

Coinciding concerns, Stavileci and Kadare, a comparative analysis

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Abstract

Apology of the Albanian Issue written by Masar Stavileci¹ and *The Disagreement* written by Ismail Kadare² are two works written in different space and time, and different circumstances, but which correspond with each other for the serious concerns raised about the Albanian people. While the first author (Stavileci) raises concerns about erosion from the outside and from the inside as a result of the lack of coordination of internal major interests, the second author (Kadare) raises concerns about the "erosion" within the Albanians themselves. Stavileci, writing during the pre-war time in Kosovo (1999), raises concerns about the damage to the national development, spiritual, moral and psychological pan-Albanian development, as a result not only of foreign chauvinistic assaults, but also of the oligarchy and the inability of the Albanian political and intellectual class who, in dramatic conditions and situations of our people were to exceed themselves, thus leaving behind them narrow and small-minded political interests and bring together the divided Albanian nation; while, Kadare (2010) raises concerns about the consequences of some individuals eroding the identity and values of the Albanian soul. Although written in various times and various geopolitical circumstances, both works meet with the concerns they raise: the preservation and strengthening of physical and spiritual Albanian integrity.

Key words: Albanian, nationalism, integration, coordination, Stavileci, Kadare.

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¹ Masar Stavileci, *Apologji e çështjes shqiptare*, (Apology of the Albanian Issue), Forumi i Intelektualëve Shqiptarë, Prishtinë, 1998 (Revised ed. 2009)

² Ismail Kadare, *Mosmarrëveshja, mbi raportet e Shqipërisë me vetveten, sprovë letrare*, (The Disagreement: Albania's relations towards Itself, Literary Treatise), Onufri, Tiranë, 2010.

Albanians in the Balkan crossroads

Situated at an important geopolitical and geo-cultural crossroads, where Empires historically clashed, Albanians have resisted foreign invasions though not without consequences. The biggest consequence, which gradually is being accepted by historiography, is that compared to the surrounding neighbors, Albanians were left aside, as "an only child" where the collision occurs upon the interests of large families with "more brothers". Being alone in the Balkans, and with no support, has made the consequences of the occupation of the Albanians more evident, including the division of the nation into three religious confessions. However, resistance and later Renaissance anticipation has allowed Albanians to preserve their ethno-cultural identity, to grow and develop and even establish their nation-state, but then again remain as a nation divided into two or more state units.

Political movements, social and cultural concepts rooted in the ethnicity or nationhood have shaped our contemporary world. Loyalty and pride of a nation, sowing faith that their country (state) is of great importance and that their individual identity is closely connected with their country makes them willing to do their best for their country, believing that their nation is more important and more superior to the powers of any invader. So, we deal here with nationalism which is defined by various definitions and opinions such as a support for the nation recognized by members of that nation, as "ideology, sentiment, movement"³. However, rapid economic development of international high-tech development and the media can probably only be an attempt to overcome the classical and radical nationalism, because Smith argues that globalization cannot make nations lose their nationalist sense as people, as he says, call for "stability and sense in an era of unprecedented change and a return to

³ John Hutchinson & Anthony Smith, *Nationalism: The Reader*, (Nacionalizmi: Lexuesi), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p.45

their ethnic heritage"⁴. Some scholars, making efforts not to adjudge the idea of nationalism, consider it as a right of nations to self-determination. Robert Wiebe in his book "Who We Are" analyzes the development of nationalism and presents the bond of nationalism with other forces that have shaped the modern world. He defines nationalism as "the desire of the people who have a common heritage and destiny to live under their own governance, in the holy land of their history "⁵.

