

ALBANIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE EYES OF THE ALBANIANS AND THE SERBS

Abstract: *The paper analyzes the multiple layers of Albanian identity – the forms that had existed before national idea made its appearance (tribe, religion, region) – which continued to be the main forms of identity even after the creation of the independent Albanian national state. The reasons that led to creation of the common identity are explored, as well as the attempts of Serbian intellectuals to deny that identity.*

Key Words: Illyrians, Albanians, identity, religion, national consciousness, tribes

This paper will also deal with forms of Albanian identity (regional, tribal, religious) other than national. This is necessary since the forms of identity adduced in the bracket precede the national one. In the Albanian case it is especially necessary due to differences among the Albanians that are much greater and more numerous than among members of most other peoples.¹ Furthermore, the differences that had divided the Albanians in the past still exist and play a role. Indeed, it can be said that national identity is a construct, as opposed to others listed above that are more “concrete” and filled with real-life contents. The 19th century nationalists ascribed new meanings to these ethno-cultural makers, increasing or playing down their significance, combining them into a common, national identity.² The Albanians, i.e. their nationalists are no different from others in this respect. The difference lies only in the difficulty of the task Albanian national activists had to tackle in order to build a common national identity out of multiple and multi-layered identities. These multi-layered identities tied parts of the Alba-

¹ Although there are also considerable regional differences in dialect, costume, customs, music, cuisine etc. among the Serbs, they are all united by the same religion, or at least appurtenance to the same religious tradition. All this holds true for Croats too.

² Bashkim Iseni, *La question nationale en Europe du Sud-est. Genèse, émergence et développement de l'identité nationale albanaise au Kosovo et en Macédoine*, (Bern etc: Peter Lang, 2008), 3.

nian people to other peoples sharing the same religion, the same regional and often tribal appurtenance, all of which, within the multi-national Ottoman Empire made acceptance of national identification as the predominant one, more difficult. As in many other cases, conflicts with other peoples contributed to faster national ripening, but life in a multi-ethnic empire served partly as a buffer against conflicts by putting them in a broader context that in turn slowed down the increase of national awareness. At the same time, pressure on the part of the imperial authorities influenced identification processes. This made the whole process more complicated, endowing the creation of the Albanian national identity with a very special character.

The evolution of idea of antiquity and indigenoussness of Albanian people

Despite the common belief, Albanian nationalism basically did not appear much later than nationalisms of other peoples: the first Albanian national “awakeners” appeared³ at the time Vuk Karadžić collected Serbian folklore, Njegoš wrote his national epics, at the time the Illyrian Movement in Croatia was trying to lay foundations of the Yugoslav nation,⁴ when German romantics strove to unite the German lands,⁵ and liberal Hungarian nobility was introducing Hungarian language as official and was founding Magyar national institutions.⁶ However, what did distinguish Albanian nationalism from others is that it really became a mass phenomenon quite late.⁷ Due

³ Marco Botsaris/Boçari published at Corphu an Albanian-Greek dictionary as early as 1809 (Natali Klejer, *O poreklu albanskog nacionalizma. Radanje većinski muslimanske nacije u Evropi*, (Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2022), 134.) One of the first Albanian national awakeners, Naum Veqilharxhi (1797- c. 1850) also published his works during the first decades of the 19th century (*Histoire d'Albanie des origines à nos jours*, eds. Stefanaq Pollo, Arben Puto, (Roanne: Horvath, 1974), 128-131). The first works of some Diaspora Albanians such as Girolamo de Rada (1814–1903) and Agnelo Masci (1758–1821) came out in that time too (Stavro Skendi, *Albanian National Awakening, 1878–1912*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 116–117; Artan Puto, „The Idea of Nation during the Albanian National Movement (1878–1912)“, (Ph.D. thesis, European University Institute, Department of History and Civilization, Florence, 2010), 60, 67).

⁴ Milorad Ekmečić, *Stvaranje Jugoslavije 1790–1918*, I, (Beograd: Prosveta, 1989), 345–484.

⁵ In the German case there was a mixture of political events and situation, social tendencies of the young bourgeoisie (wars with France, parcelization of German lands, reactionary governments) and nationalist striving in culture. (Cf. Hagen Šulce, *Pregled nemačke istorije*, (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 2001), 64–73; Zoran Konstantinović et al., *Nemačka književnost*, II, (Beograd, Sarajevo: Svjetlost, Nolit, 1987), 90–116).

⁶ *Die Geschichte Ungarns von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Péter Hanák, (Budapest: Corvina, 1991), 103–119.

⁷ N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 552–553.

to the above mentioned hindering factors, but also due to the general social, economic and cultural backwardness, it is understandable why older, pre-modern forms of identity survived longer as dominant among the Albanians than among other peoples.

The transition from nationalism of the elites to broad acceptance of national identity by the masses took longer than with other peoples despite the fact that Albanian nationalism acquired its basic tenet that it preserved as the pillar of national identity to this day, already in the last third of the 18th century. It is the idea of antiquity and autochthony of the Albanian people, as well as of the continuity of settlement in the territories they inhabit nowadays. It was first launched by Swedish scholar Johann Thunmann in his work *On the History and Language of the Albanians and Vlachs* that was published in Leipzig in 1774.⁸ He was one of the first to become interested in these at his time in Europe hardly known peoples and he advanced the idea that the Albanians were descendants of ancient Illyrians and the Vlachs (Aromunes) of the Thracians. He came to this conclusion because the Illyrians were the only people known in history to have lived in the territory now inhabited by the Albanians. Together with this claim of autochthony, Thunmann presented the Albanians with the thesis that they were one of the most ancient peoples in Europe. Varieties of these theses were developed by Danish geographer and publicist Conrad Malthe-Brun (1775-1826) and Austrian consul in Janina 1847–1850 and hobby-ethnographer Johann Georg von Hahn.⁹ They revamped Thunmann's thesis ascribing the Albanians the descentance from the mythical people of the Pelasgians. Hahn blurred the question of Albanians' origin further still by equating the legendary Pelasgians with historically better documented Illyrians and by claiming that ancient Epirots and Macedonians had been Illyrians, i.e. Pelasgians.¹⁰ Thanks to its ambiguity thus formulated thesis of the Albanian origin fitted nicely into the theory about Illyrian origin, still prevailing in Albania today.¹¹ Due to the development of linguistics and other sciences, the question of Albanians' origin and their language attracted attention of many re-

⁸ Johann Thunmann, *Über die Geschichte und Sprache der Albaner und der Wlachen*, (Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag, 1976) (The first edition Leipzig, 1774). The relevant parts of this book were used in Robert Elsie's translation (Johann Thunmann, *On the History and Language of the Albanians and Vlachs*) available on the internet (www.albanianhistory.net/1774_Thunmann/index.html, accessed November 2, 2023).

⁹ N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 135–136.

¹⁰ Johann Georg von Hahn, *Albanesische Studien*, I-III, (Jena: Verlag von Friedrich Mauke, 1854), I/10–11, 64, 213–220. Hahn equated the Illyrians with the Pelasgians, that is, he considered the Illyrians Pelasgians in broader sense.

¹¹ N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 137.

searchers and travel-writers during the first two thirds of the 19th century.¹² They were discussed by Italo-Albanian scholars and activists from Southern Italy too.¹³ Some of their conclusions seem naive today¹⁴ and were discarded in science long ago, whereas others (due to lack of sources, methodological differences and – *last but not least* – political tendencies) still spur discussions and disputes.¹⁵

While the theory of Illyrian, Pelasgian or some other ancient origin¹⁶ became attractive for foreign scholars for scientific reasons, due to its obvious advantages, it was accepted by Albanian intellectuals – “rebirthers” – at the very beginning of their national movement and it became the founding myth of Albanian nationalism. It made it possible to “kill several birds with one stone”: by depicting the Albanians as descendants of the Illyrians (or Pelasgians¹⁷), it enabled the Albanians to stack “priority claims” to the territories inhabited by them against other peoples who allegedly came later; in this context they propounded the thesis that the Albanians came to being exactly where they live now; as opposed to the neighboring peoples (Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, Turks) who had founded their states during the history,¹⁸ the antiquity of the Albanians was stressed (which was sometimes supplemented by thesis that some of the neighboring peoples, such as ancient Macedonians, originated from

¹² S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, 113–114; A. Puto, „The Idea“, 58. An overview of opinions of older German scholars (whose contribution to this question was the greatest) cf. in: Ali Dhirmo, „Der Beitrag deutscher Forscher auf dem Gebiet des Albanischen“, in: *Albanien in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Klaus-Detlev Grothusen, (München: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 1991), 160–167.

