

original scientific article  
received: 2012-01-04

UDC 316.7(496.5)

## RILINDJA'S PLACE IN THE ORIENTALISM OF INTELLECTUALS IN POST-COMMUNIST ALBANIA

*Enis SULSTAROVA*

University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, 1001 Tirana, Albania  
e-mail: enis.sulstarova@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*The paper will present the ways Rilindja, which in Albanian historiography denotes the Albanian nationalist movement from the 1850s until the proclamation of independence in 1912, is employed in the contemporary Orientalist discourse of Albanian intellectuals. The European integration of the country is often conceived of in cultural terms as an escape from the Eastern tyranny and backwardness towards Western freedom, modernity and prosperity. Following the critique of Orientalism by E. W. Said, this paper argues that contemporary Albanian intellectuals construct an idealized, simplified and homogenized picture of Rilindja in their projection of European identity of Albanians.*

**Key words:** *Rilindja*, Orientalism, Albania, intellectuals, discourse

## IL POSTO DELLA RILINDJA NELL'ORIENTALISMO DEGLI INTELLETTUALI NELL'ALBANIA POSTCOMUNISTA

### SINTESI

*Il contributo presenta i modi in cui la Rilindja, che nella storiografia albanese denota il movimento nazionalistico albanese dagli anni '50 dell'Ottocento fino alla proclamazione dell'indipendenza nel 1912, viene utilizzata nel discorso orientalistico attuale degli intellettuali albanesi. L'integrazione europea del paese è spesso concepita in termini di cultura come una fuga dalla tirannia e arretratezza orientale verso la libertà, modernità e prosperità occidentale. Seguendo la critica dell'orientalismo di E. W. Said il contributo sostiene che gli intellettuali dell'Albania contemporanea, nella loro proiezione dell'identità europea degli albanesi, stiano costruendo un'immagine idealizzata, semplificata e omogeneizzata della Rilindja.*

**Parole chiave:** *Rilindja*, orientalismo, Albania, intellettuali, discorso

## INTRODUCTION

The paper will present the ways National Renaissance, which in Albanian historiography denotes the Albanian nationalist movement from the 1850s until the proclamation of independence in 1912, is employed in the contemporary Orientalist discourse of Albanian intellectuals. We present two interrelated arguments about Rilindja's place in the emergence and development of Albanian brand of Orientalism: (1) Rilindja nationalist movement against the Ottoman Empire provided the epistemic and ontological bedrock for the emergence of Albanian brand of Orientalism, through constructing the binary opposition between Albanians as Europeans and Turks as Asiatic; (2) Rilindja itself is employed as a myth of Europeanism in contemporary Orientalist discourse of Albanian intellectuals, who are concerned with establishing the "European identity" of Albanians, in order to culturally frame the integration process of this country in European Union (EU). The paper is divided in four parts. We start with introducing below our theoretical approach. In the second part we examine the emergence of Albanian Orientalism after 1878. The third part will be devoted to contemporary placement of Rilindja in intellectual discourses about escaping the East and returning to Europe. In the final part of the paper we reach to conclusions.

Edward W. Said's seminal study *Orientalism* (1978) continues to draw attention in the academia and to be employed to study the processes of "othering" in different contexts. According to the wide-spread use of the term, Orientalism refers to degrading representations of cultures and peoples that privilege "modern", "rational", "civilized" Europe or West, against "backward", "irrational", "barbarian" Orientals in different regions of the world. Scholars, who have been inspired by his work, have revised Said's thesis to fit the cases of "othering" within Europe. Similarly to Said, Larry Wolff (1994) surveyed the invention of Eastern Europe during the Enlightenment by Western travelers and intellectuals. In their texts, Eastern European peoples and cultures were considered as semi-European and influenced by Asian barbarism. Another seminal work in this vein is Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997). She argues that "Balkanism", a term she uses to denote the Western discourse about the Balkans, is characterized by an inherent ambiguity, because the region is imagined as belonging to Europe and at the same time not fully European. In this respect, Balkanism is different from Orientalism: the latter is about an opposition between East and West, or Europe and Asia, while the former has a status of liminality, as an "inside other" within the borders of Europe (Fleming, 2000, 1231).

