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Tearing Down the Bridge between East and West: The (Re-)Writing of Albanian Identity in the Millosh Kopiliq Epic and Ismail Kadare's The Siege

Abstract

Albania lies at the crux of the doubly oriental identity of the Balkans on account of its Ottoman and Socialist past. This paper examines the role of the Ottoman Empire in literary works that engage with history in an effort to articulate a conception of Albanian identity as fundamentally European. The Kosovar epic ballads of Millosh Kopiliq and Ismail Kadare's novel The Siege both portray the medieval conflicts between Albanians and Ottomans. Yet the works do not simply assert the cultural superiority of Albanians in the face of "oriental barbarism". Instead, the Ottomans serve to dramatize the ambiguous cultural and geographical positioning of Kosovo and Albania. Using Lucien Goldmann's method of genetic structuralism, this study understands the particular identity articulated in each text as a response to the geographical, cultural and political environment of its author.

Keywords: identity, nationalism, Kadare, Albania, Kosovo, orientalism, Ottoman Empire, Millosh Kopiliq

The degree of ethnic heterogeneity in the Balkans and its continually shifting political makeup mean that defining ethnic identity has been and continues to be intensely contested in the region. In the case of Albania, the issue is all the more complicated by widespread conversion to Islam during Ottoman rule. Lacking a unified religious affiliation, the very notion of Albanianness is

destabilized. The interplay between claims to a Christian and Islamic Albanian identity calls attention to how identity within the Balkans is often fashioned with regard to perceptions of the region as oriental, and more broadly to the issues which underlie various definitions of the cultural borders of Europe and what it means to be European. It is within this context that I propose to study Ismail Kadare's novel The Siege alongside the Kosovar oral epics relating the Battle of Kosovo collected by Anna Di Lellio. The ballads represent a centuries-old story within Kosovar folk literature, relating the assassination of Sultan Murat after the Battle of Kosovo (1389) and his betrayal to Ottoman troops by a Serbian woman. The texts used in this analysis represent versions of the ballad recorded throughout the 20th century. Kadare’s post-modern novel, on the other hand, relates an unnamed 15th century confrontation between Albanian and Ottoman forces as the basis for an allegorical representation of Enver Hoxha's dictatorship in Albania. While the setting of each of the works is quite similar, and this common historical basis is essential for their comparison, the striking differences generically and between the societies in which they were composed is undeniable. Yet both call attention to the role of the Ottoman Empire not just for its central role in Albanian history, but as a frame of reference in seeking to define Albanian identity in contrast to both Turkish and Slavic others. Furthermore, these works bookend a period in which nationalism emerged globally and ultimately came to flourish in the 20th century as the nation-state became the primary form of political organization. Regarding Albania, this period extends from the Ottoman expansion into the Balkans through to the emergence of an Albanian nation-state, which allowed Albanian nationalism to realize its full potential as a political force and continues in the Albanian Kosovar independence movement. These works thus do not just reflect particular conceptions of Albanian identity, but actively intervene in their development and propagation.

As the fact that the Ottoman Empire plays such a crucial role in these conceptions of Albanian identity implies, notions of the Orient and orientalism are at play in this context. While Edward Said's epochal work on orientalism focuses on the function of oriental identity primarily in the context of colonialism, the construction of both the Ottoman Empire and “Eastern” Europe in terms of their geographical position relative to metropolitan Europe should be understood as a discrete form of orientalist discourse, through which Eastern Europe and neighboring regions are ascribed politically coded identities that serve to reinforce a sense of Western European unity, identity and

ultimately superiority. Milica Bakic-Hayen and Robert M. Hayden adapt this analysis to intra-Balkan forms of orientalism, what they call "'nesting' orientalisms," whereby European societies tend "to view cultures and religions to the south and east … as more conservative and primitive" (4). Bakic-Hayden and Hayden allude to the fact that the Balkans are especially salient in this respect since they carry the marks of both significant historical oriental others – the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Bloc (the fact that even this identity was fractured between the Warsaw Pact, Yugoslavia's path of non-alignment and Hoxha's isolationism speaks to the ambiguity and the highly contested nature of the region's identity). In the post-Cold War era, the geopolitical significance of Albania's European identity has gained particular visibility in the context of European Union and NATO expansion, as well as in the Kosovo War and as Albanian Kosovar claims to sovereignty over Kosovo continue to play out.

