



From the native point of view: An insider/outsider perspective on folkloric archaism and modern anthropology in Albania¹

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ABSTRACT

In the standard native tradition of Albanian studies, descriptive and empirical research has only confirmed their own ultimate goal of constructing national specificity and a particularly antiquated view of national culture. In this article, I show how and why an articulate analysis of the main intellectual traditions and their impact can provide fresh insights into grasping the cultural particularism of Albanian studies. Methodologically, a new picture of knowledge production must arise if we consider the historical, cultural, political and ideological terrain on which certain influential ideas and practices in Albanian studies of people's culture have emerged. The aim, then, is not to provide an exhaustive picture of a positive knowledge of culture and society, but to show the urgent need for avoiding any adoption of concepts that might be pure reconstructions of arbitrary and timeless structures and values, while rejecting any approach in terms of survivals and folklorism.

KEYWORDS

Albanian studies, descriptivism, folklorism, nationalism, socialism

INTRODUCTION

From a native point of view, one may feel conflicted in assessing the relative roles of local scholars being too close to nationalistic and totalitarian models, as various biases have arguably influenced Albanian studies and it is necessary to show how these biases have skewed reality. When several decades ago a scandal erupted in anthropology as one of the ancestral figures told the truth publicly, even though in a posthumous *Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (Malinowski, 1967), 'a number of the sorts of the right-thinking types who are with us always immediately rose to cry' that clan secrets were betrayed, an idol was profaned, and the side was let down (Geertz, 1983[1974]: 55). In fact, beyond the myth of the fieldworker being demolished by the one who had perhaps done most to create it, if anthropologists must see things from the native's point of view but they cannot have a sort of capacity to think, feel and perceive like a native (surely 'in the strict sense of the term'), as Clifford Geertz put it, the genuinely profound question Malinowski's *Diary* raised is how to make possible an anthropological knowledge of the way in which natives think, feel and perceive.

The issue is not moral but epistemological, and this general problem has always exercised methodological discussion in anthropology. The real question, and the one Malinowski raised by demonstrating that in the case of natives you do not have to

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be one to know one, is how an interpretation of the way people think and live can be produced that is neither imprisoned within their mental horizons nor systematically indifferent to the distinctive tonalities of their existence. In other words, what seeing things 'from the native point of view' means, as Clifford Geertz specified, is 'how anthropological analysis is to be conducted and its results framed, rather than what psychic constitution anthropologists need to have' (Geertz, 1983[1974]: 57), and for that matter neither what insider or outsider perspective they need to keep, nor what historical or present-time approach they need or need not try. In my case, I am situated in a transnational and global present, with an intellectual and biographical background that is informed as much by specific western European traditions as by specific local contexts. When in this article I then propose to reassess the legacy and contribution of folkloric ethnographies and cultural-historical studies in Albania, this cannot be an intriguing attempt to open up to anthropological analysis what in the West is seemingly still the unknown Albanian culture and society.

Depicting the different methodologies and approaches that distinguish academic traditions in a given society is certainly useful. It is perhaps even more important, and at once more problematic, to reveal the different political, social, ideological and cultural implications of various traditions. Most of the texts produced in Albanian scholarship contain information about practices, norms and laws. Yet, with occasional exceptions, they are not written for social scientific purposes, but as a genre of scholarship fitted to service the nationalist ideology more generally, or the communist regime in particular. While in this article a new perspective is presented on the lack of social anthropological discipline, on the ideologization of folklore and on the manipulation of culture, the arguments and the insights obtained from the critical assessment of the political and ideological context into which the available Albanian scholarship developed, with the necessary critical assessment, can be useful to appreciate comparative uses and misuses of 'native' studies throughout nationalist and communist contexts in eastern Europe and so-called socialist societies.

The focus on the history of institutions, the careers of particular individuals, intellectual biographies, trajectories and followers is crucial to understanding scholarly networks between mainstream and local traditions. The number of solid studies that address the ideological foundations and political practices of scholarly production in eastern Europe has also been rising steadily, at least since the 1990s. Some recent works do much to illuminate the disciplinary histories throughout East and South-East Europe. In particular, a series of conferences revealed that ideology, either nationalist or communist, has played a major role in the formation and development of ethnography, ethnology, folkloristics and social anthropology in many south-eastern European countries.² The contributions outline how the intellectual endeavors were

² A conference organized by the International Association for South-East Anthropology in Bankja (Bulgaria) in August 1996 focused on 'Ideology in Balkan Anthropology' (special issue, *Ethnologia Balkanica* 2 [1998]). A series of conferences organized by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale (Germany) focused on the rise of anthropology during the socialist era in people's democracies. The contributions of August 2003 were limited to eastern central Europe (Hann, Sarkany and Skalnik, 2005), those of June





affected by formally internationalist but in substance deeply national versions of socialism. Scholars were able by and large to nurture and sustain their special relationship to the nation under dramatically altered conditions, reacting more or less skillfully to fluctuating political pressures, and eventually finding a secure niche for themselves in national communism.

In this line, the critical handling of ethnographic-historical sources and the actual contributions of practitioners of the discipline in Albania may be of equal importance in assessing the development both of Albanian studies and of anthropology. If we look back at the state of people's culture studies in Albania, what we see deserves little praise and no celebration, but rather very thorough critical examination. Obviously, I take a critical standpoint that is now current in anthropology as well as in cultural studies, in post-colonial theory and more recently in post-socialist studies. However, the different periods must be approached in detail with both a critical and an insightful eye, without falling into the trap of a simple ideological critique. I therefore stick to a review of the different periods of Albanian ethnography and Albanian studies, commenting on what most scholars actually did achieve, and highlighting how the reading of their products sheds light on the fact that knowledge and politics are deeply intertwined in these contexts.

Arguably, in rediscovering an old experience meaning that many apparently non-political acts of scholarship have a political dimension, it is my contention to show that these kinds of writing are not so much concerned with the ordinary details of people's culture and people's life, but with the great debate of power locations and traditions. What precisely a critical review of the history of Albanian studies might mean for understanding the political imbrications of Albanian folkloric projects clearly depends on a reconstruction of the shifting ideological foundations of folkloric-ethnographic production in Albania that could show the parallel interests and mutual entanglements of early folklorist collectors and contemporary scholars with certain political projects of their days. This involves a critical awareness both of the larger epistemic and political field in which these studies emerged and continue to function, and of the practices and relations of power within and across different locations and traditions of an ethno-nationalist and totalitarian kind.

Although it will not be possible altogether to ignore philosophical ideas regarding nationalism, colonialism, socialism and globalism or their historical variations in Albanian and south-eastern European contexts, I will discuss them only as they arise within the issues and problems considered. Because the critical reflections are inspired by ethnography, I shall keep the focus on the politics of fieldwork, how knowledge is produced in these contexts, and incidentally on my own empirical work within anthropology. Finally, at this time I shall be retrospective, concerned more with taking stock rather than with proposing the kinds of new direction, which must be addressed at another time, and which might be revealed for anthropology and social studies in Albania and in eastern Europe or more generally for anthropological theory and methodology.

2006 to South-East Europe (Mihailescu, Iliev and Naumovic, 2008), and those of March 2011 to the Balkan 'margins of Europe' (Boskovic and Hann, 2013), where an earlier version of this article was also presented.

This type of elaboration might be very attractive, particularly given the ordinarily pedestrian proceedings of much of Albanian studies. Yet the danger of arbitrarily attributing to former writers motivations that stem indirectly from contemporary concerns is not to be minimized. Hence, I am not pitted between a historical strand in its own right and another concerned with the present uses of the past, or to use George Stocking's opposition between 'historicist' and 'presentist' analyses (Stocking, 1965). My concern is rather to offer a revised account of the history of Albanian studies as practised by native scholars and viewed from an insider's/outsider's perspective. Rather than leaning towards either presentism or historicism, the aim is to concentrate on the intellectual history of ideas, methods and contributions, through the mixing of historicism with a degree of a more frankly presentism in which 'the native's point of view' is re-examined for its contemporary uses.

If anthropology is to emerge and persist as a viable field, in Albania as elsewhere, it needs to attend more carefully to its own social reproduction. The task is therefore not simply to summarize previous and established insights and opinions, but rather to question those previously established opinions that today seem to be one-sided or condemnable. Ultimately, we need to consider how to engage constructively with the past in ways that may develop a vision for a renewed anthropology within Albanian studies from the perspective of those presentist, critical and internationally oriented positions that we need to strengthen and promote today.

THE FOLKLORIC GLORIFICATION OF ONE'S OWN PEOPLE'S CULTURE

Many Albanian studies produced in the modern tradition of western scholarship may show a great concern for the ethnographic approach and historical source-criticism or a high level of academic sophistication. Yet the aspects of what is referred to as western tradition pertain to an entity characterized by inner mechanisms of exclusion and hierarchies. Actually, the racial hierarchy and developmental logic of western culture have been the foundation of power relations in the last two centuries. In this context, Albanian culture and self-image were very much influenced by a fundamental division between those associated with the civilized world and those associated with a peripheral position within the western system and having to navigate between the two. Generally, a curious mixture of identification and exoticization has characterized depictions and descriptions of Albania from an external western point of view, as I have shown to be the case with German-writing traditions (Doja, 2014a; 2014b). In turn, the foreign attitude became crucial from a native point of view, since there was both an unequal power balance and an internalization of external ideas. The outcome culminated in a conflict between the idea of the eternal nation, embedded in Albanian nationalism, and the actual paucity of political sovereignty during much of Albanian history. This meant that the focal point of the constrained nation became an aggressive negotiation of the political supremacy of western ideas about the validity and free development of what is conceptualized as national culture and heritage.

