbeg (1405-1468), who, at the same time, is Albania's National Hero. Just like in all the following works, even in this work the history is just a ploy for the author. The novel, in a detailed manner and with a stylish structure demonstrates the surround of a medieval Albanian castle by invasion intentions bearing and an easier passage to the Apennine Peninsula aiming Ottoman Empire forces. Just like *The General of the Dead Army*, also *The Castle* has been built over two main motives that make it encompass quite an alienating style; the origin of the narrator and this character's standing point. Just like in *The General of the Dead Army*, the narrator, The Turkish Pasha, is foreign to the Albanian grounds, moreover from the enemy camp, his standpoint does not offer the opportunity of the comprehension of the Albanian reality with idolatry or pathetic positivism.

This characteristic marks Kadare's diversity and his refusal to obey the socialist realism's demands. It helps the author avoid the Marxist creativeness' esthetic standards, the party line, the folkloric patriotism, the political militancy, and other non-cultural passions so mandatory and typical of the period. Loyally respecting the mental and psychological structure of the narrator and preserving his natural perspective, in fact Kadare has respected and demonstrated his artistic ability without permitting the assimilation of the artistic demands of the literary texts from the propagandistic and party commands.

The narration of *The Castle* is mainly based on the Ottoman Empire camp giving detailed information about the hierarchical structure of the Ottoman army, its organization, its ideological bases, and its functioning strategy. On the other hand, the information about Albanian history is almost absent. If Scanderbeg or Gjergji yne (Our Gjergj) hadn't been mentioned a certain number of times, this novel could have been the story of the surrounding of any castle in the Balkans inspired by the bloody history of the peninsula. This generalizing (or minimizing) attitude continues with the absence of Scanderbeg as character in the novel.

This excessive focusing on the enemy camp provides the reader with a totally different perspective quite opposite to the standards of social realism. The objective outer perception of the Albanian grounds offers a picture of highlands, poverty, and gloom. The first impression of the Turkish Pasha, found for the first time in this land, is this:

He had never seen such mountains. They resembled a heavy nightmare that oppresses and oppresses continually and doesn't permit you to wake up. The lands and the rocks had attempted the skies with such a rage and it looked as they didn't obey any nature law. Allah must have been angry when He created this land.<sup>55</sup>

However, the conclusion is the most controversial part of the novel. Just like a classical drama, the conflict is solved by *deus ex machina*. The probable winning power, the bloody final battle, or a certain last decisive event, has been replaced by an astute solution: the rain. Without the rain (the power of destiny) the castle would have given up to thirst, a conclusion not favorable to Kadare's message, or for the symbolist and allegoric mood of the novel itself. Many critics underline that the atmosphere and such a

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<sup>55</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Keshjtjella, (The Castle)*, (Tirana: Naim Frasheri, 1972) 8.

position of the author is not unintentional. In fact, he was pointing to the political events of the 1960s in the communist Block.

*The Castle* of Kadare reveals itself not as a praise of admiration for the castle, of the endeavor under restriction, or of the isolation. In fact, it can be considered as the paradox of being under these conditions. The decision of the communist Albania of the time to back out from the military Pact of Warsaw (1961), more than to diffidence led to a sense of hope and enthusiasm among people. For a short time, the belief, that Albania's politics would undertake the way of reorientation and work to approach the western model civilization, was dominant among citizens till the 11<sup>th</sup> Festival of the Song in 1973<sup>56</sup>. Only after the invading of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Albania feared that the soviets would rely upon their military power to colonize this rebel tiny country in the Balkans'. Every single reader felt the parallelism between the Topkapi and Kremlin. While, the *deus ex machina* inspired by the mythical grounds the novel had been based at is nothing less than Kadare's sun, which rises in the West.

This assumption of the scholar A. Vehbiu offers a new standpoint:

*The Castle* can be considered the paradox of the restriction, as the relationship between the attacking forces and the attacked people is totally different from what the human logic would sense and what history has witnessed<sup>57</sup>.

Different from what can be expected the surrounded one is depicted as a more liberal civilization in comparison to the surrounding forces, which deliberately have been depicted as barbarians dangerous to civilization. When considered from a different perspective, it is noticed that this fortress called Albania, resigned to self-isolation and

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<sup>56</sup> The festival was regarded as affected by the western culture and many artists were imprisoned, persecuted, or prohibited to continue their art.

<sup>57</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 62.

doubly-restricted as a result of the bad relationships with both the state blocks, was in fact endangered by a civilization quite different from the general perception the contemporary individual might maintain in relation to the Ottoman regime. The so-called true fortress of communism was exposed to the impact of an empire much more liberal –as the Western civilization was- than the one within the borders of this utopian fortress. The reverse reading of the history of the totalitarian state, while using medieval history as armor is suggestive. As the novel was not banned, this was obviously not perceived by the government of the time.

In a more cautious approach to this novel, the reader would notice that the author's final insinuation is that the most valuable part of Albania -its righteous nobility- was imprisoned inside this fortress. While the main hero of this historically recognized struggle in order not to resign to the Ottoman Empire forces, Scanderbeg, is not inside the castle. In other words the symbol of salvation was found outside the encircled fortress. In Scanderbeg's absence- a leader that could be regarded a military dictator- the enclosed people preserved their dignity, honor, and tradition. As Arshi Pipa suggests, Scanderbeg in the novel serves as a mirror to Hoxha's cult. Just as Scanderbeg fades in the novel so will the Dictator<sup>58</sup>. Thus, Kadare's goal is clarified. His implication is that the Albanians had managed to defend their culture regardless of the negative impact Hoxha's regime had had over it. In fact, the enclosing logic should have led the author to depict a strictly organized community of severe prohibitions in compliance with the moral of the state's politics of the time under the slogan 'struggle against the two superpowers'. Excluding

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<sup>58</sup> Arshi Pipa, "Subversion versus Conformism: The Kadare Phenomenon," *Telos* 73, 1987.

this essential norm of the Albanian utopian resistance, in *The Castle* Kadare parodied ‘the communist fortress in the shores of Adriatic’<sup>59</sup>.

This post-colonialist, anti-oppressor, approach to *The Castle* suggests that the dilemma of choosing permanently between the castle and the bridge was not only dominant in the cultural background of the Albanians. Actually, this dilemma shaped the work of contemporary intellectuals like Kadare. From this perspective Kadare is equipped with a diverse feature: the verbal weapon against oppression of any type. He suggested the restructuring of this dilemma in line with the contemporary mentality, implying the western type civilization and emancipation as the most reasonable method to escape repression.

To conclude, all the populations of the Balkans especially the Albanians from the very beginning of the history overtook an isolationist behavior transmitted even in their cultural heritage and mainly symbolized by the castle notion. The experience of the Byzantine invasion followed by the sore destiny of the five-century- long Ottoman invasion and the communist self-sufficiency idea intensified their walled way of existing. Their impossibility to express any sign of opening was characterized by their threatened situation, widely conveyed in their myths, epic songs, and legends. Due to its geographical position, Balkan was always a desired corridor, a sort of bridge, for all the great powers of history. In other words, the Balkan people were caught between these two mentalities and in each their tentative to choose the first –the bridge- they were constricted to become the second- the castle-. This duality, which reached even the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was clearly reflected in this region’s works of art, as well. This tradition was

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<sup>59</sup> This slogan, adapted by one of E. Hoxha’s speeches, was one of the most famous placards during the communist regime in Albania.



continued even by the most distinguished contemporary authors including Ismail Kadare. He studied and wrote this duality so deeply rooted in the character of the Albanians and of the Balkans' people in general to lastly suggest the bridge notion as the salvation path of the Albanians.

## CHAPTER 3

### *THE BRIDGE VERSUS THE EMINENT CASTLE*

During the communist regime, the term ‘fortress’ had a political significance and stood for the ‘Albania outside the state blocks’. The implication for the castle in Ismail Kadare’s novel baptized with the same name by the wide public as an absurd paradox of the isolated existence and its jeopardizing style made the suggestion of the bridge to symbolize an invitation directed to the reader to help himself out of isolation. From this aspect the two constructions that have been tightly linked with the human-sacrifice and the immuring ballad, somehow bore and followed one another. While, within the indigenous people’s psyche the one couldn’t exist without the other.

*The Three Arched Bridge*, (1980) in fact fulfilled the one-decade-long-gap in Kadare’s work. Regarded to be an international writer of a superior rank, besides the need of the myths as a shelter for his veiled anti-communist propaganda, Kadare could not have had the castle and lack the bridge for two main reasons; his international character as a writer and his self-assigned mission to write his people’s history.

An ambassador of the Albanian culture to the outside world, Kadare used the paradoxical castle and its parody to reach the point of committing a sort of political blasphemy with his later work, *The Three Arched Bridge*. After *The Castle* and the failed attempt of breaking the borders of social realism with *The Winter of the Great Solitude*, *The Three Arched Bridge* was presented to the public when the official directives commanded a life under severe restriction, with all the sanctions the struggle against the potential attack –from the invented Western and Eastern enemies- required. Besides being the alternative of the castle for the Albanian century -long -dilemma, the bridge

symbol was as important as the castle symbol in the defining of the Albanian identity. He, who created the castle of endurance against the hatred winds blown by the country's politics, also created the bridge of the escape toward desolation and reunification with the world. Kadare hit the regime once more given protection by the many critics' studies, which considered his anti-isolation blasphemous work incompliant with the commanded genre because of the immigration in history and the reversion of the immuring legend<sup>60</sup>.

The Albanian critic Sinani suggests:

The current studies have considered the reinterpretation of the painful alternative choice between the bridge and the castle. In the light of this reinterpretation a 'castle complex' or a 'Rozafa complex' can be concluded a complex to be avoided just like one avoids the 'complex of Oedipus' in order to escape incest<sup>61</sup>.

In other words, the Albanian is required to escape the mentality of self-sacrifice by exorcizing the 'Rozafa complex'. This interesting suggestion lacks a lot when analyzed from another critical perspective as it doesn't consider the Albanian character and psyche. This analysis, which doesn't regard the difference in races, classes, and traditions, cannot lead to veracious assumptions. While a reinterpretation in the light of post-colonialism that acknowledges these essential differences would provide a more correct analysis of how this national dilemma of the ethno-type affected the work of the prototype Albanian writer of this century, Ismail Kadare.

Considering the universally accepted opinion that the human-sacrifice as the most ancient sort of forfeiture couldn't be undertaken for trivial constructions, in fact the immuring was considered as the fee of co-existence with the other populations of the

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<sup>60</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 68.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

Balkans and the other comers (the sacrifice in the bridges), as well as the fee of survival from assimilation (the sacrifice in castles). In the formation of the Albanian conscience, the duality of the tragic survival between the bridge and the castle, the way the country and the region were perceived by the world has had an immense impact.

History demonstrates that in most cases the bridge was an imposed truth required more for the others than for the self. The best example for this is the Egnatia road<sup>62</sup>, which got the name of the Roman Ignatius and was the way that connected the two ancient metropolises of Rome and Constantinople. This is evidence that the bridges in the Balkans and especially in Albania were an imposed fashion. The Egnatia road was the first land passage from West to East and vice versa and traversed the Balkans. Many times this passage has turned into a political bridge in the service of the non-Balkans, what consequently led the autochthon people to enclose themselves in castles. Even today the notion of the Balkans in general and of Albania in particular as a linking bridge between the two dominating Eastern and Western cultures together with what this in-betweenness brought are quite common and have been one of the working grounds for most Albanian scholars including Ismail Kadare.

Born and artistically formed in Albania, Ismail Kadare inherited the genetic in-betweenness of the marginal citizens of margin countries. As he claimed many times, Kadare had overtaken the difficult mission of writing the history of his country, what was implied even in the title of his most inclusive poetical collections, *Historia e Popullit ne Vargje* (*The History of the People in Verses*)<sup>63</sup>. However, his work is not a mere

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<sup>62</sup> The via Egnatia was built by the Romans in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE.  
[www.viaegnatia.com](http://www.viaegnatia.com)

<sup>63</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Historia e popullit ne vargje*, (The History of People in Verses), (Tirana: Naim Frasheri, 1961).

historical account based on the books taught at school during the communist regime. It is a timeless, ambiguous, covered truth.

Transitional and indirect most of the times, Kadare's task was the construction of a deliberate bridge between Albania and the world without accepting the sacrifice of the tradition; the depiction of his country's historical in-betweenness, and a continual –most of the times impossible- endeavor to reshape the indecisive status of the fatherland between the castle and the bridge. In other words, he turned back to his people's traditional culture and making use of it, he attempted to demonstrate the survival endeavor of the Albanians, not as the imperative conditions to choose the castle, but as the wish to build the bridge: an eminent natural connecting formation, not an obstacle in the middle of the worlds.

An adorer of the West and a hater of totalitarian regimes, which to him were rooted in the East, Kadare decided that the single applicable path for the development of his country was its opening –symbolized by the bridge- and its reshaping in accordance to the Western model. Aware of the fact that Albania had remained far from what he called its 'natural identity', Kadare constructed a new bridge-format-Albania in his work. An Albania that can be best described with an analysis of *The Three Arched Bridge*.

Kadare constantly migrated in time in order to construct a missing image of his country. His time has no linear continuity. His history develops in cycles and sometimes viciously he turns to find in history an argument, evidence, a minute fact in order to use it in his literary work to restore –to fit them to the Western model- real historical periods. He seems to totally accept the idea that 'the future lays in the past'.

With *The Three Arched Bridge* Kadare migrates in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to relate the events surrounding the construction of a bridge across a river, in which the feudal

Albania of the pre-Ottoman invasion is depicted. This migration offers nothing positive and nothing approvable. The fear and mystery that had surrounded the whole continent at the time can be seized even in the Kadareian medieval Albania. The historian Milan Shufflay, annihilated after admitting the existence of the Albanians before the Slavs in the Balkan, doesn't depict it different from the rest of the Europe of the time<sup>64</sup>. The story of the construction of this 'cursed' bridge could have taken place in Ireland, Germany or any other region of Europe. The chaotic and paradoxical situation, besides being served with feeling, terror, and productive imagination, is characterized by the Western gothic sensitivity.

After fighting the nationalistic 20<sup>th</sup> century, paying the existence fee, and dealing with every aspect of the two different worlds (East and West) Kadare seems to have felt the need to create a more idealistic, more poetical and more turbulent atmosphere, where the social realism could not possibly be part of and still be seized. Composing a narrative of myths, dreams and polarities for the first time with *The Three Arched Bridge*, Kadare reveals his character, defined by the critics as Faustian<sup>65</sup> so often. Ali Aliu in his study suggests:

Many have discovered Spain beforehand from Cervantes and Don Quixote, England through Shakespeare and his tragedies, Italy through Dante and *The Divine Comedy*, as well as Latin America through Marquez. While the unknown Albania, the enigmatic and mysterious one, has been unveiled to many due to Kadare's novels. In contrast to the great mentioned classics, Ismail Kadare reveals a very tiny and unknown country of a past and history of contradictions and paradoxes. Many in the world consider Kadare 'the last

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<sup>64</sup> Milan Sufflay, *Srbi I Arbanasi* (Serbs and Albanians), (1925).

<sup>65</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet*, (*Dialogue with Alain Bosquet*), 159.

dinosaur’, which in a distinctly characteristic and very powerful way stressed the danger of totalitarianism and the many risks of utopias.<sup>66</sup>

The frequent return to the past points out the fact that the present with its political and pseudo-moralist placards and truthful, far from-realism, existence is the tragi-comedy of a whole population. If it is depicted as the commands required would not only be disrespectful to the sufferers, but unappreciated by history, as well. This affection for the past, especially for the dark ages, shows the far-from-enlightenment position of the communist totalitarian regime.