Albania was part of the Ottoman Empire for nearly five hundred years, during which time many Albanians converted to Islam. In terms of perception, the nation thus remained associated with the Orient even after independence; to this day religious factors continue to be fundamental in defining Europeanness. The almost contemporaneous fall of the Ottoman Empire and rise of Bolshevism in Russia made the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc the natural heirs to the uncritical association of the Ottoman Empire with despotism. Albania's oriental identity was thus heightened during the Cold War when "Eastern Europe" rather than the Orient came to be the menacing Other constructed as a threat to the Enlightenment values which NATO states understood themselves as defending. Kadare's use of the Ottoman bureaucracy as a stand in for that of his own society is thus not simply a historical coincidence, but reflects a wider cultural trope. This association of socialism with the discourse of barbarism and despotism previously directed towards the Ottoman Empire can be found in the literature of other socialist European states. Christa Wolf's short story "Blickwechsel" begins with a reference to (in the mind of the protagonist's grandmother) "that nasty word 'Asia'" used by an SS officer to invoke the barbarity of the Red Army (Wolf 3-4). Charles Sabatos notes this trope in the Slovak writer Vladimir Minač's essay "Blowing on the Embers" (191).

The function of Albanian identity is not simply a question of imagining a community but of simultaneously re-imagining Albania and Kosovo's geography and cultural makeup to minimize the

liminality of its position in both senses. Thus, despite the enormous chronological, generic and national gap between these two works, the ideological structure underlying them allows for an examination of two articulations of Albanian identity in regard to its ambiguous geographical location. In each work the Ottoman Empire serves as an other against which Albanian identity is formed. The publication history of The Siege is significant in this respect. When it first appeared in 1969 references to the Christian beliefs of the Albanians, a central aspect of Albanian identity in Kadare's view, were censored. Naturally, the critique of authoritarianism the novel contains could not be openly discussed at the time either. Censored portions of the text were eventually restored when the novel was re-published in a French translation of Kadare's complete works in 1994. The translation used in this study is based on this edition, rather than the original Albanian text.

Besides this desire to escape the negative connotations of Albania's past affiliations with the Orient through a (more) European identity, Edona Llukacaj identifies Albania's economic underdevelopment in contrast to Western Europe as a key factor in Albanian identity being constructed so vigorously as European. "'Globalization', 'Europeanism' and 'Westernization'" are "inevitable criteria for the wished development" (Llukacaj 14). This position echoes Bakic-Hayden and Hayden's observation that for many Yugoslavs "to 'join Europe'" meant "economic prosperity" (8). Indeed, it continues to find currency in the most current political discourse, echoed in a statement by Tirana's mayor Erion Veliaj quoted by the BBC in May 2016 that "the western Balkans are a ghetto surrounded by Europe" (Hosken). It is thus clear that the role economic factors play in shaping Kadare's text cannot be denied. Yet the worldview expressed in The Siege cannot be said to be a direct reflection of economic conditions, just as it does not operate exclusively at the level of political and cultural ideology. Similarly, geography plays a clear role in shaping the text, yet it cannot be seen as a natural factor – Albania's geography only takes on an ideological dimension through its social coding, which represents another refraction of the region's economic and historical factors.