Arguably, native Albanian scholars have provided a unique view of Albanian tradition and people's culture in historical perspective, especially on material culture,





social organization, or mythology and beliefs, with sometimes useful observations on social changes during socialism. Their researches are scattered in disparate publications or lost in the archives, as is the case with works on customary laws by Rrok Zojzi or on oral literature by Qemal Haxhihasani. Some works of the time have been republished in recent collections (e.g. Gjergji, 2001, 2002, 2006; Ulqini, 2003; Tirta, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2007; Uçi, 2007). It is difficult, however, for contemporary scholars to integrate these works with current anthropological questions and concerns. Although many of the earlier researchers explored Albanian issues in a relatively balanced way, their publications have been reproduced with little commentary, analysis, or revision. It is difficult to distinguish which of the older works is of continuing relevance because many of them were excessively empiricist and lacked analytic depth, or even basic academic referencing standards.

In Albania, there was no equivalent to social anthropology before or during the socialist period; and this is still the case, though this issue must be examined at another time. The field has been dominated by 'national ethnography' as practised by 'native ethnographers' (cf. Hofer, 1968) and is known as studies of folk culture (*Volkskultur*), or, better, as people's culture, to comply with both socialist era terminology and wordformation in English (as in 'people's democracy'). The standard term in Albanian is the study of *kultura popullore*,³ which is often rendered in English as 'studies of popular culture', taken to mean the totality of ideas, perspectives, attitudes, images and other phenomena that are deemed to be preferred within the mainstream of Albanian culture. This translation is mistaken, if not abusive, and 'people-science' is undoubtedly more accurate. The concerns of the field have corresponded with folklore studies if we take folklore at its primary meaning as 'knowledge of the people' or the study of 'the whole of the people's traditions, customs and arts' (in English, *folklore*; in German, *Volkskunde*). The institutional history of these labels is tortuous and becomes even more difficult when well-defined tracks for professional training are absent. In Albania, as throughout eastern Europe, the study of *kultura popullore* has included investigations of material culture, folk art objects, oral traditions, myths, beliefs, customs and the like. The shifting boundaries between several academic denominations, such as 'folklore' focusing on oral traditions, 'ethnography' dealing primarily with customs and artefacts of material culture and even 'physical anthropology' dealing with racial traits, should be seen as a matter of distribution of tasks and secondary divisions within a common project of national history. The same applies not only to historiography dealing with ancient times, but also to archaeology dealing with remains of material culture, and to philology dealing with language relics.

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

Whatever the label, like native studies focused on the ‘people’s culture’ of other south-eastern European countries, including modern Greece (Herzfeld, 1982), as has also been the case in eastern Europe generally, these studies were focused on the culture to which the researcher belonged. They celebrated a national model that is supposed to be deeply rooted in the past. Their primary mission was to build up national culture by looking to the ‘folk’ to document the people’s culture of the peasants, in the conviction that in their unsullied pre-industrial settings one could uncover the nation’s essential traits and the original character of people’s culture and people’s spirit (*Volksgeist*), similar to the aim of German *Volkskunde* (Doja, 2014a; 2014b). Actually, their methodology is based above all on folklore data collection in the manner of German *Volkskunde*, which can be traced back to Herder’s perspective on culture (Sundhaussen, 1973). In all cases, the parallel does not only lie in a shared acceptance of Aryanist theses emanating from the groves of German academe to uncover similar august antiquity and cultural dignity. As such, the field of folklorist people’s culture studies in Albania can be viewed as a reworking of the German *kulturhistorische* school, to which the Italian missionary historical studies also belong, and a number of classical anthropo-geographical texts on Albanian culture and society, all from the early 20th century. This culturalist and historicist tradition has been institutionalized as ‘a deliberate, organized, conscious effort to construct a more satisfying culture’ by what is known as a ‘revitalization movement’ (Wallace, 1956: 265). In Albania, the role of these studies has been more precisely linked to Albanianism, the movement of national awakening or rebirth (*Rilindja kombëtare*).

Many of the ‘people’s culture’ studies in Albania, like many thinkers, writers, scholars and charlatans, to put it in Kenneth Feder’s terms, have ‘attempted to cast the past in an image either they or the public desire or find comforting’ (Feder, 2011). In this attitude they are foremost afflicted by what Roland Barthes called the ‘virus of essence’ (Barthes, 1957). Such studies are conducted nationwide and the village has always been the primary location of research, despite the tremendous impact of modernization and the rural exodus that depopulated the countryside in the second half of the 20th century. Social and economic change only made it more urgent to study the peasant milieu, now seen as the depository of a ‘dying’ way of folk life, customs and communities. Researchers focused primarily on the urgent collection of traditions ‘in danger of disappearing without leaving any trace’ (Zojzi, 1962: 7). Even today, similar statements are repeated in works recycled and republished in recent collections (e.g. Gjergji, 2001: 26; Tirta, 2003), paralleling the ‘salvage ethnography’ of colonial anthropology, in which ‘old age’, ‘cultural isolation’ and ‘geographic remoteness’ are deemed to reveal the embodiment of *shpirti popullor i kombit*, the ‘people’s national soul’ [*Volksgeist*].

This shows especially in the ambiguous way that these studies dealt with customary laws (Doja, 2011). At the turn of the 20th century Shtjefën Gjec ov (1874–1929), an Albanian Kosovo-born Franciscan priest and freedom fighter, dedicated himself to the records of North Albanian traditions and legends and began to publish them from 1913 onwards in the Franciscan journal *Hylli Dritës*, printed in Shkodra. He travelled to North Albania at practically the same time as Edith Durham (1863–1944), a Victorian British traveller and human-rights activist, and Franz von Nopcsa (1877–1933),



a Hungarian nobleman and secret agent of the Habsburg Empire. As a faithful German epigone, he also regarded the local customary laws, based on blood relations, as the very essence of Albanian *Volksgeist*. After his tragic death at the hands of nationalist Serbs in Kosovo (Mata, 2000), his fellow Franciscans published a remarkably competent piece of work based on his research, wherein customary social institutions are described with textbook precision (Gjeçov, 1933). Indeed, the Franciscans had a clear social and political agenda, for they saw themselves as working toward an enlightened revitalization of their own nation. As they worked over Gjeçov's notes, their over-arching and barely disguised goal was to provide Albanians with a national identity, to strengthen and unify their new nation, and, not incidentally, to bolster the standing of the Catholic Church with a code of law to be used by Albanian Christians and Albanian Muslims alike. Where there was variety in the unwritten law, they would set a standard; where there was diversity, they would show unity. Their goal was not to record the law, but to improve it.

A second edition of Gjeçov's text was also published by the official academic presses at the end of the communist era. This new publication, expanded with his unpublished manuscripts on marriage and family customs as well as with his fieldwork notes and many other cases of the application of the law he had witnessed in local assemblies, is highly critical of the Franciscan compilation, but still shows the vaunted identity and unity of the Albanian society and culture, something actively promoted both by Albanian Catholics and by Albanian communists alike. In these texts the same metaphor for 'nation revitalization' was rediscovered. In particular, the recently released 'Platform' laying down the principles of the new compilation (Uçi, 2007: 407–9) stressed the historical importance of customary laws as an act of and a testimony to the self-government and sophisticated social organization of Albanians. Independent of historical teleology and religious differentiation, the notion of 'blood' kinship relations, which was the basis for the 'blood laws' and could at the same time be used to express national connectivity 'through blood', perhaps more than in the Franciscan publication (Krasztev, 2002: 44), was meant to regulate what reproduces the most fundamental structures of society and its greatly specific and authentic cultural identity throughout the world.

As part of a socialist scholarly strategy of identity construction, customary laws were finally recognized as a crucial element in Albanian history, even though they were obsolete and reactionary according to communist ideology. Taken as one of the most romantic social institutions in South-East Europe, a source of endless fascination for Durham, Nopcsa, Hasluck and all other following travellers, they were still considered to be a 'great cultural monument' of Albanian identity, not only a part of the northern Albanian's self-portrayal, but also an important element in the identity discourse and politics (Voell, 2004). As confirmed by foreign scholars and travellers, who are frequently taken at face value even in more recent (e.g. Ndreca, 2007) or recently recycled (e.g. Tirta, 2007) publications, they are presented as a major cultural achievement and as an icon that must have enabled Albanian communities of the past to perpetually resist foreign influences and assimilation. If customary laws might become a special embodiment of the originality, authenticity and superiority of the Albanian cultural identity and national *Volksgeist*, this is not because they harboured in the re-

mote mountain villages of North Albania. Their success lies rather in the fact that they generated civilizational terms intended, through their august antiquity and cultural dignity, to earn the grudging respect of neighbouring cultures and foreign powers.