*The Three Arched Bridge* plot concerns the construction of a strategically important Balkan bridge in 1377, in the waning days of the Byzantine Empire, as the Ottomans were advancing into southeastern Europe. The story is related by a Catholic monk, who notes every event in a personal chronicle. Gjon Ukcama, the narrator of the events surrounding the bridge construction, provides the story sometimes as a historical account and sometimes as a cautionary tale. Many times Gjon’s narrative is enriched with the author’s one, a formidable surpass from one superficial account to the detailed historical report of the medieval Albania. This can be noticed even in the first paragraph of the novel when the monk introduces himself and the whole tale in relation to the bridge:

I, monk Gjon, the sonne of Gjorg Ukcama, knowynge that ther is no thyng wryttene in owre tonge about the Brigge of the Ujana e Keqe, have decided to write its story, especially when legends, false tales, and rumors of every kind continue to be woven around it, now that its construction is finished and it has even twice been sprinkled with blood, at pier and parapet.<sup>67</sup>

The medieval era in Albania is not more beleaguered or less favorable than in the rest of Europe. Feudality is a serious wound, while Albania just like the other part of Europe

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<sup>66</sup> Ali Aliu, *Miti Ballkanik te Kadareja, (The Balkan Myth in Kadare)*, (Tirana: Onufri, 2006), 26-27.

<sup>67</sup> Kadare Ismail, *Ura me Tri Harqe, (The Three Arched Bridge)*, (Tirana: Naim Frasheri, 1978), 7.

was a battle field. The book was an attempt to expose the legend truth throughout the difficulties, the genuine wildness, the madness of the period, and the superstitious human nature served.

As previously mentioned, together with a considerable number of his works *The Three Arched Bridge* is part of a series of novels and short stories in which Kadare maintained the clear goal of constructing the image of a different Albania, quite distinct from the one unveiled in front of Albanian's eyes everyday. This novel, the first of this Kadareian genre, is full of foundation breaks, rocks and stones, crimes all built around the central event, which is the human-sacrifice. The monk depicts the work in details:

After the holes for the foundations were opened, till they reached the rocks, the positioning of the big rocks started. The stones were excavated from far away and...brought here...However the color of mud was dominative. In the feet of the bridge they worked as in fever<sup>68</sup>.

Meanwhile, the water was not in a hurry. It seemed to wait and collect all its power before rushing to attack<sup>69</sup>.

All these make *The Three Arched Bridge* an establishment work. The absurd construction of this literary work continues with the provision of the image of an Albania of princes, counts, dukes, bishops, dervishes, journeyers, men of knowledge, genuine scholars, and prophets: all characters so distant to the social realistic genre dominating the Albania of the time, especially excluded from the literature of the time as figures of positive missions. The author lacking the possibility to openly express his admitting attitude toward the developed Western civilization, attempted to demonstrate it through the depiction of that historical period of Albania, during which scholars agree this land

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 40.



was compatible to its neighbors across the Adriatic in all aspects, from feudalism to emancipation. In the account surrounding the construction of the bridge, Kadare provide the Western medieval image of Albania of the time by the narration of the monk Gjon of other social events. Thus:

Toward the last days of the season our lord invited, as usual, distinct guests for the hunting in Humbetiren e Ujikut; an event he organizes every year approximately at the same period. Beside the neighboring lords and vassals, the Lord of the South Arber Gjin Bue Shpata came, as well. From the North came the two sons of the old Balsha: Gjergj Balsha and Balsha II together with their wives the countesses Marija and Komita...<sup>70</sup>

Both the river Ujana e Keqe (Wicked Water) and the bridge constructed upon it are major characters in the book, and they undergo the most significant transformations. However, the subject of the novel remains the immuring when a “volunteer” is immured inside the bridge in order to make a “sacrifice” to the river. The man's face is captured in the plaster that surrounds him, as unforgettable as it is horrifying. The monk Gjon relates:

The more hours passed the bigger, the bigger the incident looked. The night enlarged his body in an unbelievable way. The following days, as well. The silence that dominated all that week instead of dimming it, made it even bigger.<sup>71</sup>

Besides, its unquestionable power, the myth, which is depicted as “a ballad that commands”, is an eye of history kept on the occurring events. The Byzantine monk Gjon is the prototypical figure of the humanist period, so essential during the Renaissance movement. He is first depicted as a man of knowledge with academic interests, able to communicate in another language, which is related as a transitional pan- lingual mixture

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 120.

of Latin, ancient Greek and Slavish, interpreter of both the secular and religious world, and impressive discussion partner of the Western pilgrim Brocard. Gjon is worried about what the future reserves not only for his dear doctrine but for ‘our beloved country<sup>72</sup>’, as well. On the other hand, he has been located in the disadvantageous position of the unhappy bureaucrats. While his analyses are deep and comprehensive, the events - especially the one concerning the leaders- are slightly touched and the main forces in them are never mentioned. This attitude reminds the reader of the communist regime civil servant, who prefers the role of the unaware dump to the terrorizing future if he ever spoke the ‘non-recommended’. The monk Gjon has a lot in common with Kafka’s bureaucrat Poseidon<sup>73</sup> in the parable with the same title.

Giving the esteem of protagonism to a Catholic monk at the time when religious belief in Albania was banned by law and making this one the single round character of mainly positive aspects in the novel was probably the most daring act of Kadare in this novel. Gjon is given the opportunity to preach from the tribune-like podium relating the Ottoman threat and the gloomy destiny of this country, if they would ever pass the ‘bridge’. The tribune and the preaching in a communist country were luxuries reserved only to the communist leadership. Furthermore, the Catholic identity of the monk hides Ismail Kadare’s nostalgia for ‘the original religion of the Albanians’. Considering these two aspects of the monk, *The Three Arched Bridge* deserves its position as the ‘foundation work’ for all the later coming books of this timeless Kaderian genre. At the same it serves to introduce Kadare’s three main goals: the destroying of the existing

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>73</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Complete Stories*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 318.

Albania of the time, the construction of a different one, and its reshaping solely according to the Western model civilization.

In *The Three Arched Bridge* Kadare used the traditional treasure of his people attempting to recreate that other everlasting and attractive Albania in contrast to the sterile, desert-like communist one. In *Dialogue with Alain Bosquet*, he has related in details this stage of his career, naming it the 'restoration of the icon'<sup>74</sup>. Nevertheless, this Albania could not be totally distant to the actual tragic one, where he lived. So that, only the rocks the bridge is constructed with are medieval, just like in *The Pyramid*, where only the stones of the dreadful construction belong to the pharaohs' era, while the fear and the terror wind blow from the communist Albania.

In *The Three Arched Bridge*, Kadare focuses on the ancient motive of the sacrifice. The sacrifice was one of the main leitmotifs of communist propaganda: the (self) sacrifice in the name of the utopian future. This leitmotif was the pseudo-explanation for every misguided action and problematic event including poverty, the boredom of monotony, and especially isolation and pressure. In contrast to this dominating perception, the sacrifice Kadare depicts in *The Three Arched Bridge* is nothing like that. It is an intentional well-arranged murderer. A crime!

In other words, Kadare is not only the generator of an extremely qualitative novel, at the same time he is the creator of another Albania, a ghost-like one. This second Albania was a true challenge to the existing monotonous desert-like one. The literary Albania would become a restless tormenting spirit and a burden on the conscience for the communist one. This imaginary Albania was meant to become a rift—a grave—for the real one as well as a dim light of resurrection hope for the people. The tragic aspect of the

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<sup>74</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet*, (*Dialogue with Alain Bosquet*), 57.

novel is strengthened by the epilogue with an open identification of the author with the monk. As a chronicle-writer of the time, Gjon fears that his work together with his persona will be annihilated by the coming regime of ignorance's dictatorship-the Ottoman Empire threat- just like the bridge, which demanded the sacrifice. 'In such a case, the sacrifice would be no other, but me,<sup>75</sup>' writes he concluding the account of the events. This essential passage besides implying once more the fearful situation of every bureaucrat and citizen under the regime and Kadare's negation of the East as the bearer of communism and the obstacle of his 'Albania project', infers his personal fear of being annihilated by the ignorant communist regime as another way of punishment was not a choice to him, anymore.

Since 1988, when Albania was still a Stalinist country in an article in relation to the poet Migjeni, Kadare explained in details what he had risked before and still did by being the author of the Albania-project works<sup>76</sup>. Even though, many years have passed he remains firm in his opinion. For the simple reason of his international fame, Kadare was not possible to imprison. However he doesn't regard this as a special chance. On the contrary, under the domination of this kind of totalitarian regimes, where the murderer behind somebody's back was usual, imprisonment would be considered a real savor. However, he had lost this opportunity; there was only one sort of punishment left for him-if the dictatorship desired Kadare's punishment-: the murderer behind the back would be what expected him.<sup>77</sup>

However, referring to Ismail Kadare, it can be concluded that almost in all cases, except for *The Palace of Dreams* and *The Concert* the evasion of Kadare from the

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<sup>75</sup> Kadare, *Ura me Tri Harqe*, (*The Three Arched Bridge*), 122.

<sup>76</sup> Ismail Kadare, "Introduction; Migjeni, ose Urangani I ndaluar" (Migjeni, or the Interrupted Hurricane), Migjeni, *Vepra*, (Tirana: Naim Frasheri, 1988), LXI

<sup>77</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet*, (*Dialogue with Alain Bosquet*), 64.

communist discipline of ‘social realism’ was more the result of the lack of the ideological freedom than a deliberate intention of an ideological or political provocation.<sup>78</sup> Thus, *The Three Arched Bridge* cannot be considered only in the light of the social realism or as just an attempt to contradict it. Such an analysis would not be complete and would lead to a certain state of confusion.

The folk immuring ballad, which can be considered the major motive and the starting point of this novel, is one of the most brilliant artistic opuses of Albanian folk culture. In contrast to the other people of the Balkans, where the immuring-sacrifice is mostly related with temples and bridges- in the Albanian community this ballad is tightly related to the castle construction. The value of this ballad together with the awareness of its presence in the other neighboring cultures have led the populations of the Balkan into a severe competition in order to acclaim exclusive ownership of the song. Considering the ethnically ‘wounded’ lands of the Balkans, where the cultural boundaries are as disrespectful toward the political ones as these last are toward the natural boundaries, the caravan of scientists, sociologists, and ethnologists debating the origins of this ballad has been enlarged by the writers, too. In this context to obtain the title of the originator of the immuring ballad for many populations was evidence to their prehistoric existence in this region, as well as an existence dating previously than the others’ within the twilight area. However, the chronological Albanian ‘disease’ of not internationally acclaiming their artistic creativity, or being too late in undertaking such a mission was demonstrated even in this case. While the Slavs made their artistic claim through Ivo Andric’s *The Bridge on Drina*, (1945) more than five decades ago, the Albanian world had to await Kadare’s arrival for this, too.

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<sup>78</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 38.

Considered from this perspective, *The Three Arched Bridge* managed to prove that the Albanian immuring ballad was not of a lower quality than similar ones in the Balkan region. In fact, the motives depicted from Kadare show it to be one of the most comprehensive. Without any claim or direct opposition, Kadare becomes part of this inter-Balkan contest. Without underestimating the other cultures, nor touching the comparing-contrasting issue among the versions, he depicts the attributions of the Albanian version in all its beauty and originality.

Kadare's choice to demonstrate the bridge as a construction that deserved the immuring more than the castle reveals not only a personal attitude, but at the same time it is a mirror held to the Albanian traditional standpoint in relation to the Albanian civilization. The immuring in the foundation of the bridge is the undertaking of the sacrifice for the opening and for the larger inter-ethnic communication, in contrast to the sacrifice in the castle, which is symbolically related with the tendency of self-isolation and historically with the invasion danger and the cultural threat alarm. *The Three Arched Bridge* is the author's call to renounce self sufficiency, the evocation of the pre-historic Albania, a period memorized in the traditional songs as 'Kur kem' pase bese me krajlin..' (when we had besa with the the king)<sup>79</sup>. It is widely known that in the traditional folk culture of the Albanians the motive of the immuring in the Rozafa's castle foundation is more popular than the immuring in the bases of the bridge. However, Kadare regards the immuring in the bridge as primary, in the unification of Albania with the rest of the West, for him this remaining the single choice for his people.

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<sup>79</sup> The besa here stands for a friendly relationship based upon the given word and demands reciprocal faith, while the king signifies the Slav kingdom, so the verse could be translated as 'when we trusted the Slavs'.

While the author cannot possibly be unconcerned for the recognized truth that the Albanian ballad of immuring was the only one in the Balkans so tightly related with the castle, he is aware that this has been imposed by the historical destiny his people have been conditioned by. It is difficult for a civilization always in restriction to prefer the bridge over the castle and this is probably one of the most tormenting dilemmas the Albanians have experienced. The bridge is both desirable and frightful to them; “the bridge can be a path to both the good and the bad, to the friend and to the enemy...”<sup>80</sup>

The danger of expansion, which can turn the bridge over the Ujana e Keqe into a monster, can be felt during the whole novel as an unavoidable historical context to demonstrate that the decision for the ‘different Albania’ was tough. The author is encouraged by his immense dream of a diverse Albania and provides the Albanians with a model to be achieved in the future. In the short epilogue of this novel Kadare’s concern, if the Albanians will still be allowed to use the bridge as a germane device for themselves or will it be the inaugurating construction for the Albanian lands’ transformation into a mere bridge for others, is still present. The constructing group and the first caravan to pass the bridge were foreigners; the first Western and the second Eastern respectively<sup>81</sup>.

With this epilogue- probably one of the best in his career- Kadare predicted the duality the Albania of the post-communist era has been confronted with: the alternative of becoming the others’ bridge or the worlds’ bridge. In other words, the tiny country of economical problems is experiencing the inability to become a communicative bridge between civilizations and cultures, but has been enabled to obtain the role of the overpass of many malicious intentions and events as a shelter to any evil.

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<sup>80</sup> Kadare, *Ura me Tri Harqe*, (*The Three Arched Bridge*), 121.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

Creating a parallelism with what the first bridge-like construction across the Balkans the 'Via Egnatia' brought, Kadare has planned the bridge over the Ujana e Keqe to be historically followed by the 'survival within the castles' imposed by the Ottoman invaders. The timing, the plot and the conclusion of this novel, not only point to a diverse Albania opposite to the communist existing one, at the same time they depict the contours of the to-be-followed model. This model potentially rejects the Eastern model, denying this way not only the communist rule but the Islamic one, represented by the Ottoman Empire danger, as well.

Another point Kadare has been interested in and has hinted in this book is the relationship of the immuring legend with the bridge. The admitting that in the time of the construction of the three-arched bridge the ballad was introduced in the form of reproduction –a sort of recirculation- what implies its retransmission even in the previous times according to the people's psychological situation demanded by the current events, is in total compliance not only with the inner esthetic of the novel, but with the folklorist one, as well. Kadare doesn't state any direct opinion in relation to the forbearer and the deed. He leaves open the debate if it is the ballad that preceded the unexpected events in the bridge, or if it was the bridge's construction to offer the real material to the song. In a dialogue between the Albanian prince and the foreign bridge-constructors, the prince claims that the ones that damaged the bridge -still without any sacrifice at the time- managed this calamity thanks to the power of the mythical ballad, continuing that the builders could succeed the opposite with a song<sup>82</sup>. In other words, here Kadare emphasizes his goal through literature -the essential change- pointing out his belief to achieve it with the single tool he holds.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 73.