This novel cannot be effectively understood either by a method which seeks direct correlation between the root economic and historical factors which condition Kadare's intellectual environment, or one which attempts to account for the novel's worldview without penetrating to the socio-historical factors responsible for its development. Thus, a theoretical approach based on the

Piagetian aspect of Lucien Goldmann's method of genetic structuralism, in which the text is viewed as “a coherent … response [of the author] to his fellow men and his environment” is particularly well suited to analysis of The Siege (Goldmann 15). Genetic structuralism is to be understood as above all, a method for properly contextualizing literature, and emphasizes that such contextualization results in an oscillation between the particular and general, in this case the economic and historical conditions mentioned above and the immediate intellectual environment of the novel itself. The present application of genetic structuralism can thus also be seen as an answer to Terry Eagleton's claim that Goldmann's work demonstrates a “mechanistic version of the base-superstructure relationship” (32). Assembling the various socio-historical and intellectual factors at play in this context, the complex relationship between them should already begin to come into focus. As Eagleton argues, a formal analysis of the novel would struggle to convincingly correlate the structure of the novel to explicitly economic concerns such as Albania's level of development, not least of all because Kadare himself wrote from a fairly privileged position within Albanian society. Nonetheless, all of these elements are pervaded by the economic reality of modern Albania Llukacaj alludes to, even if it is not their most direct influence.

According to Goldmann, the worldview expressed by a work is not that of the author as an individual, but the author expressing the ideology of a “trans-individual subject.” A true worldview is so complex that it can hardly be expressed by a single individual – nonetheless all subjective cultural production and historical action contributes to the development of worldviews (Goldmann 40-41). The epic ballads provide an example of the trans-individual subject insofar as they are collectively composed, and continually modified as they are passed down orally. They thus represent not a single author’s worldview, but that of the Albanian Kosovar population. When applied to written literature, the author is thus understood as the mouthpiece of a trans-individual group, an individual who has a particularly insightful view of society, and can elaborate this understanding in a complex, aesthetic fashion. Kadare’s view of Albanian identity, for example, rests on a traditional understanding thereof, which has been expressed with various references to the oriental identity of the Ottoman Empire since the beginning of Albanian contact with the Ottoman Empire around the Battle of Kosovo in the late 14th century. It is further influenced by the particular nationalism of Hoxha’s regime which emphasized “the autochthonous character of the

Albanians as the sole descendants of the Illyrians" rather than sectarian identity (Di Lellio 11). The medieval setting of the novel suggests that the worldview of the Kopiliq epics is more significant in understanding the ideological context of Kadare's novel, thus the first part of the analysis will focus on this work.

The ballads focus not so much on the Battle of Kosovo itself as on the assassination of Sultan Murat. Competing Albanian and Serbian versions dispute the identity of his assassin – Millosh Kopiliq in the Albanian Kosovar version and Miloš Obilić according to Serbian tradition (Di Lellio 3). The text is not a historical document insofar as the identity and particular circumstances of the Sultan's death are unknown, yet in the context of the recent conflict over Kosovo these ballads have been deployed by both the Kosovo Liberation Army and the government of the de facto state of Kosovo to invoke a sense of the historical legacy of Albanian claims to Kosovo, demonstrating a contemporary instance of history effectively being written through traditionally literary modes (Di Lellio 7).

Beyond this historiographical element, these ballads are thus very much concerned with fashioning Albanian identity. Di Lellio correctly identifies Kopiliq as "a marker of Christian and European identity" in her introduction. Yet the Ottoman Empire is never explicitly contrasted on religious grounds, much less in terms of traditional orientalism. Instead the view of the Ottoman Empire presented here can be better understood with reference to Andre Gingrich's notion of frontier orientalism. Where conventional orientalism is based on a colonial relationship between the Occidental and Oriental subject, Gingrich seeks to understand encounters in which these groups live in close proximity and the exoticism which shapes conventional orientalism is absent. Robert Prügel articulates the view of the oriental other which emerges as that of a "Janus-headed metaphorical figure, and places beside the image of the 'bad-Turk' who poses an external threat, a good – that is to say politically harmless – Turk" (332). The Sultan is portrayed in a surprisingly positive light in the ballads. Although he clearly represents an external threat to Kosovo, this is explained away by attributing the plan to invade the Balkans to those who surround him – namely his mother and political advisers, a point we will return to in the course of the analysis of the ballads.