Today, national identity is based on a sense of belonging of a specific nation, with its symbols, traditions, sacred sites, ceremonies, heroes, history, culture and territory. However, it seems that globalization is trying to change that context. Many countries are experiencing their biggest challenge in creating societies with so-called "plural identity" versus "national identity." Their fear that perhaps such an attempt would fail is quite obvious. Therefore nationalism as a state policy or a national ideology leaves room for disagreement and controversy. Even today, nationalism and ethnicity are part of the entirety of a certain identity which is protected in the political struggles as well as social ones. Albanians, unfortunately, have always faced aggressive and chauvinistic nationalism of their different occupiers during their history, thus experiencing separation of the nation and terrible bargaining with their lands.

Ideography, coinciding concerns

"The Lord has spoken,

Nations die on Earth ... "

These are the verses of our national anthem, a patriotic composition that evokes and praises the history, traditions and struggles of our people for freedom and independence. Whenever we speak about our nation, divided and turbulent, national anthem seems to incorporate

⁴ Anthony Smith, *Kombet dhe Nacionalizmi në erën globale*, (Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era), Dudaj, Tiranw, 1995, p.174

⁵ Robert H.Wiebe, *Who We Are: A History of popular Nationalism*, (Kush jemi ne: Një histori e nacionalizmit të popullarizuar), Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, p.xii

our story through centuries, throughout the Balkans Peninsula, or even better, the Volcanic Peninsula, because even nowadays it resembles a volcano which threatens to explode.

In this article, I would like to present a simple reflection from the perspective of a reader, encouraged and inspired by two popular books among us, that of Professor Masar Stavileci titled "Apology of the Albanian Issue"⁶ and the book of Ismail Kadare "The Disagreement: Albania's Relations Towards Itself. (Literary treatise)"⁷. Both these works disturb, with a fascinating power, our nationwide sense; while reading, they create the feeling of symbiosis between them; they promote the perpetuation of our national history and curiosity of the reader towards the Albanian issue during specific historical and political circumstances. It is important that, both these works, written by different authors and in completely different political circumstances for the nation, raise similar concerns: the progress of the nation, its unification for the common good of all. Both authors make one reflect, without stopping, on efforts, progress and prominence, inclinations, glow and fade, the bright times and the dark times of the Albanian nation.

During their history, Albanians faced different obstacles. As autochthonous people in the Balkans, Albanians did not have the privileges that other nations, that is, their Balkan neighbors did have. Religion, brought upon Albanian lands conquered by the Ottomans, divided them into the Muslim majority with some privileges, but without the privileges in the field of education in their native language, unlike the Orthodox Christians and Roman Christians, who did not have other privileges offered by the invaders but some on educational field; Albanians were also divided upon their geographic position and historical events into the northern part, which remained economically and socially underdeveloped, and the southern part, which enjoyed the right to development and "had reached a more

⁶ M.Stavileci, Op.Cit.

⁷ I.Kadare, Op.Cit.

advanced society, although still patriarchal⁸. These economic, religious, and educational differences deeply affected such a division, but fortunately, not forever. Albanians did not have educational opportunities as it was prevented by the two major world powers, because educated Albanians would have more opportunities "to accomplish their national individuality."⁹ By the end of the 19th century, seeing the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Albanian Renaissance personalities began designing the future of Albanian state. "We all have faith in God, but Albania is our mother and father. Let one pray to God as one pleases. But this should not divide us," Naim Frasheri wrote in his book called "The True Albanian League"¹⁰.

Professor Stavileci in his work presents the Albanian people as "... the most European nation on the Balkans ... a European nation that has never been the cause of wars, of quarrels, attacks or occupation of lands of the others"¹¹, but as people "... who did not hesitate to take part in the liberation wars, especially anti-ottoman wars during the XV-XVII centuries."¹²; he also presents "...Albanian links with various peoples in Europe, as long-time relations, as permanent relations..."¹³, and the 19th century as " the century with anti-Albanian background and plans on serious amputation of ethnic Albanian territories"¹⁴. Why did we, Albanians, tolerate such things to happen to us during our history which is considered to be so ancient? Why did we, Albanians tolerate "the annexation of Çamëria (Chameria) by Greece, with a decision at the Ambassadors' Conference in London in 1913"¹⁵, enabling the expulsion of Albanians from their lands or enforcing the change of their identity into Greeks; or why did we allow "not to be