During the last two centuries Western Orientalism has been internalized by modernizing societies in other regions of the world, becoming part of the local discourses and identities. The Western disciplinary gaze is accepted by its subjects even in the process of anti-colonial

struggle. In the course of modernity the idea of the West become part of self-definition, which is termed as self-Orientalism. Self-Orientalism in turn recreates the cultural or civilizational hierarchies, because, as Ussama Makdisi puts it, "in an age of Western-dominated modernity, every nation creates its own Orient" (2002, 768). Thus, variations of Orientalism have been perpetrated within East European countries and societies by political and cultural elites in the processes of constituting national identities and for building up support for certain regimes of power and social stratification. To explain this reoccurrence of Orientalism among "Oriental", or "Eastern" peoples, Milica Bakic-Hayden has developed the concept of "nesting Orientalism", referring to the gradations of different "Orient": Asia is more "East" than the Eastern Europe, while within Eastern Europe the Balkans is more "Eastern", while within the Balkans, different nations are perceived as more Eastern than the others (Bakic-Hayden, 1995, 918).

However, this is not the end of the story, as nesting Orientalism occurs within a nation-state when a majority culture perceives a minority culture as uncivilized and unfit for modernity: "Orientalism is also a specter that haunts people's minds and serves as a tool for concocting social distinctions across state borders as well as within them" (Buchowski, 2006, 465). Such is the case with Turkey, where modernizing and Westernizing Turkish political and cultural elites have constructed the image of the "native Kurd" and have targeted it for nationalizing and "corrective" projects of modernity (Zeydanlioğlu, 2008). Moreover, within a society and culture one may find further gradations, which may be termed "internal Orientalism", or "domestic Orientalism" (Buchowski, 2006; Jansson, 2005). Given groups or social categories, such as "peasants" or religious communities, especially if they are concentrated in a given region, may be framed and stigmatized as (more) Eastern and as resistant to modernization and Westernization projects of the powerful elites. In this case, Orientalism becomes more imaginary and fantastic, and the same time more resilient, because "such a domestic Orientalism cannot be confined in an isolated space, even if localized, since the Other can now live side by side with 'us', occupy the same place, speak the same language and believe in the same God" (Buchowski, 2006, 467). An example might be the case of secular Albanian elites and secular media distinguishing between an "Albanian Islam", which is tolerant/European and an "Arab Islam", which is extremist/Asian. Then, the Albanian Muslim believers appropriate such labeling in their power struggle for the dominance in the hierarchy of the Albanian Muslim Community.

Self-Orientalism, external Orientalism (which is directed against perceived other nations and societies) and internal Orientalism should not be seen as mutually exclusive but rather as gradations of the same basic discursive strategy of "nesting Orientalism", by which even the victims of Western Orientalism stigmatize those they deem

as (more) "Oriental Others". A case in point might be the study by Aziza Khazoom of Jewish Orientalism. The roots of Jewish Orientalism lie in the stigmatization of Jews as "Orientals" within Europe. In their post-Enlightenment emancipation the Jews were granted citizenship rights in France and Germany, but on the condition they disregard their "Asiatic" appearance and customs and assimilate to the "modern" ways of the dominant society. With time, emancipated Western Jews downgraded Jewish refugees coming from Eastern Europe, because of their "un-modern" appearance and "primitive" behavior. Behind this Jewish Orientalism lied the fear that the newly coming Jews could jeopardize the position that Western Jews had gained in their societies. After the creation of the state of Israel, Orientalist strategies have been employed by Israeli Jews coming from Europe ("Ashkenazim"), to secure their upper political and social position against Jews coming from Middle East ("Mizrahim"), whereas both groups have been discriminating against Palestinians and other Arabs (Khazoom 2003; see also Gerber 2003; Piterberg 2001).

