

# *Historični seminar 8*

*Uredila*

Katarina Keber in

Luka Vidmar



Ljubljana 2010

## HISTORIČNI SEMINAR 8

*Uredniški odbor* Katarina Keber, Katarina Šter, Luka Vidmar,  
Mojca Žagar Karer

*Znanstvena monografija je recenzirana.*

*Uredila* Katarina Keber in Luka Vidmar

*Jezikovni pregled*

*slovenskih delov besedila* Luka Vidmar

*Prevod in jezikovni pregled*

*angleških delov besedila* DEKS, Luka Vidmar, Nada Grošelj

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*Založil* Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU

*Za založnika* Oto Luthar

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Spletno mesto: <http://hs.zrc-sazu.si/eknjiga/HS8.pdf>

ISBN elektronske izdaje: 978-961-254-216-0

ISBN tiskane izdaje: 978-961-254-215-3

CIP - Kataložni zapis o publikaciji  
Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana

930.85(082)

930.1(082)

HISTORIČNI seminar 8 [Elektronski vir] / uredila Katarina Keber in Luka Vidmar. - El. knjiga. - Ljubljana : Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU, 2010

ISBN 978-961-254-216-0

1. Keber, Katarina

252226304

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# *Ethnography in Communist Albania: Nationalist Discourse and Relations with History*

ARMANDA HYSA\*

## ABSTRACT

This article highlights some aspects of the political and ideological pressure and control on Albanian ethnography under communism. It analyzes how profoundly Marxist-Leninist ideology, combined with nationalist ideology, affected the development of the discipline. It also describes the discipline's strong relation to and dependence on Albanian hermetic historiography.

## KEY WORDS

Albanian ethnography, ethnography under communism, ethnography and nationalism, national culture, historical materialism

## IZVLEČEK

Članek osvetljuje ideološko-politični pritisk in nadzor nad albansko etnografijo v času komunizma. Raziskuje, kako močno je marksistično-leninistična ideologija v povezavi z nacionalistično ideologijo vplivala na razvoj vede. Prav tako opisuje razmerje oziroma odvisnost vede od albanskega hermetičnega zgodovinopisja.

## KLJUČNE BESEDE

albanska etnografija, etnografija v komunizmu, etnografija in nacionalizem, narodna kultura, historični materializem

While preparing this paper, I felt that this topic had been part of me for a very long time. Research on the development of ethnography and ethnology in Albania is still very poorly developed. In Albania only one ethnologist and one folklorist have written critically about the development of ethnography<sup>1</sup> and folklore<sup>2</sup> after 1990. However, neither author goes very far. Their point of

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<sup>1</sup> In Albania and in many communist countries, the discipline of ethnology was called ethnography and was more a description of what was called the "traditional way of life of the people." In the case of Albania, I use the term "ethnography" when I am referring to the communist period, and the term "ethnology" when I am referring to the post-1990 period.

<sup>2</sup> Xhagolli, Arritje të folkloristikës, pp. 4–19, and Tirta, *Etnologjia e Shqiptarëve*.

view is that any problems in the way these disciplines developed were only caused by the ideological influence of the Albanian dictatorship and censorship.<sup>3</sup> The overall conclusion of both authors is that communist ideology did not affect the content of the discipline, but mostly the form of ethnological work.

Albania's political isolation from the rest of the world affected scholarship, including ethnography. After 1990, reflection on these effects was perceived as a rite of passage from the "eastern" way of doing ethnography to the "western" way of doing ethnology (or the process of westernizing Albanian ethnography). This consisted only in changing the name of the discipline from ethnography to ethnology and in deleting the quotes from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Enver Hoxha. Once this had been done, the problem was considered resolved and what remained were only positive achievements.

While writing this paper, I realized that I was writing a history – but from the position of an anthropologist, because I am an anthropologist observing and participating in a process of reflection about the present situation of ethnology and anthropology, and at the same time I am also an inside informant. I realized that I was describing my own journey in the search for answers. The first questions I asked myself and my colleagues when I started working as an ethnologist<sup>4</sup> were "What is ethnology?" "What makes it distinct from social history?" "Who are the principal objects of its analysis?" "What is fieldwork?" and "How can I organize it?"

The answers were provided to me orally. I was advised to read some works by Albanian ethnographers and, if I wanted to know more about theory and methodology, it was recommended that I begin learning Russian. By this I do not mean that there is anything wrong with learning Russian, or using literature written in Russian; in fact, I regret not having had this opportunity. What I mean is that the only theoretical and methodological literature available at our institute that could help young researchers mature in ethnology dates from the mid-twentieth century and is generally in Russian. This literature has never been updated and until 2003 no such material had been published in Albanian.

My department did not have any relations with any other ethnology department in the world. The few ethnology journals that the Academy of Sciences used to purchase for the institute had stopped arriving by the mid-1980s, or even earlier. I was surprised to find out that only a few professors had contact with colleagues abroad. Beyond this there was only darkness. The only thing that remained after my initial shock, and the emotions and feelings that my colleague and I experienced first time we crossed the wall

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<sup>3</sup> Tirta, *Etnologjia e Shqiptarëve*, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> I started working as an ethnologist only three months after I graduated from college with a degree in history at the age of 22.

of isolation,<sup>5</sup> was amazement and a decision to go on despite the difficulties. The answers I received and that I am still receiving made me realize what constituted this wall of isolation, and what still makes it so strong and resistant. This strength is constituted by the interplay of the three factors of communist ideology, nationalist ideology, and discourse, as well as by the relation with and dependence on Albanian hermetic historiography.

### **Some Theoretical Remarks**

This paper takes a comparative approach, analyzing the history of Albanian ethnography under communism in a wider context, that of the countries of southeast Europe. I will not use this approach in terms of comparing this history with that of any specific country in the Balkans or eastern Europe. Here I introduce an outline of the conditions that brought about the establishment of Albanian ethnography, as well as the way it was developed, used, and transformed. The coordination of the Marxist periodization of history applied in history and Morgan's and Engel's' stages of unilineal evolution of society applied in ethnology was not something exclusive only to Albania. This coordination, combined with the tasks assigned by the Party of Labor of Albania and Enver Hoxha, as well as with the narrative of the Albanian nation, gave birth to the "scientification" of that mythic narration. This process shaped the form and content of research in the humanities in Albania in general, and of ethnography in particular.