⁸ Stavro S.Skendi, *Zgjimi Kombëtar Shqiptar* (Albanian National Awakening), Phoenix, Tiranë, 2000, p.419

⁹ Ibid,p.420

¹⁰ Ibid,p.159

¹¹ M.Stavileci, Op. Cit. p.21,24,25

¹² Ibid,p.22

¹³ Ibid,p.21

¹⁴ Ibid,p.23

¹⁵ Ibid,p.44

recognized as a nation at the Berlin Conference"¹⁶? Apparently, "the lack of raising the unresolved national question in its entirety by our national political parties, and the lack of coordination of actions and common positions, are considered here as our weak side," says Professor M. Stavileci¹⁷, because even after the First Balkan War, Albanians were forced to fight in order to prevent the disintegration of their country already disintegrated and divided, as the fate of their country was again in the hands of the Great Powers. Recognition of the independence of Albania in its nowadays borders damaged the Albanian nation because "more than half of its territory was left outside its borders and more than half of its nation was left under the occupation of Serbs, Montenegrins and Greeks."¹⁸ "Separated and left under the sovereignty of the Southern Slavs" writes Professor Stavileci, Albanians will experience "the greatest disintegration of their historical, political, economic, and cultural and language entity" and will be prevented "in joining the other Albanian half"¹⁹. As the oldest nation in the Balkans and Europe, more numerous than others, always against the invasions and occupations, counting "well-known Albanian and pro-Albanian names since the ancient times until today, such as Diocletian, Jan Kukuzel, Barlet, Bicikem, Popes of the Vatican, Leonik Tomeu, our Renaissance personalities such as: Imam Hasan Tahsini, Pasko Vasa and Sami Frasheri, up to our contemporaries ",writes Professor M. Stavileci²⁰, and then the Declaration of Independence of Albania on 28 November 1912, when "... the flag and the anthem were finally united in the South" writes Ismail Kadare "to be present, sometimes together and sometimes separately, in the rites of the Albanian state"²¹, yet, we tolerated the vicious project of Ilija Garashanin "*Naçertanija*" to remain alive although the Albanian state was established.

¹⁶ Loc. Cit.

¹⁷ Ibid,p.8

¹⁸ Ibid,p.50

¹⁹ Ibid,p.49

²⁰ Ibid,p.25

²¹ I.Kadare, Op.Cit.p.11

Garashanin continued in the tune of Vasa Cubrilovic's infamous project "Istjerivanje Arnauta"²² and disintegration of Albania " not in two parts but more, more than four parts or even eight parts, and finally abolish it altogether, by using all possible means: army, police, terror, weapons, dogs, rape of women, agrarian reform, "writes Ismail Kadare²³ ; Garashanin spirit will eclipse even the Nobel laureate Ivo Andric and his infamous " Elaborate " in which proposals dealing with the Albanian issue in the Balkans and European context, which at that time was closely related to the emergence of Serbia in the Adriatic Sea, "says Professor Masar Stavileci²⁴, strongly persisted that: "With the partition of Albania, the attractive center for the Albanian minority in Kosovo will disappear, therefore, in the new situation, Albanian minority will be more easily assimilated. We will, then, benefit with 200.000-300.000 Albanians, and most of them are Catholics, whose relations with Muslim Albanians have never been good. The issue of displacement of Muslim Albanians to Turkey would also be realized under the new circumstances, because there would be no stronger action to prevent it"²⁵.

Further, in the works of both authors, an extraordinary description of political and historical developments can be seen, the description of reboot destructive feelings and negative energy that had never slept within the Serbs who saw "the Illyrian successors as very dangerous for the Yugoslav idyll "²⁶, and who initiated the collapse of communist Yugoslavia firstly and chiefly with " the campaign against Albanians and not with the arguments against communism, "says in his work Professor M. Stavileci²⁷.