In order to synthesize the enormous temporal gap and accompanying socio-historical changes, Di Lellio's suggestion that the Kopiliq ballads be understood as a “mnemonic practice” is key (6). The fact that they are transmitted orally means they are in a sense continually re-written as they are passed down, which is the most significant formal feature of the ballads, indicating they are by nature a form of historiography, and reflect the shifting fortunes and concerns of the Albanian Kosovar trans-individual subject. The ballads anthologized by Di Lellio range from 1923 to 1998. In examining their development, the most striking feature is that the more recent versions are much shorter. The 1923 version, which will be analyzed in greater detail presently, is marked by a conflict between the pious and essentially good nature of the Sultan and the fact that he is an invader. The most recent version is very much a product of wartime in that it contains neither this moral complexity nor the romantic idealization of Kopiliq and his death. The 1998 version suggests the actual experiences of the Kosovo war. The Sultan has come to “steal our bags of flour / Take our place here on the planet” (Di Lellio 167). Kopiliq proceeds to kill the Sultan whereupon soldiers “pounce” on Kopiliq and “chopped the head off Millosh” (Di Lellio 167). The ballad ends on an ambiguous and rather melancholy note: “Headless now proceeds that body / White the snow now turns the mountain,” the hero’s dismembered body suggesting the state of the territory of Kosovo and indeed that of the Albanian people as a whole (Di Lellio 167).

Di Lellio's analysis of the ballads coincides with Shefqet Pllana's portrayal of Albanian Kosovar folk music as representing "a kind of chronology of the masses' struggles" against the Turks whereby the "exemplary heroism" of those who resisted is emphasized (224). Pllana explains how this inherently political aspect of the genre took on a new life during and after World War Two with both old and new songs commemorating Partisan heroes and it is this same dynamic today that serves the cause of Kosovar nationalism (224-25). After the breakup of Yugoslavia, the ideological focus of the ballads shifted to Albanian nationalism based on honoring the soldiers who gave their lives defending Kosovo from non-Albanian forces as opposed to a united Yugoslavia. Di Lellio demonstrates how this lineage of nationalism stretching back to the Battle of Kosovo was activated in the struggle of the Kosovo Liberation Army and carries over into the (partially-recognized) state apparatus of Kosovo today; a dynamic which suggests the appropriation of literature by political discourse (Di Lellio 7).

The plot development reflects the fact that Serbians constitute a more fundamental other to Albanian identity beyond the Ottoman period. In a formal sense, the murder of the Sultan serves to set up the story of Kopiliq's downfall, rather than acting as the climax of the ballad's action. After murdering the Sultan, the Kosovar hero escapes, and Ottoman soldiers cannot lay a finger on him; instead, it is a Serbian woman who is responsible for his ultimate demise. In this portion of the ballad we see its most significant Other is in fact Serbians rather than Turkish Ottomans, which accounts for the ballad's continued popularity and prominence in the context of the Kosovo conflict. Referred to by the derogatory term “shkina,” the Ottoman soldiers encounter an “old Slav woman” who reveals the secret to unlocking Kopiliq's otherwise impenetrable armor. Acting on this advice the soldiers succeed in killing Kopiliq, thereby casting Serbs as the true villains of the tale. This alignment of Serbs with Turks ultimately serves to emphasize Kosovo is a solely Albanian territory and that Serbs are just as foreign to the land as Turks.