At the time, this novel was officially criticized for its tendency to ‘escape in history’ and for not including the current issues of the socialist realism<sup>83</sup>. However, it seems that even the critics of the time were scared by the substantial truth this imaginative flee enveloped: the considering of the current issues from a different perspective. In the struggle between the frightened conservatives who desired the avoidance of the bridge together with the maintenance of the existing isolation and those who wanted its construction –foreign, unidentified as they were-, the second ones triumphed. So, even in this work of his, the parody of the castle overcomes the castle itself, similarly with *The Castle*’s case. In its most dramatic analysis the bridge symbolizes the late opening of the isolated fortress.

On the other hand, the literary criticism of the time attempted to classify *The Three Arched Bridge* as an ordinary chronicle of medieval Albania. The debate in relation to the inaugural ritual of immuring divided the critics into two groups; the ones supposing that the narrated ritual was a true fact and the others believing this to be an artistic convention inherited by the antecedents as a symbol of obtaining permission from the fatherland before hurting it. At the same time, this novel was the starting point of a new era in the ethnographic studies in relation to the emancipation of the Albanian lands of the time<sup>84</sup>. However, no scholar suggested – or dared to suggest-that *The Bridge*... was the other side of *The Castle* in the national dilemma- the anti-castle.

The Balkans’ populations reached the 20<sup>th</sup> century with no definitive choice between the two sides of the dichotomy; the castle and the bridge. However, most of this region’s intellectuals including Kadare concluded that the sacrifice for the bridge was of a higher

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<sup>83</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 62.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

moral and of a more humanistic value. The Kosovo Albanian scholar Rexhep Qosja suggests the same in his famous play *Beselam, pse me flijojne?*<sup>85</sup> (*My Bessa-Keeper, Why Am I Sacrificed?*)

To conclude, Kadare's *The Three Arched Bridge* is not an ordinary historical novel of one-dimensional plot and message. It is a novel that preceded the political events in Albania where communism is indirectly parallelized to the Ottoman invasion for the first time and the abolishing of two is asked: a call understood in the light of postcolonialist theory. The novel's call to replace the fortress with the bridge was heard the moment the enclosing had reached its peak. More than a decade was necessary for the Albanians to pay attention to the writer's appeal to pull down their 'iron shutter' turning this into a massive action. A relatively pacific manifestation took place a short while after the fall of the Berlin Wall. However, Kadare remained loyal to his mission of reproducing the history of his fatherland and offering it from a different perspective. He remained loyal to the Albanian reality and to his country's inherited historical indeterminateness in selecting one side of the dilemma. Even though he was conscientious of his duty and had already been positioned against the fortress-like isolation, after *The Three Arched Bridge*, Kadare returned to the restrictive notion of castle to mine the Albanian one with novels such as *Broken April* and *Palace of Dreams*, whose many-fortressed structure was often parallelized with Dante's *Inferno* levels<sup>86</sup>. Toward the end of the 80s Kadare goes even deeper in the castle. *The Pyramid*, his last work depicts the construction of two pyramids that required so a high number of human sacrifices.

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<sup>85</sup> Rexhep Qosja, 'Beselam pse me flijojne' (My Bessa-Keeper, Why Am I Sacrificed?) *Mite te Zhveshura*, (Tirana: Botimet Toena, 2002)

<sup>86</sup> Sinan Kocani, "Les souterrains de la terreur ou la politisation de l'imaginaire infernal dans 'Le Palais des Reves' d'Ismail Kadare", (Universite de Paris IV: La Sorbonne, 2003)

## CHAPTER 4

### *ALBANIAN IDENTITY IN KADARE*

Perdite shoh qarte e me qarte      Everyday I see clearer and clearer  
e vuaj thelle e me thelle      and suffer deeper and deeper<sup>87</sup>...

wrote the Albanian poet of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Migjeni (Millosh Gjergj Nikolla). This unfinished poem shows the suffering of the writer and the pain he depicts in “Vargjet e Lira” (The Free Verses), the only book the poet managed to publish before his untimely death at the age of 27, in 1938. The book is a mirror held to the Albanian reality of the time. In Migjeni’s perception, it was a reality of an inexplicable visual beauty, but still a beauty that hurts and kills. He writes:

The pale moon, like the face of a dead, stares from the sky. (It) stares the mountain world, crystallized by the snow. (It) stares the crystallized cottages of the village that don’t even breathe. All of them have been wrapped up by the whiteness of the snow. And, does this white beauty kill. (It) kills the soul of the highlander just like the cold nude statue of a woman kills the soul of the artist.<sup>88</sup>

The reality in front of Migjeni was one of political instability, of an independent but highly dependent country, of dire economic problems especially in the rural areas, aggravated by the numerous wars people had involuntarily been involved in, of continual threat to ancient culture, and of an endangered national identity. Migjeni, firstly as a teacher, focused on the social issues engaging the youth. The youth in his country was a

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<sup>87</sup>Migjeni, *Vepra*, 103.

<sup>88</sup>Migjeni, “Bukuria qe Vret”, (Killing Beauty), *Vepra*, 171.

youth of undeveloped and nonintegrated women, of high illiteracy rate, of people violated by the *Kanun* tradition of vendetta, and of assimilation-aiming-propaganda of hardly any existing foreign religious schools. The Albanian intellectuals had left the country willingly, or had been sent in exile. The book was nothing less than the documented preoccupations of a scholar in front of a country and civilization's destiny; a scholar that sought for modernity, liberalism and integration, but was aware of the identity and cultural problems to be faced within the country located in the 'twilight area'.

Not much has changed in 75-80 years. The picture in front of the population of west Balkan while looking at their reality is almost the same. Regardless of their citizenships, - Bosnians, Croatian, Macedonian, Serbian, Montenegrin, Albanians of Kosovo, or Albanians inside the country's boundaries- they all share the destiny of being born in the tiny peninsula of big historical importance that besides the negative image all over the world gave Balkan people no other benefit. They had the fate to be the captives of Europe, which probably is a harsh but very appropriate definition for the population of the Balkans, who altogether share the in-betweenness of the region they were born in. The natives of the Balkans are all categorized in the zone of difficulties -that twilight area- which probably will be the last to get integrated in the EU, one of the largest economic and political unions.

The economic problems inherited by the dictatorial system, the absence of an uninterrupted self-governing tradition, the geographical position of a potential bridge between the worlds, or of the enclosed castle, the destiny of being the location that witnessed the highest number of battles in all times, the coexistence of many nationalities and many religious beliefs in such a small area, or all these factors together strengthened

the strange beauty Migjeni wrote about. A portrayal paradoxical in all its nuances; the nuances of being 'the other' and 'in-between', in the place you were born and plan to die.

Probably no other words better than the two verses of Migjeni, the first of the modernists and the last of the 'Rilindasve' -the scholars of the Albanian late Renaissance- are more appropriate to express the repetitive reshaping of the work and of the artistic identity, Kadare experienced over the years. The work of the Rilindasve, together with the Balkans' ethnic ancient ballads and myths, are the starting point and the inspirational well of Ismail Kadare.

Since the early 90's, when he asked for political asylum in France and settled in Paris and Albania entered the longest period of transition from dictatorship toward democracy, Kadare's work has been mostly concerned about the issue of Albanian identity, its roots and impact in the Balkans. Revitalizing the Albanian Renaissance motto 'feja e shqiptarit eshte shqiptaria'<sup>89</sup>, which means that 'the Albanian religion is Albanianhood', he undertook the difficult mission of reestablishing a Pan-Albanian identity at the beginning of the third millennium, just when the independence of Kosovo and the fear of a possible reunion of Albanians was the main diplomatic issue of Eastern Europe.

It is obvious that the issue of national identity comes further when a nation is experiencing a crisis or when it is in a transitional period; a period of pushing away the past without rejecting the roots and entering a new phase of existence. Identity, this living notion, is the product of an endless and complex process of a symbolic construction of the concept of belonging, where the collective process encounters the personal one. The individual process is a more stable 'crystallized' one. The collective identity is open

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<sup>89</sup> Pashko Vasa, (Vaso Pasha), 'O moj Shqypni, e mjera Shqypni' (O Albania, Poor Albania)  
<http://www.shkodraonline.com/vasa.html>

ended and continually reshaped and restructured. Nowadays, the Albanian national identity based on an ancient cultural heritage is being reexamined.

This chapter will attempt to analyze the phenomenon of Albanian identity through Ismail Kadare's work focusing on the public debate of Kadare and the Kosovo scholar and analyst Rexhep Qosja, as well as on Kadare's later works in relation to the Albanian identity and nationalism.

From a historical perspective, the existence of the Albanians in the Balkans can be traced in all studies of the prehistoric epoch. The Dardanian<sup>90</sup> tribe in the region that today is the Republic of Kosovo and part of northern Albania and the Epirus state of Pyrrhus<sup>91</sup> in the south demonstrate the existence of a population different from the Greeks and contemporaneous to them and of the same polytheist religion from the very beginning, at least the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE. According to a number of historians the arrival of the Slavs in the Balkans had been firstly recorded during the 6<sup>th</sup> century, while their presence in this peninsula goes back to 10<sup>th</sup> century<sup>92</sup>. It would not be correct to state that a sort of co-existence between the Slavs and the Albanians never occurred. Actually the two ethnic groups were forced to face the same destiny of numerous invasions and of fierce wars' battleground.

However, as Ismail Kadare, with his ironical style, emphasizes in his work *Three Elegies for Kosovo*, the relationship between the Albanians and Slavs, especially the Serbs, was not stable. Probably due to the two tribes' abrupt temper, heritage of the rocky geography, their accustoming to the war climate, and most probably due to their struggle for existence 'the Albanians and the Serbs fought each other when they had nobody else

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<sup>90</sup> John Wilkes, *The Illyrians*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 86.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

to fight with'<sup>93</sup>. Yet, the relationship between the Albanians and the Serbs deteriorated with the Kosovo issue.

The Serbian arguments for demanding Kosovo inside the borders of their country were three: the suggestion that Kosovo was a desert land in their early arrival, the myth of Kosovo- the death of King Lazar in the Battle of Kosovo (1389) -, and the great Albanian migration of the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, not to mention the economic intentions for the most fertile land within the rocky Balkans<sup>94</sup>. These arguments were debunked not only by the Albanian historians, but by foreign historians, too. Both gave facts of the Dardanians' existence in this region long before Christianity. They pointed to the historical fact that the Battle of Kosovo was fought between the Ottoman Army ally with the Macedonian Serb King<sup>95</sup>, who approved of the Ottoman rule with no resistance and a Balkan alliance including all the Slav tribes and Albanians<sup>96</sup>. In this bloody battle, which made many international scholars deduce that the name of this field derived from the Ottoman expression for the region 'Kanli Ova'<sup>97</sup>, thousands of Albanian combatants and princes were killed, as well. On the other hand, it is widely known that the Albanian emigration of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was one forced upon the Albanians of Islamic belief by fierce massacres conducted against them by the Orthodox Serbs<sup>98</sup>. Even foreigner

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<sup>93</sup> Kadare, *Three Elegies for Kosovo*, 118.

<sup>94</sup> Noel Malcolm, "Is Kosovo Serbia? We ask a historian" *The Guardian* 26 February 2008  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/26/kosovo.serbia>

<sup>95</sup> Richard G. Jansen, *Battle of Kosovo, 20 June 1389*, (10 October 2000,  
[http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles\\_kosovo.html](http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles_kosovo.html)

The same suggestions can be found even in Elsie Robert, "Historical Dictionary of Kosovo", 85

<sup>96</sup> Malcolm Noel, "Is Kosovo Serbia? We ask a historian" *The Guardian* 26 February 2008  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/26/kosovo.serbia>

<sup>97</sup> 'Kanli Ova' means 'Bloody Plain' the name the Ottomans baptized field-Kosovo, where the battle took place, after the death of Sultan Murat I.

This epithet was also used by M.A. Ersoy in the poem 'Uc kafasiz derdine, uc milyon halk' *Safahat*, (Istanbul: Erhan Yayınları, 1999), 224.

<sup>98</sup> Richard G. Jansen, "Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo: An Abbreviated History", April 25, 1999.  
<http://lamar.colostate.edu/~grjan/kosovohistory.html>

historians, with the objectivity the fact of not being part of this whole ethnic issue provides, such as Noel Malcolm, the writer of *Kosovo, A Short Story* agrees that Kosovo was not the original geography of the Serbs in the Balkan as their presence is firstly noticed in Sancak and Novi Bazaar<sup>99</sup>. According to him, the Albanians were present in Kosovo even during the medieval era, emphasizing the incorrectness of the Serbian assumption that the Albanians arrived in Kosovo in the 1690s from the Dukagjini highlands<sup>100</sup>. Using the France and Algeria example of colonialism as a parallelism for the Serbian presence in Kosovo Malcolm suggests:

...it can not be the case of Serbians' rights over this territory, just like France or any other colonizing power nowadays cannot pretend ownership of the colonized regions ...of course there was real difference between the case of Kosovo and the case of a territory such as Algeria: in the latter example the distance,...and race make a difference<sup>101</sup>

In this context, although none of the Balkan populations were part of the colonized territories, the regional instability and century long invasions made them experience not the harsh cultural extermination the former colonized countries went through, but a long term attempt of reshaping and restructuring that ended up with permanent traces of deculturization and assimilation. First, the 500-year-long Ottoman occupation and bloody battles, of an unfamiliar Eastern political system equipped with different horrific policies, of foreign or assimilated rulers, of both forced and unforced religious conversion, of mother tongue prevention and schools absence, of diminished women's role in society

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<sup>99</sup> Noel Malcolm, "Kosovo and Bosnia: Three Points", *Bosnian report*, March-May 1998, New Series no.3. <http://www.bosnia.org.uk/bosrep/marmay98/kosovo.cfm>

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*,

<sup>101</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 5-9.



with the forced covering policies gave the initial fractures to the native culture as a whole making the perception of this empire as a colonizing power much easier.

From a different perspective, Kosovo's unity with Albania and the single Albanian identity are not recently generated notions. These two have been considered a single ethnicity for more than 3000 years, while the notion 'Kosovo as Serbian land' was generated less than 300 years ago as a result of the previously mentioned arguments. The regions of the actual Albania and the newly recognized Kosovo Republic were considered as one, –Albanian lands- both during the Roman Empire and the Ottoman Empire invasions, what can be proved by the division of the 'villayets' during the rule of the latter.

Furthermore, the Albanians besides having the identical historical fatherland struggled together for independence during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, the Albanians just like most populations were introduced to notions such as 'nation', nationalism, and ethnicity; and, this is what made them struggle for the establishment of Albania as an independent country. Their independence (1912) was the last to be obtained by the crumbling empire as a totally ethnic achievement, while there is evidence to show that they had been active in the independence struggle of other Balkan nations, especially in Serbia.

Only a few months later, experiencing the fate of the weak, Albania was introduced to its actual boundaries. At the time, Albanian regions such as Kosovo were concluded to be added to the lands of other countries such as Serbia and Greece. Not to go to details, the new born independent nation had to deal with land, war, and economic issues to the end of World War II; a period during which Kosovo managed to be reunited with the motherland. However, this region was sacrificed by the dictator Hoxha as a federation in

the Republic of Yugoslavia for the existence of another communist state within the Balkans. Having to deal with the issue of existence, the Albanian concern about culture, language, and ‘uncontaminated’ identity during this period could not possibly be more urgent.