The term *Kanun* is unmistakably a European-inspired coinage in Albanian, going back to a Roman-Byzantine-Ottoman civilizational mixture, but its ideological implications have to do with what can be described as the contact or buffer zone that North Albanians provide between local and invasive cultures, which recalls the status of Greece in 'the margins of Europe' (Herzfeld, 1987). Such cultural ambiguity feeds on localized forms of otherness, onto which dominant powers and their regional agents map larger global divisions. Among those suspected of harbouring communist antipathies were 'backward' people under foreign influences from reactionary pre-socialist states or

hostile neighbouring nation-states. The highlanders of the North, *malok* in Albanian, have been denied full cultural recognition. Yet the Albanians sometimes represent these people as embodying the conditions from which the *Kanun* has long since rescued the Albanians themselves. That is why both cultural and political leaders in the socialist era alike waged aggressive centralizing campaigns to homogenize national language and culture. The occasional quest for a pan-Albanian *Kanun* in contemporary Albania is still about the creation of a strong centralized cultural identity designed to protect the 'weaker' members of the nation from the immoral blandishments of the 'uncivilized' and 'subversive'. More than a crypto-colonial situation (Herzfeld, 2002), we see here how the national pride of cultural authenticity is a mark of political necessity.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATION-CENTRED POLITICS

People's culture studies are oriented towards one's own culture and cultural details, towards the search for authenticity or antiquity of customs and cultural values of a given society, which is one's own society. This fact bears in itself important political and ideological implications. The folklorist framework of such approaches can hardly be considered to be a methodological or a disciplinary approach. Often transformed into a passion for local or national cultures, the framework can exceed simple collecting, conservation and study approaches. Its practices become a kind of cultural manipulation, a 'FakeLore' or 'Folklorismus' — the term used to refer to the voluntarist 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). As such, they include the performing, staging and adaptation of any element of a tradition or folklore outside the cultural context in which it was created, often implying changes in form, meaning and intended goals of actors. This attitude is particularly likely to be entangled with nationalism and totalitarianism. This entanglement can be inadvertent and unintentional. Yet, depending on countries, political regimes and ideologies, as the specific cultural practice of folklorism in the heyday of Nazi German *Volkskunde* clearly showed, such a folklorist framework often becomes, deliberately and intentionally, the prey and fuel of political ideologies stemming from nationalistic claims or totalitarian regimes.





Like the tradition of German *Volkskunde* that emerged when the German national state was created (Doja, 2014a, 2014b), people's culture studies also took shape in the historically determined political, economic, social and cultural conditions when nation-states were created across central and eastern Europe, as movements of national liberation threw off Ottoman, Russian, Prussian and Habsburg overlords. These conditions created a burning feeling of national resentment and a climate that was extremely favourable to the production of all-encompassing ideological solutions, which led the local intellectual elites to consider Romantic nationalism a viable strategy for overcoming the historical problems their group was faced with (Greenfeld, 1992). As a nationalist ideology, Romanticism started with German national resentment in reaction to the universalism underpinning French enlightenment, thus giving birth to pan-Germanism. Paradoxically, the threat stemming from German reactions induced a similar resentment giving birth to pan-Slavism (Sundhaussen, 1973). Other national elites reacted not only to pan-Germanism but also to pan-Slavism. This was the case with developing forms of neo-Hellenism and other competing 'Great Ideas', mutually exclusive south-eastern European national ideologies of Great Greece, Great Bulgaria, Great Serbia, finally giving birth to similar ideas of Albanianism, and more recently to Macedonianism or neo-Ottomanism, which from the start were aimed at discovering a glorious cultural ancestry, worthy of comparison with that of the Greeks. Thus, a chain reaction of mutually imposed national frustrations and reactive exaltations was the driving force of Romanticism, which must have sparked off in southeastern Europe 'imagined communities' from 19th-century proto-nationalism to modern ethno-nationalism.

Albanian nationalism is intertwined and entangled with various long-term regional concerns that continue to operate strategically today: not only the Illyrian origins of the Albanian people and its language, but also post-Ottoman nation and state-institution-building, border security in reaction to Hellenism and Slavism, pan-Balkanism and efforts to create a larger Albania, warfare and ethnic strife, inter-religious ideology and religious identity, or orientalism and Europeanization. Yet, the evolution of Albanian nationalism has experienced a certain delay compared with other neighbouring south-eastern European groups, which helps in explaining the virulence of the current issues that have arisen in similar terms in the early 20th century in most of the south-eastern European peoples, who earlier escaped the Ottoman Empire or who much earlier engaged in a national movement.

Like the tradition of German *Volkskunde* (Doja, 2014a, 2014b), the history of folklorism and the folkloric tradition of 'people's culture' studies that developed in Albania cannot be separated from this broader political and social context that generated widespread interest in the collection, description, conservation and often exaltation of one's own national people's culture altogether with the 'scientific' ideal of a nation-building discipline. This became part of broader native studies that native scholars, emulating German terminology, prefer referring to as *Albanologie*, especially linked to the search for national identity in Albania. This is not, however, a specific trait of Albanian studies (Cabanes, 2004) or even south-eastern European studies (Naumovic, 1998). Much the same as the German *Volkskunde*, these studies have been institutionalized in Albania, as elsewhere in central and eastern European

countries, at a time of national movement and state-building. As is generally the case with any native studies that are at once advocacy studies, the desire to stand out from neighbouring countries and the aggressive promotion of claims to civilizational superiority and antiquity were, and still are, the characterizing features of these studies. If the nation became nominally independent but at the price of a sometimes-humiliating form of effective dependence, as in the case of Greece (Herzfeld, 1982), such claims are almost always disproportionate to the political standing of the country. In these situations, almost naturally, a science or a group of sciences has been institutionalized in South-East Europe, including Albania, during periods when the need was felt for a project that could specify tasks of 'national' importance. This would confirm that there really existed a nation, and that in its pretensions to independent statehood the nation had a continuity of territorial possession and a historical legality or at least a cultural legitimacy. The historical inaccuracy of the pretensions is not acknowledged in these projects and it is ideologically stabilized by the idea of the homogenized nation-state.

The reception of Romanticism turned Albanian people's culture studies, as elsewhere in the German-speaking countries, as much as in most of Central and East Europe, into a weapon of politics and national pride. Romanticism and nationalism both favoured a new focus on the rural homeland. Romanticism embraced the domestic countryside because of its search for a retreat into the aesthetics of idyllic harmony. In turn, these new aesthetic values had a standardizing impact upon the new political movements of nationalism. The ideal life in the Romantic imagination of nationalism was then perceived as a return to one's own nation's alleged rural roots, while the task of these studies is to enforce identity construction in several ways. A common nationalist reading of Albanian people's culture is simply to identify the cultural entity in terms of the Illyrian ethnic group as ancestral to the contemporary Albanian community. Such identification provides Albanian nationality with a respectable pedigree extending back into the remote past, firmly rooted in the national territory. Once made, such identification can be extended to interpret progressive changes and cultural developments as if they were due to the activities of the Illyrian ancestral ethnic group. If other evidence contradicts the model of autochthonous development and national cultural unity, it typically can be accommodated and such nationalist interpretations seem able to accommodate flatly any contradictory evidence.

They provide the proof of national cultural unity over heterogeneous local communities. They locate, with varying degrees of success, the nation's essential continuity from antiquity to the present. They insist on its superiority in autochthony and uniqueness over rival neighbouring cultures as an indispensable element for a prestigious image of national identity. They become a nation-building discipline because they provide cultural and historic evidence of Albanian existence, distinction, prestige and legitimacy as a confirmation of 'scientific' ideals. In Albania as in other countries in the south-eastern 'margins of Europe' (Herzfeld, 1987), these principles are at work in people's culture studies and throughout the historical sciences, as it was already the case in the German traditions of *Alttertumskunde* and *Volkskunde* (Doja, 2014a, 2014b). Albanian people's culture studies are perceived primarily as a 'national' science that is supposed to uncover the *Volksgeist* and contribute to understanding





Albanian superiority and exclusivity, especially against the identity of neighbouring Slavic and Greek cultures.

In this way, if the collective national self is granted an absolute value and is implicitly and explicitly opposed to 'others' and to otherness, as has been shown in the case of Bulgaria (Valtchinova, 2004), the structural dichotomy between the study of one's own and of others' cultures implied the lack of a value-free viewpoint and impeded the adoption of a universalistic perspective. In addition, positioning one's own collective self in the centre of a specific research project on society and culture implies a self-reflexive approach in a narrow sense of the word, in the way of being allowed to speak of and for the collective self. Perhaps this might seem to be an echo of Clifford Geertz's famous formulation of the anthropological authority speaking of and for the culture under study (Geertz, 1973), or an echo of more recent concerns of an anthropology at home.