Negative stereotypes of the Orient date from Ancient Greece. Catherine MacMillan points to Aeschylus' play The Persians as associating Persia with despotism and “sluggishness, inflexibility and passivity in the face of despotic rulers” (30). As the Ottoman Empire became one of the most powerful military forces in the world and began to pose a viable threat to Europe, it was conceived in very similar terms. Yet these traits are not to be found in the portrayal of the Sultan in the ballads. Recalling the notion of frontier orientalism outlined above, the Sultan can be seen as the “good Turk” reflecting the familiar cultural aspects Kosovars would have encountered in Turks. The only real character trait the Sultan exhibits is a deep piety – he is otherwise a passive character dependent on his mother and advisers. The idea of a military campaign is given to him by his mother after interpreting one of her son’s particularly vivid dreams. Only upon the subsequent urging of his mother and being persuaded by advisors does the Sultan set off for Kosovo (Di Lellio 51). Furthermore, crucial to the Albanian perspective, is whether he extends his hand or his leg to greet Kopiliq. An alliance is not out of the question at this point, yet the Sheh-Islami, representing the “bad Turk,” encourages him to kick Kopiliq and have him grovel rather than greeting him hospitably. The ballad reflects the long-term domination of Kosovo by the Ottoman Empire as much as it ostensibly portrays victory against them, seeking not only to exclude Turks and Slavs from Kosovar identity, but also to reduce responsibility for centuries of foreign domination to the

figure of the “shkina”. Portraying the Sultan as passive also serves to set up the scapegoating of Serbians, preparing the plot to demonstrate that it is not the might of the Ottomans, but the old woman's duplicity which ultimately results in centuries of occupation, attested to by the enduring currency of the ballads and their importance in the most recent conflict with Serbia. By scapegoating Serbs for the Ottoman occupation, the ambivalent view of the other constructed in frontier orientalism cannot be said to exist for Albania Kosovars' Slavic neighbors. By virtue of Serbian claims to sovereignty over Kosovo and the rejection of a multi-ethnic society implied by the ballad, a “politically harmless” Serb is not possible.

Di Lellio illuminates how the ballads also deal with the key conflict in Albanian identity between the nation's ancient Christian heritage and mass conversion to Islam during the period of Ottoman rule. Kopiliq's Christian identity in the face of the Muslim invaders formulates a “collective religious identity that downplays the Albanians' overwhelming conversion to Islam vis-a-vis their pre-Ottoman culture” (6). Thus, as in The Siege, we see an effort to re-imagine the cultural affiliation of Albanians. The ballads undertake a sort of demographic revision of Albania, especially in their contemporary reception, by asserting an autochthonous Albanian presence in Kosovo, ascribing Serbs the status of a fundamentally antagonistic role in history, exaggerating the Albanian Kosovar population insofar as the defeat of the Ottomans at the Battle of Kosovo is attributed to Kosovars alone, when in fact a trans-ethnic alliance of Balkan rulers won the battle, and revising the religious make-up of Albanian society. As the analysis above suggests, the ballads deal with the period of Ottoman domination by giving us to believe that Kosovo was conquered not on account of its relatively small size and population, but instead because of Serbian treachery. It is thus clear that the Ottoman Empire does not serve as an oriental other so much as a non-Albanian other in the ballads. In the ballads, the Ottomans are simply a remnant of the historical source of the legend rather than an other consciously selected as a backdrop against which to define Albanian Kosovar identity.

The portrayal of the Ottomans in The Siege, on the other hand, is much more conscious and loaded with cultural and political associations. The controlling influence on this text is Hoxha's authoritarian state – The Siege is clearly framed as a response to the system, yet the aesthetic realization of this critique is shaped as much by the practical motive of self-preservation and the