The declaration of The People’s Republic of Albania and its entering in the East Block meant the establishment of a communist regime, probably the most severe of Eastern Europe. After an oscillated relationship the Albania of the time totally interrupted its relationship with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1948)<sup>102</sup>, abandoning the Albanians of Kosovo to frequent pressure under the patronage of Serbia and frustrating the Kosovo’s dream of peace, freedom, independence and democracy, till February 2008.

In 1961, Albania broke with the Soviet Union, and with all the other countries of the Socialist Block. China was the last severed relation, towards the end of the 1970s<sup>103</sup>. Finally, the self-isolation, under the motto “through our own endeavor<sup>104</sup>”, beside the well known economic problems that created, led to cultural isolation. It was this cultural standstill, which gave rise to a new generation of writers of socialist realism. This cultural isolation, which was fed with artists’ fear to create, didn’t help at all ‘the returning to our own roots’ as often insisted by the dictator Hoxha. In fact, the dullness of themes, language, plot, settings and characters of ‘socialist realism’ literature led to the strengthening and calcification of what was to be the imaginative wall between the individual and his culture and identity.

Within Albania Ismail Kadare’s works became more popular for their veiled dissidence, social realism’s commands denying attitude, and unusual plots, which

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<sup>102</sup> Miranda Vickers & James Pettier, *Albania, From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity*, (New York: Taylor and Francis Ltd., 1999), 2.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>104</sup> A slogan familiar in Albania during this period; it was launched in a speech of E. Hoxha.

indirectly contradicted the political developments in Albania. At the same time, these works contributed in the construction and preservation of Albanian culture due to the usage of a pure Albanian language, the emphasizing of the Albanian's historical triumphs and the revitalizing of the mythical folk epic songs, ballads and legends. Kadare's international fame grew as world's attention turned toward the Balkan Peninsula during the last two decades and he was one of the rare writers whose artistic concern was compatible with the historically delicate issues of this geography.

In accordance to the Albanian Renaissance scholars, preferring the role of the vocal guardian of his mother culture, Kadare's starting points are the Albanian myths and the glorious periods of his country. Kadare's main thematic concerns are the source of the myths and ancient legends, the political the historical invasions over Balkan, especially the Ottoman invasion of his country treated in novels such as *The Castle*, *The Three-arched Bridge*, *Palace of Dreams*, and *The Blind(ed) Order*.

Ismail Kadare attempted to narrate the historical events of the highly-tension-filled period around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the twelve-episode novel, *The Blind(ed) Order* (1999). The plot of the first micro-novel of this series, *The Wicked Year* (1985) turns around the situation of the Balkans of the time from the Albanian Independence in 1912 to the Conference of London in June 1913, when Albania's lands were divided. Many of the settings and events in *The Wicked Year* remind the reader of the Orwellian novel *1984*<sup>105</sup>.

The related evil year is marked by two similarly horrifying events for the Balkan people; the appearing of a comet –Kadare in this novel depicts the comet Halley appear 3

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<sup>105</sup> Olsi Jazexhiu, "Viti Orwellian I Ismail Kadarese", (The Orwellian Year of Ismail Kadare) 21 September, 2007, <http://www.albstudent.eu/glocal/opinion/viti-orvellian-i-ismail-kadarese>

years after its original appearance in 1910- and the unwished so often ‘delayed’ independence of the Albanian ‘vilayets’ from the Ottoman Empire. With the anxiety the first bore the novel narrates the fear dominating the Balkans in relation to the second. While the neighboring countries are concerned about a possible expansion of a non-Slav, Muslim country, the Albanians fear the interruption of the existence dream. The novel is a collective narration of many variable voices, a technique the author relied upon even before in works such as *The Pyramid*, providing the reader with the dominative superstitious, uncertain, and undetermined atmosphere of the time. The depicted is a half enthusiastic, half suspicious atmosphere of pseudo-combating peasants in the geopolitically tumultuous battle field, of domestic spies and international agents, as well as of anonymous or multi-voiced chronicles and pamphlets. The author makes use of all the nuances of a powerful damascening irony in relation to the destiny of people. He proposes a daring portrait of Balkan in all its aspects. Kadare narrates:

...in the forests of Mamurras ruled the gangs of Tur Kusari, (while) a little bit further there was the northern army of black baggy pants under the command of Uk Bajraktari...while the Muslim groups of Esad Pasha, which demanded a return to the Turks, went around middle- Albania under the noise of drumming, yelling ‘(We) want the Father’<sup>106</sup>...and singing as in funerals gloomy songs...<sup>107</sup>

*The Blind(ed) Order*, just like all Kadare’s work lacks an improving depiction of the ‘own people’ to demonize the anti-hero or sanctify the personal. Though, he attempted not to be blind to the virtues present in Albanian tradition- virtues, which had been forgotten by most traditions, including the European Western one-, Kadare is quite severe

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<sup>106</sup> The call refers to an Albanian Shi dervish and rebel- Haxhi Qamili-, who rebelled under the idea of Islam as nationality

<sup>107</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Viti I Mbrapshte*, (*The Wicked Year*), (Tirana: Naim Frasheri 1985), 12.

toward Albanian people. Even in his first novel *The General of the Dead Army*, he is cautious not to idealize an uninformed mentality of a present -not rare- underdevelopment. Exceptional in style, but always a good follower of the Albanian earlier limited tradition, Kadare is not different from Migjeni, Konica, Noli, Mjeda and Shiroka who have insistently criticized the negative sides of their nation regarding the Albanian reader their first audience.

However, most of the weaknesses the previously mentioned brilliant figures of Albanian Renaissance and literature as well as Kadare have criticized are not exclusively Albanian. These inconveniences, such as the great desire to emphasize the absence instead of being content by the presence –the half full, half empty glass issue- can be observed all over the Balkans. This issue has been touched by Kadare in *The General of the Dead Army*, when the priest companion of the general relates:

“The predominant themes of their songs are destruction and death. That is a characteristic of all their art. You find it in their songs, in their dress, in the whole of their existence. It is a characteristic common to all Balkan peoples of course; but it is even more pronounced in the Albanians than anywhere else. Look at their national flag: simply a symbol of blood and mourning.<sup>108</sup>”

In other words, a certain state of apathy, hopelessness, and avoidance of endeavor mostly defined as typical laziness of the region’s people, in fact points to the lethargy of the looser and the weak, as well as to the historical impossibility of the Balkans to achieve control of their own territories, which have produced the actual circumstances.

In relation to Ismail Kadare’s general attitude toward his country it can be suggested that his critical position is not parallel to the group of those many intellectuals of ex-communist countries, who in order to become interesting and read widely in Western

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<sup>108</sup> Kadare, *The General of the Dead Army*, 134.

countries provide real-unreal, minimizing, and exaggerating comments over their countries. Kadare's attitude in relation to his country has remained unchanged regardless of the capitulation of the communist regime. He has never attempted to reshape his previous perception of the Albanians, defining their identity as a different issue from the communist regime.

This attitude has led to wide-spread consideration of him as a die-hard nationalist. Kadare prefers such a classification to the miserable position of self-denial referring to a critical article of a French critic '*When it comes to his country's problem Kadare is as blind as Homer*', in relation to his novel *The File on H*. The critic derided such a conclusion not due to any attitude of other culture's negation; on the contrary his conclusion was the result of fatherland affection of the writer<sup>109</sup>. *The File on H* together with *The Wicked Year* is characterized by a thorny irony of the Balkans' absurd nationalism, while both can be regarded as 'a collection of the Balkans' deliria' at this point. Regarding Kadare as nationalistic would be improper, if we consider his thorny criticism of Albanian (and Balkan) vices. In *The Wicked Year*, Kadare satirizes ignorance, religious division, and superstition mercilessly:

...in the forests of Mamurras ruled the gangs of Tur Kusari, (while) a little bit further there was the northern army of black baggy pants under the command of Uk Bajraktari...while the Muslim groups of Esad Pasha, which demanded a return to the Turks, went around middle- Albania under the noise of drumming, yelling '(We) want the Father'...and singing as in funerals gloomy songs...<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 100.

<sup>110</sup> Kadare, *Viti I Mbrapshte (The Wicked Year)*, 12,

The invitations<sup>111</sup> the fathers of temples made to the main leaders as a result of the Tirana mufti directives...and especially due to the predictions of the future-teller Hance Hamdije, who predicts that otherwise Albania would become small as an orange fruit.<sup>112</sup>

As can be noticed, Kadare was no blind nationalist. He, alike all Albanian scholars, who dared pointing to the truth, was not criticized and labeled Homer-like nationalist for any chauvinist attitude toward other ethnicities or any offensive statement toward them, but for mentioning the pure factual truth of the Albanian existence in the peninsula. Kadare was labeled nationalistic and was considered to be victimizing his people for stating that the Albanians are as ancient as the Greeks in the Balkans, that the Slavs' arrival dated between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, that there exists an Albanian epos contemporaneous with the Greek myths and that the Albanian language derives from the Illyrian language just like the Albanians are the successors of this ancient Balkan community<sup>113</sup>.

The previously mentioned sorts of critical articles seem to ask the Albanian cultural emissary of the last seventy years to hide a truth.

...not to mention the Albanian autochthony in the Balkans as the other later coming tribes are enraged by the fact, not to state their Illyrian roots as a tensioning phenomenon for the twilight zone, not to admit the existence of at least the two most important cities of the western coast, Shkodra (4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and Durres (4<sup>th</sup> century BCE)<sup>114</sup>, as ancient as Rome itself, and not to even quote details from the German scholar Siegfried Leibniz's reports of

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<sup>111</sup> 'The invitations point to the calls of different groups of people made to the government to resign and enter under the protection of any of the superpowers.

<sup>112</sup> Kadare, *Viti I Mbrapshte, (The Wicked Year)*, 47.

<sup>113</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Identiteti Europian I Shqiptareve (The European Identity of Albanians)*, (Tirana: Onufri, 2006), 100.

<sup>114</sup> en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\_of\_Albania – 105k

1695 and 1705 that were followed by many others, which all underline the fact that Albanian language is one of the basic six European languages<sup>115</sup>.

While the Balkans were till lastly tormented by the Serbian devastating ‘hurricane’ of monstrous crimes and genocide first in Bosnia and later in Kosovo, the labeling of Ismail Kadare ‘nationalistic’, who used positive arguments to support the Albanian issue, is not only unjust, but provocative as well.

The debate between Rexhep Qosja and Ismail Kadare in relation to the Albanian identity took place under the shadow of the current political and cultural furrow, which as a matter of a fact, affected the current problems around Albanians and their legitimate regions. Now, after the fall of Berlin Wall that led to the Albanian democracy (1991-92) and the autonomy of Kosovo (2000) to be followed by its independence (February 2008), the population of the west Balkans had the possibility to reexamine and ‘wake the sleeping identity’. These two scholars’ disagreement was in relation to the impact of Islam over the Albanian identity.

It is arguable that the divergence of these two Albanian scholars is related with the issue of religion as probably the most praised virtue of their people by both and other scholars as well, was the religious tolerance and harmony among the three main religions existent in Albania: Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Islam. In a letter the clerics of Lezha send to Pope Clement VIII in 1602, declaring their discontent in relation to their Italian bishop and asking his substitution, they state that one of the major reasons is his destructive attitude negatively affecting their relationship with the Muslim community<sup>116</sup>. Regardless of the fact that many other beliefs have been entering this lately opened

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<sup>115</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 102.

<sup>116</sup> <http://members.aol.com/dxhezo/literatearly.htm>



culture and many Albanians have converted to different sects and less to other religions this gracious harmony has not been affected.

Ironically, according to an indigenous cliché the Albanian trans-religious tolerance is a product of the Albanians' disregard for the mystic world. As it is widely known the Albanian national hero, Scanderbeg converted into three different religions to have the pagan symbol of goat on his armor. Even during the struggle for independence, when all other ethnicities of the Balkans were claiming their separation from the Ottoman Empire bringing up their diverse religious beliefs as a sign of their diverse identity and the Albanian Renaissance scholar Naim Frasheri, in his work *The Kabala* (1898) suggested the majority Muslim Albanians to gather under the Bektashian belief for a Balkan model ethnic identity the Albanian attitude was unchangeable. Frasheri's suggestion was soon disregarded by Vaso Pasha with the verses that became the Albanian motto during the independence struggle; 'feja e shqiptarit eshte shqiptaria'<sup>117</sup>. However the late unification of the different religious communities delayed the Albanian independence, making Albania the last country to obtain its independence in 1912 from the crumbling Ottoman Empire. A union that might have not been achieved without the support of the clerical class, evidence to what is the protagonist role the Catholic priest Dom Nikolle Kacorri and the Muslim mufti Vehbi Dibra overtook.

From a generalizing perspective Vaso Pasha's motto-'the Albanian religion is Albanianhood'- seems to have gained power after the declaration of independence. Within the 'trimmed' Albania, religion started to lose importance and control to come to the point of its prohibition by law in 1967 by the communist regime, while the Albanians

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<sup>117</sup> Pashko, Vasa, (Vaso Pasha), 'O moj Shqypni, e mjera Shqypni' (O Albania, Poor Albania) <http://www.shkodraonline.com/vasa.html>

of Kosovo became more and more connected to their Islamic religion as a distinctive feature from the oppressing Orthodox Serbians. This different orientation of the divided Albanians was probably the starting point of the formation of two different branches of identity within the Albanian identity. Probably led by the dream of a greater Albania and a pan-Albanian identity none of the two scholars, neither Ismail Kadare nor Rexhep Qosja, were attentive to this diversity that generated the controversial phenomenon the ex-colonized communities experienced; the alienation and othering of the individual from his own culture and natural identity.

The arguments of the two intellectuals, although used in favor of two opposing theses have the same target and apparently the same starting point. While the target remains the geopolitical and cultural localization of Albania and the position of Albanians in the Balkans, their starting point seems to be the rediscovery of the Albanian identity. According to Qosja the Albanian identity in fact is the sum of three different identities which present themselves in the Albanian conscience in compliance with their three religious beliefs; Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox<sup>118</sup>.

According to Kadare the three religions are just composing elements of the Albanian threatened identity that is a single one for all Albanians that have in common the language, the geographical position, the history of their nation, the folklore, the myths, and all symbols of national culture. Kadare goes further considering the conversion of Albanians to Islam not just the Ottoman propaganda, but at the same time as a strained long process supported by the greedy neighboring countries of the tiny country in order to

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<sup>118</sup> Rexhep Qosja, "The Albanian Question and its Solution", *La Question Albanaise*, (Paris: Fayard, 1995) <http://www.albanianhistory.net/texts/AH1994.html>

manipulate the endeavor for freedom and independence of this population underlining this fact:

‘when they lost every hope for a possible replacement of the Albanians of their own identity with a Slav one, they decided that there was only one method left; a third identity that would weaken and make paler the Albanian existing identity’<sup>119</sup>

Two controversial conclusions derive from the two intellectuals. For Qosja as the Albanians belong to Europe thanks to their Christian ‘half’ and to the Islamic culture thanks to their Muslim ‘half’; it is not only natural but also favorable for them to chose an oriental cultural model as this way it would be easier for them to obtain and protect their rights<sup>120</sup>. On the contrary, for Kadare such a ‘fractional’ Albanian identity is not only incomprehensible as it is false, but at the same time hazardous as it restricts the natural inclination of Albanian identity –including that of the Muslims’- toward Europe and Western culture, successors and ancestors of which they are.