Within this theoretical framework, this article examines the Orientalist discursive strategies used by Albanian intellectuals for forging modern Albanian national identity. Being a European, but a developing, ex-communist country with a majority Muslim population, Albania has frequently been the target of pejorative stereotyping by Western travelers, politicians, literature and media (Alpion, 2002; 2005). Despite this, Albanian cultural and political elites have developed their self-Orientalism, because, since the end of nineteenth century, the processes of modernization in the country have been framed along a West-East axis, with Albanians struggling to escape from the consequences and "pollution" of their national "European" identity by a series of "Eastern/Oriental others" (Sulstarova, 2007; 2009). Starting with the National Renaissance period, Orientalism became an essential tool in the struggle against the Ottomans and in the conceptualization of an ancient Albanian nation of "European roots". In the present, while Albania celebrates the 100-anniversary of independence from the Ottoman Empire, *Rilindja* constitutes one of the founding blocks of Albanian national identity and it is now interpreted as a Europeanizing moment in Albanian history and as a prelude to the contemporary integration of the country to Europe.

### NATIONAL RENAISSANCE

The period from the League of Prizren (1878) to the proclamation of independence of Albania (28 November 1912) is known as the *Rilindja Kombëtare* [National Renaissance]. It was during this time that Albanian nationalists in Ottoman vilayets in the Balkans, as well as in Istanbul and the diaspora, began articulating the idea of the nation and they developed a national language and literature along the way. Similar to other Balkan nationalisms

of the period, the Albanian nationalist intellectual's ideal was a modern national state according to the model of the advanced national states of the Western Europe. To achieve this aim, they appropriated in large part the late 19<sup>th</sup> European discourses about the division of the humanity into races and nations. In this framework they made use of the post-Enlightenment Orientalist stereotype of the "despotic Turk" (Çirakman, 2001), in order to oppose to it the image of Albanians as an old, indeed the oldest, and pure European nation, longing to get rid of the Asian barbarism. For instance, in his programmatic work, *Shqipëria ç'ka qenë, ç'është dhe ç'do të bëhet* [Albania: Past, Present and Future], published in 1898, Sami Frashëri employs the image of the barbarian and despotic Turks to make the case that the contemporary "Asiatic" Turks have not changed even slightly since their brutal appearance in Europe centuries ago, while Albanians, despite being Muslim in majority, are an European people and deserve a fate different from that of the Turks and alike the other nations of Europe.

What are the Turks? – A savage nation coming from the deserts of North Asia with goads in their hands... Where are today the Huns, Vandals, Mongols, Avars, Goths and so many savage peoples that once invaded half of earth by burning, overturning and shedding blood? The Turks had no right to live longer than their friends; they have had a gratuitous life till now, and have no right to live a day longer, because till now they have not founded a nationality and government like the whole world, but still wish to live forever with savagery. They are going to lose and must lose for the sake of the humanity; but what business do they have with us, that they want to take us with them in their demise? What business do we have with them? Did we come [to Europe] with them? Never! We are not Turks coming from the deserts of Asia. We are the oldest people of Europe; on the ground of Europe we have the right to our claims more than any other nation (Frashëri, 1999, 71–72).

Similarly, Sami's brother, Naim, who is considered as the national poet of the Albanians, defined the Albanian nation against the Oriental mirror of the Turk. His major poem is *Historia e Skënderbeut* [History of Skanderbeg], about the 15<sup>th</sup> century Albanian prince who led an uprising against the Ottomans. The poem opens with an idyllic picture of medieval Albania, characterized by wisdom, peace, wealth, honor, hope, friendship and *besa* (Frashëri, 1967, 80–84). This "golden national age" was interrupted by Turkish invaders:

A big beast,  
Coming from Asia,  
Spread like a shadow.  
It was a damned nation,

With cunning in tongue,  
 With cruelty in eyes,  
 With a satanic heart;  
 Wherever came from or went to  
 Brought mourning with him,  
 Killed, severed and impoverished,  
 Where he stepped, grass wouldn't grow  
 .....  
 Civilization drowned in the sea  
 Darkness rose like a cloud  
 Spread on earth were ignorance,  
 Blood, death, wilderness!  
 (Frashëri, 1967, 90–100, 109–112).