¹³ N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 137–146.

¹⁴ This holds true especially for amateurish linguistic explanation of some words (Noel Malcolm, „Myths of Albanian National Identity. Some Key Elements as Expressed in the Works of Albanian Writers in America in the Early Twentieth Century“, in: *Albanian Identities. Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Bernd J. Fischer, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 77–78).

¹⁵ For a good survey until the present cf. Kurt Gostentschnigg, „Die Frage der albanischen Ethnogenese. Ein historischer Abriss ihrer Diskussion bis zum Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts“, *Grazer linguistische Studien*, 66, (2006), 39–60. Despite being much less founded, the Pelasgian theory was not completely eliminated to this day (Cf. Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Die Albaner. Eine Geschichte zwischen Orient und Okzident*, (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2012), 36–42).

¹⁶ There was also a theory, completely discarded today, that the ancestors of the Albanians had come from the Caucasus. One still comes across it in fake scholarly works (Cf. Jovan I. Deretić, *Srbi i Arbanasi*, (Beograd: Ganeša klub, 2013), 24–25; Aleksandar Dardanski, *19th Century Patchwork Languages. Romance Bastard Language – “Sqip/Albanian“*, (s.l. 2018), 14–19).

¹⁷ Claiming Pelasgian ancestry had the seamy side inasmuch it enabled Greek propagandists to spread confusion (especially among Orthodox Albanians) based on allegedly common descent of the Albanians and the Greeks. (Cf. S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, 154.)

¹⁸ Jonilda Rrapaj, Klevis Kolasi, „The Curious Case of Albanian Nationalism: the Crooked Line from a Scattered Array of Clans to a Nation-State“, *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 44, (2013), 212.

them); this latter claim made it possible to appropriate great men who originated from these peoples, as well as their cultural and political achievements¹⁹; it was claimed ancient Illyrians had inhabited the huge area, from northern Italy in north-west to southern Epirus in the south, and the Great Morava in the east and the Sava in the north, which testified to “historical injustice” because the newcomer peoples had allegedly ousted the Albanians into a comparatively small territory they inhabited in the 19th century (which served to indirectly deny the fact of their comparatively recent and in historical sources better documented territorial expansion).²⁰ These theories would be built into the very foundations of Albanian national identity.

Because they were so flattering and applicable, these theories were quickly adopted by the elite (i.e. cultural and political leaders).²¹ Representatives of the League of Prizren Mehmed Bey and Ali Bey Vrioni, touring European capitals (Berlin, Vienna, Paris) to gather support for the League’s cause, propped up Albanians demands with claims that the Albanians had been allegedly been in the Balkans before the Greeks (who demanded Albanian-inhabited territories in Epirus)²² Other Albanian leaders developed this thesis in the context of the struggle over Albanian-inhabited territories the Ottoman Empire had to cede to the neighboring states after the Great Eastern Crisis 1875–1878.²³ Pashko Vasa, (1825–

¹⁹ Ekrem Bey Vlora was told in early 20th century by his brutally realistic relative Mahmud Makir Effendi that the Albanians had ruled over half of the world 2.000 years ago but have dwindled to just 1.5 million people over centuries due to internal squabbles (Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lebensrinnerungen, I-II (1885 bis 1912)*, (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1968), I/124).

²⁰ Utilitarianism of the autochthony theory was brought to the pitch with claims the Albanians had come to being in Dardania, that once comprised Kosovo, Metohija and western Macedonia, i.e. exactly in the territories that remained outside of the Albanian nation state (Cf. B. Iseni, *La question*, 23). At the time parts of Kosovo and Metohija were annexed by Fascist “Greater Albania” Hamit Kokalari even put this thesis in the title of his book (that otherwise deals little with ethnogenesis). (Cf. Hamit Kokalari, *Kosova. The Cradle of Albanians*, (London: The Anglo-Albanian League, 1998), 4 (The French original appeared in 1943).

²¹ It should be kept in mind that at first only small part of the leading Albanian circles was interested in utilizing these theses. The vast majority of others continued to regard the situation of their ethnic or religious community and their personal within them, in the traditional context of the Ottoman empire and of smaller areas and communities to which they belonged. The inherited or acquired position in the state hierarchy, esteem enjoyed by a family and the size of its property, the office within the tribe or clan (bayraktars), membership in the clergy etc. were decisive and not the alleged antiquity of the Albanian people.

²² George W. Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle. Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians 1874–1913*, (London, New York: I.B. Taurus, 2006), 57.

²³ It was a “discursive escape” from the Ottomans and their rotten empire through transformation of the ancient Illyrians into a modern European nation (Dušan Fundić, *Austrougarska i nastanak Albanije (1896–1914)*, (Beograd: Balkanološki institut, Clio, 2021), 42).

1892), a Roman-Catholic intellectual with European experience²⁴ published in Paris in 1879 a booklet *The Truth on Albania and the Albanians* in which, based on Greek myths, he expounded the theory that the Albanians descended from the Pelasgians, who had allegedly been expelled from Greece by Hellenic tribes. According to him, the Pelasgians founded ancient Macedonia.²⁵ Their language, inherited by the Albanians was allegedly the oldest in Europe, and they the oldest people on the Old Continent.²⁶ Pelasgian origin of the Albanians was accepted also by Ismail Kemal Bey Vlora²⁷ who proclaimed Albania's independence in 1912. He finished Greek gymnasium in Janina and was prone to philhellenism all of his life, but believed the Pelasgians were older than the Hellenes and that Greek civilization developed from the Pelasgian one.²⁸ The Pelasgian and the Illyrian theories were coupled by certainly the greatest Albanian intellectual of the 19th century, Shamseddin Sami Frashëri²⁹ (1850-1904) in his work *What was Albania*,

²⁴ Vasa was born in Shkoder where he attended a foreign school. In 1842 he became interpreter in the British Consulate in his native town and six years later he took part in the revolution in Venice. After it was crushed he left for Constantinople and entered civil service in which he remained until his death. During the 1870s, together with couple of other Albanian intellectuals (Sami Frashëri, Jani Vreto, Hasan Tahsini) he was active in founding patriotic societies in Constantinople. At the time of the Berlin Congress in 1878 they founded the Central Committee for Defense of the Rights of the Albanian People that formulated the demand that the Albanians be united within a single autonomous vilayet. Vasa was a typical representative of the first generation of "renewers" that had their roots in both eastern and western cultures and were tied to their own nation as well as to the Ottoman Empire within whose framework they saw the future of Albania (A. Puto, „The Idea“, 87–103).

²⁵ Wassa Effendi, *La vérité sur l'Albanie et les Albanais. Étude historique et critique*, (Paris: Société anonyme de publication périodiques, 1879), 7–11.

²⁶ W. Effendi, *La vérité*, 30, 49, 60, 67. Cf. also: A. Puto, „The Idea“, 106–109.

²⁷ Ismail Bey Qemali Vlora (1844–1919), stemming from one of the leading Albanian families was high state official and administrator of several vilayets until he went into willing exile in 1900. He espoused moderate reforms and he returned to the country only after the Young Turks' revolution. While abroad he established ties with Albanian nationalists. In the new Parliament he led the opposition Ahrar Party (A. Puto, „The Idea“, 188–203).

²⁸ Ismail Kemal Bey, *Memoirs of Ismail Kemal Bey*, ed. Sommerville Story, (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1920), 25, 355. He considered the Albanians to be the oldest people in Europe (Ibid, 373).

²⁹ Sami Frashëri was the younger brother of one of the main leaders of the League of Prizren Abdyl Frashëri (1839–1892) and the patriotic poet Naim Frashëri (1846–1900). He spent most of his life in Constantinople as a civil servant and author contributing vastly to both Turkish and Albanian cultures. As such he had vividly double ethno-cultural identity, although over time its Albanian component grew stronger at the expense of the Turkish one (which was the corollary of weakening of the Empire and its unsatisfactory policy towards Albanians) (A. Puto, „The Idea“, 137–165).