In Kadare’s opinion, the Albanian population has no partial identity, false or even hidden behind deceptive traps. He suggests:

...Albanian identity is (also) lucid, although many don’t want to notice it while for others noticing it is inconvenient. The Albanians are one of the most ancient populations of the European continent; an originating population over this land, just the way the Albanian language has been accepted by all great lingual specialists to be one of the basic languages of the continent. Geography, the most stubborn entity of the world, is the first to witness the Albanian Europeanism.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Kadare, *Ideniteti Europian I Shqiptareve (The European Identity of Albanians)*, 40.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

In other words, both Ismail Kadare and Rexhep Qosja agree with the idea that if the Albanians had conserved their essential religious belief, Christianity, their return to the European identity they belong to, would have been easier<sup>122</sup>. However, Kadare points out the fact that this grief –if so- of Qosja in fact contradicts the intellectual’s initial idea that the ‘half’ of the Albanians belong to the eastern civilization. Kadare maintains that this ambiguous atmosphere created around the notion of the Albanian identity has been produced and launched from those for whom the Albanian factor was a source of fear for two reasons: the existence and possible growth of a non-Slavic country and the inner instability of the nation in the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea<sup>123</sup>. So every religious controversy created in Albania was product of outer tendentious forces, a propaganda the Albanians shouldn’t be fooled by.

This positioning of Kadare has been considered tendentious many times within and outside the country, mostly by Muslim scholars. The new generation historian Olsi Jazexhiu accuses him thus:

The anti-Semitic, anti-gege, and anti-Islamic racism of Kadare, which has been extensionally explained in his study *The European Identity of Albanians*, does not exclude even the gypsies<sup>124</sup>.

While Kadare, born Muslim, maintains that this attitude of his is exclusively pointing to the European identity of Albanians without encompassing any attempt of disrespect toward the Muslim majority. In his later study *The Albanian Nation toward the Beginning of the Third Millennium*, in order to support this claim Kadare argues:

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>124</sup> Jazexhiu, “Viti Orwellian I Ismail Kadarese” (The Orwellian Year of Ismail Kadare) <http://www.albstudent.eu/global/opinion/viti-orvellian-i-ismail-kadarese>

One of the very first Christian countries of Europe, Albania originally was land of the western European civilization. Starting with the great hymn *Te Deum* that was written by an Albanian bishop one thousand five hundred years ago, to continue with the protector of the western tradition Gjergj Kastrioti Scandebeg; the most sublime and famous personality of not only the Albanians but of the whole Balkan, who was classified as ‘the athlete of Christ’ and finally to come to the Albanian nun Mother Theresa; the most famous Albanian woman of today. It is thorough this bright line we can see and witness this civilization, so widely negated from the malign intentional ones of the Albanian nation<sup>125</sup>.

To conclude, the Albanian nationalism and identity occupies an important place in Ismail Kadare’s work especially during the last two decades. Aware of the divergences the new transitional period would bring and the reestablishing of Yugoslavia’s border would offer, he dedicated this period of his career to proving the Albanian identity as exclusively European hoping that this main goal of the second part of his career would be achieved like the main goal of his career under the communism regime- the regime’s demolition -managed to be realized. Kadare is of the opinion that only by following the European model of civilization, considering this the natural choice of a more compatible culture with the indigenous one, will the Albanian achieve the peaceful independent and free existence they have been dreaming of since the beginning of history. Even though Kadare’s approach can be regarded more of essentialist nuances than of modern nationalistic ones and can be criticized of being chauvinistic in some aspects, considering the conditions his country was found in, for centuries and the provocation the oppression of Ottoman rule first later followed by communism within the

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<sup>125</sup> Ismail Kadare, *Populli Shqiptar ne Fillim te Mijevjecarit te Trete, (The Albanian Nation toward the Beginning of the Third Millennium)*, (Tirana: Onufri, 2005), 34.

borders and Serb chauvinism in Kosovo, Kadare's this approach is excused like that of any post-colonialist scholar that experienced colonialism and colonial oppression in their countries.

## CHAPTER 5

### *THE SELF -ALIENATED*

Avioni lejohet te zbrese me ne fund.	The plane is allowed to land, finally
Duke shkerbyer engjejt flatron serish.	Scaring the angels, (it) wings again.
Mbi rrokaqiej shenjat e kryqit	over the skyscrapers, the cross signs
Te zotin e presin te zbrese lartesisht	await for their god –master- to descend highly.
Kurrkund ne bote bujtesin e larget	nowhere else on earth the distant guest
S’e presin kaq dehshem e me kaq buje	is awaited with such inebriation, such grandeur
I varur humnershem midis tokes e qiellit	hung abyss-likely between lands and skies
Midisesi I madh degjon ‘alleluia’. <sup>126</sup>	The grand mediator hears the ‘alleluia’ ...

This stanza quoted from the poem, ‘Christmas in New York’, one of the last poetic works of Kadare (1997) is one of the best examples of the in-betweenness of the author. Probably impacted by a factual journey to the famous metropolis, the poem consisting of four parts unveils the ambiguity covering the figure of Kadare; his frequent emigration in time, his mission, and his fatherland-inherited duality. Most importantly, this poem opposes the dominant idea among Albanian scholars that states a conceptual metamorphosis of the writer.

Ismail Kadare’s in-betweenness is not an easily defined as the insecurity between two cultures. Actually, Kadare’s in-betweenness is a mark of his country’s national identity, which cannot be defined as a single unambiguous entity. So that Kadare’s novelistic character is complex, fluid and impossible to be framed according a certain model. He goes further back between life and death, existence and inexistence, real world and dream world, isolation and opening, the role of Christ and that of anti-Christ. In the

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<sup>126</sup> Ismail Kadare, “Krishtlindje ne New York” (Christmas in New York) *Pa forme eshte qielli, (Formless Is the Sky)*, (Tirana: Onufri, 2005), 211.

Kadare world, the castle doesn't stand without the bridge, life is produced by death, freedom passes through detention, while existence is fruit of inexistence just like the future that lies in the past, and Western development means Orient's denial.

Written after the fall of the communist regime, the previous stanza depicts the enthusiasm the changes of the 1990s under the motto 'freedom and democracy' brought, pointing to the following problematic issues. The first verse of this stanza- the first in the second part of the poem- points to the abolition of the communist regime in the beginning of the 1990s. Finally, after a fifty-year-long-attendance the 'plane' carrying uncertainty is allowed to land in the 'Promised Land'. In other words, after the fall of communism in Albania, the Western world looked positive and hopeful to this opening, evidence to what are the many visits of important figures of the Western super-powers in Albania at the time.

It is evident that the opening was followed by an immense feeling of curiosity toward the country that despite the fact it was located in the coast of Adriatic had managed to remain totally unexplored due to the politically commanded isolation. On the other hand, the tiny country symbolized by the plane, due to the parallelism the writer builds between the modern vehicle and the eagle -emblem of Albanians-, had been awaiting this opportunity for touching the West with such a thirst that reminds the reader of the first ships of pilgrims to America, giving meaning to the metaphor of New York in the title and evoking the Albanian exodus of 1992.

The following lines emphasize the status of the relationship of Albania with the West after the first euphoria the achievement of democracy donated. They satirize the long transitional period and once more define the position and role of the writer himself. It is not strange that soon after the curiosity faded away and the international attention turned



toward other 'hotter' events, the Albanians -to their disappointment- learned that in contrast to what the Hoxha regime had preached the world politics did not develop in accordance to the Albanian domestic politics, but the Albanian politics were supposed to become compliant with the world's.

Furthermore, in the forth line of the stanza, the Albanian community turns to the religious faith, which in this poem is both a literal and symbolic return. The concrete return points to the reopening of churches and mosques all over Albania after the abolition of the atheism law of 1967, while the symbolic return is that of the victim of uncertainty, who opens his hands praying to the skies for a miracle, not knowing which is the path to be followed. Every Albanian could be regarded as a victim of uncertainty during the first years of transition with his hands open to the skies and their eyes toward the West.

In the first analysis, it is obvious that the second four lines, as suggested by the title of the poem, point to the figure of Christ and his glorification on Christmas Eve in a city that could be considered the heart of Western development and culture-or at least what these definitions stand for- from a generalizing perspective. This glorification is not only the pure amazement of a citizen from a small country toward the immensity and development of another. It is not either a mere amplification of the 'American Dream' in the eyes of Balkan people. It is the constant assumption of Kadare, found in all his works, baptized by him as 'the legitimate right of Albanians': their European identity as a result of their original Christian belief.

From another perspective, the portrayal in the last four lines is mostly a personal one. Hence, it demonstrates the permanency of Kadare's artistic character, without denying his professional maturation with time, from *The General of the Dead Army* to *The*

*Shadow*. With the last lines Kadare points to his un-belongness; he is nothing like the angelic inhabitants of the holly unreachable skies and still he is not on the lands. The dualism of Kadare is not obvious only to the critics; it has been pointed out by the figures he provides as parallels to himself.

As in this poem, Christ has been many times a corresponding figure to Kadare's suggested self portrayals. Kadare is a Christ to his people in the aspect that he was the first to openly break the borders in 1990 and ask political asylum in France precipitating the political events in his country. Ismail Kadare is a Christ to his people due to his endeavor to keep their hope alive, due to his mission in relation to the Albanian truth, and mostly due to the role of mediator between the West and his fatherland, he undertook. Kadare is a Christ due to his pacifist war-condemning attitude. Kadare is a Christ due to his in-betweenness: as dead as him and as alive as him. Kadare's artistic character is as time-disregarding, as immigrant and as criticized as Christ figure. Moreover, Kadare owes Christ the notion of life within death and death within life so dominative in most of his novels.

Another figure Kadare attempted to build a parallelism with himself is the resurrected character of the Albanian folkloristic ballad of revitalization; Kostandin. The evocation of this ballad in the novel *Doruntine* (1980) is another from Kadare's emigrations in time. Kostandin being a restored from death (for a short period in order to maintain the given *bessa* and bring back home, to see her mother, the sister, who married 'seven mountains away'<sup>127</sup>) provides a magnificent metaphor for Kadare's position between the dead Albania and the lively world.

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<sup>127</sup> Kostandin and Doruntine" ballad,  
<http://www.zeriyt.com/fragmente-nga-letersia-shqipe/ballada-e-doruntines-t5690.0.html>

In the novel *Doruntine*, with which Kadare once more disregarded the contemporary events and turned to the enchanted world of legends, for the first time in his artistic work he paid attention to the relationship of the shadow –ghost- with the human-, of the underworld with the real world.

However, the most convenient motive Kadare borrowed from the revitalization ballad to bring to his novel with a corresponding plot, is the character of Kostandin; as an in-between figure Kostandin stands for all what Kadare's art built. Besides, their 'K' first letter of the Christian symbol of cross in Albanian (kryq), the same in the Krisht (Christ), Kostandin and Kadare, the three share the position of the persona between the worlds. This can be noticed even in the original title of *The Shadow*, which was *Three K*.

The novel *The Shadow*, with its original title 'Three K' was written during 1984-1986, almost at the same time with the novel *Agamemnon's Daughter...*<sup>128</sup>

Kadare makes uses of these two figures –Christ and Kostandin- to define first his and later Albanians' cultural duality. Albanians' status as stuck between two cultures, their identity issue as one in extinction enduring the deadly atmosphere of communism, and his personal attitude as an intellectual resurrected from death to preach life and as a mediator between the two worlds that 'other' him alike.

In the context of the novel, *Doruntine* was brought home, by a dead revitalized exceptional Albanian Messiah. The young woman of a name deriving from the same root with the Albanian word 'dhurate'- gift- was taken to her fatherland by her younger brother, Kostandin. Kadare seems to have preferred this as his mission: the gifting of a

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<sup>128</sup> Kadare, "Introduction", *Hija, (The Shadow)*, 5.

different Albanian truth thorough his art overtaking all the weight of sinning against the totalitarian regime for the sake of a pure divine-like art.

This novel in a quite firmly way negated the predominant thesis of the time according to which the communist era was the most glorious period of the tiny country. Furthermore, it depicted an epoch when the ancestors of Albanians had a tight well-built relationship with all communities of the old continent, so tight as to mediate marriages with Bohemian friends<sup>129</sup>.

Moreover, this work was a real opposing statement to the isolated Albania of the time, preaching and glorifying the openness of another era. In other words, Kadare's *Doruntine*, was another novel that pointed to the author's admiration of the West and consequently his denial at any cost of what was Eastern. Besides, the novel constructed as an account of many eye-witnesses was the first Albanian modern work that treated the issue of incest, even though to simply demonstrate it as an invalid path in relation to Kostandin's reason of resurrection.

From an analytical point of view, Ismail Kadare's creativity genius managed to bring to light works that revitalized the hope of those Albanians, who were experiencing the harshest type of dictatorship under the communist regime, and fed with self-esteem the Albanians outside the official borders victims of blind nationalistic hater. In contrast to the vast number of contemporary bestseller writers, who owe their fame among variable reader classes and communities to mass literature, Kadare successfully avoids becoming part of clichés and pseudo-values creating an admirable intellectual model within and outside Albania. Probably Kadare's most exceptional feature is not his talent, the ability

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<sup>129</sup> Kostandin and Doruntine" ballad,  
<http://www.zeriyt.com/fragmente-nga-letersia-shqipe/ballada-e-doruntines-t5690.0.html>

to create literature under a totalitarian regime, or the diverse themes and motifs; his distinctive characteristic –probably unique- is, as he declares, his successful attempt to produce normal literature in abnormal circumstances<sup>130</sup>. In the interview with Branca Bogavac asked for the intensity of his engagement with social issues as in his work *Aeschylus, This Great Loser* Kadare suggests that writers' passion and serious attachment with human rights should be demonstrated by the same serious attachment toward responsibilities<sup>131</sup>, the writer replies that his engagement was contentious. However, he maintains to have not distorted literature in service to his engagement<sup>132</sup>, once more pointing to his responsibility mainly being in this field and his duty in society being of art providing and without damaging it, of mentality restructuring character.

In other words, in a society where the freedom of expression was monstrously controlled and restricted, Kadare found the method to become an international qualitative writer and at the same time guaranteed himself a way to be readable and affective among the Albanian audience. He managed it through the single available way building a double binary structured over the unchangeable reality where the writer and his work are official state issues and the virtual existence of the written work, which was the single tool to transmit and acknowledge the truth. Products of this duality are the public severe auto-critiques compelled by the regime every time this author's published work included any detail not in compliance with the social realistic genre, event successive to all his

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<sup>130</sup> Johanna Nezri, "Kadare: Rezistenca ime, te shkruaja ne nje vend anormal", (Kadare: My Resistance, to Write in an Abnormal Country), *Panorama*, 10 August, 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Ismail Kadare, "Pse e Shkrova Dimrin e Madh" (Why Did I Write *The Great Winter*) *Shekulli*, 22 August, 2007

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*,

works<sup>133</sup>. This duality can be noticed in the untimely plots and the motives of sublime sacrifice, as well.

Traditionally, Albanian literature was a literature produced by emigrants, while Kadare's literature was an emigrant and an emigrating tool for the reader. Kadare's work is among those rare presences inside the isolated Albania that provided support for the Albanians' dreams, the single sphere the totalitarian regime probably had not been able to invade, contaminate and totally make part of its tormenting world. While making word of the writer's double calendar in *Invitation to the Studio*, he emphasizes this fact and his duality as well:

The more I meditated the clearer it was; there did exist a sort of a dead kingdom, where if not ourselves, our dreams and sleep were part. So a part of us belonged to that world beyond the borders, while our bodies were restricted here<sup>134</sup>.