At their base, these concerns are essentially about power and the politics of representation, about who has the right to represent whom and for what purposes, and about whose discourse will be privileged in the ethnographic text. Surely, these epistemological problems are not new for anthropologists. However, the introverted perspective of people's culture studies actually stands opposite to these epistemological concerns. In their case, it is sameness, not dialogical or intersubjective exchange with otherness or from a distance, that guarantees both understanding and knowledge. Meditating on the 'faults' of national character or the 'national psyche', this self-reflexivity may also fashion itself as a 'critical' one. More frequently, however, this is rather a flattering self-recognition. In its extreme form, the study of one's own people's culture becomes a celebration of one's own exclusivity.

The main studies of 'national' and people's culture in Albania are clearly caught up in celebrations of the nation, and blanket allegations of being a 'nationalist discipline' should have normally been heard of. Indeed, it is not surprising to see scholars, writers, literary theorists and critics launching and conducting debates on Albanian 'psychology' and the 'national soul', mixing within their arguments an 'Albanian' glorious past, cultural heritage, folk culture, ethnic territory, the principle of 'blood' or racial traits. Questions of language, philology, folklore, customs and traditions have provided the core arguments for the great debate on modernity in Albania, not unlike within the old tradition of German *Volkskunde* (Doja, 2014a, 2014b). In a general way, as elsewhere in south-eastern and central Europe, the influence exercised by these ways of thinking and the discourse on folklorist people's culture and 'folk ways of life' have contributed to the essentialization of the national character and have long encouraged official studies to interpret cultural difference in terms of hierarchy (Bausinger, 1993), thus providing arguments for nationalism and exclusivism.

THE HISTORICIST VIEW OF ONE'S OWN PEOPLE'S LIFE

Following the tradition of many influential works of the interwar period (e.g. Çabej, 1939), philological approaches to the study of the Albanian people's culture and history carried higher prestige than other approaches, and were accompanied by greater



professional opportunities towards what is known in a restricted sense as *folklore studies*. Institutionally, after a track within the short-lived National Institute of Studies in 1940–1944, Albanian studies of people's culture were born in the aftermath of the Second World War and had a complex history under socialism. Following the reorganization of the National Institute of Sciences in 1947, people's culture studies were recognized in 1955 under the auspices of the Institute of History and Linguistics. In 1960, they became a body in their own right with the establishment of the Institute of Folklore. In 1979, this institute was transformed into the Institute of People's Culture within the National Academy of Sciences that had been established in 1972. Simulating since 2008 an Institute of Cultural Anthropology, they moved out of the National Academy to be housed within a newly formed National Centre for 'Albanological' Studies.

A pervasive continuity of Albanian people's culture studies during socialism can be shown in their ambiguous relationship with German intellectual traditions (Doja, 2014a, 2014b).⁴ Given a tradition in important areas of Albanian studies such as linguistics and history, which was set by the most influential Albanian scholars who were trained during the interwar period in German-speaking universities (e.g. Eqrem Çabej or Aleks Buda), people's culture studies in Albania, as elsewhere in central and eastern Europe had developed since the beginning by emulating and replicating the theories and methods of German *Volkskunde*, perhaps in a way that must have also paralleled the development of Boasian anthropology under the influence of the German anthropological tradition (Stocking, 1996). However, while *Volkskunde* as a whole was obliged after 1945 to break with its own traditions, Albanian studies remained still preoccupied with the Albanian national character and, like in Eastern Germany (Doja, 2014a; 2014b), they approached *Volkskultur* or people's culture in the same essentialist terms.

During the early decades of socialism in Albania, the *Volkskunde* tradition of people's culture studies had another tradition, seemingly quite different, grafted on to it. Under the label of *etnografi*, or *Ethnographie* in Eastern Germany, people's culture studies in Albania emulated Soviet *etnografiya* and followed the logic of the latter's development and separation from *folkloristika*, as in other Eastern European countries (cf. Valtchinova, 2004; Hann, Sarkany and Skalnik, 2005). For specific historical reasons that have more to do with the Soviet influence in eastern Europe, rather than with 19th-century developments that saw the field of a descriptive ethnography become opposed to the theoretical field of ethnology, the emulations of Soviet *etnografiya* in eastern Europe are often rendered in English with a homographic term such as 'ethnography', which is often confused with the allophonic term of the method of 'ethnography' in anthropology.

4 Surely, the 'German-speaking point of view' in the development of Albanian studies cannot be a simple metaphorical expression for understanding 'culture' in terms of *Volksgeist*, which might be 'common sense in many cultures and among many scholars of different national traditions irrespective of their nationality and the language of their writings', as one anonymous reviewer seemed to assume while warning against the risk of homogenizing the various influences of German-speaking scholars on Albanian studies that could disregard their differences and historical peculiarities over a century of scholarship.



In Albania as in East Germany and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the *etnografi* studies adopted a deliberate interest in historical facts, which does not necessarily mean an interest in historical process and historical approach. It seems that this point reveals a characteristic weakness of the professional education system in Albania. Training in people's culture studies and archaeology was reduced to learning techniques, certainly necessary, but not accompanied by a structured training in history and social change, considered by the regime as dangerous disciplines. Training in history was at the time, and still remains, very poor, and it is impossible for people's culture scholars to achieve any historical synthesis. They privileged the search for origins, and for the most 'primitive state' of an object, practice or ritual. Culture was conceived of as *etnokultura* and emphasized a deliberately ethnicized concept of the folk, which merged into that of people and nation (*kultura popullore-kombëtare*), paralleling the concept of 'ethnos' in Soviet *etnografiya* (Bromley and Kozlov, 1989).

These studies were associated with an array of arts and techniques performed in order to transmit the stock of memory, knowledge and practices through the generations. All were to be 'read' as crystallizations of the past, with the material artefact coming to be seen as a direct testimony to primordial origins, thus functioning in a similar way to historical records. While employing a historicizing terminology, being concerned to show the temporal depth of the phenomena they studied, Albanian scholars still avoided historical chronology. Quantitative calculation was replaced by a qualitative terminology: the labels 'pagan' or 'archaic' were (and remain) coextensive with 'popular' or 'authentic'. The category of 'people' [*Volk*] in *kultura popullore* slipped easily from connotations of 'traditional' and 'archaic' into a political equation of 'people' with 'nation', increasingly associated with an additional socio-class understanding of the 'people' in contemporary socialist society leading to a 'socialist nation'.

After breaking with the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1960s, an Albanian variant of the Chinese Cultural Revolution [*revolucionarizimi*] took place to mobilize people's culture knowledge as a way to service the evolving ideological claims of the communist regime. While the very specific global and local context of this campaign must be positioned and examined in more detail at another time, such studies tended to privilege and celebrate the material framework of 'people's life', which corresponded to the axiom of the determinant character of the material world and of the labour value in Marxist social theory. In this way, the material culture of traditional rituals and customs was separated from 'spiritual culture', which was in turn separated from the study of verbal and musical arts, as distinct sub-fields of people's culture studies. These demarcations further obscured the structural and functional bases of cultural practices.

However, if people's culture studies during socialism were plagued by a deliberate interest in historical facts and a predominantly historicist view of one's own people's life, this does not necessarily imply that I am ignoring works dealing with the socialist present, as some hastily believed (Lelaj, 2011). Rather, this is a methodological contention of the folklorist, empiricist and historicist character that made these works an instrument of communist propaganda. Undeniably, for a long time most of people's culture studies were clearly in charge of the state of 'everyday affairs' [*çështje të ditës*],

dealing mainly with the study of so-called ‘socialist changes in ways of life’. Indeed, this could not be otherwise at a time of ‘further revolutionization’ of the socialist life in Albania, especially during the 1970s, when the reformation of people’s culture studies was under the tight supervision of the Hoxha regime. A programmatic paper presented to the National Conference of Ethnographic Studies in 1976, which can be considered to have laid down the main principles of the transformation of the Institute of Folklore into the reformed Institute of People’s Culture, and perhaps the appointment of the author as its first official director in 1979, was especially intended to show the effects of time and the changes occurring in social conditions and ways of life under socialism (Uçi, 1977).⁵ As stated by the soon-to-be comrade director of the Institute of People’s Culture, ‘a typical and very interesting renovation of folklore’ was the modification of its functions, considered to be ‘a critical appropriation of people’s cultural heritage motivated by socialist ideology’. Although the people did not entirely lose a spiritual life, the religious, magical, or ceremonial functions of folklore were assumed to have ‘atrophied’, and to have been replaced by a sense of the decorative. Folklore was ‘increasingly activated in the spiritual life of society with its artistic-aesthetic functions’ (Uçi, 1977: 79–80).