fact that such a critique could only have been made indirectly if the novel was to be published at all. Indeed, Kadare claimed in an interview published in The Paris Review that he was under direct surveillance between 1967 and 1970, a time span which encompasses the writing of The Siege ("The Art of Fiction" 209). Besides this well-established aspect of the work, it can also be read as a response to the environment in a geographical sense, namely the contradiction between Albania's geographical location and how it is viewed culturally and politically. In a broader sense, Goldmann's conception of worldviews allows us to view both works in the context of the development of nationalism and Albania's political status. The Ottoman Empire serves not just as itself, but to reflect Hoxha's Albania. Kadare thus plays into a centuries-old trope of associating the Ottoman Empire with despotism. According to Nedret Kuran-Burçoglu, the association of the Turk with despotism dates back to Sir Paul Rycaut's 1666 book The Present State of the Ottoman Empire. In this work Rycaut lists what he claims to be the "maxims" of the Ottoman Empire, in particular "absoluteness of the emperor" and "oppression and subjection of the people" (Kuran-Burçoglu 33). This trope was recapitulated by Montesquieu, who found in the Turk not merely a convenient embodiment of despotic government, but the very source of this "Oriental regime" (Kuran-Burçoglu 44). The first and one of the most explicit suggestions that the Pasha parallels a modern day dictator is an exchange with his Police Commander. In an effort to find a scapegoat for the military defeat, he grants the police the power to "Spy on anyone!" (The Siege 106). Further references extend this conscious association with Hoxha's Albania. We learn that "the wording of the main slogans yelled during an attack" are "worked out up on high …" (The Siege 290). Not even in the height of passion is it possible for the soldiers to freely express themselves. Besides this, we are told of the Kafkaesque proposition of "towns containing offices cluttered with papers explaining the ins and outs of every case, the merits and the weaknesses of officials, including his own" (The Siege 310). The state of paranoia brought on by Hoxha's domestic surveillance apparatus is reflected in the "reign of terror" that takes hold in the minds of the army, such that even doctors are said to be prosecutors and spies "are all over the place" (The Siege 167).

Kadare's use of the Ottoman Empire as an other against which to define Albanian identity is driven by what Di Lellio identifies as one of the once challenges to Kosovar nationhood – proving its Europeanness. Viewing The Siege as a nationalist text may strike one as odd considering it

scarcely gives a voice to the Albanian heroes and the fact that Albania was ultimately conquered and dominated for five hundred years by the Ottoman Empire. The nationalism of the novel must be understood as an effort to come to terms with the ambiguity of the Balkans' geographical location and ultimately to assert the Western identity of Albania in contrast to the Ottoman Empire and Islam. Di Lellio writes that, “Kadare considers the identification of Albanians with Islam, no matter how tempered by additional cultural and religious influences, as wrong and dangerous” (Di Lellio 34). Indeed, the second passage narrated from the Albanian perspective contains the implication that for an Albanian to accept Islam is tantamount to treason. An Ottoman “chief” describes what the reader knows to be Albania's actual history: “You'll renounce [Christianity] yourselves in due course, he added, because no nation could possibly prefer martyrdom to the peace of Islam” (19). The soldiers' refusal to abandon their religion even in the face of apparently certain death thus begs the question of the loyalty of those who converted. Besides this critique we are given to believe that Albania was never fundamentally oriental insofar as conversion to Islam is not in keeping with the view of “true” Albanian identity offered here.

In the Paris Review interview, Kadare turns to language as a marker of the fundamental divergence between Ottoman and Albanian culture and ultimately of associating Albania with Europe as one of the continent’s “basic languages” (“The Art of Fiction” 197). When asked to speak to the impact of Turkish on the Albanian language, he argues that the impact was limited to “administrative vocabulary [and] cooking” since “they are two totally different machines, and one can’t use the spare parts of one for the other” (“The Art of Fiction” 199). While it may be true that few loanwords continue to be used outside of these areas and that grammatically they are very different, the claim that Turkish and Albanian are fundamentally different to the point where loanwords cannot be adopted from one to the other is simply untrue – indeed it seems an extraordinary claim to make about any language. This observation does, however, hold more true for his prose, which Llukacaj describes as preserving the Albanian culture of the nation's golden age prior to Ottoman rule in part through “usage of a pure Albanian language” (14). Nonetheless the finding of linguists Juliana Godeni and Marsela Kajana suggests that Albanian has more than superficially borrowed from Turkish and that Kadare's style is a conscious deviation from colloquial Albanian. He offers a further linguistic claim that “modalities that exist only in classical Greek”

which are not even found in modern Greek are preserved in the Albanian language. This supposedly “puts one in touch with the mentality of antiquity” (“The Art of Fiction” 199). Here we see an expansion of Albanian claims to European identity beyond the question of religion. Indeed, by framing Albania as the sole “true” heir of classical Hellenic civilization, Kadare appropriates perhaps the most important element in constructing European cultural identity.