Beside Gjirokastra, Kadare's birth town, which was a permanent nourishing source to the writer especially during his childhood that was mostly spent in the period of WW II, Kadare's dualism was mostly served by his student life in Moscow. As a child he became witness of a multi-faceted Albania in pieces: of superstition and swallowed empiricism, of losing superpowers, of dying eminent concepts and living moldy ones, of a decaying nobility and revitalized unapprised propaganda. While narrating Albania in *Palace of Dreams* he provides such a gloomy vision that reminds the reader of T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* (1922).

A piece of wasteland by a bridge; the sort of vacant lot where people throw rubbish. Among all the trash and dust and bits of broken lavatory, a curious

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<sup>133</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 46.

<sup>134</sup> Kadare, *Ftese ne Studio, (Invitation to the Studio)*, 252.

musical instrument playing all by itself, except for a bull that seems to be maddened by the sound and is standing by the bridge and bellowing.<sup>135</sup> ...

However, Kadare's scholarship to Moscow served him as a more concrete contact with an established communist system and the Russian literature. He turns to Albania toward the end of the 1960s, when the warm relationship between the Soviet Union and Albania had started to perish. Despite of the fact that the experiences in the motherland of communism were probably the fundamental impacts in shaping him as a reverse prototype of the communist model, he was supposed to create literature under the strict surveillance and according to this communist model itself. At the same time, the student life in Russia served the writer to understand that communism's greatest fear was death. He narrates that the death processions and funerals were invisible in Russia<sup>136</sup>. Then he suggests that this was due to the impossibility of the totalitarian system to control it, thus:

The underworld was uncontrollable to communism; it was competitive and held the ability to ridicule every aspect of this huge creation that wanted to shape everything, every aspect of life, every human according to its criteria of misery. This is why communism attempted to veil death –to make it invisible- and disregard the hereafter concept aware of its inability to find a method to rule over it as over everything.<sup>137</sup>

In the light of this observation of his, Kadare discovered a way of indirectly opposing communism without sacrificing art. Kadare attempted to construct an imaginary underworld- an uncontrollable hell-, a literary achievement as well as a rejecting effort toward the regime. Through his novelistic works, Kadare projected the most impressive labyrinth of Albanian isolation in centuries and especially that of the communist period

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<sup>135</sup> Kadare Ismail, *Palace of Dreams*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), 109.

<sup>136</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet*, (*Dialogue with Alain Bosquet*), 114.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

of imperceptible physic and mental oppression. So it is not casual that Kadare from the beginning of his affirmation with *The General of the Dead Army* would be fascinated by the idea of creating a vision of grief and suffering.

The value of life, the price of death, the blood tax, the burial and tombs, resurrection and its murder, forgetting and eternity, the human sacrifice, as well as the body and the spirit- the shadow- are all fundamental artistic notions in Kadare. All these deadly and infernal images would provide the author's perception of life and structure Kadare's project-vision hidden behind the essentially included elements as necessities to survive. Consequently, he was able to create literature and indirectly criticize the system, revealing the monstrous profile of the communist Albania and suggesting the establishment of a diverse Albania. Kadare is aware that the realization of such a project, the creation of a different Albania as the distorting mirror of the real one, is difficult, almost impossible, 'Don Quixotic' in all its aspects, another figure the parallelism with which was present in Kadare's and his critics' works. In relation to this parallelization Kadare confesses:

For a long time I dreamt to write the parallelization of Don Quixote. This was both a simple and direct desire similar to the dreams of ordinary people...So in my desire, there was neither philosophical load hidden, nor the goal to demonstrate anything...But, as it often happens; old desires are equipped with new characteristics as time passes...My Don Quixote would be the duplication of the original work with an exception; it wouldn't be written in freedom but in detention<sup>138</sup>

The label of Cervantes' hero, Kadare heartily accepted, has followed him as a suitable nickname for many reasons. Don Quixote is mainly a metaphor to Kadare's almost

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<sup>138</sup> Aliu, *Miti Ballkanik te Kadareja, (The Balkan Myth in Kadare)*, 10.



impossible mission of becoming the guardian of mother culture, which had been eclipsed by the regime of the time, a metaphor to the ‘noble dimension’ of his novels, and to his trapped position between a fantastic world and a realistic one. Kadare can be regarded Don Quixotic because his target to produce real literature with the attitude of a writer ‘above the conflict’ and still affect an infected audience without being banned was parallel to a fight with the wind-mills. Kadare is a Don Quixotic artist for the position of the sophomore (wise-fool) he maintained; thanks to his profession he had the luxury that by becoming a ‘wise’ scholar not to lose the most valuable treasure of remaining foolish<sup>139</sup>.

Kadare was labeled Don Quixotic and positioned outside social realism by the critics of communist Albania, as well, who with this statement condemned every dissident of the party line. Above all, Kadare remains Don Quixotic for the perception of himself he often prefers to provide the reader with. In his narratives that surpassed the borders and the epochs, with which Kadare aimed an imaginary journey beyond the limits in compliance with ‘the necessity’ of the plot and the virtual infernal construction, his inner dualism, his transcendentalist attitude compatible to that of Poe and Melville, and moreover his postmodernist in-betweenness are dominative.

However, Kadare succeeded the creation of a personal genre different from the communist social realism, internationally appraised, and publishable within the Albanian borders due to the in-betweenness his among-worlds existence provided. In *Ftese ne Studio*, Kadare relates what he baptizes ‘the second calendar of the writer’<sup>140</sup>. Briefly, the crucial point of the enigma of the writer’s endurance lays in an explanation quite simple

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<sup>139</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 113.

<sup>140</sup> Kadare, *Ftese ne Studio, (Invitation to the Studio)*, 252.

at the first sight: the writer's ability to shelter his artistic persona inside this second calendar –second home- for as long as the violent season continues. This eternal shelter, named 'the immigration into the dream world' by many writers is Kadare's migration in time as a deeper notion of getting away from the many laws, rules, and commands of any type 'the human established since his first appearance on earth'<sup>141</sup>.

Kadare's second calendar, what is the forbearer notion of his early mentioned achievement to create normal literature –or abnormally qualitative literature- under abnormally absurd conditions served him not only as shelter against the contamination of the talent, but as a highly-located pedestal above the conflict offering him a more inclusive and less sided image of the Albanian truth in geography and times.

Kadare would strongly rely upon the death notion and would start the building of a labyrinth- like hellish fatherland with *The General of the Dead Army*. In this novel he gives start to the 'quest for the dead spirits' of history. While the excavations turn the rocky land into an inescapable maze and the workers tear the infertile bloody land with their sharp tools as infernal demons, the tormented spirits of the dead soldiers remind the Albanians of the many excavations of people's bones in the Albania of the time to be buried in a less honorable place or to be thrown in the hurried river of Drin (a) after being regarded as 'enemies of the rule of people'.

The projection of the Balkan's hell would become a favorite motif for Kadare, who would pick his preferred tyranny to make it major part of most successive plots: the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire was a 'gold mine' for many Eastern writers as a ready-to-use metaphor standing for the totalitarian regimes they experienced. Absent till lately in the narratives of most Turkish authors, the Ottoman with its multi-cultural

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 270.

existence including all races, religions, climates, portraits and totalitarian mechanisms was a favorite motive for the Balkan writers including the Greek N. Kazantzakis<sup>142</sup> and the Bosnian I. Andrich<sup>143</sup>.

Yet, Kadare's work can be regarded to have a constant 'emperor dimension' due to the major role the imperial rules play in his novels. The Egyptian, Roman, Byzantine, Soviet, Chinese and Ottoman, all historical superpowers' creation and fall was part of the Kadareian work. The totalitarian empire notion would serve Kadare to strengthen his imaginary hellish fortress and establish his controversial thesis in relation to the identity crisis of the two countries of Albanian population and their in-between individual 'othered' to his original native culture as consequences of the Islamic Ottoman Empire and Soviet descending communism. The oppressing existence of the two as the tenebrous underworld-projection was constant in Kadare's novels, but it was best depicted in *Palace of Dreams* (1981).

*Palace of Dreams* is the parallel history of two dictatorships: the physically enslaving one and the mentally-spirit-killing one. Both have been served as the political allegory of totalitarianism. The story is set in the Ottoman capital, while the central character is a young man, Mark-Alem, a descendent of the noble Albanian family of the Qyprillinjve. (Koprulu-from the bridge's region) Mark-Alem's job-place is in the fortress of nightmare, where dreams arriving from all the parts of the empire are selected, classified, and interpreted in order to discover the so-called 'master-dream' that would predict the overthrow of the rulers or even better-worse- their death. The administrative hierarchal structure of the *Palace* is wholly built over a mere superstitious conjecture; a three-

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<sup>142</sup> Kazantzakis Nikos, *Greek Passion*, (1953)

<sup>143</sup> Ivo Andric, *The Bridge on Drina*, (1945)

instant-long anonymous image's revelation that is supposed to uncover the truth for the Empire's future. The general-director explains to Mark-Alem in his entry interview:

“Allah looses a forewarning dream on the world as casually... He unleashes a flash of lightning or draws a rainbow or suddenly sends a comet close to us. . . . It is up to us to find out where the dream has come to earth. . . . For the interpretation of that dream, fallen like a stray spark into the brain of one out of millions of sleepers, may help to save the country or its Sovereign from disaster; may help to avert war or plague or to create new ideas.”<sup>144</sup>

All this absurd mechanism projected to prevent the disastrous ending points to the fear system the totalitarian regimes have created, which terrorizes them equally to the sufferers of their dystopian world. Moreover, the novel emphasizes the immense desire of these totalitarian systems in order to command even over the dream world and the hereafter. Furthermore, this novel that made the author to be accused of deliberate evasion from the political ground of social realism reserving the great deal of his fiction to historical and folkloric themes<sup>145</sup>, actually manages to touch one of the main concepts of modern literature after Renaissance, the fading away of the image of a tyrannical God, satirizing the paradoxical systems of terror.

Just like Kadare himself will declare time after time in relation to this fictional work of his, this project was the many-chambered imaginary construction of the Death Kingdom that appears in the sleep-time with a dream. It is a kingdom that belongs to the hereafter, continuing its existence parallel and contemporaneous close to the self, inside the self<sup>146</sup>. Kadare creates a kingdom realistic and equally imaginary; this project is the kingdom of afterlife as much as it is the ‘hurting’ reality. The darkness, the tragic flow,

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<sup>144</sup> Kadare, *Palace of Dreams*, 32.

<sup>145</sup> Sinani, *Nje Dosje per Kadarene, (A File on Kadare)*, 294.

<sup>146</sup> Aliu, *Miti Ballkanik te Kadareja, (The Balkan Myth in Kadare)*, 61.

the obstruction of time or its reversal course, the dullness and the dust of every feature, the hallucinations and the loss of hope are all characteristics of the Greek perception of the underworld –Hades’ reign. It seems that the author’s inspiring work was the epic journey of Heracles or Orpheus to the Kingdom of the Dead. No characteristic of the Western-model hell is absent in the *Palace*; after Homer, Kadare turns to Dante to borrow from him the infernal structure with all its hierarchal steps, the administrative sectors, and the leveled evil to cover every dark corner with the dust of the unchangeable gloominess as a specific characteristic of his literary manufacture.

The *in-tenebris* structure of *Palace of Dream* points to the core of Ismail Kadare’s spiritual portrayal of the Albanian individual and his country’s social isolation and dualism during both the Ottoman and communist regime. The half nightmare, half real perception of his fatherland is thus (as quoted before):

A piece of wasteland by a bridge; the sort of vacant lot where people throw rubbish. Among all the trash and dust and bits of broken lavatory, a curious musical instrument playing all by itself, except for a bull that seems to be maddened by the sound and is standing by the bridge and bellowing.<sup>147</sup> ...

This dual existence bore the unavoidable identity crisis during these regimes and led to the concerning in-betweenness after their fall. This sort of dualism has been related in details in the novel *The Shadow*.

Kadare transfers many motives and issues treated in *Doruntine*, using sections from the original legend as well, to his later novel *The Shadow* -a phenomenon very common in this author’s work-. The hero is constantly tormented by these verses:

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<sup>147</sup> Kadare, *Palace of Dreams*, 109.

Kemi pare, s'kemi pare, / Shkon i vdekuri me te gjalle<sup>148</sup> / Hipur ne avion<sup>149</sup> te  
bardhe<sup>150</sup>

We have seen (a lot), / we haven't seen (such a thing) / Goes the Dead in the  
company of the Alive / upon a white plane

*The Shadow* written when the communist dictatorship was still dominating in Albania and published only after its fall, narrates the story of a somehow failed cineaste under the communist regime, who time after time enjoys the privilege of being sent on service to Paris. Every time he turns to the 'city of lights' his friends require him to confess and still to live for them. The narrator contends:

Telling them that there was nothing to tell about could be fatal. Beside the total disappointment, my dulling, and the loss of esteem, they would doubt about other things...There existed the danger that I might lose them forever, blame for unfaithfulness, betrayal, collaboration with the Ministry of Domestic Issues etc, etc..<sup>151</sup>

The detained of 'Hades' would suspect the cineaste about the spiritual fee he paid – serving the regime with any evil deed- to obtain such a luxury and still would be eager to listen to him narrate that other world, the prohibited truth.

Despite his rather often surpases from the mausoleum-Albania to the alive-Paris, the protagonist will be depicted to understand that his surpases are merely physical - mechanical actions-. The literally short trips and the anxiety for the returning demonstrate his inescapable tight relation to the Albanian 'dead' community, just like the under-

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<sup>148</sup> "Kostandin and Doruntine" ballad;

<http://www.zeriyt.com/fragmente-nga-letersia-shqipe/ballada-e-doruntines-t5690.0.html>

<sup>149</sup> The original 'horse' has been replaced by Kadare with 'plane'.

<sup>150</sup> Kadare, *Hija*, (The Shadow), 229.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

worldly Kostandin, while the ballad of revitalization becomes constantly more present as the narrative develops.

The hero meditates:

I had to go beyond fatality, to step beyond the magic separating line, and alike the man, who endeavors to overcome the curse of his race I had to overcome isolation, The East, the violent ‘Asiatism’ enforced on my European being. And, if I wouldn’t be able to achieve it, it meant that a malicious sign was there, over the dream. The bodies of the young men, with their chests massacred by the weapons and the thorny fences just because they had wanted to step beyond, were constantly in my mind.<sup>152</sup>

The basis of this narrative is the partial escaping in the absence of a real opening to the world. The escaping in *The Shadow* is not only a surpassing of the communist borders, a transition from the world of enslavement to the world of freedom, a breaking of the chains tightly enforced over the spirit and mind. It is the awakening of the soul to deny dehumanization, the impossible dream to leave Hades without turning your head to look back, and the revitalization of the dead leaving his grave. However, in contrast to most Kadareian novels, which bring the mythical dimension of nowadays by immigrating in time, this novel inspired by the job trips of the author to France<sup>153</sup> is set in the contemporary atmosphere of airplanes, parties, starred hotels and cafés, carrying the myth to modern times.

The time immigration occurs in the conscience of the protagonist, who can be regarded as the writer’s self-portrayal. Every time he leaves a timeless land to go to fertile land, be a spectator for some days, and turn back to the airless ‘hole’ he belongs. After becoming aware of his impossibility to belong to the community of life, the

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>153</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 192.