What it is, What will it be? from 1899. In its very beginning he bravely claimed that the Albanians were the oldest people in Europe and that they even brought civilization to the Old Continent!³⁰ In his view, reminiscent of superiority complex (*Grossenwahn*), the Pelasgians had inhabited the whole Balkan Peninsula, lands along the Danube, Asia Minor and Italy; Etrurians and Latins descended from them, as did Illyrians, Thracian, Phrygians and Macedonians, who were all Pelasgian tribes. They allegedly mixed with the tiny Hellenic people that settled in Greece later on, whereas the latecomer Slavic and Bulgarian settlers partly ousted and partly assimilated the ancient Macedonians.³¹ In keeping with this, the Albanian language developed from the Pelasgian, ranging thus among the oldest languages in Europe, whereas many ancient great men, such as Aristotle and many Roman emperors, had actually been Albanians!³² It is easy enough to laugh at these a-historic claims today, but they should be seen in the then historical context when the small, uneducated and poor Albanian people fought for recognition and its place among larger peoples with longer and stronger cultural and state traditions. At the same time due to the level of development of linguistics, historiography and ethnology (from which the theories on the antiquity of the Albanians had been taken!), such claims did not seem as absurd to the contemporaries back then as they seem today.³³ Already by the end of the 19th century the thesis of the Illyrian-Pelasgian origin was spread in books for the masses.³⁴

The conviction of Albanian antiquity found its place in the appeal to the great powers to recognize the newly proclaimed independent Albanian state in 1912,³⁵ as well as in the declaration of the Lushnjë assembly of January 21, 1920 that demanded withdrawal of Italian troops that still controlled part of the Albanian territory.³⁶

³⁰ Sami Bey Frasher, *Was war Albanien, was ist es, was wird es werden?*, (Wien: Hölder, 1913), 2 (available at: www.spinnet.eu); Cf. also Puto, *The Idea*, 167–168.

³¹ S. B. Frasher, *Was war Albanien*, 3–6.

³² S. B. Frasher, *Was war Albanien*, 17–18, 23–24.

³³ Sami Frashëri smuggled these ideas also into the first Turkish encyclopedia whose author he was, as well as into the Annual of the Kosovo Vilayet for 1896. (G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 96, 115). They were also popularized by Faik Konitza (1876–1942), a well educated propagandist who lived and published in the West (A. Puto, „The Idea“, 280).

³⁴ Roman-Catholic priest Ndoc Nikaj published in Brussels in 1902 his History of Albania in which he espoused the theory of Illyrian-Pelasgian origin. According to him too, Philipp II and Alexander the Great were Albanian heroes, precursors of Skanderbey (D. Fundić, *Austrougar-ska*, 161–162).

³⁵ I. Kemal Bey, *The Memoirs*, 373.

³⁶ Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen*, II (1912 bis 1925), (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1973), II/122.

This shows that the thesis of Albanian antiquity has taken firm root among Albanian cultural and political leaders by the first decades of the 20th century. During the inter-war period the theory of the Pelasgian-Illyrian origin became stock-in-trade of Albanian propaganda. In his propagandist book (the first on the Albanians in English) Constantine Chekrezi admitted the origin of the Albanians was dubitable, but goes on to claim: „But however that may be, it is generally recognized to-day that the Albanians are the most ancient race in Southeastern Europe.³⁷ Thus the (debatable) thesis became a dogma.³⁸

It was only the communist regime that started building scientific infrastructure in Albania after WWII and systematically educating scholars. One of the main tasks of Albanology under the aegis of Enver Hoxha's regime was exploration of the genesis of the Albanian people “on ancient ethnic foundations”.³⁹ By utilizing ethnology, historiography, archeology and linguistics it tried at all costs to prove the alleged direct and uninterrupted continuity from the Illyrians to the modern-day Albanians, whereas claims of this continuity were repeated *ad nauseam* at all occasions.⁴⁰ Despite ideological differences, this basic thesis was supported also by political emigrants⁴¹ – since, as we have shown, it had taken root in Albanian intellectual circles long ago.⁴² The fall of communist dictatorship brought about no changes in historiography, especially not in this core identity question. Old cadres

³⁷ Constantine A. Chekrezi, *Albania. Past and Present*, (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 3, 7. According to him, the Illyrians were Pelasgians “in a broader sense” (Ibid, 4).

³⁸ Cf. also B. H. Kokalari, *Kosova*, 4.

³⁹ Frano Prendi, „La continuité ethno-culturelle illyro-albanaise et la formation du peuple albanais“, *Albanien in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Klaus-Detlev Grothusen, München: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 1991), 11.

⁴⁰ Cf. e.g. F. Prendi, „La continuité“, 11–17; *Histoire*, ed. Polo, A. Puto, 31–40; Kristo Frasheri, *The History of Albania. A Brief Survey*, (Tirana: s.n., 1964), 10–40; Aleks Buda, „About some Questions of the History of the Formation of the Albanian People and their Language and Culture“, *The Albanians and their Territories*, (Tirana: 8 nëntori, 1985), 12, 21 (5–32).

⁴¹ Cf. for instance the first history of the Albanians in English by T. Zavalani from 1963. (Tajar Zavalani, *History of Albania*, (London: I. B. Taurus, 2015), 13–22). Zavalani too considers many Roman emperors, as well as Justinian Illyrians, i.e. Albanians (Ibid, 30–38).

⁴² To be true, the Communist authorities did not take the nationalist tack from the beginning. It came about only in the 1950s when Enver Hoxha cut short the discussion on Albanian origin by decreeing that they were descendents of the Illyrians, however, without denying their Pelasgian roots (Fatos Lubonja, „Between the Glory of a virtual World and the Misery of a real World“, *Albanian Identities. Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Bernd J. Fischer, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 96, (91–103)). The reasons for suppressing nationalism in the beginning were relations with Yugoslavia between 1944 and 1948. After the break with the big neighbor there was no reason any more not to use the simplest ideological weapon for winning over the populace. (Cf. J. Rrapaj, K. Kolasi, „The Curious Case“, 219).

remained deaf to results of foreign scholars⁴³ and they continued to call the tune well into the 21st century, with just one or two dissenting voices here or there. The expansion of the internet enabled the un-scholarly version of Albanians' origin to reach all corners of the globe where Albanian Diaspora lives.⁴⁴

Travel writers and Albanian identities

However, the way to wide acceptance of the theory of Illyrian-Pelasgian origin was everything but short. Travelers roaming Albanian-inhabited lands during the 19th and early 20th centuries found no identification with the Illyrians or Pelasgians among common people. On the contrary. In 1840s, at the time the first signs of national awakening were discernable among Albanian intellectuals, historian-cum-journalist Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer, (1790–1861) who traveled through Albanian-inhabited areas, described the Albanians as practical and down-to-earth people, and in spite of their conservatism, he stated that “the desire to acquire any reliable information on their own national past was felt in Albania by no-one so far. Neither in politics nor in science has this people had a common thought and it seems the Albanians never felt the urge to penetrate over the limited horizon of the family, the tribe, private acquisition of property, hatred and revenge.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Outside of Albania linguists, archeologists, historians and ethnologists have come to discoveries that to large extent confute the theory of Illyrian/Pelasgian-Albanian continuity. Not only was the territory inhabited by Illyrian tribes reduced to that the ancient authors had ascribed them, but the theory that the ethnogenesis of the Albanians took place in the territory they inhabit today, was also refuted in high degree. It was also confirmed that there are no proves that the Albanians are direct descendants of the Illyrians, not only because of the huge gap in historical sources dividing the last mention of the Illyrians from the first mention of the Albanians (Joachim Matzinger, „Die Albaner als Nachkommen der Illyrer aus der Sicht der historischen Sprachwissenschaft“, in: *Albanische Geschichte. Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung*, ed. Jens Oliver Schmitt, Eva Anne Franz, München (R. Oldenbourg Verlag) 2009, 13–36; Andreas Lippert, Joachim Matzinger, *Die Illyrer. Kultur und Sprache eines alteuropäischen Volkes*, (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2022), 8–13, 21–26, 71, 115–118, 123–124, 163–167, 184–186; Milutin Garašanin, „Formation et origines des Illyriens“, in: *Iliri i Albanci*, ed. Milutin Garašanin, (Beograd: SANU, 1988), 81–90, 112–113, 142–144 (81–144); O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 41–48).