Official studies of people’s culture thus came to overestimate the purely material or artistic character and instrumental or aesthetic functions of symbolic forms and cultural practices, and to neglect the anthropological study of their semantic and functional values. As I showed in more detail elsewhere (Doja, 1998b), this method erected an artificial division between research on artistic and oral traditions and that on social and cultural systems as a whole. Folk songs and other verbal forms of oral traditions or handicrafts and other objects of material culture had to be evaluated in artistic terms, while rites and many other practices could only be considered as vestiges and survivals of some folkloric institution.⁶

The spiritual-material and ceremonial-artistic dichotomies emerged in different forms, but the attention to ‘survivals’ was consistent with the 19th-century evolutionism of Tylor and Frazer as well as the folkloric paradigm of *Reliktforschung* in Europe generally (Bausinger, 1993). Symbolic forms and cultural practices were considered to be isolated islands preserved from modernization and contact with learned culture. Albanian people’s culture scholars, like their fellows in other eastern European

5 To his merit and to the best of my knowledge, Alfred Uçi is the first and by now almost the only scholar of the old generation to assess critically and reflexively the evolution of the discipline during socialism in Albania (Uçi, 1997). Even though he skilfully slipped away from fully acknowledging his own responsibility for many of the developments that are the target of criticism, he confessed ‘feeling the personal and collective responsibility as researchers who have been subjected to the pressure of the totalitarian state ideology and the unscientific ideological influences that ruled the social life of Albania in the form of prejudices, illusions and myths, thus paying the “ransom” imposed by the intolerance of the communist regime’ (Uçi, 2007: 391).

6 Recent reproductions of works of the socialist era still maintain these interpretative practices without any revision at all (e.g. Gjergji, 1988 [there is an English translation from 2004]; 2006; Tirta, 2003, 2004, 2007).



countries, were obsessed with the supposedly 'popular' or 'authentic' origin of such forms and practices to the detriment of what founded their presence within a cultural system.

Peasant culture was taken to reflect a primitive, 'initial' state of things, which led to a burgeoning of detailed studies of various items of 'traditional' culture, taken outside historical time. For example, the purported practice of 'couvade' in which a man ritually simulated labour pains during a woman's birth and the existence of 'sworn virgins' who take on honorary male social roles and identities were both characterized as vestiges [*mbeturina*] of a hypothetical matriarchy (Gjergji, 1964; but see Doja, 2005 for a critical reassessment). More specifically, however, the study of people's culture was aimed at providing a material background to the thorny question of Albanian ethno-genesis (Buda, 1980, 1982). Customs and traditions as a whole were related to late antiquity and the Middle Ages (Dojaka, 1983), while the obsessive connection to Illyrian origins was claimed for people's arts and costumes (Gjergji, 1969, 1973, 1988) or religious beliefs and mythology (Tirta, 1974), as the exclusive 'paternity' of certain motifs was for legendary ballads (Sako, 1984: 157–65; Panajoti, 1984) and epic poetry (Buda, 1985).

The task was always to assign cultural forms and practices a qualitative place in the process of historical becoming according to a vision that, evolutionary in its essence, at least sought to simulate the procedures of a method of classification. Skillfully arranged in the drawers of time where dates are irrelevant, they had no secret to reveal, and 'survivals' no longer had any function worthy of further investigation. Given their interest in philology, they might have been sensitized to the subversive possibilities of etymology. Scholars of oral tradition have reintroduced the techniques of manuscript genealogy in anthropology (Vansina, 1965). However, the majority of this kind of work in the hands of nationalist folklorists showed no interest in subverting authoritative etymologies, simply because they were more interested in constructing their own.

Albanian folklorists even rarely succeeded in applying Marxism. Actually, aside from the obligatory quotes from the founding fathers of scientific communism, they were relatively more concerned with complying with the strict requirements of the dominant ideology than putting it thoroughly into practice. Instead, they often appealed to classic evolutionist and cultural diffusionist perspectives, including Morgan's concept of 'unilineal evolutionist stages', which was nevertheless assimilated through Engels, Tylor's notion of 'cultural survival', or the notion of 'cultural areas' borrowed from the anthropo-geographic school. All are relatively similar to Marxism in their historicist reflection and the way they work in the context of the evolutionary sequence of stages or areas of development of society.

As a result, even for the distant past the engagement with concrete processes of social change is very limited. Many preferred to shy away from contemporary studies and to continue working with the dominant temporality of a pre-socialist past, following a retrospective focus that only rarely drew on the synchronic methods that had replaced evolutionism in the West. From the start, for instance, the venerable historian who was soon to become the comrade president of the National Academy of Sciences set the tone of national history (Buda, 1962), while the dean of people's culture studies at that time tackled the regional issue, by showing the contribution

of folklore in identifying 'ethnographic areas' and retracing their formation and transformation toward increasingly inclusive units up (Doja, 1998b), many followed suit trying to prove the contribution of people's culture to Albanian nation-building (Pollo, 1977; Xholi, 1981; Uçaj, 1984), the contribution of different folkloric elements to the national unity of people's culture (Zojzi, 1977; Tirta, 1983; Sako, 1984), and even a necessary relationship between individual creative activity and national patterns of people's culture and folklore (Panajoti, 1977, 1980, 1981, 1988; Hyso, 1988).

Very much influenced by the Soviet tradition of scholarship, these studies were and still are typically considered as an auxiliary discipline to history and historical philology. Much of this scholarship, as I showed in more detail elsewhere (Doja, 1998a), was also concerned with local and regional variations. Normally, the research was oriented towards highlighting the integrative function of people's culture, coupled with its distribution among the broadest layers of the population. Albanian people's culture scholars might have recognized syncretizing processes between various cultural and religious systems that could have been relevant to cultural analysis in anthropological and historical perspective. However, not only are they ignored but they are systematically traced back to a national model of reference, which served to construct a particular idea of culture, state and nation. The acknowledging of local values meant that the dangers of fragmentation of the national entity were acknowledged in practice, but an additional dimension was gained in terms of historical depth, which was so reevaluated.

ETHNOGRAPHY AND FOLKLORIC ARCHAISM

At the beginning of the 20th century, when Boas and Malinowski insisted on the importance of fieldwork and displaced Frazer's 19th-century interest in survivals, they firmly believed that they had inaugurated a new epoch for the development of their discipline that would enable objective comparisons between human communities and the scientific study of culture and society. Indeed, the achievements of their revolutionary theory and method were basically a move away from historicism and folklorism towards social science, which must have established modern anthropology in the succeeding decades.

By contrast, in their efforts to seize the 'authentic' traditions of people's culture such as they supposed had 'really' functioned in a society of official ideology, Albanian scholars, like their fellows in other eastern European countries, were devoted to descriptive and factual information, which provided nothing more than localized and historicized snippets of primordial materials, suitable for historical archives and folkloric atlases. Much the same as the programme to create the *Deutsche Volkskunde Atlas*, particularly emphasized during the Nazi period in Germany (Jacobeit, 2005), what was more important was to sketch numerous folkloric-ethnographic atlases and gather massive series of oral literature, including artefacts, dresses, habitations, labour tools, utensils, songs, dances, rites and ceremonials, which could help sustain folklore festivals and fill ethnographic museums in order to adequately perform the cult of 'the Nation'.





The uncritical juxtaposition of reported customs exemplified by people's culture scholars is hardly an exaggeration of what was once unforgettably denounced by Edmund Leach as 'the butterfly collecting' of older forms of anthropology that dealt with the arrangement of cultural data according to their types and subtypes bounded and distinguishable as species types and classifiable as such in a kind of Linnaean taxonomy (Leach, 1961: 2). People's culture scholars in Albania as in other eastern European countries can freely be such folkloric collectors of local butterflies, because they have been unable and unwilling to go beyond their own experiences and tolerate 'inspired guess-work' of explanations and generalizations that could transcend their local setting.

In this sense, one may wonder how to understand the alleged 'strong commitment to fieldwork of exceptional quality' (Hann, 2007) that is argued to have been conducted by practitioners of people's culture studies in many former communist countries of central and eastern Europe, including Albania. It is also assumed that relatively little attention has been paid to the remarkable persistence of the folkloric tradition in the era of socialism, in which the ostensible ideology might not have prescribed quite different approaches. It seems suspicious, however, how similar particular contributions to local knowledge, rather than inhibiting the generalizing comparative perspective of more 'cosmopolitan' styles of anthropology, could potentially enrich teaching and research in 'international' anthropology.

For the sake of the comparative approach, also characteristic of social anthropology, there are by now some collections of testimonies to the 'interesting, sometimes fascinating vicissitudes' within many eastern and south-eastern European anthologies of people's culture studies during the era of communist rule (e.g. Hann, Sarkany and Skalnik, 2005; Mihailescu, Iliev and Naumovic, 2008; Boskovic and Hann, 2013). However, even to the mind of one of these editors (Skalnik, in his comment to Hann, 2007), they are basically fruitless, being characterized during most of the studied period by intellectual sterility, inability to study the present in which we live, parochialism, isolationism and ignorance about world trends in social anthropology. Seemingly, the latter did not miss anything substantial by knowing nearly nothing about the so-called 'socialist-era anthropology'.

Beyond the specific intellectual and institutional influences of particular metropolitan traditions, whether they are positively or negatively viewed, there seems to be an entity called 'international anthropology' that is informed by what is referred to as an 'anthropological spirit' (Stocking, 1982: 173). There is also a sense in which a certain current of Euro-American anthropology itself was becoming more 'international' in the recent historical past. No doubt, this might be construed negatively as a kind of post-colonial 'multinational' anthropology. More positively, however, it might be viewed as a disciplinary ideal to be realized somehow by mediation between the anthropologies of the Euro-American center and those of the post-colonial periphery.