Two articles in particular were quite inspiring for me, written by Klaus Roth (1998)<sup>6</sup> and Slobodan Naumović (1998).<sup>7</sup> Roth's article is very important for understanding how the humanities developed under the rule of dictatorship. However, what makes it especially important for the case of Albanian ethnography is the characteristic intensity and harshness, as well as the strong political control that this dictatorship (not unlike the Nazi dictatorship in Germany) exercised over every social, cultural, political, and economic institution. There was no exception to the rule for the humanities in general, and for ethnography in particular.

Naumović's article critically examines the role played by the specific existential position of Balkan ethnologists (known as the "double insider syndrome") in the ideologization of the discipline of ethnology. Naumović proposes the following:

If, following Karl Mannheim, we accept the assumption that human thought generally does not constitute itself freely in the free social space,

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<sup>5</sup> Third Inasea conference, Belgrade, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Roth, *Folklore and Nationalism*, pp. 69–79.

<sup>7</sup> Naumović, *Romanticists or Double Insiders*, pp. 101–120.

than we can concentrate on two key aspects of the social “entrenchment” of ethnological ideas and thinking subject. ... In the Balkan context, the existential position of the ethnologist ... is characterized ... by the double insider syndrome: the ethnologist in principle belongs to the group he studies, and shares its language, traditions, dominant values as well as interests ... he more or less consciously identifies himself with his object of study. At the same time, he belongs to a subgroup, that of intellectuals, whose task is to study, consolidate and if needed, to invent the identity and interests of his wider group, as well as to defend them by force of arguments, when they are questioned by rival groups. He functions as the intellectual advocate of his subject of study. As such, the ethnologist will be particularly tempted to react if he perceives his group to be in a position of cultural or any kind of inferiority, and if his group and its culture are perceived as victimized. ... This specific existential position, double insider syndrome, should be considered as one of the primary factors leading to the ideologization of Balkan ethnologists and their disciplines. Both, the nature and the degree of the ideologization of Balkan ethnologies are considered to be determined by the interplay of the existential position of Balkan ethnologists and of historically imposed political economic and social conditions of their respective countries.<sup>8</sup>

Naumović continued to elaborate and maintain his theory, and ten years later he introduced a new way to explain the double insider syndrome. Naumović speaks of an unconscious insider position, which is the one belonging to the studied group, and a conscious one, which is the one belonging to academia, whose duty is to provide arguments, true or false, for the protection of the nation. He identifies both those situations as potential factors of ideologization of ethnological discourses; in the first case the anthropologist might not be fully aware of it, “while in the second, she or he ideologizes her or his discourse deliberately.”<sup>9</sup> It is the combination of both of these situations that was termed “double insider syndrome.” This explanation is part of the introduction to the volume *Studying People in People's Democracies*, dedicated to a critical view of the development of ethnology during the communist period in Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia. The concept of double insider syndrome seems to have resolved, or to be able to provide the right answers, to the problem of the ideologization of ethnography and to its extent. It is because I find it useful that I use it as an analytical tool for this article. On the other hand, it must be carefully applied.

First of all, caution is in order when using a generalized form of this concept. From its first appearance in 1998 to the most recent in 2008, Naumović refers to this concept as the syndrome of Balkan ethnologists in general, as though it were the ultimate fate of all ethnologists born in the Balkans, a

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>9</sup> Mihailescu, Iliev, Naumović, Introduction, p. 14.

destiny that none can escape. It seems to be an existential position that is given rather than constructed. It seems to be permanently inside of us without the possibility of changing or “curing” it. It seems like an advertisement: “you have this sickness that cannot be cured – but behold, it can be managed.” At least, this is the idea one receives after reading that the authors themselves had “to master” their own double insider syndrome.<sup>10</sup>

I do not think that being an insider, in terms of belonging to the group one studies, necessarily leads to the ideologization of scholarly discourse, even in cases when ethnography or ethnology is perceived as the “science of the nation.” The debate over anthropology or ethnology in Albania is extensive and lengthy, but I strongly believe that if ideologization is unavoidable for an insider it is the same for an outsider. In this sense, it seems that the destiny of ethnology, whether considered the “science of the nation” or not, is that of an ideologized discipline. However, is it so in all cases, with each and every contribution by each and every ethnologist? I believe the answer is “no.” The insider or outsider positions have to do with the researcher’s subjectivism or, in Bourdieu’s terms, with his or her habitus.

If the existential position of researchers is viewed as a structuring/structured habitus from different social and political areas, then the (double) insider is given a dynamic dimension. It is no longer standing there, waiting to infect each and every ethnologist. It can be constructed, it can appear, but it can also be deconstructed and therefore disappear.

As Ritzer puts it, “The habitus both produces and is produced by the social world. On the one hand, habitus is ‘a structuring structure’; that is, it is a structure that structures the social world. On the other hand, it is a ‘structured structure’; that is, it is a structure that is structured by the social world.”<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, researchers as insiders belong to the studied group that constitute the field of research, even when this is a huge imagined ethnic one. The academic field where they are working is that of a discipline, which requires them to provide evidence and advocacy to the primary, larger field. However, both of those fields in which ethnologists seem to be insiders are not simply standing there; they are constructed in continuance by the work and ideas of other colleagues or predecessors, of different disciplines and traditions, as well as their use by politics. In this view, even in the cases when some researchers feel from the inside that they belong to the researched field, and have become part of the academic field mentioned above, it does not follow that each and every researcher internalizes that which the second field requires of them – to provide arguments, true or false, and advocacy for the first field. This is because within the academic field there are other fields of activity, fields that also need to be consistent with research methods

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Ritzer, *Sociological Theory*, p. 521.

and theories. Providing any condition to advocate or give evidence for the construction and the protection of a nation means also not respecting these methods and theories, and because of this many ethnographers – even though they formally belong to the academic world with the mission of pursuing the “science of the nation” – never acted as such, or at least in some cases. So it means that some researchers never internalized that field or, better put, never structured their cognitive structures (*habitus*) in accordance with that field. It is this part of ethnological work that escaped the imposed political control of nationalist and communist ideologies. On the other hand, advocacy does not necessarily lead to ideologization. On the contrary, sometimes responses to other manipulations made in the name of science are needed. As such, I propose formulating a criticism of ethnography during communism not separated from that of history because in many cases national histories impose strict rules on ethnographers, and this is what I seek to do in this article.