⁴⁴ Jens Oliver Schmitt, „Vorwort“, in: *Albanische Geschichte. Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung*, eds. Jens Oliver Schmitt, Eva Anne Franz, (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 7–10 (7-12); A. Puto, „The Idea“, 18–21; J. Rrapaj, K. Kolasi, „The Curious Case“, 186–188, 223–224.

⁴⁵ Quoted in: O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 15. In his propaganda book some 70 years later Vladan Đorđević pointed out at this lack of historical consciousness, underpinning it by alleged lack of epic poetry, even about the greatest Albanian hero, Skanderbey (Vladan Georgievitch, *Die Al-*

Fallmerayer mentioned some of the elements that made ripening of national consciousness, i.e. creation of the common national identity more difficult.⁴⁶ Apart from religious differences, outside observers perceived as obstacle especially the existence of tribes – even though they were created only since late 15th century and were solidified in the 18th, and although only small fraction of the Albanian mountain population had tribal organization.⁴⁷ Regardless of the comparatively small number of inhabitants, considerable part of the territory of the present-day Albania belonged to the area with autarchic tribal organization.⁴⁸ Due to their autarchy, the tribes (regardless of having an alleged common ancestor or not) were an obstacle to national unification and creation of common identity. This held true particularly since some tribes were ethnically mixed, Albanian-Montenegrin, whereas others preserved the tradition of Slavic origin or of having come at some point from areas now populated by purely Slavic inhabitants such as Bosnia-Herzegovina or parts of Montenegro.⁴⁹ A much more serious obstacle to national homogenization than the ethnically mixed tribes, were fudes among tribes that were sometimes literarily “at daggers drawn”. They were caused by grab of another tribe’s territory, ousting of one tribe by the other,

banesen und die Großmächte, (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1913), 15). Although poems about Skanderbey were created after his death, they were forgotten over time, i.e. during the centuries of Ottoman rule he was remembered only by the Roman-Catholics (Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Skanderbeg. Der neue Alexander auf dem Balkan*, (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet Verlag, 2009), 88, 299, 306). In his pioneer work Hahn noted only short lyric poems (dirges and love poems) with no historical contents (J. G. Hahn, *Albanesische Studien*, II, 123–157).

⁴⁶ The awareness of ethnic differences must have existed, if for no other reason than because of the language difference from other peoples.

⁴⁷ O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 65.

⁴⁸ For the best overall survey of the Albanian tribes cf. Robert Elsie, *The Tribes of Albania. History, Society and Culture*, (London: L.B. Taurus, 2015).

⁴⁹ R. Elsie, *The Tribes*, 3–4, 38, 49–53, 58–60, 70, 78–79, 83, 95, 103, 145, 163, 286, 313. This ethnic blariness is understandable if one takes into account that the tribes were created at the same time, in the territory inhabited jointly by Slavic, Albanian and Vlach populations and at the time the power of local feudal lords was disappearing and Ottoman domination was being established (Cf. *Istorija naroda Jugoslavije*, II. *Od početka XVI do kraja XVIII veka*, (Beograd: Prosveta, 1960), 152–155, 717–727, 1175–1178). Authors of this work ascribe certain national cohesion to Montenegrin tribes in 18th century that was due to common faith and common struggle against the Ottomans, which distinguish them from the behavior of the Albanian tribes. On the other hand, martial traditions, tribal organization and the main branches of the economy – cattle-breeding and pillaging – were common to Montenegrin and Albanian tribes. The objects of plundering were not chosen according to ethnic or religious affiliations but according to their wealth. (Cf. O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 81, 127–128; R. Elsie, *The Tribes*, 25, 28, 31, 53, 76, 121, 153, 221, 250, 255, 258–259, 262, 265, 282, 285–286).

conflicts over pastures, blood feud etc.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the English adventuress Edith Durham noticed there were sometimes feuds within the same clan of a tribe, whereas relations between certain tribes were good.⁵¹ Tribes came into being as substitute for states at the time medieval proto-states disappeared under the Ottoman onslaught. Therefore, they behaved as mini-states and were not spared internal tensions that exist within states, albeit on a very primitive level and in rudimentary form. As ersatz-states the tribes sprang back to life after the fall of communism that entailed a breakdown of law and order in Albania.⁵² Jens Oliver Schmitt identified the clan as the main cell of the Albanian society even in late 19th century when the circle of nationally conscious activists was broadening. It was characterized by strong inner cohesion and isolationism in regard to the rest of the world.⁵³

Family and tribal ties were more important than national or religious affiliation,⁵⁴ the latter still being the main form of collective identification in mid-19th century. This, however, does not mean religious affiliation was no important segment of the pre-national identity – especially since its importance was stressed by the official Ottoman government’s approach that divided the population into *millets*, such as the “Turks” (i.e. Muslims), “Greeks” (i.e. Orthodox Christians) and “Latins” (i.e. Roman-Catholics).⁵⁵ Religious affiliation was the chief obstacle for accepting national identification, and it survived as a kind of obstacle even after the creation of the independent Albanian state. Naming of adherents of certain religions by ethnic names caused confusion well into the 20th century with many religious people with unfortified national awareness. Religious identification hindered national integration of the Albanians the more since it tied the largest part of Albanians to other, from nationalists’ point of view, not automatically friendly peoples. This held true above all for the Orthodox and the Muslims. During the centuries of the Ottoman rule the larger part of the Albanian people converted to Islam. Nationalist construed this very fact as a proof of relative religious indifference of the Albanians.⁵⁶ To be true, change of religion can be explained by practical reasons⁵⁷ – the more

⁵⁰ R. Elsie, *The Tribes*, 20, 85, 103, 123, 140, 151–154, 159, 163, 167, 185.

⁵¹ R. Elsie, *The Tribes*, 290.

⁵² F. Lubonja, „Between the Glory“, 101.

⁵³ O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 72; O. J. Schmitt, *Skanderbeg*, 103.

⁵⁴ G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 32.

⁵⁵ O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 132–133. There were also other ethnically and religiously defined *millets* that are irrelevant here.

⁵⁶ S. Frascheri, *Was war Albanien*, 16.

⁵⁷ Chekrezi explained acceptance of Islam with the desire to preserve freedom, i.e. as sacrificing religion in favor of freedom (C. A. Chekrezi, *Albania*, 37; N. Malcolm, „Myths“, 86). Kokalari

since it happened at all times: concretely, already in the Middle Ages Albania was in the area where influences of the Eastern and Western Churches overlapped, so change of confession occurred due to opportunism, depending on the strength of one or the other church and their allies.⁵⁸ However, switch from one Christian church to another, i.e. acceptance of their authorities at that time was no great change thanks to numerous shared elements.⁵⁹ The arrival of the Ottomans who brought Islam did not basically change this opportunistic pattern,⁶⁰ except for directing the largest number of converts toward the dominant religion, i.e. Islam. By the end of the 19th century some 70% of the Albanians profes-

goes so far as to claim the Albanians were converting to Islam in order to save themselves from being assimilated by the South Slavs. (sic). (B. H. Kokalari, *Kosova*, 5). Writing (from the reduced Kosovar perspective) several decades later, the Kosovar historian Hasan Kaleshi claimed conversion to Islam had saved the Albanians from assimilation. Schmitt rightly criticizes this view as projection of nationalist ideas created after 1880 onto distant past. (O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 109). Schmitt adduces several much more plausible reasons for converting to Islam but he admits there are no alternative explanations why conversion with the Albanians was more massive than with other Balkan peoples. (O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 109). Apart from the omnipresent opportunism and occasional pressure from the government, the reasons were probably the weakness of Church organization, abolition of the Patriarchy of Peć and the duration of the Ottoman rule. It is interesting that the thesis that Islam saved the Albanians from assimilation was mentioned by the French missionary Jean-Claude Faveyrial in his work of 1889 that was published only in 2001. (Jean-Claude Faveyrial, *Histoire de l'Albanie*, (s.l. 2001), 186). Since he was more a compiler than an original author, it can be supposed that the thesis circulated already in late 19th century. Niko Županič published it in 1912. (Niko Županič, *Altserbien und die albanesische Frage*, (Wien, Leipzig: Anzengruber Verlag, Brüder Suschitzky, 1912), 38–39).