During much of the poem, Naim juxtaposes the Albanian hero, Skanderbeg, with a series of the corrupted, "Asiatic" and despotic Turkish characters. It should be remembered that the cult of Skanderbeg was at the center of the literary production during Rilindja, as the Albanian nationalists at the 19<sup>th</sup> century thought of their task as a completion of what Skanderbeg had begun. Accordingly, Skanderbeg struggled not only to maintain the national freedom of the Albanians, but also to protect Europe from the Asiatic barbarians. But the then Europe did not help the Albanians, because, says Naim, she was in the deep sleep of ignorance and fanaticism; "it was not like today," it took Rousseau and Voltaire for Europe to wake up (Frashëri, 1967, 17–28). In the meanwhile, the uprising of Albanians served to as a barrier to the fury of the Turks and it conserved Europe for the future Enlightenment to come.

If it was not for Albania,  
 The blind Europe, all of it  
 Would be taken by Turkey,  
 It wouldn't be saved  
 (Frashëri, 1967, 265–268).

Therefore Europe is indebted to Albanians and now it has the chance to return the favor and save Albania from the Turkish yoke. Similarly, other Albanian nationalists freely made use of Orientalist stereotypes about the Ottomans, found in Western newspapers and travelogues of that time, to contrast "the Turk" to the imagined European, virtuous and pure Albanian nation, longing for liberty and emancipation from "Asian yoke and barbarism". But it should be remembered that both Sami and Naim Frashëri were not Western travelers to the Orient, looking for adventure and exoticism, nor colonial rulers making a career in the East by "civilizing the natives". Istanbul was their home, more so than their place of birth in Southern Albania. But living within a cosmopolitan milieu shaped by the intellectual currents of European Enlightenment, Romanticism and nationalism (Ypi, 2007) they appropriated the European Orientalist discourse for giving an answer to what they felt was their most fundamental and pressing

question at the time: the fate of the Albanian nation at the coming demise of the Ottoman empire.

### POST-COMMUNISM ORIENTALISM AND RILINDJA

Since the democratic revolution of 1990-1991, the Albanian national identity has been partly reshaped by the work of intellectuals, in the new context of transition to capitalism and liberal democracy. In contemporary dominant political and intellectual discourses, integration in the EU is considered as a *telos* of historical progress, a view also stimulated by the Brussels bureaucracy. Indeed, the signing of the Association-Stabilization Agreement of EU with Albania in 2006 was greeted by political analysts and social scientists in the country as an inaugural end of the transition period. In a sense, "integration" has been "sanctified" up to the point that one cannot argue or criticize it without being treated as blasphemous as EU integration is seen as the only way of salvation. Thus, the goal of integration cannot be contested and it is situated beyond the reach of the public debate (Kajsiu, 2006, 7).

The majority of public intellectuals have considered the integration of Albania to the EU within an identitarian framework. They describe Albanians as an ancient people of European stock who have always wished to be a part of Europe and Western civilization. The blame for Albania's exclusion from Western development for many centuries is placed upon a series of "Eastern" others both outside and inside Albanian society, a discursive strategy resembling the "nesting Orientalism" mentioned by Bakic-Hayden. The Ottoman period is still taken as the most "Oriental" portion of the country's history and serves as a standard against which to judge the subsequent history of the Albanian state. In this respect, the Communist period (1945–1989), arguably the time when Albania underwent a rapid modernization (see O'Donnell, 1999) is included in the rubric of "East", too. Leading contemporary Albanian intellectuals consider the Turks, the Russians, the Chinese and the Albanian communists as part of an "Eastern" history, when Albania was detached from the Western Europe.

Another distinction of contemporary Albanian Orientalism is the emphasis on Islam as a new danger, reflecting the global atmosphere created after 9/11 and the "war on terror." During Communism, Islam, alongside Albania's other religious traditions, was considered as a tradition of bigotry and as a perpetrator of ignorance, against which communism was to educate the atheistic "New Man". Only after the fall of Communism did Islam assume the role of the new "Other" with which Albanian society had to struggle with. Although freedom of religious practice has been re-established in Albania, still a major part of intellectuals consider the public rituals and practices of Islam as strange, exotic, "Asiatic," ignorant, backward, a breach of secularism and religious tolerance, and for some, even as a possible bridge for bringing ter-

rorism to Europe. They argue that at a time of the “clash of civilizations”, Islam is pulling Albania toward the East. By insinuation, the “true” religion of Albanians is thought to be Christianity, especially Catholicism, foremost because it links Albanian history and culture with that of Western Europe.