As already stated, it is necessary to use the double insider syndrome as a tool for analysis, as proposed by Naumović. This can easily be traced as a *habitus*, especially in those researchers that sought to build the rules and policies of the “national sciences” in general (i.e., history, linguistics, human geography, ethnography, ethnology, and folklore). However, it cannot be generalized and it cannot be isolated only to ethnographers and ethnologists. Moreover, it turns out to be a sickness, a syndrome, when even with the continuous changes in the field of theories and methods some researchers choose to close their eyes, and not to change their *habitus*. Their double insider syndrome, combined with other political and social factors, tends to maintain the ideologized discourse of the human disciplines in general, and of ethnology in particular, even today.

In addition, I would like to further develop this concept or, in other words, to “triplicate” it. The Albanian humanities were fully established after the Second World War, with the establishment of the communist regime. Albanian scholars were to establish an Albanian science within a Marxist-Leninist theoretical and methodological framework. Some of these researchers felt that they belong to all three of these fields, and as a consequence they succumbed – sometimes fully and sometimes partially – to the ideology.

### **Origins of the Ideologized Tradition of Albanian Humanities**

Since the first appearance of publications on nationalism, an emphasis was put on ethnography and folklore as disciplines created from nation-states, especially those in central and eastern Europe in order to discover the “spirit of the folk” that constituted one’s nation and the traditions, norms, and values that differentiated it from other peoples and, consequently, from other nations.

Slobodan Naumović offered the metaphor of the double insider syndrome in response to the claims that the ethnology of eastern and southeastern Europe as a “national science” should be considered a Romantic invention, and that together with folklore it feeds nationalist territorial pretensions, persecution of minorities, and the forced cultural homogenization of the native population.<sup>12</sup> He paraphrases Halpern and Hammel, who assert that ethnology and related disciplines are by their origin and nature “profoundly political in all nations,” also including social anthropology in Great Britain and ethnology in the US, and not only in the regions mentioned above. It is the political background involved in the growth of each of them that makes the difference between an ethnology related to colonization and one associated with the development of the nation-state, and each of them reflects their different histories.<sup>13</sup>

He continues his argument by stating that between social sciences and modern ideologies there exists a “double-bind” relationship, which is based on the need of the first to have research-oriented values and the dependence of the second on scientific legitimization. As consequence, “this ... does not imply that social sciences should be considered as sub-species of ideology but rather as part-time victims.”<sup>14</sup>

What totalitarian states aimed to do was to turn the social sciences from part-time victims of ideology, with an ideologized discourse, into sub-species of ideology, with an ideological discourse. Being employed part-time in the service of ideology, the social sciences also have free space for their development. The efforts to subjugate them are efforts to narrow that free space, or even to suffocate it.

The main “strugglers” during “the struggle to forge new national identities”<sup>15</sup> in the nineteenth century were intellectuals. According to Artan Puto, the intellectuals of this period (not only in Albania) perceived the nation as a living body with its own lifecycles: birth, growing up, maturation, degradation, death, and resurrection or renaissance. For this reason, the nationalist movements were named “awakenings.” According to this ideology, the period of degradation and lethargy of the Albanian nation was represented by the Ottoman period, and Albanian historians named the nationalist movement the “Albanian National Renaissance.”<sup>16</sup> The Albanian Renaissance activists were also promoters of the theory of the Pelasgian origin of the Albanians, of the purity of the Albanian race, and of the theory that Albanians – first Pelasgians, then Illyrians, then Arben/Albanians, and finally Shqipetar – fought during their glorious history to survive despite the long periods of slavery

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<sup>12</sup> Naumović, *Romanticists or Double Insiders*, p. 109.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>15</sup> Todorova, *Ballkani imagjinar*, p. 262.

<sup>16</sup> Puto, *Fryma romantike dhe nacionaliste*, p. 15.

under the most powerful medieval empires. The hypothesis of the Pelasgian origin of the Albanians was first proposed by some western linguists in the eighteenth century that studied Albanian. To use Malinowski's term, it was a "mythological chart" because it provided the right to exist as a specific and distinguished nation.<sup>17</sup>

Among many other national myths and heroes, the one mentioned above was and still is considered to be one of the pillars of Albanianism. This period of time was not one of real established scholarly research. At that time, the humanities were being established in Serbia, Greece, and Bulgaria, but not in Albania because there was no Albanian state at that time. However, Albanian intellectuals did not create these myths out of nothing. Researchers from Austria (i.e., the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and Italy visited and studied Albanian-populated areas of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>18</sup> They wrote remarkable studies on the history, ethnology, archeology, geology, and linguistics of the Albanians. What are now viewed as nationalist myths were considered scientific and historical truths at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Most of these researchers concluded that there was a natural linguistic relation between Albanian and Illyrian. They had not found any evidence yet of any large-scale migration by the descendants of the southern Illyrians, and in the Albanian language they saw no obvious affinity with any other language. So they concluded that the Albanians were the direct descendants of the Illyrians.