⁵⁸ On religious conditions in Mediaeval Albania cf. Milan v. Šufflay, „Die Kirchengestaltung im vortürkischen Albanien. Die orthodoxe Durchbruchzone im katholischen Damme“, *Illyrisch-albanische Forschungen*, I, ed. Ludwig von Thallóczy, (München, Leipzig: Duncker und Humboldt, 1916), 188–281. For a very biased Roman-Catholic version on relations between the Roman-Catholic, Byzantine and Bulgarian churches, especially concerning the Archbishopric of Ohrid cf. J. Faveyrial, *Histoire*, 62–82, 89–99, 127–133, 136–143, 162–169, 176–177, 203–206.

⁵⁹ To mind comes Stefan Nemanja who was originally baptized Roman-Catholic only to convert to Orthodoxy later on. Due to common heritage from the first millennium of Christianity baptism in one of the two traditional churches is also recognized by the other, i.e. no second baptism is needed when switching from one church to the another.

⁶⁰ The greatest Albanian national hero, Skanderbey, changed his religion twice: he was baptized Orthodox on his birth, he converted to Islam in Turkish captivity, only to convert to Roman-Catholicism for political reasons when he needed western support after his defection. (Schmitt, *Skanderbeg*, 38, 333). In his struggle against the Ottomans he enjoyed support above all from Albanian, Slavic and Vlach Orthodox peasants and part of the Roman-Catholic clergy, whereas his banner with double-headed eagle was a clear reference to Byzantine – Orthodox – tradition (Ibid, 90).

sed Islam which meant strong identification with the Ottoman Empire – not just for families engaged in civil or military service.⁶¹ Because of all this, one should not suppose the Albanians were more or less religious or unreligious than members of other peoples.⁶² Religious syncretism that is often present in areas where two or several religions meet, is not necessarily the sign of religious indifference, whereas religiously-based conflicts and dissention would remain a fixture among the Albanians for a long time. The heterodox Muslim Bektashi sect featured as a kind of bridge between Muslims and Christians. It had Shia leanings and adopted some Christian elements too. Although it appeared in Anatolia in the 12th century, by the 19th it acquired powerful strongholds in southern Albania. Since 1878 its tekas (whose number increased from some 20 to 50-odd at the eve of the Balkan Wars) became hotbeds of nationalist propaganda.⁶³ However, despite their importance for the Albanian national movement, it seems their influence is being overestimated: not only because not all Bektashi were active in the national movement, but because their total share in the overall Albanian population was under 15%. Furthermore, most of them were concentrated in the south.⁶⁴ That was yet another of the regional differences among the Albanians that will be addressed further on.

⁶¹ S. B. Frascheri, *Was war Albanien*, 17. Even if one disregards grand vesirs and other high dignitaries of Albanian origin, at the time Albanian national movement began to be irksome for the central government in late 19th and early 20th centuries, the number of Albanians in leading posts throughout the Empire was huge (Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen*, I, 90, 102–104, 123, 128, 205). Apart from that, during Abdyl Hamid's rule, they made the core of the Sultan's guard. (G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 83–85).

⁶² O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 116. Some researchers (Malthe-Brun, Hobhaus) ascribed weak religiosity to the Albanians (N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 137). Out of that, Albanian nationalists coined the myth of religious tolerance for their use (N. Malcolm, "Myth", 84–86; N. Klejer, *O Poreklu*, 259, 349, 368; Story (ed.), *The Memoirs*, 362; A. Puto, "The Idea", 264–272; Nathalie Clayer, "Religion, Nationsbildung und Gesellschaft", in: *Albanische Geschichte. Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung*, eds. Jens Oliver Schmitt, Eva Anne Franz, (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 110 (107–117)). Unable to shirk the truth completely, Chekrezi tried to sanitize it with claims of alleged religious indifference and tolerance, despite dangerous attempts of the Ottoman authorities to stir religious tensions (C. A. Chekrezi, *Albania*, 57).

⁶³ On the Bektashi cf. Robert Elsie, "The History and Culture of the Albanian Bektashi", in: *The Albanian Bektashi. History and Culture of a Dervish Order in the Balkans*, ed. Robert Elsi, (London: I. B. Taurus, 2019), 1–16; Natalie Clayer, "Bektashism and Albanian Nationalism", in: *The Albanian Bektashi. History and Culture of a Dervish Order in the Balkans*, ed. Robert Elsi, (London: I. B. Taurus, 2019), 138–160; Idem, *O poreklu*, 375–390.

⁶⁴ N. Clayer, "Bektashism", 152–153. It seems even Natalie Clayer, otherwise excellently acquainted with the situation during the time of national renewal, somewhat overestimated their importance.

Religious identification was until mid-19th century easily the most important identity characteristic, rivaled by tribal (where tribes existed) and regional ones, and only from the middle of the 19th century onwards, gradually by the national one too. Even the League of Prizren that was motivated by fear of Ottoman Empire's loss of territory in favor of the neighboring Christian states was to a large extent religiously tinted (unlike the Albanian Central Committee in Constantinople that put up nationalist demands): it tabled demands in the name of the Muslims, not only Albanian ones. Because of that, it meant no "national awakening" for most Albanians at the time.⁶⁵ As with many historical phenomena, the League of Prizren was retrospectively ascribed many characteristics it originally did not possess – first of all, the all-Albanian nationalist, multiconfessional and supra-regional character.⁶⁶ On the other hand it is true that it united representatives of quite disparate tendencies – from pan-Islamic and pro-Ottoman, over regional and even local, to nationalist and autonomist – each of them getting the upper hand, depending on the situation. The fact is that the representatives of northern areas (who were the most numerous) were interested primarily in preservation of Muslim, especially Albanian territories, whereas autonomist tendencies were present in the Albanian south and among the members of the Albanian Central Committee in Constantinople.⁶⁷ The main obstacle, of which the League (unlike the Central Committee) as originally Muslim organization was not aware, was the religious divide. During the next half a century religious identities and conflicts stemming from them constantly obstructed the constitution of a common, national, identity. Not only did the Albanian Roman-Catholics in 1878 consider their Muslim co-nationals Turks,⁶⁸ but as much as 70-odd years later some Albanian Muslims in Kosovo were not quite clear about the difference between Muslims and Turks, or at least their reli-

⁶⁵ N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 204–208, G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 44–47; Bogumil Hrabak, *Prizrenska arbanaška liga 1878-1881*, (Beograd: autorovo izdanje, 1998), 14, 25, 62–63, 65–66, 71–72, 117–118, 120, 122, 147–148, 302–303, 334.

⁶⁶ N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 16. Even its autonomist features strengthened only over time.

⁶⁷ G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 46–65; O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 137. According to the Austrian consul who knew the Albanian situation well, most Albanians had no understanding for the League's demands. (Teodora Toleva, *Uticaј Austrougarske imperije na stvaranje albanske nacije 1896–1908*, (Beograd: Filip Višnjic, 2020), 471).

⁶⁸ B. Hrabak, *Prizrenska arbanaška liga*, 182. For the Albanian Muslims their Bosnian co-religionists were closer than their own Roman-Catholic co-nationals (Ibid, 269), and as late as the end of the 19th century, the Orthodox south Albanians saw no difference between Albanian Muslims and the Turks. (T. Toleva, *Uticaј*, 199).

gious identity was stronger than the national one.⁶⁹ Similar was the case of the Peć/Peje League of 1899. It was a kind of the second edition of the League of Prizren managed by one man (Haxhi Mulla Zeka). The League espoused the end of blood feuds with the aim of common defense against external enemies and the right to carry arms. Its founding charter was signed by 27 Albanian and 9 Slavic Muslims.⁷⁰

Until the creation of the independent Albanian state, as well as during the first ten-odd years of its existence, the cases of religious hostility and conflicts (that were combined with other conflicts and interests) were numerous.⁷¹ To make things worse, religious divisions (also seasoned with other causes) sometimes occurred among nationalists themselves.⁷² After the creation of the independent Albania religious affiliation was used as a screen for posing political, social and regional demands. Thus malcontents opposing the government of prince Wilhelm von Wied in central Albania could move local Muslims to rebellion by using their uninformedness, fear of foreigners and by manipulating their religious feelings, so that the rebels demanded the return of the Ottoman power or at least a Turkish ruler, as well as the Turkish (i.e. Islamic) flag.⁷³ A proof of predominance of religious identification was the fact that Greek occupiers in southern Albania after WWI managed to win over part of the local Orthodox population (Albani-

⁶⁹ Zoran Janjetović, *Konfrontacija i integracija. Nacionalne manjine u Srbiji 1944–1964*, (Beograd: INIS, 2022), 447–448, 515–518.