The typical Orientalist narrative in the writings of Albanian intellectuals takes the reader through different stages of Albanian history: early Christianity, late Byzantine period, the Albanian principalities in the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ottoman-Turkish invasion in 15<sup>th</sup> century, uprising of Skanderbeg, the Ottoman-Turkish establishment, *Rilindja*, the peasant rebellion in Middle Albania in 1914-15, the interwar period, Communism, and post-communist transition. Each stage takes its identity according to whether it brings the Albanian people closer to Western or Eastern civilizations, (i.e. closer to Europe or Asia). Each Western stage is followed by an Eastern one, thus resembling the history of Albanians to the swinging of a pendulum. Each stage is valued in the narrative according to the role it plays for the reintegration of the nation with Europe: So, if it brings the nation closer to the Western side it is considered as positive, if it brings the nation closer to the Eastern side it is considered as negative. Therefore, the division into stages does not take into account its longevity: a couple of years or decades can be equal, or more significant to several centuries. The sequence of the stages is constructed in the table below, based on the narratives found in various texts of intellectuals published during post-communism.

A brief explanation of the table is required here. Christianity is cited often as one of the cultural roots of Europe, as especially the Latin Church as the founder of Western civilization. As a consequence, very often many Albanian intellectuals and politicians like to emphasize the early conversion of Albanians to Christianity, calling the later as the “true religion of Albanians”, or the “religion of fore-

fathers”. For example the writer Ismail Kadare (1998, 32) notes that “being one of the first Christian countries of Europe, Albania has been, as a consequence, an initial ground of Western European civilization”. The division of the Roman Empire in two parts and later on the schism of Christianity is taken to be the source of the West-East breach. This is one reason why Albanian intellectuals are keen to emphasize that although the Byzantine Empire is considered to be an Eastern influence in Albania, on the other hand, Northern Albanians remained faithful to the Roman Catholic Latin Church, which in the eyes of some intellectuals balances the Eastern influence of Byzantium and the Orthodox Church (see Plasari, 1992, 19–20).

Then follows a brief stage in 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries when Albanian lords become independent from their overlords. This period is praised as a golden age in Albanian history, also because the alleged cultural life in the courts and chancelleries of these princes was at a par with their Western counterparts (Plasari, 1992, 20). Then, the stage of Ottoman invasion is portrayed as a truly Asiatic one, aiming at destroying the whole of Europe (Kadare, 2006, 24–25). This is why the stage of Skanderbeg is very important in the Orientalist narrative, because it represents the Albanian negation to the East: “Gjergj Kastrioti, together with his sensational rebellion against the Ottoman state, proclaimed a new idea and a new ideal: divorce from the East and alliance with the West” (Kadare, 2001, 10). Then comes the Ottoman stage in 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period when Albania was “separated from the mother continent and was transformed into the far-off border province of an empire, whose heart was in Asia” (Misha, 1997, 30).

The next stage is *Rilindja*, which tries to bring Albania back to Europe. *Rilindja*'s greatest achievement is the independence of Albania in 1912 and its recognition by the European powers in 1913. As a sign of the acceptance of Albania by Europe, the powers decide to bring Prin-

**Table 1: Stages of Albanian history as presented in the Orientalist discourse by various intellectuals:**  
**Tabela 1: Dobe albanske zgodovine kakor jo predstavljajo razni intelektualci v orientalističnem diskurzu:**