Cynicism and the greatest irony ever, is that Serbs demand the unification of all Serbs wherever they are, in one- single state, including the dead, while ruining everything that is not Serbian, presenting themselves as people extremely humble and experiencing

²² "Expulsion of Arnauts"-Expulsion of Albanians. V.II.

²³ I.Kadare, Op.Cit. p.27

²⁴ M.Stavileci, Op.Cit.p.109

²⁵ Ibid, p.122

²⁶ I.Kadare, Op.Cit. p.118-119

²⁷ M.Stavileci, Op.Cit. p.148

sufferings from others, but considering themselves as a nation chosen by God himself (the self-called nation as a 'Holy Nation'; in original "nebeski narod"). However, they do not even try to hide or minimize their hatred against Albanians. Ismail Kadare notes Miroslav Krležha's statement given in the 1930s, and the way how Serbs in Belgrade had described Albanians: "... as nameless 'raja' (commonalty), with an unnamed country, with no history, no literature nor a literary language, with no tradition, no poetry, in other words, without all the characteristics that define humans and a human tribe as such.. "28. To oppose such a derogatory bias, Professor M. Stavileci, in his writing, emphasizes the importance of "establishing the Nationwide Assembly, as an act of historical wisdom whose main aim would be the Albanian national reconciliation and unity"29; an Assembly that will unite all Albanians regardless their differences, "who would have no collective and/or personal enmity, ire, anger or rage, preserving this way the highest human values"30.

"Hell is not just the Others"

Albania is a 100-year-old country. Kosovo declared its independence only four years ago. Even though we are two separate units of one whole ethnicity, we are the nation which, as noted by Professor Stavileci "tends to build a democratic civil society" (M. Stavileci, 1998). Professor Stavileci has adopted the famous Sartre's saying from the well-known play "No Exit": "*Hell is the others*", and put it as the motto of his book, extending, in our case, that "*Hell is not just the Others*"; we do, unfortunately, constantly repeat our mistakes, forgetting the statement of Ernest Renan in 1882, cited by Kadare, that "nation is the soul, the spiritual principle "31."But history, as noted by Prof. Stavileci, condemns every nation that has not been able to learn its lesson, especially when it is a bitter experience of history; it condemns any

28 I.Kadare, Op.Cit.p.122

29 M.Stavileci, Op.Cit. p.11

30 Ibid,p.14

31 I.Kadare, Op.Cit.p.167

nation that allows the history to repeat itself despite the unpleasant circumstances, although, allowing its repetition can happen without its fault and against its will!"³². And if the verses of our national anthem tell us that: "*The Lord has spoken, Nations die on earth...*", the question is whether we shall allow ourselves to fade away as a nation because we forget Pashko Vasa's emphasized remark that "*Albanianism is the only and holy ideology of Albanians*," as Professor M. Stavileci writes in his book³³; or "*we shall fight for it, in order to live*", thus fulfilling the dream of Albanian Renaissance personalities, "the missionaries of hope" as called by Ismail Kadare, and so building and strengthening our democratic and civilized society, because "Albanians' fate is in the hands of Albanians themselves"³⁴.

Conclusion

By objectively assessing both works, one may enjoy the close links they have and share, recalling the waves which crashed against our nation for centuries, making it fight for its survival; but one may also see the concerns related to the narrow political interests and the lack of readiness in overcoming narrow-minded interests, for the benefit of the major national ones.

Today, Europe is ahead of us, "Our recaptured home" as Kadare calls it. Being integrated and embracing common European values, though in two state units, we, Albanians should recall and never forget the famous statement of the former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, that nations "should preserve their national identity."

³² M.Stavileci, Op.Cit.p.168

³³ Ibid,p.15

³⁴ I.Kadare, Op.Cit. p.205

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