⁷⁰ G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 123–127; D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 142. The League of Peć fought basically for privileges of certain individuals and regions and not for national rights.

⁷¹ S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, 174, 180, 366, 375, 384–385, 411; B. Hrabak, *Prizrenska arbanaska liga*, 153, 157, 184–185, 194, 198, 203, 206, 221, 269; N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 62, 430; M. E. Durham, *High Albania*, 17, 69, 99, 199, 201, 257, 277, 283; M. Edith Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari (Turk, Slav and Albanian)*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1914), 19, 89; A. Degrand, *Souvenirs de la Haute Albanie*, (Paris: H. Weber, 1901), 59, 115, 149, 154, 271, 307; D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 143, 160, 237; Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen*, I, 269; Ger Duji-zings, „Religion and the Politics of “Albanism“. Naim Frashëri’s Bektashi Writings“, in: *Albanian Identities – Myth and History*, eds. Stefanie Schwandner-Sievers, Bernd J. Fischer, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 62 (60–69); A. Puto, „The Idea“, 272; T. Toleva, *Uticaj*, 198–199, 478.

⁷² Thus a religiously-based spat broke out among nationalists in Bucharest in mid-1880s between Orthodox and Muslims, with part of the Orthodox espousing Russian and part Greek sponsorship, whereas Faik Konitza favored Austro-Hungarian one (D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 193; S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, 147; Emiddio Pietro Licursi, „Empire of Nations. The Consolidation of Albanian and Turkish National Identities in the late Ottoman Empire, 1878–1913“, New York (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 2011), 63–64).

⁷³ D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 286–303; O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 145; C. A. Chekrezi, *Albania*, 146–151; Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen*, II, 70–85, 93–94.

ans, Aromunes and not very numerous Greeks),⁷⁴ whereas the northern Roman-Catholic Mirdite, true to their autonomist traditions tried to declare a separatist republic with the aid of the government of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.⁷⁵ Religious affiliation played a role in behavior of larger part of adherents of three major confessions during the whole period of national awakening: as a rule, the Muslims were devoted to Turkey, even when they opposed the government measures during the *Tanzimat* (1839) and later on;⁷⁶ the Orthodox were for larger part under Greek influence that was spread primarily by the Greek Orthodox Church;⁷⁷ the Roman-Catholics made up large part of northern tribes that strove for autonomy that, together with traditional privileges of carrying arms and exemption from taxation, contained a strong religious component.⁷⁸

The claim of Albanian nationalists that religion was not important (i.e. that the “religion of the Albanians was Albanianism”, as Pashko Vasa had put it), did not mirror reality but their wishes.⁷⁹ The reality was quite different, so one of

⁷⁴ Religious affiliation meant cultural too, acquired not only in church, but also through schooling and disseminated through press. Apart from the Greeks, its disseminators were the Albanians who in large number lived in Greece. Apart from common religion, the propaganda stipulated the alleged common ancestry, solidarity against the purportedly common foes, the Slavs, and other elements that could be fitted to circumstances. On the other hand, there were always nationalists who wanted to draw a clear line between the two peoples (N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 390–408).

⁷⁵ Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen*, II, 151–152.

⁷⁶ For their part, the Ottoman government daffly manipulated religious sentiments of Albanian Muslims. This held true especially for the Sultan Abdyl Hamid, but the approach was not alien to the Young Turks who superseded him (D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 81, 152, 183–185; G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 76, 80, 92–93).

⁷⁷ D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 128; S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, 82, 108, 469. We have already seen that the Greek propaganda referred also to the common Pelasgian origin (Ibid, 154, 310).

⁷⁸ Cf. e.g. M. E. Durham, *High Albania*; A. Degrand, *Souvenirs*. As late as 1912–1914 the Roman-Catholics were more prone to follow their own leaders who for their part, pursued their own interests that were particularistic and sometimes did not even encompass all their co-religionists. Religious and tribal differences were intertwined with regional and personal wishes of the leaders (D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 237, 267, 305; M. E. Durham, *The Struggle*, 3–70). For that reason it is difficult to say if the reasons of identity were prevalent over others.

⁷⁹ R. Rrapaj, K. Kolasi, „The Curious Case“, 208. Because of that Rrapaj and Kolasi called this claim the most often abused and/or misconstrued claim in Albanian historiography. Suggestions proffered in independent Albania that the population convert to Protestantism or adopt Bektashism as common religion, only mirror the depth of the religious gap. (Cf. Piro Misha, „Invention of a Nationalism. Myth and Amnesia“, in: *Albanian Identities. Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, Bernd J. Fischer, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 45).

the leading Austro-Hungarian Albanian expert, Lajos von Thalloczy, even deemed religious hatred among the Albanians was stronger than among other peoples.⁸⁰ This held true both for relations among the Albanians themselves and for their relations with other peoples of different religion. Ethnic differences construed as religious ones were certainly one of the main reasons that the Albanians in the Kosovo Vilayet were the worst religious fanatics⁸¹ - and therefore the least accessible to nationalist indoctrination.⁸²

Apart from all adduced differences dividing the Albanian-speaking population of the four vilayets, there was yet another one, old and perceptible, whose importance for national integration is more difficult to gauge. It was the division between the Gegs in the north and the Tosks in the south.⁸³ There are differences among them in dialect, costume, culture and temperament, despite the fact that none of these two groups is homogeneous and without sub-groups.⁸⁴ On the whole, the Tosks had always been seen as the more cultivated, better integrated into the Ottoman Empire⁸⁵ and more open to the rest of the world. Since the Middle Ages the influence of the Orthodox Church was felt there, that until into the 20th century tied part of the population to the Greeks. Because of Greek schools this increased the educational level, but, as we have seen, made national identification more difficult. Finally, from among the Orthodox Tosks the Albanian Diaspora came to being - at first in southern Italy in late Middle Ages, and then in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century. Both of them were significant for national awakening after 1878.⁸⁶ The major nationalist force among the Tosks was made up of part of the beys, strengthened by craftsmen, merchants and clerks.⁸⁷ On the other hand, the Gegs (who fascinated European travelers in much higher degree) lived in northern Albanian-inhabited areas, i.e. in the Shko-

⁸⁰ D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 202.

⁸¹ T. Toleva, *Uticaj*, 172; O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 143; D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 81, 132, 136, 179, 245; S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, 348, 391.

⁸² Social importance of religion, even for those who did not practice it, as late as the inter-war period, is proven by an anecdote about how the future Communist dictator Enver Hoxha was invited to take part at the founding meeting of the Albanian Communist Party as a member of the group from Korça, whose members (who were all Orthodox) realized they needed a Muslim as representative of the largest religious group in the country. (Blendi Fevziju, *Enver Hoxha. The Iron Fist of Albania*, (London: I.B. Taurus, 2016), 73–74).

⁸³ Conditionally speaking, the border between the two groups is the river Shkumbin.

⁸⁴ D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 103–104.

⁸⁵ Out of 30-odd grand vesirs the Albanians have given to the Ottoman Empire almost all were Tosks. (G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 23).

⁸⁶ S. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, 159–164, 215–237; N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 139–146, 165–170, 321–323.

⁸⁷ G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 23–27.

der and Kosovo Vilayets and in the Debar Sanjak of the Monastir Vilayet. They were considered wild and unruly and their tribes enjoyed a *de facto* autonomy that found its expression in tax exemption, carrying of arms and military service in auxiliary units in case of war that enabled them to plunder.⁸⁸

As other differences, nationalists played down the differences between the Gegs and the Tosks, depicting their mutual relations as brotherly.⁸⁹ As opposed to this, Hahn claimed the differences in dialects were huge and that members of these two groups could understand each other with difficulty or not at all.⁹⁰ He also claimed there was no love lost between them, so the Ottoman authorities used the Albanians from one territory to quench Albanian rebellions in the territory of the other.⁹¹ He claimed (in mid-19th century) the Tosks had no feeling of national unity with the Gegs.⁹² Even if he exaggerated, he was not lying: there were always conflicts, or at least misunderstandings, even though it is not always clear if they had regional or some other (local, religious etc.) basis.⁹³ In any case, even as late as the last third of the 19th century it was sometimes hard to establish solidarity that would go beyond limits of tribes or regions, or beyond the interests of regional elites or chiefs.