Correspondingly, it is possible to combine interests in local folklore with comparative research into the burning contemporary issues of 'postsocialism', by integrating scholars working on contemporary transformations with those specialized in other periods of history and complementing the interests of those scholars who develop other regional interests and further objectives into fields not covered at all

in the national canon. Such a combination of local and cosmopolitan interests would help to promote a vision of anthropology as a 'mature synthesis' and a more 'balanced discipline', which is neither the celebration of one's own people nor the exoticization of 'the Other' (Hann, 2007). It is refreshing to hear a senior western scholar offer a self-conscious dismissal of the mainstream anthropological model as an example worthy of emulation, by calling

attention to the ignorance of most British and North American anthropologists about eastern European contributions to the discipline. Anthropologists should know about and study the works of local scholars, be aware of history and carry out research diachronically. In this endeavour, local traditions cannot be ignored and, indeed, should be reinterpreted, developed and fruitfully employed in our efforts to advance anthropological studies everywhere.

At first sight, it might seem that we have here the unusual situation in which ethical, practical and intellectual considerations all point in the same direction. However, the matter is more complicated than indicated and the optimistic vision of a synthesis of western anthropology and native people's culture studies appears oddly unanalytical. In the 'struggles' to institutionalize some kind of anthropology throughout central and eastern Europe (Skalnik, 2002), the identities and institutional positions of many protagonists vary widely from one country to another. As Katherine Verdery showed (in her comment to Hann, 2007), in this battle it is precisely the relationship of western-style anthropology to national people's culture studies that is at stake. Part and parcel of a more obscure academic politicking to further hidden agendas on a local and global scale (Buchowski, 2012), rather than an epistemological and methodological dispute, this issue is much more about the inertia of institutions and the viability of social networks, about prestige and very specific power and existential interests. In particular, both the name and the content of the discipline are hotly contested in any post-socialist country of East-Central Europe, including Albania. But the institutional consolidation of the methodical and methodological chaos and disorder that dominate the methodologically unclear and vague definition of 'anthropology' must be examined at another time.

The perspective of German *Volkskunde* or Soviet *etnografiya* and their emulations in South-East Europe, including Albania, is the exact opposite of the social anthropological project in the strict sense of the word. The best publications in the genre of folkloric people's culture studies are certainly not contributions to a national tradition of theory and practice in comparative scholarship, but are based on the empiricist descriptive norms of the communist and nationalist ideology in Albania or evolved during the relative cultural autonomy of the 1970s and 1980s in Kosovo.

The problem is not just that we are dealing with a large gap between folkloric people's culture studies and anthropology, but these are two traditions with clearly opposed origins, philosophies and epistemologies. The broad contrast between the comparative enquiries carried out by anthropologists in Western Europe and the definition of the folkloric people's culture studies or 'native ethnography' in eastern Europe have long been recognized and articulated (Hofer, 1968; Halpern and Hammel, 1969). Both traditions are profoundly political, as George Stocking showed in a well-known discussion of the opposition between anthropologies of 'empire-building'





and anthropologies of 'nation-building' (Stocking, 1982), and both traditions share conceptual roots with either colonialism or nationalism (Stocking, 1991). If anthropology was the creation of European states that established overseas empires and if people's culture studies were the creation of Europe's colonized, there must have been expectable differences of emphasis and it is hardly surprising that there was not much overlap of these discourses and that dialogue on methodological and theoretical orientations was difficult.

The political background to the growth of anthropology in an empire-building project differs radically from the history of folkloric people's culture studies in a nation-building project. While empire-building encouraged comparative and theoretical knowledge, nation-building required descriptive and factual information. Indeed, a 'national' or 'imperial' attitude is of considerable importance when regarding 'descriptive' against 'comparative' methodological and theoretical frameworks. From the beginning, the colonial context enabled anthropologists to focus on the study of 'others' and encouraged knowledge that was comparative and theoretical, that is, creating models of alien, exotic and 'primitive' cultures from different colonies that might apply in other colonial contexts. By contrast, in an intellectual project that is still nation-centered, like the folkloric people's culture studies that developed in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, neither comparison nor theory creation is useful.

The nation-centered academic agenda produced lots of narrowly conceived works with little appeal to general scholarship. Situating theory in this field has been always problematic. It seems local scholars are still reluctant to take up theoretical and methodological innovations and approaches as pioneered and adopted in the historical writing on other regions, as well as in related disciplines in social sciences and the humanities. Theory-averseness among local scholars is largely rooted in the earlier folkloric commitments to producing regionally specific factual information and accumulating distinctly bounded building blocks from which a solid scholarly edifice would eventually emerge. Amid this intense production of the particular, theory became associated with a kind of universalist, immeasurable, abstract and freefloating thinking that had no proper place in the specifically local areas of study. Their general focus remained on the identification, collection and description of different customs and customary details of one's own national culture or of a particular national culture, in any case the culture of the nation and the people to which the researcher belonged, which inevitably gave these studies both a political nationalist attitude and a methodological descriptivist and essentialist orientation.

Certainly, the emergence of anthropology into modernity out of its exotic manifestation [*Völkerkunde*] as part of the colonial project is not to be minimized, but it was tempered by the crisis of self-doubt and a series of self-critiques during the post-colonial era. Arguably, anthropology is the only social science that has undergone repeatedly a radical degree of self-discipline. Following decolonization, the great majority of anthropologists discarded the notion of 'primitivism' constructed by their predecessors (Kuper, 1988), together with the accompanying intellectual framework that conceived the search for the essence of humanity as a search for what existed 'originally', 'before', under 'primitive', 'savage', or 'non-modern' conditions. The dominant ideological thrust of the anthropology that was created after the turn of the cen-

tury, as an alternative to the great evolutionary schemes, has been liberal, reformist, anti-racialist and culturally relativist. As I showed in more detail elsewhere (Doja, 2008), very early Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* depicted anthropology serving as the 'bad conscience' of European colonialism, defending the capacities and the cultures of native peoples and calling into question many unexamined ethnocentric assumptions of European 'civilization' (Lévi-Strauss, 1955).

Critiques of this type, focused on the relationship between anthropology and colonialism, were more explicitly articulated throughout the 1970s largely from a Marxist political economy perspective and called for a politically engaged anthropology (Hymes, 1972; Asad, 1973; Copans, 1975; Stocking, 1991). Their main pivotal debate was around the demand for the de-colonization of anthropological knowledge and the political role of anthropologists in the reproduction or contestation of colonialism and imperialism. In the mid-1980s, textual practices emerged as the object of intense debate in anthropology (e.g. Clifford, 1988; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986), including the subsequent feminist critique. Some of the main targets of these critiques were the textual practices of the so-called *realist ethnography*, the modalities of authorship and authorization inscribed in rhetorical figures, or the problems of representing cultural alterity. They influenced an entire critical trend on the prevailing objectivist, essentialist and reified conception of 'culture'. Conversely, the historicized, located, polyphonic, political and discursive character of any 'cultural fact' was emphasized (e.g. Rosaldo, 1989; Fox, 1991; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997).

This opened up a moment for novel forms of writing that were more sensitive to the location of the author and the incompleteness of anthropological data. Today, this critique could be seen as effecting a set of displacements from cultures-as-text (interpretative turn), to texts-about-culture (writing culture and the politics of representation), ending up with anthropology-as-cultural-critique (critical cultural constructivism). Arguably, there were more antagonistic and controversial tendencies within the textual turn of this postmodern, by now largely regressive moment, but beyond my scope at this time (for a more detailed critical approach, see Doja, 2006). Nevertheless, an increased awareness of the politics of ethnography emerged, from the power-laden nature of fieldwork to the polyvocality of any representation of culture. As a result, some anthropologists increasingly problematized dialogue, constructed their ethnographies along dialogical lines (Marcus and Fischer, 1986) and shifted the dominant style of writing from authoritative monologue to involved intersubjective exchange (Tedlock, 1983; Tedlock and Mannheim, 1995). Presumably, many anthropologists now write with a deeper understanding of how power and history shape the ethnographic process, thus emphasizing the relationship between power and the politics of representation (Marcus, 1999).

Overall, these critiques endeavoured to take anthropology towards new fields, leaving behind an association with colonial spaces that had so deeply marked the development of the discipline. The universalizing of the practice of anthropology has been achieved by taking on board the implications of a more contemporary and informed philosophical epistemology, including a multiplicity of enunciative locations and ways of thinking that have de-centered its original object. In this way, the public





legitimacy of the anthropological pursuit has been to advance the goal of a cosmopolitan and comparative science of human history, which has helped anthropologists to transcend the colonial and uncover the politics of knowledge and the technologies of production of alterity, explicitly located within political projects of domination and the power configuration defined by imperial globality and global coloniality.