In ethnology, I would assign a special role to the contribution of Baron Franz Nopsca. He belonged to the cultural circles school. According to this school, every cultural element and social institution has a specific origin, and it diffuses in the form of circles. The distance from the center of the origin determines the change in the cultural elements. The nearer they are, the more original form they have. As they travel further, the greater the distance from the place of origin, the more they are transformed and lose their originality. The origins of cultural elements are studied not only in space, but also in time, departing from what is known as "survivals,"<sup>19</sup> tracing their origins back through written sources or archeological artifacts. Nopsca wrote four main works for the folk culture (material, spiritual, and social culture) of northern Albania. He applied his theory widely in all these works, making comparisons and giving examples from European and Asian countries and peoples, as well as from Antiquity to the present.

After 1912 an Albanian state was established, but not yet Albanian

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<sup>17</sup> Hysa, *The Religious Identity of Albanians*, p. 343.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed analysis of the intentions, lives, and works of Austro-Hungarian researchers in Albanian ethnic territory, see Gostentschnigg, *Zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik*.

<sup>19</sup> The term "survivals" refers to those cultural elements and social institutions considered to have belonged to early primitive or ancient societies and that have survived unchanged or little changed up to the present.

science. During the rule of Ahmet Zog (1924–1939), young people tended to study in western countries, mostly in Italy and Austria. Eqërem Çabej, the founder of Albanian linguistics after 1947, and Aleks Buda, the founder of Albanian history, studied in Graz and Vienna, respectively, and were students of some of the researchers mentioned above, or at least had direct personal contact with them. Thus they not only trod the paths of their Austrian ancestors, but were thereby prepared to further strengthen their findings in Albanian studies. On the other hand, Rrok Zojzi never studied ethnology, but because of his good knowledge of German he used to accompany groups of German and Austrian ethnology students as a translator, learning the techniques of research and fieldwork in particular from them. As his interest in ethnology increased, he read many ethnological publications in German and became well acquainted with the Vienna school of ethnology. He also began collecting material artifacts and ethnologically recording Albanian culture.

The findings of the Austro-Hungarian and Italian researchers, intentionally or not, led to the foundation of Albanian studies abroad, and it is in that tradition that one finds a precursor that led to the process of nationalist ideologization of scholarly discourse established many decades later. This was the situation of the field of research that created the double insider syndrome as a habitus of future Albanian researchers.

### **Institutionalization of Ethnography: Theoretical and Ideological Orientations and Constraints**

Two years after the Second World War ended, the Albanian government – at that time officially called the “People’s Power” – decided to open and establish the Institute of Sciences in 1947, which would be the kernel of the future Albanian Academy of Sciences. All of the intellectuals that founded it had studied and excelled at western universities, especially in Italy, Austria, and Germany.

Their existential position was clear: men that loved their nation and believed in their mission to provide arguments to protect it. However, from the beginning there was a double ideologization. The intellectuals were not left free to choose the theoretical and methodological apparatus that would permit them to find proper scientific arguments. They had to wait for the decisions of the party in power. Tirta says that the official orientation of ethnology in the communist countries maintained some principles and theories that were totally archaic; for example, the strict implementation of the classic evolutionism of Lewis H. Morgan (according to Engels). As in all eastern

European countries, it refused to even discuss contemporary theories and methods coming from the west.<sup>20</sup>

History, on the other hand, was to be considered only through the Marxist materialist dialectical approach. This blended these two disciplines just like the friendship and cooperation of Marx and Engels. It would be impossible to understand Albanian ethnography of the communist period without analyzing the way historical materialism was conceptualized, particularly in Albania.

Historical materialism has to do with the materialist conceptualization of history. In the Marxist-Leninist philosophical tradition of the communist countries, it is also synonymous with dialectical materialism and determinism. Albanian philosophical vocabulary considers historical materialism to be a science in itself, the science that studies the general laws of the development of the human society. "Historical materialism is considered to be *the general sociology of Marxism, the theoretical and methodological bases for the specific social sciences, as well as for the concrete sociological studies*"<sup>21</sup> (my emphasis). Thus the Marxism-Leninism researchers were mainly responsible for providing the social sciences and humanities with their theoretical and methodological framework. They were also the philosophy-makers of the politics of party power, and this allowed the direct dependence of science on the party and its directives. Furthermore, researchers were considered part of the intelligentsia, and this social category was considered to belong to the proletariat, which held power. They were the educators of the masses with their teachings on class consciousness, class struggle, and revolutionary practice and, according to the fifth thesis on Feuerbach,<sup>22</sup> were themselves to be educated in ongoing fashion. It was the obligation of the party and its leader, Enver Hoxha, to reinforce this educatory process from time to time, publication after publication, work after work, congress after congress. An integral part of the administration of every research center, be it a university or research institute, was the "Base Organization of the Party," with its head, secretary, and ordinary members. This kind of institution in itself had the obligation not only to transmit and instruct researchers on how they should organize their work according to the instructions of the party, but also to monitor and check the writings and the behavior of the "scientific workers."<sup>23</sup>

When analyzing folklore (*Volkskunde*) under Nazism, Klaus Roth stated, "From the outside the discipline seemed to thrive during those years: new chairs, institutes, archives and museums were established, vast research

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<sup>20</sup> Tirta, *Etnologjia e pergjithshme*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Fjalori Filozofik, p. 288.

<sup>22</sup> Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*.

<sup>23</sup> Even today researchers are officially recognized as "scientific workers."

projects were funded and numerous studies were published, the discipline was upgraded, respected and deemed ‘important for the nation.’”<sup>24</sup>

The same thing also happened in Albania. Important tasks were assigned to ethnography. I analyze these tasks and the way the party exercised its power over researchers and the discipline through a precise ideological and theoretical framework based on some of the most important theoretical articles written between 1962 and 1980, which served as an ideological and theoretical guide for researchers. Because ethnography was considered a historical discipline, and because it was organized at a department level and not at the institute level, Albanian ethnographers were considered to simply be researchers that could not constitute their own philosophy on how to develop their own discipline. This is the reason there are only two policymakers in Albanian history that even tried to build a policy of ethnography. At the beginning of this article I mentioned the dependence on Albanian hermetic history, and by this I mean not only the restriction to combine historical materialism with evolutionism, but also an institutional dependence that often resulted in arrogance. These articles clearly reveal how the process of subjugating scholarship to ideology went on year by year, and the degree to which it aspired to possess scholarship. It was felt that ethnography should simultaneously be the “science of the nation” and also contribute to the building of socialism through the construction of a socialist popular culture. The contribution of science toward the nation and toward socialism was based on the same Marxist-Leninist application of historical materialism, so they are very mixed within the same articles and works, becoming a single unique ideology – the national-communist ideology.