Process of creation of Albanian nation and state and the Serbian view

How, then, did such a divided population acquire common identity, i.e. how were the Albanian nation and the state created? What were the factors that made it happen? First of all, it must be said that the Albanian state was formed by

⁸⁸ O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 128; G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 28–34. Their importance was aptly put by Gawrych: “what they lacked in overall education and integration, they more than made up for in firepower and autonomy“ (Ibid, 29).

⁸⁹ W. Effendi, *La verité*, 81.

⁹⁰ J. G. Hahn, *Albanesische Studien*, I, 12. Large differences between the two major dialects have come about during the last 400-500 years and they represent a serious obstacle to easy mutual understanding (O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 34–35).

⁹¹ J. G. Hahn, *Albanesische Studien*, I, 13.

⁹² J. G. Hahn, *Albanesische Studien*, I, 218.

⁹³ Antagonisms have long survived not only Hahn, but the creation of the Albanian state and nation. At the end of WWII the antipathy acquired a political hue too since most of the Communists who took power in Albania were Tosks, whereas the staunchest opposition to the establishment of Communist power came mainly from the Gegs of northern Albania, Kosovo and Metohija. (O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 156–157.) When a literary language was finally adopted in 1972, it was based on the (minority) Tosk dialect spoken by one third of the Albanians. Although the Albanians in Yugoslavia (Gegs) accepted it in order to show national loyalty, anti-communist émigrés from Albania did not (Ibid, 35, 167).

chance as the consequence of Ottoman Empire's defeat in the First Balkan War in 1912.⁹⁴ Until that moment there was no Albanian nation, but scattered groups of Albanian nationalists at best. It is true that the circle of people who accepted the national idea (and thus Albanian national identification as their primary identity) gradually expanded since the end of the 19th century. However, the stress must be on the word *gradually*. The factors contributing to broadening acceptance of Albanian national identity were manifold and can be summed up as the feeling of the Albanian population and their leaders of being endangered. That feeling was first awoken by the *Tanzimat* reforms (taxes, military service, religious equality) that put into question the privileged position of beys and parts of the Muslim population. The common struggle against the imposition of reforms created mutual solidarity rooted in (until then non-existent) opposition to the Ottoman government, that had underlying ethnic individuality.

The Great Eastern Crisis 1875-1878 that ended with Ottoman defeat entailing the obligation to cede territories partly inhabited by the Albanians was the next incentive to homogenization that, together with religious, contained ethnic elements too. Cultural development influenced members of the Albanian intelligentsia (above all those living outside of Albanian areas) and inspired them with ideas of antiquity of their people that they used before the great powers to defend their rights. This development continued during the decades after the League of Prizren had been crushed and was spurred by numerous factors: from opposition to pan-Islamist ideology of the Abdul Hamid regime and the policy of turcization of the Young Turks, over the influence of the south Italian Arbëreshë and nationalist emigrants in Romania, Egypt and elsewhere, to the example of Greek nationalism and opposition to it, Austro-Hungarian policy that forwarded creation of the feeling of Roman-Catholic-Muslim unity among the Albanians after 1896, encroachments of the neighboring Slavic states and interference from great powers. All these factors contributed to development of various forms of insecurity with different parts of the Albanian population that, apart from preservation of traditional identities and acting along the traditional lines (religious, tribal, regional, obedience to traditional or upstart leaders) partly found an outlet in acceptance of the nationalist propaganda.⁹⁵ In other words, Albanian nationalism came into being as markedly reactive in regard to outside factors, pressure and dangers.⁹⁶ It developed through local insurrections and rebellions that often had quite limited goals, whereas the nationalist

⁹⁴ G. W. Gawrych, *The Crescent*, 202.

⁹⁵ For the best survey of these complex and intertwined phenomena and processes cf. N. Klejer, *O poreklu*.

⁹⁶ O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 117.

infused the idea of a territorial autonomy after 1878⁹⁷ (but not of independence for which they were aware the Albanians were not ripe),⁹⁸ while construing in retrospect all rebellions and insurrections as national-liberating.

In spite of this, at the moment the independent Albanian state was created, the vast majority of its inhabitants, as well as most people speaking one of the Albanian dialects outside of that newly proclaimed state, had no developed national consciousness, i.e. did not adhere to the Albanian national identity as the defining one.⁹⁹ The Albanians were no exception in this: when Italy was founded, Massimo d'Azeglio said one still had to create the Italians.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, one had to do the same in Albania too.¹⁰¹ The inter-war Albanian state made the first steps on that way,¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Even the final uprising in spring 1912 was led by leaders with most disparate views, leading no less heterogeneous masses. The nationalists (Hasan Prishtina, Nexhib Draga) managed to impose nationalist-autonomist demands on the Ottoman government, but realistically without the demand for complete independence (D. Fundić, *Austrougarska*, 237–245). The very notion of autonomy was differently construed by its supporters: while national interests (schools and administration in Albanian, predominantly local use of tax revenues) were the most important things for the nationalists, the Muslim elites and tribal chiefs cherished preservation of the old informal autonomy of certain regions in which they had the decisive say (Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lebenserinnerungen*, I, 103–104, 217, 240).

⁹⁸ This was the opinion of Pashko Vasa, Ismail Qemali Vlora, Sami and Naim Frashëri, Faik Konitza and some other nationalists (A. Puto, „The Idea“, 274, 290–291; Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lenenserinnerungen*, I, 143, 216, 240). With aristocratic haughtiness Ekrem Bey Vlora considered Albanian chiefs decadent and the masses primitive and even half-wild (Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lenenserinnerungen*, I, 4, 104, 129, 143, 258; *Ibid*, II, 4, 26, 45, 122, 169).

⁹⁹ N. Klejer, *O poreklu*, 425. Sami Frashëri estimated some ten years before independent Albania was created, that 90% of the Albanians were „no Albanians whether in minds, nor in hearts“ (S. B. Frascheri, *Was war Albanien*, 95). Ekrem Bey Vlora, who probably knew the real situation better than the Constantinopolitan Sami, estimated that at that time national identity was developed with 1-2% of the Albanians at best! (Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lenenserinnerungen*, I, 129). At the time independence was declared nobody in Albania knew how the Albanian flag looked like, and some Kosovars confused it with the Austro-Hungarian one (sic) (*Ibid*, II, 9–10). According to Mustafa Kruja, the very name Sqiptar (Albanian) was used only by intelligentsia, whereas it was unknown to most ordinary people. Most of the ordinary Albanians identified themselves according to their religion (A. Puto, „The Idea“, 233). However, Todor Stanković noted that in Kosovo and Metohija the Albanians called themselves exclusively “Shkipetars”. (Todor P. Stanković, *Putne beleške po Staroj Srbiji 1871–1899*, (Beograd: Štamparija Đ. Munća i M. Karića), 1910, 132).

¹⁰⁰ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy 1871–1982*, (London, New York: Longman, 1990) (6th ed.), 30.

¹⁰¹ National activist Mithat Frashëri, son of the leader of the League of Prizren, Abdyl, wrote after 1912 that the Albanians were facing the task of transforming their country from a bunch of clans into a nation. (F. Lubonja, „Between the Glory“, 91).

¹⁰² J. Rrapaj, K. Kolasi, “The Curious Case“, 215–216; O. J. Schmitt, *Die Albaner*, 144–146, 151; A. Puto, „The Idea“, 25; Ekrem Bey Vlora, *Lenenserinnerungen*, II, 211–212.

while the decisive headway in building Albanian national identity was made only by the communists after WWII: in Albania and in Yugoslavia. In Albania, together with Stalinist brand of communism, nationalism became the ideology of the state;¹⁰³ in Yugoslavia the repressive policy against the Albanians during the inter-war period (coupled with the existing religious differences) contributed to national homogenization,¹⁰⁴ whereas the attempt at solving the national question after WWII by allowing free national development of all peoples and national minorities enabled the Albanians (who were granted schools, press, cultural institutions in their language, together with the opportunity of participation in government) not only to preserve their identity, but to truly develop their national consciousness.¹⁰⁵

Nowadays no-one would dispute national identity of the Albanian population; on the contrary, one could rather reproach them (as other Balkan peoples too) for undue insisting on it. However, how did the things look from Serbian perspective at the time immediately preceding the foundation of the Albanian state? Serbian politicians, intellectuals and scholars (these functions were often intertwined in some persons) denied national identity of the Albanians. To a large degree they shared the views of the Albanians of other European travel-writers, scholars, diplomats and politicians, utilizing their remarks for their own needs.