If we want definitely to overcome 'the definitional straitjacket that we inherited from this history which wedged anthropology between nationalism and primitivism' (Pina-Cabral, 2006: 665), a comparable transformation of both the empire-building and the nation-building strands requires a more serious and additional engagement as much with the colonial and post-colonial arguments on imperialism, as with the Romantic and communist debates on nationalism and exclusivism, and with the ethnocentric and authoritarian discourses on the global politics of knowledge and truth. More than anything else, a serious engagement is still much needed with nationalist ideologies and their communist socio-class variations in eastern Europe, including Albania. Indeed, it is still important to show clearly how the 18th-century Romantic legacy became corrupted in a variety of cultural and political ways by 20th century professionals. Only then can native micro-studies of people's culture be integrated into wider regional histories and cosmopolitan theory.

The problems of distinguishing variant approaches within anthropology and of distinguishing anthropology from other forms of cultural study are complex. A change in the logo of a discipline does not necessarily reflect or engender predictable changes in methodological and theoretical orientations. Nor do decorative details, like the very claim that people's culture studies in South-Eastern Europe can be characterized as an 'anthropology on the margins', with which we were dealing in the conference organized by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (Boskovic and Hann, 2013) and where an earlier version of this article was first presented. Similar exertions cannot resolve the differences between scholarly traditions that are produced by the deep interpenetration of politics and scholarship.

The compromise and cooperation between anthropology and people's culture studies might be a nice utopian dream. Already in the interwar period, the scientific project of 'European ethnology', including the cartographic project of a European ethnological atlas where scholarly erudition prevailed over theoretical originality, initiated since 1937 by the Swede Sigurd Erixon, were also aimed at being a similar cumulative project of international research coordination, bringing together people's culture scholars working independently in their own country or region under various disciplinary labels (Schippers, 1991). However, despite all Erixon's efforts and those of his successors and despite the creation in 1967 of the journal *Ethnologia Europaea*, one must agree that with few exceptions very little work published in the framework of this 'European ethnology' goes beyond national or regional boundaries. Not only is the idealistic vision of the utopianism and absurdity of such projects 'as undesirable as the return from chemistry to alchemy' (Skalnik, in his comment to Hann, 2007), but in many ways these projects may be dangerous in allowing deliberate manipulation of the academic distribution of power.

All this suggests that what is at stake here cannot be some strange 'blurring of genres', but the more serious matter of the gulf between the descriptivist and the

historicist approach in the regions that had been under the control of nationalist and communist regimes and the analytical social science in liberal-democratic social settings. Essentially, the difference between the situation in western European and in post-communist academic institutions has been a confrontation between the archaic, pre-scientific, descriptive field of folkloric people's culture studies, with no theory or methodology of its own, and a modern, theoretically and methodologically elaborated social science that endeavours to reflect on a broad and diverse array of fundamental issues in the sphere of social and cultural development, and to do so in literally a global comparative context.



THE MISSING LINK

The specific problem with many Albanian texts of some relative academic standard is not simply that their dominant temporal mode has remained unchanged in the new political context or that like other eastern European scholars their dominant subject is still confined to their national frames. At first sight there can be nothing wrong with either a political attitude oriented towards one's own nation and national interests or a methodological orientation towards the identification and description of national characters. Most of the time, the connection between the nation-state and one's own people's culture studies may be mutually beneficial. The state needs an educated elite citizenry, and the instilment of national pride in past cultural accomplishments may be appropriate and laudatory. Indeed, for more than 200 years now, modern nations have been constructed, and continue to be so, in that way.

After all, there is also a well-recognized fact that the interpretation of the cultural record is hardly ever straightforward, resulting in unambiguous and definite reconstructions of the past or understandings of the present. Therefore, the articulation of alternative, long-neglected and overlooked voices on one's own culture may not be inherently different and more problematic than other readings of cultural evidence. The problem is how to evaluate patently nationalist interpretations of the cultural record, especially when nationalist reconstructions seem perfectly consistent with the cultural record. No doubt, even in this case the consistency is deceptive because of the purported and deliberate ethnic identification. The quest for identification of some culture as ancestral to a given ethnic group is not only misleading, but also dangerous, especially when the state's agenda or the popular movements driving that agenda appear more questionable on moral grounds or when the scholars are asked to verify some implausible, nationalist-inspired reading of their own culture.

For many reasons nationalist interpretations are, at best, problematic and should be recognized as such. In particular, cultures and ethnic groups are not synonymous, and it can be argued that the adoption of modern constructivist perspectives on ethnicity and nationality is incompatible with attempting to identify ethnic groups and construct national identity on the basis of a perfect correlation with cultural evidence (Kohl, 1998). Clearly, the methodologically descriptivist and essentialist orientation and the politically nationalist attitude, both leading to the reification of a national character, cannot even help their own purpose. They ultimately turn out to be quite



harmful to the very national interests they seek to promote. In the last analysis, the methodological and ideological bias of local folkloric people's culture studies may have reproduced old patterns of cultural particularism and cultural determinism, while unduly undercutting a more important potential to generate more analytical insights into the specificities of Albanian culture, society and history.

Above all, there are a number of naiveties to deplore in the folkloric study of one's own people's culture. One naivety is to believe that the unity of one's own ethnic group can be defined from a list of common cultural traits. Another naivety is to believe that social and geographic isolation is the basis of ethnic exclusivity. Yet another naivety is to believe that the ethnic label refers to an exclusive lifestyle that exclusively relates to an actual group of people. The overall methodological orientation and political attitude refer to the assumptions of 'groupism' (Brubaker, 2009) that tend to make-believe that the social world is populated by homogeneous groups, closed and differentiated, discrete and out of time. These become protagonists of social life as if they were naturally things out there in the world, entities identified by a name and endowed with culture and agency, with common interests and goals.

People's sense of themselves, who they are and what they have done continuously changes and cannot be held constant over centuries. Rather, they are caught up in larger historical processes capable of altering and destroying them. Ethnic entities and identities cannot have essential unity and continuity because they are not bounded objects in the natural world, not a 'natural kind' with cultural traits, but a conceptual reality of symbolic processes grounded in the operation of a general scheme of social partition established by the position of a boundary between 'us' and 'them'. Since the now classic approach inaugurated by Fredrik Barth's 'Introduction', ethnicity has been the analysis of the foundation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries (Barth, 1969). Rather than the cultural characteristics of any particular group, which allow only for the social effects of cultural difference, the analysis of ethnicity seeks to reveal the general process of identification and otherization. The dynamics between imposition and acceptance of collective identities are grounded in the structural and transactional principle that real entities are constituted only in relation to one another. They are applicable only in reference to an 'otherness' and can be realized only by the organization of dichotomous groupings on the boundary of 'us' in contact with or confrontation with or contrast to 'others'.

For Albanians, for instance, establishing their distinctiveness as a group is to define a principle of enclosure by erecting and maintaining a boundary between themselves and foreign groups. In their case, instead of an antiquated view of cultural continuity typical of folkloric people's culture studies, I showed elsewhere that collective cohesion and solidarity are acquired by obvious or virtual strategies of identification and opposition that are realized across a limited number of cultural traits. The successive changes of the ethnic label to 'Illyrian' to 'Albanian' to 'Shqiptar', or the successive and often reversed religious conversions to Nicene Christianity to Eastern Orthodoxy to Roman Catholicism to Sunni Islam to Sufi Bektashism, are projected as interior markers of the group during much of Albanian history (Doja, 2000b). Yet, if anything, they can simply be understood as a possible means of negotiating and redefining their collective identity. Boundaries, which formed the social organization of their bounded

collective division, were thus successfully maintained with neighbours and foreigners (Doja, 1999a). Albanian identity is a unitary and coherent social reality that is self-evident simply from the very fact of being named. If we should not take words for things, ethnicity is then not a thing out there in the world but a perspective on the world.

Arguably, people's culture studies in Albania might have tried, sometimes with varying success, to analyse the cultural values of the rural population as backward customs of a stratified group or class and to apply the methods used in traditional village research to topics of the necessary changes connected with the adoption of socialist values and norms. They may even promise greater attention to local variations in taking up new themes. However, they encourage even less attention to the insertion in and interaction with social processes in historical perspective than anthropology is inclined to do. Most of these studies are based on formal criteria and classifications, remaining neglectful of the social context and the relationship of actual social actors to the subject being researched. In the end, they fail to address the core anthropological questions of cultural dynamics and social change, especially the modernization issue of Albanian society, simply because they still have difficulty in addressing the issue of methodology. Predictably, in people's culture studies of this kind there are few references to theoretical or comparative work and questions are never asked to distinguish between real practices, ideal systems and ideal-typical processes, nor between behavioural norms and rules of what most people actually do and ideal norms and rules for what people ought to do and how they ought to behave.