In the first issue of *Ethnografia Shqiptare* Rrok Zojzi, the founding father of Albanian ethnography, wrote an introduction in which he synthesized the historical development of ethnographic research in Albania. He continued with the assignment of the duties that ethnography should fulfill. Researchers of nationalism and ethnicity emphasized that a characteristic of the national(ist) disciplines is the search for the roots of one’s people. In the case of disciplines within a historical materialism framework, an important aspect was to trace the roots of those disciplines themselves. Tracing the roots of the discipline to antiquity willingly or unwillingly led to tracing the roots of one’s own people to that period. The combination of historical materialism as theory and method, with the founding myths of the “awakening” period, led to what we now call “national-communist” myths and what essentialists even today call “Albanian studies.”

“Ethnography is a new discipline that studies ‘the special cultural characteristics of peoples, their ethnic and national specifics, *the historical process of their development and perspectives*. The inhabitants of our county

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<sup>24</sup> Roth, *Folklore and Nationalism*, p. 70.

and their life and culture have been written about since ancient times. The ancient Greek and Roman authors left us their writings, a great patrimony of ethnographic materials on the life and culture of the ancient Illyrians”<sup>25</sup> (my emphasis). These are the opening words of the aforementioned introduction. It is clear that ethnography was considered a discipline in the service of the nation. Zojzi continued with a description of contributions in ethnography since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries found in the works of Albanian humanists and Catholic priests. During the second half of the nineteenth century there was an intensification of the gathering of ethnographic data. “In each and every publication,” wrote Zojzi about the intellectuals of that period, “their notebooks and journals, we can find ethnographic materials gathered with great care and love for the people and its culture.”<sup>26</sup> However, he states that all this work had a descriptive character, the gathering was not based on scholarly criteria, and a scholarly analysis was often lacking, or in a very rudimentary phase. All this work evolved further at the beginning of the twentieth century, with more systematic work in the gathering and analysis of ethnographic materials and data. During that period articles on the Kanun and the northern Albanians clans begin to appear.<sup>27</sup>

According to Zojzi, the development of world capitalism and the hardening of its inner contradictions brought about the development of an ethnographic discipline “that was to become a strong weapon (of capitalism) in the predacious purposes of the great imperialist states toward the small and backward people.”<sup>28</sup> It is in this framework that the Albanian people became an object of foreign research, and the place of study was always determined by the geopolitical interests of the moment of their respective states. In any case, despite their real intentions, they did contribute positively to ethnography because they gathered and published much ethnographic material and data,<sup>29</sup> and sometimes they even became friends with Albanians, such as Mary Edith Durham or Franc Nopsca.

Then came the period of national independence. Zojzi states that the hope was to institutionalize research in Albanian studies, but “it did not work out that way. The several governments that held the power up to the liberation<sup>30</sup> did not give minimal priority to scientific work in Albania.”<sup>31</sup> However, there were efforts to continue the study of traditional culture in the steps of

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<sup>25</sup> Zojzi, *Etnografia shqiptare*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> According to Albanian historiography, the liberation period corresponds to the end of the Second World War. Albania was liberated not only from Italian and German occupation, but also from the exploitative capitalist regime of King Zogu.

<sup>31</sup> Zojzi, *Etnografia shqiptare*, p. 5.

the intellectuals of the awakening period, and these efforts remained in the private sphere, and were not, according to Zojzi, encouraged by the state. The result of this work was published in various journals, including *Hylli i Dritës* (1913–1944), *Leka* (1929–1944), *Mësuesi* (1929), and *Shkolla Kombëtare*<sup>32</sup> (1937–1943).

“The oath, honor, loyalty, manhood, and other traditional virtues of our people were considered by the higher classes to be impairments; the artistic traditions such as folk music and dances, folk art, and so on were considered old-fashioned. ... But the masses, especially the villagers, protected these traditions and made efforts to develop them.”<sup>33</sup>

According to this view, the lower classes are always the ones to bear and protect the national culture, and consequently the nation itself. The higher classes not only automatically represent the exploiters and the enemy of the poor, but also the betrayer of the nation. During this period, according to Zojzi, especially noteworthy was the publication of the Kanun as codified by Shtjefën Gjeçovi in 1933. This was the situation of Albanian ethnography before the Second World War.

In his introduction to the history of ethnography, of course, Zojzi had to find the best of words for the development of ethnography under the power of the party. The first thing that the Party of Labor of Albania did for this purpose was to establish ideological bases for the study of traditional culture. This was intended to be the end of cosmopolitanism, and the leading ideology would be that of proletarian internationalism.<sup>34</sup> After the establishment of the ethnographic section near the Institute of Sciences, great work began in collecting ethnographic materials, especially in those areas where they were disappearing. Many fieldwork expeditions for gathering information and ethnographic objects were organized as a result. New archives of “our national culture”<sup>35</sup> were established and new centers for its development were opened all over Albania. They were used to gather as much ethnographic material as was possible. In this way the “national culture” was documented all across Albania.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the discipline was thriving those years.

“A very important step in ethnographic studies was the knowledge acquired by ethnographers in the field of Marxist-Leninist methodology, and of the materialist understanding of the social phenomena of the people.”<sup>37</sup> The introduction then continues by presenting articles published in various scholarly journals in Albania and abroad.

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<sup>32</sup> Literally ‘The National School’.

<sup>33</sup> Zojzi, *Etnografia shqiptare*, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> This is the way researchers use to express this when talking about Albanian culture during communism.