No.	Stage	Longevity	Side of Civilization Pendulum
1	Early Christianity	1st-11th century	Western
2	Late Byzantine period and Slavic invasions	11th - 14th century	Eastern
3	Albanian principalities	14th – 15th century	Western
4	Ottoman invasion	15th century	Eastern
5	Uprising of Skanderbeg	1443-1468	Western
6	Ottoman rule and Islamization	16th – 19th century	Eastern
7	<b><i>Rilindja</i></b>	<b>1878-1912</b>	<b>Western</b>
8	Peasant rebellion in Middle Albania	1914-15	Eastern
9	Interwar years	1918-1939	Western
10	Communism	1945-1990	Eastern
11	Post-communism	1990-	Western

ce Wied as the head of the new state. Prince Wied was challenged by a rebellion in 1914–1915, whose aim it to return Albania to Ottoman Empire, or have a Turkish prince as the ruler of independent Albania. After the World War I, Albanian state is reestablished and a period of relative stability and modernization follows, especially under the rule of King Zog. After the World War II, the communist regime of Enver Hoxha is established in Albania, which now is described as an Eastern or Asiatic stage: “The last period of Enver Hoxha’s rule was entirely oriental” (Ngjela, 2006, 23). Enver Hoxha is called “the most anti-European man this country has known” (Kadare, 2006, 8), and his mode of rule is defined as “degenerated Byzantinism” and “Oriental Stalinism” (Plasari, 1992, 51). At last, come the present time, when Albania again has the opportunity to leave behind once and for all the swinging of pendulum and integrate firmly and forever with Europe. To realize this aim, Albanians should be aware not to fall prey to the latest seduction from the East, this time in the shape of Islamic fundamentalism. A strong attachment to Islam is contrary to the European identity of Albanians and may jeopardize their chances of integration with Europe. An example of this warning is the following passage:

*The fact that a large part of Albanian people has a Muslim origin without doubt is not an advantage concerning the idea of integration to Europe and its structures, especially if one takes into consideration the aggressive and anti-Western face that a part of Islamism is showing in the world, in particular in the Mediterranean area – a part of Islam which, regrettably, not very rarely, is identified with the whole of Islam. But this is not a fatality. It can turn into a fatality if we [Albanians] are not careful to show that Albanian Islamism has nothing to do with Islamic radicalism and that the former is not an impediment in the totality of European identity of the Albanian (Misha, 1997, 99).*

Despite the careful wording of the above citation, one can detect in it the clash of civilization thesis, which juxtaposes the West with Islam and which is situated within the Orientalist separation of the West from the East. Another contemporary intellectual and politician, Spartak Ngjela (2006, 49), puts this in a straightforward way: “The clash of Western civilization with the Arab-Islamic one is in its apogee”.



**Fig. 1, 2: The brothers Naim and Sami Frashëri are representative of Albanian National Renaissance. Sl. 1, 2: Brata Naim in Sami Frashëri sta predstavnik albanskega Narodnega preporoda.**

After this brief exposition of the Orientalist historical narrative, which is predominant in the writings of Albanian intellectuals, it becomes clear that *Rilindja* is situated according to the stages that precede and succeed it. Accordingly, *Rilindja* is thought of both as a continuation and as a radical break. It is a continuation of mission of Skanderbeg and a break with the subsequent period of the Ottoman rule. The continuation argument is emphasized by Ismail Kadare (2001, 12), when he writes that it was during the *Rilindja* that Skanderbeg emerged from obscurity and “gained his splendor as the carrier of Europeanization”. As for the radical break with the past, he argues that *Rilindja* by founding the national culture of Albanians, at the same time it marked the liberation of Albanian culture from the perverse and slavish influences of the Oriental culture of invader:

*Against this scum without a proper name rose Albanian National Renaissance. With its clear Europeanist program, with the Swiss model of the state that would replace that of the four vilayet, with its enlightened ideas and spirit, the National Renaissance was struggling to undress from Albanian culture and language the rags of servitude, even before the liberation of Albania.* (Kadare, 2006, 30–31).

In another work, Kadare (2010, 114) makes it clear that in the middle of a total clash between the two continents, a clash involving “regions, skies and gods”, *Rilindja* made the right and unshaken choice of Europe. This is because *Rilindja* itself was a European phenomenon. In favor of the European nature of *Rilindja*, another intellectual and politician, Spartak Ngjela, mentions the fact that it originated not from inside of Ottoman Albania, but from the old Albanian colonies in Italy: “This means that it has come [to the Albanian nation] from the West” (Ngjela, 2006, 84).