Kostandin-cineaste of this novel attempts to invent a 'Doruntine' that would make him part of the livings. He, who had left the fresh blooded bordering walls of Hades, wanted a boundary that would give life to his shadow-being getting more and more attached to the Parisian Sylvan. In a single room of a Parisian hotel he whispers to himself:

...How could I explain her that I was here carrying the thirst, the desire, the anxiety, the kindness, and rage of thousands of people and that she was not merely the French girl called Sylvan, but already a biblical woman, a dimension of the impossible, a dream within the troubled sleep that I, breaking the nature's laws, could hold to take from inexistence to life?<sup>154</sup>

However, the created link remains partially effective reinforcing the cineaste's in-between position as a shadow.

To conclude, the dilemma of Albanian inner duality has always been of major interest for Ismail Kadare, the work over which he has revealed his artistic personality's between-worlds trapped character, as well. Inside this literary projection of in-betweenness Kadare goes back and further in all periods of Albanian pre-history, history, myths and legends pursuing for the proving of existence of the Albanian identity. He touches other current issues that have been internationally discussed such as the paradox of survival in certain circumstances, and an un-belonging existence of 'neither-nor'. The cineaste coming from nowhere, the resurrected Kostandin, Christ within the skies, the employee of the dream Palace, and the general in charge of a dead army are all characters sharing the same in-betweenness with the individual in the first persona singular in the poem 'Christmas in New York'. He belongs to no place, has no past and no future, embraces no beliefs and no ideals, has no sit on earth and no sit in the skies, is no part of the deadly community neither of the lively one, he exists not and is there: a fluid composition of human features.

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<sup>154</sup> Kadare, *Hija*, (The Shadow), 182.



## CHAPTER 6

### *WORLD'S UMBILICUS*

From the declaring of Albania's independence in 1912 to the mid-1940s of the establishment of communism within the official borders and the ultimate separation of Kosovo, the Albanian thought hosted a generation of scholars that contributed in all fields of life. During this period this generation of thinkers first ideated the path Albania was supposed to follow in culture, philosophy, sociology, and science to later give their indispensable contribution in its establishment aided by a milder climate, due to the political instability and international support. The first Albanian governments of the Renaissance movement, the German Prince Vid's short reign, the democratic governments of F. Noli and Mehdi effendi, the monarchy of king Zog I and the fascist Italian pseudo-colonial period, that substituted one another during these decades, were all supported by different superpowers which endeavored for easy -proper or cultural- colonies within the continent and seemed ready to invest for a certain sort of development of these lands. The generation of thinkers that came further during this period benefited from this dominant uncertainty to form the national conscience of Albania and implement it till 1945 when Kosovo became a present federation to Yugoslavia by Enver Hoxha, who at the same time was the founder of the totalitarian regime in Albania.

Similarly to the neo-Albanian intellectuals in southern Albanian, the intellectuals of northern Albania mostly due to the clerical school of Shkodra represented by Father Gjergj Fishta, Anton Harapi and Krist Maloki endeavored to establish -what even nowadays remains the aspiration of Albanian people- the ultimate escape from a non-

declared anarchy and the construction of a Western-model following state. One of the most outstanding figures of this period, the Kosovo intellectual Maloki, can be considered a secret path-provider for Ismail Kadare's opus and orientation.

While focusing on the Albanian century-long problems particularly the historical-social plagues that decelerated the Albanian development and hold back the scholarly required change in orientation, the general objective of Krist Maloki's writing became the concrete objective of the Albanian world: the establishment of the Albanian national conscience. Even though he published a little, his diverse genre from that of his contemporaries- essay- became the heart of this generation's ideals. The daring, original, spontaneous, comprehensible, and reality-criticizing works had not been present in the Albanian literature of reality-glorifying emigrants since Faik Konica's death and remained absent till Ismail Kadare's arrival, except the limited number of articles published by the Prizren scholar.

Krist Maloki remains a partisan of Albanian modern literature for two fundamental reasons; he was the first Albanian genuine literary critic, who relied upon the introspective method and he was the first Albanian scholar that introduced the occident model as such in all its aspects to the Albanian world. As a critic, Maloki was the first to approach his contemporary glorified Albanian poets (novelist were almost absent in the Albanian literature of the time) with a sense of realism. Without disregarding their professionalism and according them the respect and esteem they totally deserved, Maloki suggested that not every person, whose 'hand hold a pen' was a giant of Albanian literature and that Albanian literature needed a higher quality of writing to be

promoted<sup>155</sup>. For instance, in his critique of Naim Frasheri, Maloki depicts the symbol of Albanian Renaissance as a figure more of a spiritual value and a romanticizing talent on paper than as a scholar providing ideas and solutions for the development of Albania, so essential at the time Frasheri created<sup>156</sup>.

Since the beginning of decade-lasting-struggle of Albanians to obtain their independence from the Ottoman Empire the orientation of the to-be-formed state and the model to be followed was a matter of dispute among Albanian scholars. Most Muslim scholars of the time, especially the ones that had obtained a respectful position under the imperial rule due to their positive relationships with Istanbul were for the Ottoman model not to mention the ones that would have agree with a mere autonomy. On the other hand, the Christian Albanian intellectuals, mostly educated in Italy and Graz of Austria, were for the governing model they had witnessed in the countries they had lived. This model was also in compliance with their religious belief, which would make possible the obtaining of the Pope's protection in the future. It is obvious that both sides were aware of the economical and social problems of Albania and wanted a powerful protector to develop. However, the country's independence was more essential at the time, what made possible the late union of the three religions for this same reason, while the inherited dispute, even after, caused the still-lasting problems within Albanian identity and belonging to produce the issue of the model to be followed.

Krist Maloki was the first to bring the issue of 'belonging' to modern terms. He pointed out that the notion behind this debate was not the model-country to be followed- Ottoman, Italian, Austrian, or British-, nor the absence of a national religion –Sunni

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<sup>155</sup> Maloki Krist, "Oriental or Occidental? (2)", *Oriental or Occidental?*, (Tirana: Plejad, 2003), 74.

<sup>156</sup> Maloki, "Naim Frasheri", *Oriental or Occidental?*, 94.

Islam, Shi Islam, Catholicism, or Orthodoxy-; it was the issue to chose between the two orientations of the world, the oriental and the occidental one. However, Maloki is against the orient type represented by the Ottoman Empire and its romantic glorification, in all terms. He stands for a political, cultural, and social development orientated toward the Western culture probably considering the issue of religion as irrelevant and permanently solved with the harmonious rapport among religions existent in Albania.

In all Maloki's work his attitude as an occidental intellectual is clearly noticed. In his opinion, the side in which Albania should stand was indisputably the west. He contends:

Even though the flag of Albanians' cultural effort would remain the Albanian traditionalism, the development and advance in all fields of life should be achieved by the occidental model; the self-conscience as a nation and the survival of Albanians in this world can be obtained only by following a Western model development while preserving our traditional values<sup>157</sup>.

This attitude of Krist Maloki was accepted by and became dominant even in Ismail Kadare's work, what can be noticed in the motherland motifs and the re-dimensioned Albanian myths that occupy such an important place in his novels. Furthermore, Kadare accepted the notion of orientation Maloki suggested, defending a cultural orientation toward the West and not a accepting a state-model, negating the Eastern orientation in all its aspects, and not considering the Islamic religious belief of the majority of the Albanians as an obstacle to this orientation.

The traditionalism, Maloki suggested and Kadare accepted was not the cultural orientation Albania undertook under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. It was the indigenous culture shaped with the dynamical changes of the new era, cleansed from the rust of prejudice that could not possibly have to do with the core of Albanian noble

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<sup>157</sup> Maloki, "Oriental or Occidental? (1)", *Oriental or Occidental?*, 14.

existence in history. Implying that an oriental model was not a return to the roots but the renunciation of the original ones established by our genitors, Maloki states that “those who preferred the rejection of the original Albanian tradition, in fact were blindly ready to overtake a foreign cultural tradition”<sup>158</sup> and renounce the Albanian existence once and forever.

Maloki was a connoisseur of the Albanian problematic psychology of multi-faceted heritage. However, he seems totally optimistic in the point that these problems were absolutely resolvable with the new proposed comprehensive orientation. The change in orientation would bring a diverse approach to Albanians’ psychology and social community; due to this change in mentality the essential reshape in all fields of life would be obtainable. In other words, Maloki believed that the construction of the new Albania could be achieved by the reshaping of the oriental way of thinking, working, and living<sup>159</sup>.

The poverty of both real and inner life dominant in Albania was considered by him the heritage of the oriental past, probably as a result of the alienation to the self-culture it presented the Albanian identity with. Maloki suggests:

The pomposity, laziness, misery, and melancholia of the moldy ‘Byzantine spirit’ vegetated over the Albanian society and prevented its real ‘western spirit’ preserved by generations to flourish<sup>160</sup>.

The clash of the oriental thought and the occidental thought according to Maloki was the clash of the ‘old-fashioned’ with the ‘modern’, or of ‘archaism’ with ‘contemporariness’. He claims:

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<sup>158</sup>Maloki, “Oriental or Occidental? (1)”, *Oriental or Occidental?*, 14.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>160</sup>Maloki, “Oriental or Occidental? (2)”, *Oriental or Occidental?*, 111.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Albanians are supposed to fight the biggest war they would ever fight. This war is different as it is against an invisible enemy within themselves: the war of Albania's next 'generation' of scholars against the old generation of mystics, the war of a creative mind against a destructive mentality, the war of an enlightened perspective against a dark one, what means the war of Albanian Occidentalism against the Albanian Orientalism<sup>161</sup>.

With Orientalism Maloki does not refer to this notion defining it as Edward Said did in his famous work years later claiming:

My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient as weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness...As a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge.<sup>162</sup>

On the contrary, with Orientalism Maloki refers to the Eastern orientation; this being the definition of this term before Said's presence.

From this standpoint, Maloki's assumption seems to be contradicting the idea the other for-West scholars of the time brought up. To him the Albanian Orientalism was not a new trend brought to the Albanian geography by the recent scholars of Muslim roots and Eastern education, who imitating the neo-Turk movement in the heart of the Ottoman Empire created a parallelizing neo-Albanian movement in our country. Neither was the Albanian Orientalism a derivation of the spreading of the Mohammedan religion in the Albanian lands. On the contrary, it was a misfortune of Eastern roots originated in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the Albanian lands were given to the Byzantine Empire (the eastern side of the divided Roman Empire), which forced upon the Albanians the Eastern Christian belief –Orthodoxy- and Eastern Byzantine administrative rule. From that moment on, the

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<sup>161</sup> Maloki, "Oriental or Occidental? (1)", *Oriental or Occidental?*, 17.

<sup>162</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1979), 204.

Orient-oriented path was not only a threat to the Albanian culture and customs preserved with immense difficulties, but also to their national existence endangered by the Eastern powers.

The loss of the natural identity bounds of Albanians, which according to Maloki started in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, was considered a fatality for the Albania of today by Ismail Kadare, as well. After Maloki was made voiceless for the Albanians within the borders and those of Kosovo, under the communist regimes of Hoxha and Tito, respectively, Kadare attempted to reestablish the bonds of the tiny country with Europe, what Maloki called “the natural orientation of the Albanians”<sup>163</sup>.

For more than half a century, Ismail Kadare with his literary work would attempt to show the Albanian world as an essential component of Western civilization. All his work is concerned with the artistic projection and intellectual verification of the Western identity of Albanians. In a young age, taught the history of his country like most Albanians, Kadare admits to have been terrorized by the idea of Albania’s removing from the map<sup>164</sup>. This fear seems to have affected him as an intellectual in searching for a way in order to guarantee the survival of the Albanian country and identity, and to have found it in Maloki’s assumptions for an ‘Occidental Albania’. Essentially, this attitude of Kadare, is particularly noticed in the extreme concern he shows for the current situation of the Albanian identity as Orient as Occident, as Islamic as Christian. Kadare is concerned about the ‘ignorance’ of Albanians in relation to their identity problems and their indifference in relation to the major historical events concerning their ethnical history.

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<sup>163</sup> Maloki, “Oriental or Occidental? (2)”, *Oriental or Occidental?*, 113.

<sup>164</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 111.

‘The Albania of Kadare’ is not a community merely infected by Western civilization as an easy colony that had no other choice but to continue its existence under this domination. On the contrary, to Ismail Kadare the Albanian culture was one of the ancient traditions that gave life to the dominant culture of the worlds and a legitimate inheritor of it, ‘what was stubbornly witnessed by the tiny country’s geographical position, history, language and tradition’<sup>165</sup>. According to Kadare, even the social aspect of Albanian identity would doubtlessly point to the origin of Albanians as part of the Western civilization if disinfected by the traces of what the two Eastern generated misfortunes- the Ottoman Empire of Islamism and the communist regime of isolation- brought to this country.

Kadare is aware that Albanians’ troubled survival was blended with hardships since the beginning of history due to its geographical position attractive for both the Eastern and Western powers as an opening in the Mediterranean Sea and as a strategic fortress-bridge to be overtaken in order to provide a passage toward each other or minimally an advantageous position. Nevertheless, he seems not to regard this positioning of his country as the major effectual factor in relation to the Albanian actual circumstances including the economic, social, and cultural ones.

To Kadare the issue of problematic existence of the tiny country is exclusively of Eastern origins. However, differently from Maloki, who considers every aspect of Eastern origin similarly important and negative in creating the disturbing Orient-orientated system of thought, behavior, and attitude since the gloomy wind that started to blow from the Byzantine Empire’s period over the Albanian spirit and original roots, Kadare regards the Ottoman Empire and the communist regime as the two chief

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 186.



responsible rules for Albania's belated and partial development. Parallelizing the two as equally suppressive and tyrannical, Kadare considers the Ottoman invasion and the communist regime as the two absolute factors of the identity crisis and the orientation of this same identity toward a non-familiar imposed culture, as well.

Kadare's concern in relation to Albanian identity, his righteous assumption that it is a complex double-ended identity, his inquire to depict the Ottoman Empire and the communist regime as the exclusive 'criminals' and his attempt to cleanse and unwrap his native country by the enclosing effects of these two is not a late phenomenon in his career. In contrast to most Albanian contemporary intellectuals, who turned to this issue only after the fall of the communist regime, and to most 'loud voices' who regard the demonstration of the European roots of Albanians not as a natural return to the origins but as an essential argument to obtain financial aid from the developed union and aim only the economic development of Albania, Kadare's work has always been interested in this issue including the most severe periods of the communist regime and has mostly been concerned with the cultural and social aspects of the claimed Western identity.

In other words, many intellectuals of the post-communist era considered the Albanian identity issue as a tool to fight the current economic hardship in the Eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea; they attempted to pose it as a burden on the conscience of the European developed nations by producing a self-victimized portrayal of Albania. Whereas, Kadare's claim at this point was early planned and implemented; he implied the Occidental-orientation of the Albanians from the beginning and reinforced this with his characteristic style and approach. It has been widely recognized that Kadare's style is more of Western characteristics than of Eastern ones. His success in narrating over the dispute as in *The General of the Dead Army* and the loyalty shown to the Western

tradition fundamental works by the encompassing in plots of works such as *The File on H* and *Aeschylus, this Great Looser* of the Hellenic epic songs of Homer and the ancient Greek tragedies of Aeschylus, respectively, demonstrate his orientation as a creative writer since the beginning of his career.