<sup>36</sup> Zojzi, *Etnografia shqiptare*, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

However, the traditions of “our national culture,” says Zojzi, were not considered by ethnographers to be dead material, a closed chapter of the history of the Albanian people, only with historical and museum value, but as a living activity, full of life, that continue to grow and develop parallel with the economic and social growth and development of the people. This was the orientation that the Party of Labor of Albania gave to Albanian scholars under the guidance of Marxist-Leninist principles. This is why Albanian scholars studying traditions were making efforts to develop them further, in order for the new culture of the Albanian people to be national in form and socialist in content.<sup>38</sup>

Like every discipline, and education, work, industry and so on in the Albanian communist state, ethnography had a mission to fulfill, a mission toward the nation, providing scholarly arguments for the uniqueness of the Albanian people and contributing to building socialist culture through the application of ethnographic knowledge. What Zojzi wrote in the first introduction to Albanian ethnography determined the trends of its future. Being a historical phenomenon, ethnography has a birth and a development. It is the study of traditions and ethnicity. As such it is considered to have been born with the traditions and culture of its own people, who protected it with love during difficult historical periods from foreign assimilation and from the deprecation of the exploitive upper classes, who very often were cosmopolitans and embraced foreign exploitive cultures. During the awakening, the gathering of ethnographic data was considered a patriotic duty by Albanian nationalist ideologues, a job that continued up to the Second World War. The contradictions between the emerging proletariat and the transitory feudocapitalist exploitive regime of Zogu increased, and in this contradiction the intellectuals tried to continue their work in ethnography in order to protect “our dear national culture” from the evil of cosmopolitanism. And with the “People’s Power” the culture of the people and the nation was finally considered safe. There was no longer felt to be a contradiction between material social practice and the ideology of superstructure, between proletariat and governmental structures, because political and economic power belonged to the people itself. If the culture of the ruling class had always tried to oppress the culture of the exploited people, now the last was also the first. However, the final historically determined period of history was communism, and the revolutionary practice had to revolutionize every segment of society on an ongoing basis toward the achievement of that last and eternal stage of history and social organization. Regarding this aspect, science was to revolutionize itself on an ongoing basis, and also to guide the revolutionarization of one’s own society and culture toward the classless and strata-less communist so-

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

ciety and culture. This is why ethnography had to be “national in form and socialist in content”.

Rrok Zojzi is one of those complex personalities whose work cannot be analyzed so easily. He preached historical materialism as theory and method, but he also dedicated his life to ethnography and fieldwork, and applied all his energy in teaching all other ethnographers how to do fieldwork and the ethics of it. Many of his articles are still worth reading and using because they contain not only interesting data, but also interesting theoretical concepts that escaped the censure of the period. Above all, his notebooks of fieldwork deposited in the Archive of the Department of Ethnology are treasure troves because of the data recorded there and the original interpretations that were ideas of the moment when he wrote down what he collected.

### **Reinforcement of Ideological Directives on Albanian Ethnography in the 1970s**

The year 1967 is one of the most important years in the history of Albanian communism. On 6 February that year Enver Hoxha presented his notorious *Programmatic Discourse against Religion and Backward Habits*. Immediately after this, the right to believe in God, to frequent places of worship, or to declare any religious identity was abolished. These kinds of discourses held by the dictator were considered as laws to be obeyed, but not only that. It was through them that educators were being educated on an ongoing basis. After some years, every institution had to reflect on how the new ideas of the leader and of the party were being implemented – successfully, of course. As far as ethnography is concerned, two articles were written in 1974 and 1976 regarding theoretical directives. Another history of the development of ethnography in Albania and of further duties appeared in 1974, in the journal *Etnografia shqiptare*, written by the ethnographers Andromaqi Gjergji and Abaz Dojaka.<sup>39</sup> Again the story began with the ancient authors up to the period of communism. However, it gave a detailed account of the fields of study within the discipline. It was much more concerned with introducing how science was being created by applying historical materialism and the ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Enver Hoxha, and the Party of Labor of Albania. According to Dojaka and Gjergji, every topic in Albanian ethnography was being analyzed using historical materialism as a method, from topics on material culture (traditional agriculture, handicrafts, clothes, buildings, and figurative arts), to topics on spiritual and social culture (family, migration, mythology, ceremonial feasts, and the Kanun). In addition to material culture, with the rapid changes the traditional way of life was disappearing.

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<sup>39</sup> Dojaka, Rezultatet e punës, p. 13

Researchers were especially concerned about describing in detail the material aspects of traditional life, in order to document what was disappearing at a fast pace, and this duty helped them escape the communist ideology at a certain level. However, there was no escape for social and spiritual culture. The new revolutionary communist way of life could not accept coexistence with a traditional way of life that for centuries had served to exploit the people. This was made especially clear in the *Programmatic Discourse* mentioned above. Dojaka and Gjergji continue:

The fifth congress of the party and the *Programmatic Discourse* held on 6 February 1967 against the backward habits and views that humiliate women, against religion and religious prejudices, against folk traditions related directly or indirectly with religion, assigned new duties to Albanian ethnography. The roots of those bad traditions and habits, which hold society back, should be discovered, as well as their idealistic-reactionary philosophical bases. In focus was the war against them and the efforts to replace them with a new one. Nowadays, ethnographers chose their topics according to the great duties highlighted by the party for the development and the further strengthening of the ideological and cultural revolution in our country.<sup>40</sup>

The new direction that ethnography had to take would lead it toward the study of contemporary Albanian society.<sup>41</sup> However, the ethnographers would not abandon research on the past way of life and culture of the Albanian people. “Together with the other historical branches, ethnography will contribute to shedding light on some of the most important questions of our historiography, like that of ethnogenesis, the contribution of our people in the material and spiritual culture of neighboring people and vice-versa, etc. These problems will be solved based on sane ideological positions, on the basic principles of historical materialism.”<sup>42</sup>

Reading this article, one understands that ethnographers were supposed to move more toward the social sciences – to apply the sociology of Marxism. In a soft way, the two ethnographers admitted that up to 1973 ethnographers had merely collected and described the material culture that belonged to the past traditional way of life, and that even though they were analyzed under the rules of historical materialism, the level of the analyses was not the required one, and that mere description prevailed.