¹⁰³ J. Rrapaj, K. Kolasi, "The Curious Case", 219-227; A. Puto, „The Idea“, 18-21.

¹⁰⁴ Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Kosovo. Kurze Geschichte einer Zentralbalkanischen Landschaft*, (Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau, 2008), 190-210; Petrit Imami, *Srbi i Albanci kroz vekove*, (Beograd: Samizdat Free 92, 2000), 253-283.

¹⁰⁵ Z. Janjetović, *Konfrontacija*, 313-314, 490-492, 496-502, 551-552, 556-559, 562-570, 583-596, 607-610, 615-616, 629-634, 651-653; P. Imami, *Srbi i Albanci*, 424-434; Isabel Ströhle, *Aus den Ruinen der alten erschaffen wir die neue Welt! Herrschaftspraxis und Loyalitäten in Kosovo (1944-1974)*, (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), 129-153; Veljo Tadić, „Education and Cultural Transformation of Kosovo“, *Kosovo. Past and Present*, (Belgrade: Review of International Affairs, 1989), 197-208; O. J. Schmitt, *Kosovo*, 238-243. At the same time awareness that they were deprived of self-determination and the fact that the Albanian-inhabited areas were the most backward from the start and that they developed slower than others, created dissatisfaction that was channeled in nationalist direction. Suppression of manifestations of dissatisfaction (that took different forms from graffiti to creation of illegal organizations, terrorism and mass demonstrations) spurred the sentiment of national solidarity before the perceived government pressure. Thus despite free expression of national sentiments, the sense of being endangered contributed to building and fortifying common identity: strengthening of nationalism that verged on chauvinism strengthened oppression and in turn, it strengthened nationalism further still, i.e. national identity colored by auto-perception of being victimized (Z. Janjetović, *Konfrontacija*, 240-269, 314-318, 381-394, 423-425, 441-447, 473-481, 524-542; Dimitrije Bogdanović, *Knjiga o Kosovu*, (Beograd: SANU, 1985), 245-256; I. Stroehle, *Aus den Ruinen*, 197-287, 322-343). Conflicts during the 1990s conferred new mythical traits to such identity.

The Orientalist discourse¹⁰⁶ (ill-fitting to representatives of a people that itself had freed itself from Ottoman rule only recently) was coupled with specifically Serbian perception of the origins of the Albanians (at least of those in the north), including those in Kosovo and Metohija.¹⁰⁷ Together with European stereotypes, local ones were also created. Thus, the Albanians were perceived (with reference to European authors) not as a people, but as a group of savage tribes prone to plundering and violence and incapable of building a state.¹⁰⁸ Due to lack of knowledge and interest in more remote Albanians, the perspective was constricted only to their northern part. That part was certainly more important since in northern Albanian areas the population, Albanian and Montenegrin, had the notion of partly shared ancestry, whereas parts of northern Albania also played a larger role in Medieval Serbian history than was the case with southern Albanian regions. Serbian propagandists used these irrefutable facts to justify with historic and ethnic arguments Serbian demands for access to the Adriatic through north Albania at the end of the First Balkan War.¹⁰⁹

On the other hand, Serbian demands for territorial enlargement in Kosovo and Metohija were justified with uncontested presence of the Serbian population, of Serbian historical traditions and monuments in these regions, but also with claims that the Albanian population of these parts was recent and that it settled down by force with the aid and thanks to benevolence of the Ottoman authorities. Another thesis (that was important in the times when all interested parties feverishly produced population statistics that had to prove that their territorial demands were justified) following from this stipulated that the vast majority of the Albanians in Kosovo and Metohija (or even in northern Albania) was

¹⁰⁶ V. Georgievitch, *Die Albanesen*, 92, 103, 162; N. Županič, *Altserbien*, 3, 6; Tomo P. Oraovac, *Arbanaško pitanje i srpsko pravo*, (Beograd: Prometej, 1999) (original edition from 1913.), 46.

¹⁰⁷ Interestingly enough, some Serbian authors, under influence of foreign ones and oblivious of possible implications, ascribed Illyrian or Illyrian-Thracian origin to the Albanians (Balkanicus [Stojan Protić], *Albanski problem i Srbija i Austro-Ugarska*, (Beograd: Štamparija Dositej Obradović, 1913), 6; N. Županič, *Altserbien*, 27, 38; T. Oraovac, *Arbanaško pitanje*, 9, 42). However, the argument of Albanian antiquity came in handy to show that they made no progress in civilization during 2,000 years.

¹⁰⁸ V. Georgievitch, *Die Albanesen*, 40–54, 92–93, 96–99, 103, 125, 130–133, 146, 167; N. Županič, *Altserbien*, 44–46, 49; T. Oraovac, *Arbanaško pitanje*, 10; P. O. *Stara Srbija i Arbanasi*, (Beograd: Štamparija Dositej Obradović, 1904), 14, 23, 51; Balkanicus, *Albanski problem*, 12–18, 24, 44.

¹⁰⁹ V. Georgievitch, *Die Albanesen*, 6, 11, 26–32, 158–162, 166; N. Županič, *Altserbien*, 9, 13, 24–25, 39–40, 47; T. Oraovac, *Arbanaško pitanje*, 4–9, 12–25, 45, 54–72, 110–110; Spiridon Gopčević, *Stara Srbija i Makedonija*, (Beograd: Parna štamparija Dimitrija Dimitrijevića, 1890), 208–209.

in fact of Serbian origin. According to this thesis, under Albanian pressure, the Serbs first started changing their costumes (in order to hide visually), then religion (in order to adapt religiously) and finally the language and national feelings, creating thus simulacrum of Albanian majority in Kosovo and Metohija.¹¹⁰ This was an oversimplified view of ethnic and migratory processes that in reality took much longer than the Serbian authors claimed. For their part Albanian nationalists pretty early responded with inverted claims that the Kosovo Serbs were actually denationalized Albanians whom the Serbian state and Church had forcibly “serbianized” (i.e. concealed under Serbian names) during the Middle Ages.¹¹¹ Even if they conceded the later settlement of part of the Albanians in those regions, it was not construed as an invasion, but rather as the “return” of the Albanians to the territory from which the Slavs had ousted them since the 6th century.¹¹² Both mutually opposed theses still circulate in scholarly and quasi-scholarly circles and their role in political propaganda is obvious. In the Serbian case, denial of the existence of the Albanian nation stopped soon after the creation of the Albanian state: it became pointless since chances of realizing territorial aspirations petered out, whereas very clear manifestations of Albanian nationalism also undeniably refuted it.

¹¹⁰ T. Stanković, *Putne beleške*, 8, 17–20, 31, 43, 52, 55, 61, 101, 109, 124–126–132, 142, 149–150; S. Gopčević, *Stara Srbija*, 131–134, 195, 197–200, 206–207, 214–216, 223, 232; P. O., *Stara Srbija*, 71; Oraovac, *Arbanaško pitanje*, 35–41; R. T. Nikolić, „Širenje Arnauta u srpske zemlje“, *Glasnik Srpskog geografskog društva*, 3-4, (1914), 1–6, 18 (1–18); Jovan Hadži-Vasiljević, *Muslimani naše krvi u Južnoj Srbiji*, (Beograd: Sv. Sava, 1924), 12–14, 18–19, 23–24, 29, 38–39, 65; V. Georgievitch, *Die Albanesen*, 160–161; N. Županič, *Altserbien*, 28–31.

¹¹¹ Albanian historiography after WWII made it its business to prove “scientifically” this thesis. With the aid of toponomastics and anthroponymy it tries to prove Albanians hid under Slavic names, living in villages with Slavic names to boot – allegedly because the Serbian authorities imposed Slavic names on people and places (Cf. e.g. M. „Tërnavë, Albanians in the Feud (sic) of Dečan in the 30’s of the 14th Century according to the Chrysobull of Dečan“, 227–246; Skender Gashi, „The Presence of the Albanian Ethnos (sic) in Kosova during the 13th-14th Centuries in the Light of the Serbian Church Sources“, 247–286; Rexhep Doçi, „The Pre-Islamic Anthroponymy of the Llapusha Region in the Light of Microtoponymy“, 305–325, all in: *The Albanians and their Territories*, (Tirana: 8 nëntori, 1985).

¹¹² M. Edith Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1920), 82.