Anthropology shares with all other social sciences the important factor of studying human beings in action and interaction. Yet, all other sciences study only some of the people and/or some kinds of things people do, just as people's culture studies are specialized in the culture of one's own people. But there are very many people today, and over the ages there has been a vast majority of people, who are not at all like one's own people. Why do they live the way they do? Why do they not live the way one's own people do? More importantly, why do one's own people not live the way they do? Contrary to people's culture studies where the objects of study differentiate specialists and a large thematic variety then delineates the specialisms, the different specializations of anthropology as a distinct science are outlined by its own distinguishing theoretical concepts and questions about humans, which no other science of humanity is already asking or has already answered. These may include the range of human diversity, the commonalities across all different kinds of humans and human ways of life, and how the elements of a particular human way of life fit together, influence each other and develop over time. There is still a distinction between anthropology based on theoretical concepts and specific heuristic tools, and people's culture studies based on a series of objects and a specific geographical area. Anthropology cannot look at just one kind of culture, certainly not just the anthropologist's own kind of culture. One premise of the human sciences is that most people are not as aware of the causes and consequences of their own behaviour as they often like to think they are. That is why what C. Wright Mills referred to as the 'sociological imagination' is necessary for researchers to learn to see meanings, rules, relationships, institutions and such phenomena that are 'invisible' to the attention of group members (Mills, 1959). Familiar things tend to be taken for granted or overlooked, and, if anything,





the comparative perspective of anthropology serves to question assumptions and to expose the taken-for-granted. The aim is neither to provide an exhaustive picture of a particular culture nor so much to show the actual occurrence here and there of some unique characteristics of cultural or regional specific forms and configurations, but to discover how they are related to each other, how they are similar to each other, and how they are differentiated from one another. Instead of a positive knowledge of culture and society, in Lévi-Strauss's terms, it is the 'differential discontinuities' of their common occurrence or non-occurrence that are significant (Lévi-Strauss, 1958: 358), and that constitute the subject matter of anthropology.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the theoretical objective of my own work in anthropology is to show that even the analysis of data from a particular culture can reveal cultural diversity across human communities and provide broader theoretical generalizations. If the realities of Albanian cultural specificities, for instance, an in-depth analytical account of the structure of social organization (Doja, 1999b), marriage patterns and fertility rates (Doja, 2010), age-grading practices of identity construction and knowledge transmission (Doja, 2000a) or music education and cultural socialization (Doja, 2014c) provide a representative picture of Albanian emic concepts, human life-worlds and cultural change (Doja, 2013),⁷ this makes it possible to incorporate comparisons with other cultures in Europe and beyond. In turn, the comparative analysis of ostensibly similar cases across the world cannot show Albanian culture to be unique or exceptional in its achievements. Nor can it be summarily described as either western or eastern, European or non-European, or having any hierarchical relations to African, Melanesian, or Amerindian cultures. Albanian culture is just as important as other cultures, without exception, for providing anthropological explanations on human history and society.

Beyond a simple question of comparative methodology, what seem to escape most native scholars of Albanian people's culture are the complex mechanisms that make it possible for social values, religious beliefs and political ideologies to meet together in relation to the structure of society as a whole. Sociologists and anthropologists who set themselves the task of generating theory based on ethnographic and historical data from their fieldwork, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) showed, do a kind of work that can be done only by the sociologist or the anthropologist. People's culture scholars, in their valiant effort to find and describe facts, tend to forget that the distinctive offer of sociology and anthropology is theory and not a description, however detailed, or based on research, however exhaustive. Indeed, the compilations of folkloric atlases or ethnographic and historical archives are superior to any sociologist or anthropologist regarding the description of data, but they show at once their lack of sociological and anthropological relevance, which would correct the conventional ideology behind the 'dusty bundles' of accumulated data. If social anthropology is opposed to the folklorist character of people's culture studies, this is not so much because it focuses on another culture, since even the anthropologist's own culture may be the subject of anthropology, but because anthropological analyses are comparative and cosmopoli-

7 Publications and citations can be accessed @: <http://www.researcherid.com/rid/C-1637-2008>.

tan in nature, in the sense that as much as possible they take into account a whole of various and different cultures. Yet, the subject matter of anthropology is only apparently the study of different customs in other cultures. It is rather the role of an 'Other' as a pole of comparison and a mirror of the 'Self' that is never put in question as the essential part of anthropological theory and practice.

Even after the Second World War when anthropologists began to study European populations, they were generally limited to the geographical and social margins of modern Europe, which may have seemed closer to some non-European populations previously studied or at least more accessible by the method of ethnographic research. Indigenous anthropologists also tend to study 'down' rather than 'up', and while their prior familiarity will often be greater, so may be their involvement in structures of power with an active commitment to changing the 'otherness' that is being observed. Even though geographically or culturally close enough to an observer self, the other seems therefore to be a necessary ingredient of the discipline. Where this distance seems to be lacking, it is intellectually introduced by the use of research methods and concepts forged at the time when anthropology was still practised exclusively on the other outside Europe (Schippers, 1991). This explains why in some countries like Britain the legitimacy of anthropology 'at home' may still remain questionable (Jackson, 1987), as if it were somehow in contradiction to the general objectives of the discipline. Also, in the case of the community studies of European populations carried out by North American anthropologists, it seems that the mirror game between self and other, which is essential to the anthropological method, would give an image of the self in lieu of the other, which seems incongruous and sometimes may elicit annoyance at the North American imagination of an European 'Other'.

If 'internal others' at the margins of European cultures may be quite distant from an anthropological professional even within the same European nation-state, the nation-state affiliation with European cultural cores becomes a particularly salient boundary in defining the West European exclusivist bias of 'insider/outsider' relations, as I showed elsewhere to be the case within German-writing traditions of scholarship (Doja, 2014a, 2014b). Otherness is no doubt a multidimensional phenomenon, which may be envisioned in terms of the number of boundaries that must be crossed: language, religion, colour and body type, urban-rural residence, sex, age, occupation, class, power, nationality or nation-state affiliation, as well as all the other differences that anthropologists treat under the rubrics of society and culture. From this perspective, any group may be an 'other' and the status of 'insider' and 'outsider' must always be relative. Nevertheless, as George Stocking reminded us in his discussion of national traditions in anthropology (Stocking, 1982), we may assume that the number and type of such boundaries that must be crossed will have significant effects on the relations involved in inquiry, the kinds of information elicited and the sorts of understanding made possible in ethnographic research.

Notwithstanding the diversification of the discipline in many different theoretical schools, the main objective of anthropology is to explain cultural diversity by means of the unified and common ways in which humankind produces culture, ideas, norms, institutions and social behaviour. In this sense, no culture is isolated, but always in coalition with other cultures, which is what enables it to build cumulative





sequences (Lévi-Strauss, 1952). Ultimately, the idea of anthropology as the exclusive study of 'other cultures' must be replaced by Lévi-Strauss's plea for anthropology as the mutual interpretation of cultures and of reflexive critical self-awareness, which is what makes radical ethnography possible and enables the understanding of things as they are. Only on that basis can anthropology become valid and also make sense in explaining specific cultural singularities in a given society, including the anthropologist's own society.

CONCLUSION

The pervasive essentializing discourses that characterize Albanian studies of 'people's culture' certainly appear unusual and difficult to grasp, if one schematically employs traditional categories developed in current scholarship dealing with this question. In turn, an articulate analysis of the main intellectual traditions and their impact, linked to a careful examination of the historical contextualization in ideological perspective, is likely to produce a more sophisticated understanding of the cultural particularism of Albanian studies. While analysing the historical, cultural and political terrain in which certain influential ideas and practices in Albanian studies of people's culture emerged, the aim of this article was to frame the argument in such a way as to focus on a critical reassessment of different strands of scholarship and take into account the close association of the development of Albanian studies with the national context and ideology in Albania.

In methodological terms, I tried to engage with a comparative analysis of ideas and practices rather than with a search for positive literal proof. The presentist approach and critical interest advocated here might not be exhaustive, and certainly a number of questions that remain open will require complementary historicist and historiographic efforts. My presentist and critical approach definitely is positioned and selective. However, if this article has managed to provoke at the very least a non-stereotyped discussion throughout a set of reflections on the emergence and development of Albanian studies, it merely offers itself as one among several possible alternatives. I hope it will encourage further debate, deeper enquiries and thorough reflection, which can suggest different explanations. Even though it might perhaps justifiably attract attention to self-criticism, it may hopefully stimulate and enrich a debate that could contribute much to the already critical research on historical and current modernization. Ultimately, while the difficulty of simultaneously taking into account distinct strands of academic traditions is clearly realized, I believe the attempt to articulate them in relation to one another may lead to a fascinating intellectual problem. The conceptual aspects of this situation not only show how to deal with an extant social structural problem of knowledge production but may also have important theoretical and methodological implications beyond those of the specific problems addressed in this article.⁸

⁸ This article stems from a question on the rise of anthropology in the south-eastern 'margins of Europe' during socialism, formulated with an invitation to give a presentation at

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a conference organized by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale (Germany) in March 2011. I benefited greatly from the presentations, discussions, comments and encouragements of all participants as well as from numerous friends and colleagues who have read parts of this article at various stages and have helped to improve my argument: Enika Abazi, Chris Hann, Andre Gingrich, Christian Giordano, Klaus Roth, Kurt Gostentschnigg, Stephane Voell, Alexandar Boskovic, Pamela Bollinger, Vesna Godina, Evthymios Papataxiarchis, Jurij Fikfak, Rajko Mursic, Robert Gary Minnich. I am also very grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and recommendations. For the original presentation, see a video accessible @: <http://youtu.be/NeQ1E-CIQSRc>



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