However, in the same issue the linguist Androkli Kostallari (who led the group of linguists that standardized the Albanian language) showed himself to be impatient with ethnographers. “Enough with descriptions and

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

collections of the material culture, we have to build socialism, and you ethnographers are not doing your job well” – this is what one can grasp from a first reading of his article. But let us read his words instead:

*Based on the orders of the second plenum of the Central Committee of the Party of Labor of Albania, held on June 1967 for a more thorough study of the habits of familiar life and of the kanuns that prohibit the establishment of the new socialist relationships, promoted by the party, to the researchers of history and literature, and especially to the ethnographers, was assigned the duty to attain a deeper knowledge of these scraps, so that they can be replaced completely. Material life should be collected as historical patrimony and be stored in museums. The study of the social life of the people has an urgent character. It is a war that does not wait. It has to be done right now, every single hour. It will permit us to penetrate deeper into diagnosing the ideological and social illnesses that survived from the historical past of our society, and will help for faster recuperation through the strength of our Marxist-Leninist ideology, as well as to better recognize the paths of the development of our society.*<sup>43</sup> (emphasis mine)

Providing knowledge for policymakers has always been a matter of debate for the ethics of anthropology. However, in the case of Albanian ethnography, this was not a matter of choice and debate. It was an order of the party and the ethnographers were expected to obey; they were expected to play their part in building socialist society, or else they had no reason to exist as such. Nonetheless, engagement in demonizing some habits and traditions had a negative influence on the development of ethnographic analyses in many cases because the time and energy of the ethnographers were channelled towards condemning and not understanding the ways traditional Albanian society functioned. In a sense, this was also what the party required, but because of the pressure it used to exercise through the “base organization of the party” at the institute ethnographers were afraid to apply a functionalist approach. If they had they might have seemed to be protecting backward habits and thus be transferred as workers to any factory, be fired, or, worst of all, even politically persecuted. So the party itself failed in its intentions.

Albanian ethnography reached its peak in 1976, when the National Ethnographic Conference was organized, as part of the celebrations for the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of Albania. Among about sixty-five participants, only eight were ethnographers by profession (this has always been the number of ethnographers, and later ethnologists in Albania, and this is the current number – if one does not count Albanians abroad), six were “associates” of the department, and four were folklore specialists. The rest were historians, archaeologists, linguists, art historians,

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<sup>43</sup> Kostallari, Mbi shtresëzimin e te drejtës kanunore, p. 25.

lawyers, demographers, and researchers of Marxism. The main focus of this conference was to celebrate the achievements in the “cultural sciences” under the leadership of the Party of Labor of Albania. There were achievements in collecting the material culture of the past – a task that should continue – and toward the integration of the good traditions into the new socialist culture. The conference was opened by the Minister of Education and Culture, who, after praising the achievements and the happy life under the rule of the party and its leader, reminded the “researchers of culture” in general, and the ethnographers in particular, that they should obey the teachings of the party and its leader<sup>44</sup> because this was their revolutionary mission. Four keynote speakers presented the theoretical lines that these researchers should follow (and obey). This was a national ethnographic conference, but none of the key speakers was an ethnographer. Aleks Buda and Stefanaq Pollo were historians, and Zija Xholi and Alfred Uci were Marxist philosophers. The ethnographers had demonstrated themselves as incompetent in the interpretation and implementation of Marxism in their works. Institutionally, ethnographic research was organized still under the Institute of History.

The party allowed only a very narrow group of intellectuals to have access to foreign literature in order to stay in contact with what was going on and to create strategies for the future development of their respective disciplines. This is the “monopolization of knowledge” ordered by the party for one or two representatives from each field. They read what was going on and they prepared the new theoretical and ideological directives for the rest of their colleagues. They were the real triple insiders – they were creating the double ideologization of the academic field and were taking care to maintain it. Buda, Pollo, Xholi, Uci, Kostallari, and others represent typical cases of triple insider syndrome, and their efforts were to try to compel other researchers to embrace it.

The keynote speeches by the group of four mentioned above introduced some “contemporary” theories and trends in cultural studies abroad, but all with negative connotations, judging and condemning them, arguing that they not only should not be followed by Albanian scholars, but that it was the duty of these scholars to oppose to them through their findings. Aleks Buda’s talk *Etnografia shqiptare dhe disa probleme te saj* (Albanian Ethnography and Some of Its Problems), after repeating and elaborating further the things Zojzi wrote in 1962, summarized the capitalist and revisionist theories in culture, added some new achievements of Albanian ethnography up to 1976, and gave some recommendations about what should be done next.<sup>45</sup>

Pollo then directed ethnographers’ attention toward the national question. He considered Albanian folk culture to be the historical production of the

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<sup>44</sup> Cami, *Fjala e hapjes*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>45</sup> Buda, *Etnografia Shqiptare*, pp. 15–35.