On the other hand, many other contemporary Albanian intellectuals used the self-victimized portrayal considering the Orient-orientation as unavoidable for the Albanian identity relying upon the Islamic faith of the majority of Albanians. This easy acceptance of the East was fruit of the long decades of its glorification during the communist regime if not the same economic purpose in order to ‘touch’ the Islamic countries making use of the ‘Islamic Brotherhood’ notion. However, Ismail Kadare denied becoming part of this ‘begging caravan’ maintaining his position unchanged and asking only for the legitimate rights of the Albanians. In one of his late studies (as cited before), Kadare declares:

...Albanian identity is (also) lucid, although many don’t want to notice it while for others noticing it is inconvenient. The Albanians are one of the most ancient populations of the European continent; an originating population over this land, just the way the Albanian language has been accepted by all great lingual specialists to be one of the basic languages of the continent. Geography, the most stubborn entity of the world, is the first to witness the Albanian Europeanism.<sup>166</sup>

While the world was waiting to leave behind the bloodiest century of history and had overcome the notions of chauvinist nationalism, due to their late contact with the world the Albanians more than ever became aware of their largely marginalized perception by others turning to dig in their culture for evidence of belonging. In this period marked by the crisis of values and by the immoral and ignorant politics, the work of Kadare and his

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<sup>166</sup> Kadare, *Ideniteti Europian I Shqiptareve, (The European Identity of Albanians)*, 20.

claims have become indispensable for the marginalized of the absurd. The voice of Kadare, reminding and glorifying the almost- forgotten Albanian values and condemning the vices by the narration of the ethnic destiny, has become a ‘torch’ for the citizens of the in-between country, who struggle for acceptance in the big family of Europe. It is a voice of equilibrate development denying the chaos of the prolonged transitional period and aspiring rightful existence within the Western union not colonial survival of economic dependence.

During the communist regime, in the absence of the opportunity to clearly express his opinion and quite careful to create artistic works instead of purely political slogans, Kadare would construct his West-admitting and East-negating position from the very beginning of his artistic career; a position enforced after the publishing of every his book. With his first novel, the masterpiece *The General of the Dead Army*, Kadare besides relying upon the Western tradition methods of narrative, would depict a Western –Italian- military general without any attempt of demonizing him and often sympathizing with him, totally opposing the commands of social realism. This first novel would suggest a totally different idea from the dominative one: the abolition of hater and inimical feelings not only toward the ex-invading nations during WW II, but of the West in general.

Whereas, the plot of most his succeeding novels such as *The Castle*, *The Three-Arched Bridge*, *The Blind(ed) Order*, *Three Elegies for Kosovo*, and *Palace of Dreams*, would be build over the tyranny of the Ottoman Empire. Without disregarding the military organization and exceptional success of this empire’s invasions, Kadare would emphasize the totalitarian character as well as the cultural and social effects of this empire over the conquered regions. In contrast to the mild depiction of the Western symbol –the general- in his first novel, the depiction of the Ottoman characters in the

following novels is -if not superficial- not sympathizing. This approach of Kadare toward the two civilizations demonstrates his permanent Occidental anti-Oriental attitude denying once and forever the thesis of a personal metamorphosis of this author after the fall of communism in Albania.

At the same time Kadare's approach to the Western and Eastern characters emphasizes his idea of Albanian identity and Albania's orientation. As an Albanian author he enables himself in digging deep in the psychology of the Western characters providing their attitudes as familiar and comprehensible for his primary audience the Albanian reader, while the superficiality of the depiction of the Eastern characters, the absence of an inner analysis of them once more points to Kadare's Occidental path; the alienation of Eastern features is another way of familiarizing with the West.

Kadare continues this attitude even later; while the reasons he treated all historical empires, especially the Ottoman one, so thoroughly in his work were many, the main one remains still its usage to deny this empire as 'oriental colonizing'. After experiencing two millennia of intricate existence and tired of the non-stable history of minute moments of glory, Albania had to deal with the totalitarian catastrophe of communism, as well; communism was a real calamity for the Albanian nation<sup>167</sup>. As a foreign well-managed dictatorship was more acceptable as a continual deviation than even the minute attempt to hit the regime directly, Kadare preferred the symbol of the Ottoman Empire to what would be considered political heresy, decadence, and probably suicidal.

In other words, the first reason the invasion of Albania by the Ottoman Empire occupies such an important place in Kadare's work is its 'sheltering ability' toward the ruling power. The Ottoman invasion in his novels was the allegory and metaphor of the

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<sup>167</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 34.

dictatorship of Albania; a way of criticizing without being censored. The Ottoman Empire's practices and laws of the time have served the writer as common examples to light the fire of rebelling –if not to prevent it blow out- against repressive practices such as the persecution of the 'deviators', the restriction of the right of thought and speech, censorship and so on. The Ottoman Empire was only one of the many symbols of dictatorship the author used. In one of his widely praised novels *The Pyramid* (1992), where Kadare builds the analogy between the pressuring pharaoh regime in ancient Egypt and the severe dictatorial regime in Albania in relation to the restriction of the right of speech, he writes:

‘The habit of keeping quiet reached such proportions that, according to a further report from A.K.Juqub Har, the linguist, forecast that the present trend continued, then half of the Egyptian language would have disappeared within three years, and within a decade there would be barely three hundred words extant, which could be learned even by dogs<sup>168</sup>.

Another reason the Ottoman Empire is so often present and so thoroughly considered in Kadare's work is its imperial army- the invading tool-. Organized better than any other in the Balkan and Europe, this army fought in the destiny-defining battle of Kosovo in 1389<sup>169</sup>. This battle between the disciplined Ottoman army and the united Balkan army can be considered more the war of two opposing civilizations and cultures. There, for the first time in history the Balkan army of glorious fighters that quested more for fame, praise and courage lauding than for triumph over the Ottoman confronted a real military composition of an iron hierarchy and centrism. Thus, the army of the mono-dimensional totalitarian regime overcome the colorful alliance and learned the weaknesses of the

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<sup>168</sup> Ismail Kadare, *The Pyramid*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1996), 112.

<sup>169</sup> Jansen, *Battle of Kosovo*, 20 June 1389, [http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles\\_kosovo.html](http://www.historyofwar.org/articles/battles_kosovo.html)

Balkan counties, which were taken over soon after. Consequently, Kadare's focus on the Ottoman invasion period of Albania is due to his belief –contradictory to Maloki's suggestion- that many of Albania's domestic and foreign problems of nowadays are not as old as the Byzantine Empire's powerful period. In other words, to Kadare the Albanian crisis originated as a result of the Ottoman invasion starting in the field of Kosovo. This approach of Kadare is quite comprehensible if his claim of a totally Western medieval Albania as depicted in *The Three Arched Bridge* is taken in consideration. (Analyzed in the third chapter.)

However, another important reason that makes Kadare focus on the Ottoman invasion is the five-century-long period of interaction between his occidental fatherland and oriental conquistador. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century the institutions, the administration, and the army of the Ottoman Empire had a factual impact on the Albanian society. Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire as the most powerful Muslim state of all times managed to have the majority of Albanians converted to Islam what for Kadare was the beginning of the alienation of Albanians to their native culture. Furthermore, Albania was 'sealed off' from the rest of Europe by this vast Oriental force. So according to him the country was cut off from its existing natural Western path. This gap was deepened by the totalitarian regime so highly dependable on and designed according to the Eastern model of the Chinese and Soviet communism. Often defining Islam with the Ottoman Empire and vice versa, Kadare maintained the two responsible for the distancing the Albanian population had from his original European identity.

The new perception Kadare established in relation to the period of Albanian existence under the Ottoman Empire rule is not only the deepening and modification of Maloki's ideas into a new more modern bias. It is not even only the demonizing of the powerful to

victimize the weak self. Kadare similarly to Migjeni left the booth of preaching and made his ideas available to all classes of readers. Severe toward his primary Albanian audience Kadare's Ottoman Empire symbol aided him to criticize even the disputes among the Albanians as another major reason in the reverse development of Albania, as Kadare regards the oriental model development. In other words, the long-lasting Ottoman rule had left in a lethargic situation, what had led into an anarchy that had made impossible the proper implementation of the Occidental model proposed by the enlightened generation of the time and had provided communism with the necessary conditions to be established in Albania. After the fall of communism and the starting of the prolonged transitional period, instability has not been missing nor within the borders neither in the Balkan region. In fact, a sort of anarchist wind has been blowing for more than a decade, while the domestic divisions among Albanians have been very affective on this. The bloody year of 1997, when the brother killed the brother is the best example of this dispute. As a similar situation of lack of union and the relatively anarchist climate had been present during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century after the independence from the Ottoman Empire, Kadare fears the replacement of communism by a similarly threatening totalitarian and extremist rule. He contends:

The possible threats to the Albanian society of today are two: nationalism and the recently-developed Islamic terror. The first one has demonstrated itself as very complex, unclear, and easily confounded with the cultural nuances, while the second seems to be more attractive<sup>170</sup>.

Kadare suggests that the flourishing of the fundamentalist Islam in the coast of Adriatic would be a calamity to the Western society and its development as big as the Ottoman Empire was, at the time.

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<sup>170</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alan Bosquet, (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet)*, 187.

To conclude, Kadare's attitude toward the east of the Ottoman invasion and the communist regime, their parallelization to one another, and the firm denial to consider the opportunity of Albanian identity and cultural development as a bridge identity and as a blended culture, place Kadare in the same side with many African and Asiatic post-colonial writers and scholars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who like them, not only denounced the crimes of the dominant regime that encompassed the most features of colonialism, but gave his indispensable contribution to the establishment of a path to be followed after the fall of communism. However, Kadare remains the central figure of Albanian literature during the last decade as his great narrative was not only a mean of enjoyment for the reader, but a different and early perspective in relation to Albanian society, identity, culture, tradition and language. In spite of the fact that Kadare remains a unique voice within his mother culture, from an international perspective he can be considered a post-colonialist such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o or Gayatri Spivak debating the origins of his country and its natural orientation toward the native roots.

Kadare's colonizing power is not an economical superpower in quest for cheap work force. Kadare's colonizer is the East of Ottoman rule and communist dystopia. Kadare's slavery is the 'spirit-chaining' and culture-demolishing imposed totalitarianism of Eastern origins, while his work in general can be considered an Albanian version of 'decolonizing the mind'. If excluded from this category Kadare can be easily regarded a severe nationalist of great effect, or as an anti-Islamic author, whose pan-Albanian propaganda for a single identity regardless the religious belief and geography is turbulent for the Balkan region of delicate equilibriums and can affect the established superficial tranquility.



## CONCLUSION

Writing in relation to Ismail Kadare is probably the dream of every Albanian intellectual that aspires to work over the literature of his country, as this controversial figure, remains the main writer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Albania. This thesis attempted to provide the historical and cultural background, which relies behind Kadare's writing and to propose a diverse perception of his work when considered from a different perspective thorough a detailed analysis. At the same time, this thesis attempted to provide a relatively objective consideration of the twilight zone of the Balkans; the depiction of the circumstances of the multicultural Balkans through the analysis of the literature created by the central 20<sup>th</sup> century writer of the most tumultuous ethnicity in the most unstable zone of the European continent.

In other words, Kadare's work was a 'bible' to every contemporary scholar who attempted to study the diverse fields of social science in Albania, as it can be suggested that Kadare's work enclosed the past, the present and future of the tiny country. Kadare managed not only to become the central figure of the post modernist literature of Albania, but probably it was his work, which established it. The Albanian scholar Bulo comments:

Kadare's presence and work have had the significance of a school of thought for Albanian literature; the have played a protagonist role in starting the emancipation of this literature in accordance to the international criteria, due to the innovative methods, the broad range of topics, the pure native language, and the exceptional style. The importance and the real dimension of Kadare's work in Albanian culture become even more obvious if we consider

the fact that the literary development of the time suffered the imposed political and ideological limitations...<sup>171</sup>

Analyzing his earlier novels –*The General of the Dead Army* and *The Winter of the Great Solitude*- this thesis demonstrated that Kadare was not a post-communist dissident tracing signs of dissidence even in his Enver Hoxha flattering considered work. At this point, it is important to emphasize the fact that not everything that occurred within the relationship of Kadare’s literature and the totalitarian regime of Albania can be explained exclusively in the light of intentional opposing or political provocation. Probably, one of the main reasons of Kadare’s evasion from the communist discipline of ‘social realism’ was the lack of ideological freedom to create real literature.

In the light of the novels *The Castle* and *The Three Arched Bridge*, this thesis attempted to emphasize the sheltering, tradition preserving, and hope revitalizing role Albanian myths and legends played in Kadare’s work. Considering the works Kadare published in the 80s, *The Three Arched Bridge*, *Palace of Dreams*, *The Pyramid*, and *The Wicked Year*, this novel focused on Kadare’s escaping in time as a tool to hit the regime.

It was attempted to categorize and make more comprehensible the ‘unique’ voice of Albania as well as to foresee the path undertaken in the cultural area of the Balkans and especially the author’s fatherland after the fall of communism, the changes that re-dimensioned the world’s history. Furthermore, this thesis attempted to focus on the identity crisis and orientation lack, dominant in Albania and other Balkan countries during the last two decades, the topics that make up the core of Kadare’s work during this period, which together with his expressed attitude led to his consideration from a post-

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<sup>171</sup> Bullo, *Ismail Kadare Dhe Vepra e Tij*, (*Ismail Kadare and His Work*), 5.

colonialist perspective. In other words, analyzing Kadare's debate with the Kosovo scholar Rexhep Qosja and making use of Kadare's studies in relation to Albanian identity, this thesis pointed to his nostalgia for and to his mission in re-establishing a European pan-Albanian identity.

Focusing on the novels *Palace of Dreams* and *The Shadow*, this thesis, provided the perception of Kadare as an in-between and doubly marginalized author personally and professionally matured in an in-between Third World Country. Kadare's work demonstrates that he is inevitably caught between two cultures –Eastern and Western- as well as between two worlds – here and hereafter. Besides, depicting the monstrous control of the soul Kadare parallelizes with the East, this analysis suggested the Western orientation Kadare 'desperately' seeks for his country. The Occident orientation of Kadare and his denial of Orient were thoroughly related in the last chapter, where the post-colonialist features of Kadare become even more apparent.

Kadare's anti-colonialist and post-colonialist character is different from the fathers and many important figures of this movement, such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Ch. Spivak, in relation to the perception of the West. The work of these scholars, who witnessed Western colonialism in all its manners in their countries, included contempt toward the First World West. E.Said citing F. Fanon suggested: "Europe is literally the creation of The Third World."<sup>172</sup> On the other hand Kadare's work, as obviously noticed even in this analysis, is a continual struggle to claim the European identity of Albanians. In *Dialogue with Alain Bosquet*, he claims:

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<sup>172</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (Vintage Books Edition, 1994) 197.

“If you feel yourself (to Bosquet) inevitably European, I would classify myself desperately, not to say catastrophically European.”<sup>173</sup>

This diversity is result of the original roots of the endured oppression; Kadare’s oppressors are the Eastern generated Ottoman Empire and communism, what explains the diversity.

However, Kadare’s approach remains post-colonialist. Albania’s oscillation between its original and later imposed culture, the national dualism between traditions, the in-betweenness, the continual marginalization Albanians endure by both the West and the East, and their desire to belong, were all themes of Kadare’s work.

In the near future, I hope to analyze Kadare’s *The European Identity of Albanians* in the light of E. Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*. Another research that I hope to accomplish is the extension of this research with a more detailed analysis including the work of other Albanian, Kosovo and Balkan authors, believing that it is time for the academia to pay attention to this ‘forgotten’ region of Europe.

In my further researches, I also want to focus on the marginalization of the populations of the Balkans by the developed countries, on the religious diversity within the ‘twilight area’ and the effects these two had over the population’s relationships within Balkan, in order to provide a new perspective in the consideration of the whole Balkan issue, inside and outside this area.

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<sup>173</sup> Kadare, *Dialog me Alain Bosquet* (Dialogue with Alain Bosquet), 185.

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