Accordingly, the identity discourse constructed around the Ottoman Empire in The Siege serves not just as a means of disavowing the oriental elements incorporated into Albanian culture, principally Islam, but also as an oriental other against which Albania is to be understood not just as culturally similar to Europe but as a full-fledged member of the European cultural space. This use of the Ottomans expands one trope of the Orient as inherently despotic, as discussed earlier. The ultimate implication of this view is that the Ottomans are barbaric and therefore fundamentally opposed to European culture. An early passage, narrated from the perspective of the defenders of the fort, explicitly gives voice to this view: “What we saw spread out beneath us was Asia in all its mysticism and barbarity, a dark grave getting ready to swallow us all” (The Siege 63). Naturally, this statement is not to be identified with the author, nonetheless it can be seen as the European view of the East from which Kadare seeks to “save” Albania through defining the nation as fundamentally European. It further reinforces the point that what is at stake in establishing the identity of East and West is not simply the unity of a particular group, but creating a siege mentality such that the other is understood as an imminent threat.

Within the narrative itself, by conflating these two historical others – the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Bloc – in the attacking army, the defenders of the fort are thus not to be seen just as Albanians, but more broadly as stand-ins for Europe under siege. The novel begins with, and each chapter except the last concludes with, a brief passage narrated from the Albanian perspective. Nearly all of these passages contain references to the religious beliefs of the fort's defenders – primarily Christianity but also remnants of Albania's pre-Christian faith which persist (references which could only be published in the revised edition completed in 1994). A further cue that the Albanian fortress is to be viewed more broadly than Albania is contained in an exchange referencing the impending Ottoman attack on Constantinople: “While the empire is girding itself

finally to destroy the Eastern Rome, Constantinople, here it is refining the details and performing a dress rehearsal for its onslaught on the Western Rome, that is to say on Europe" (290).

The demarcation of Albania from the Orient is also accomplished through the re-narration of geography itself. The suggestion that "their monarch lives at the other end of earth" is an obvious example in this respect (The Siege 111). Even more significant in this regard is that the novel concludes as soon as the carriage carrying the Pasha's wives exits Europe. Here we see a further attempt by Kadare to create a sense of enormous distance between (European) Albania and the Ottoman Empire. This final passage of the novel revolves around the conversation of the commander's harem as they return from the defeat. The attempt of the women to come to terms with their place in the world is drawn out in a stream of not always connected remarks, composed mostly in short paragraphs. Although the narrative time of this passage is not more than part of one day, the drawn-out style creates a sense of a large distance, isolated landmarks beside the long road, a style which translates into the understanding that the brief narrated passage stands in for a considerable amount of time. Besides this effort to create a sense of geographic distance, the novel ends just as the women note, "we must have left Europe behind us by now" (322). Framing the conclusion of the work as such suggests not just a supposed muteness of the Orient, but the fact that it is unnarratable or not worth narrating.

Having analyzed the role of the Ottoman Empire in The Siege alongside Kadare's statements in The Paris Review, the cultural landmarks which he navigates in order to position Albanian identity as one which is fundamentally European should be clearer. By using the Ottoman Empire to allegorically invoke Hoxha's regime, the novel refers to both of the great oriental "threats" to Europe, that of the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Bloc. These associations are responsible for a common perception that to be Albanian or Balkan is to be not-quite-European. Despite the ostensibly cultural level on which this conflict takes place, Kadare's effort to define Albania as European in a geographic, religious and cultural sense is nonetheless clearly conditioned by the socio-historical and indeed explicitly economic conditions of Albania. As Llukacaj's analysis makes clear, the desire to be European is linked with the desire for a greater level of economic development and prosperity. Kadare reflects a desire which can essentially be expressed as wanting to join the "winners" of history. This is of course partly to do with the negative connotations

of oriental identity, and the fact that both the Ottoman Empire and Eastern Bloc collapsed, but is also strongly conditioned by the low level of economic development in Albania relative to Western Europe.

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