Albanian people, as an ethnic and national community. He proposed that ethnographers should remain loyal to the historical periods of the development of Albanian people because they also represent the phases of the development of Albanian culture.<sup>46</sup> His main preoccupation was to explain the dialectic of the development of culture as a historical product, a dialectic that in any case did not affect its ethnic character. Ethnographers were supposed to provide arguments for the autochthony of Albanian culture, but how could they do this? If this culture were so old and had such a clear ethnic character, than it would mean that Albanians were an isolated people, locked in barbarity (according to the Morgan/Engels phases of human cultural evolution). However, Pollo put an end to this dilemma: he proposed that archaeology and linguistics data were not enough to clearly shed light on the early stages of the cultural history of the Albanian people.<sup>47</sup>

These data cannot tell us much without the help of ethnography, which, departing from the present, has the ability to trace back the origins and the age of some cultural elements and artifacts, assisted by historical documents and archaeological and linguistic data. Thus between ethnography, linguistics, archaeology, and history there are mutual relationships. When an archaeologist finds an artifact, it is the historian that tries to give an explanation to that fact through documents and, if they are lacking, it is the ethnographer that compares the actual artifacts with what was found by the archaeologist and discusses the similarities and differences. When the similarities seem to be greater than the differences, it means that that artifact can be considered an indigenous one and evidence of Illyrian-Albanian continuation. Even within the differences there are two categories. One set of differences between contemporary folk culture elements is composed of natural internal change and development during the centuries, and so it does not affect the ethnic nature. The other set of differences is composed of the influences of elements of foreign cultures, but they never managed to be fully internalized into Albanian culture, and are thus readily visible. According to Pollo, there are three basic components of Albanian ethnicity: territory, language, and folk culture. In his view, because 1) there was no great migration of Illyrians from their lands, 2) the people that migrated toward the Balkans in the sixth and ninth centuries clearly had nothing to do with the Albanians, 3) the Albanian language has genetic relations with the Illyrian one, and 4) Albanian folk culture poses some elements that are easily traceable through archaeology as Illyrian, this proves that the Albanian people are direct descendants of the Illyrians, and therefore the Albanians are indigenous and unique.<sup>48</sup> This is more or less the theory and method that Nopcsa introduced when studying

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<sup>46</sup> Pollo, *Kultura popullore si shprehje e veçorive*, p. 37.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 39–43.

northern Albania. However, even though they had the right method, there were defects in Nopcsa's theory. Nopcsa's theory was not based on dialectical materialism, but on (reactionary) metaphysical idealism, giving this path to Albanian autochthony a romantic and isolated character. Nonetheless, Nopcsa was recommended as a good example to be followed.

At the end of the first and last conference ever of Albanian ethnography, Aleks Buda concluded that:

1. Albanian ethnography should continue to discover, collect, document, and study the folk culture of some regions that had not been covered yet;
2. The concept of tradition should be extended and also include new socialist traditions. Therefore ethnographers should include some sociology in their approach;
3. Albanian ethnographers should expand knowledge of bad and backward habits and traditions, as well as good ones, and recommend that the good ones become part of socialist culture;
4. They should contribute to shedding light on the evolution of the Albanian people based on the preceding points;
5. Albanian ethnographers should take an active part in compiling educational booklets, which would serve artisans in their efforts to preserve the Albanian character of their products.<sup>49</sup>

In 1979, the Department of Ethnography became part of the Institute of Folklore, and the institute changed its name to the Institute of Folk Culture. At the same time, Albania broke off its relations with China and declared itself "the only Communist island in the world." The theoretical and ideological orientations during the 1980s were more or less the same, but with a stronger emphasis on the usefulness of the orders of Enver Hoxha.

Reading through the fifteen issues of *Etnografia Shqiptare*, the proceedings of the conference mentioned above, and some articles in the journal *Kultura Popullore*, the trend of the development of ethnography becomes very clear. The ethnographers that studied material culture spent most of their time describing. There are detailed descriptions of folk costumes, traditional handicrafts, traditional agriculture, traditional buildings, and the technology used in production and construction. Most of this material was collected through fieldwork.

In a sense, description made possible an escape from the restrictions that were imposed on ethnographers. On the other hand, after 1990, when theoretically there were no more limits for the entrance of new ethnological literature and ideas, ethnographers found themselves in a difficult position. Most of the theories that were coming from abroad seemed too strange and very different from what they had been doing. Thus, after 1990, it was time

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<sup>49</sup> Buda, *Fjala e mbylljes*, pp. 10–12.

for them to publish works that up to then had remained in manuscript form – of course, after deleting the quotations from the party and Enver Hoxha. This last step did not occur in all cases. Works that had been so highly ideological could not be “cleaned out” so easily because after this there would be very little left. Thus there were also many books published even after 2000 that continued to proclaim how miserable the lives of Albanians had been before the enlightening rule of the Party of Labor of Albania.

With the exception of some efforts to introduce some theories and open up a debate, the situation of ethnological research in Albania continues to be a kind of carbon copy of the communist period.

## **Conclusions**

This paper analyzed the dependence of Albanian ethnography on political ideologies and history in an institutional sense. It introduced the theoretical precursors of ethnography before its institutionalization and analyzed the main theoretical articles, whose purpose was not to foster scientific discussion, but to order researchers what to research and how to do so. It also briefly introduced the way political control was imposed on researchers through the orders of the Party of Labor of Albania and Enver Hoxha, and through the base organization of the party. The framework of the article is very narrow, considering the breadth and completely unexplored history of the development of Albanian ethnography. There is much to be done in analyzing all the documentation and articles, as well as the memories of ethnographers themselves. Only in this way can we achieve a better understanding of what we inherited from the past, and how what we inherited affects the current development of the discipline in Albania today.

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## **Etnografija v komunistični Albaniji: Nacionalistični diskurz in povezava z zgodovino**

### Povzetek

Etnografija v Albaniji podobno kakor v številnih drugih državah s socialističnim oz. komunističnim sistemom ni bila samostojna znanstvena veda, temveč je bila vezana na zgodovinopisje. Etnografija je temeljila predvsem na teoretskih izhodiščih in je izključevala terensko delo. Članek na kratko opiše zgodovino razvoja etnografske vede v Albaniji v obdobju komunizma in analizira njeno zvezo z zgodovinopisjem. Tovrstna povezava izhaja iz hotenja nekdanje politične elite, da utrdi in razširi nacionalistično ideologijo. Medtem ko je zgodovinopisje temeljilo na konstrukciji albanskega naroda kot homogene »entitete«, je etnografija skušala najti oz. ustvariti kulturno podlago za utrditev nacionalne države in oblikovati nacionalno folkloro. Na takšen način je postala nacionalistična ideologija ena od osrednjih paradigem, ki še dandanes prežema številne znanstvene tekste s področja etnografije kakor tudi zgodovinopisja.