At the same time, *Rilindja* represents a new orientation, a new start for Albanians, because it is the inauguration of modernity and Westernization of the country. For example the media analyst Mustafa Nano (2006) writes that *rilindasit* [nationalist writers and activists of *Rilindja*]

...were the first to launch the idea of a nonreligious national identity, the first to turn their eyes towards the West, the first to harvest the idea of a secular state, the first to call for the emancipation of Albanian woman... The National Renaissance marks the great turn. Without it we would not even exist [as Albanians]. Firstly the *rilindasit* and later on all the representatives of Albanian culture, one after another and all of them together, have had their eyes towards the West and they have done whatever they could to detach their people from Oriental backwardness.

According to the Albanian intellectuals that employ the Orientalist discourse, the new orientation towards the

West which *Rilindja* started can be properly estimated not only by looking to the historical stage that precedes it, but also to the ones that follow it. Especially the communist stage is considered as another fall back to Orient, thus as the negation of all the ideas of *Rilindja*.

*The whole chronicle of communism in Albania can be summarized in few lines: infringement of the orientation of Gjergj Kastriot and National Renaissance. Rabid enmity against Western orientation. Perverse friendship with those that were not friends to us: Serbs, Soviets, Chinese. At the very end a suicidal isolation.* (Kadare, 2001, 14).

For Kadare, the communist leader of Albania, Enver Hoxha, turned upside down the Western program of *Rilindja*: the anti-Ottoman psychosis of *Rilindja* was turned to anti-capitalist psychosis and he substituted the Soviet and Chinese models of the state for the Swiss model advocated by *Rilindja* (Kadare, 2004, 48–49). The present alliance of Albania with the West proves right the vision of *Rilindja* and proves wrong that of communism. The NATO war against Yugoslavia in 1999 is interpreted as an act which fulfilled the testament of Skanderbeg and *Rilindja* (Kadare, 2001, 16).

One of the strongest invocations of *Rilindja* as the cornerstone of European identity of Albanians in post-communist years happened in 2006, when Ismail Kadare and Rexhep Qosja, a literary critic and academician from Prishtina, were engaged in a lively debate about the European identity of Albanians. Qosja (2006, 31) had written in an essay that Albanians belong to both Western and Eastern civilizations. This caused a prompt response by Kadare and others who brought in the *Rilindja* to contradict the arguments of Qosja. So, Kadare (2006, 18–19) asked whether the poets of *Rilindja*, De Rada and Naim Frashëri, have lied to us when considered Albanians as Europeans? He was followed by the publicist Piro Misha (2006) who argued that to challenge today the European identity of the Albanians is to question one of the basic tenets of the political and cultural philosophy of *Rilindja*. Misha ends his intervention in the debate by asking the rhetorical question: “Are there any realistic alternatives for Albanians except that of political philosophy of *Rilindja*?” (Misha, 2006). Thus, to abandon *Rilindja* would mean to abandon the Western course that Albania has finally taken.

## CONCLUSION

Edward Said originally meant Orientalism to be a representation of the colonial peoples by European powers, an academic knowledge and cultural imagination interlinked with systems of colonial domination, but he warned that Orientalism is not synonymous with colonialism. Orientalism can be employed by colonial peoples to de-

fine themselves and others. It can also be employed in the absence of colonial experience and within Europe, as nesting Orientalisms in the Balkans attest. Orientalism can be used to designate groups or traditions within a state or society, hence the term of "domestic Orientalism." Indeed, the only stable feature of Orientalist discourse may be the two opposing signifiers, "West" and "East", and this opposition serves as a nodal point for the arrangement of a whole series of binary oppositions that are transferred across time and space.

Intellectuals in different periods of Albania's modern history have conceptualized the modernization of Albania as an escape from East and a movement towards the West/Europe. During the National Renaissance, the "Other" of Albanian national identity became "the Turk," representing the barbarian and Asian invader who was to blame for the regress that the ancient European nation of Albanians had undergone under its rule. In the years of post-communist transition, while the goal is the integration of the country with the EU, the communist past is Orientalized and seen as a cultural consequence of Ottoman and Byzantine yokes.

To present the credentials of Albania as a European country and to culturally advance the process of European integration, some leading Albanian intellectual search for historical periods that would support the existence of a Western tradition, or modernity ethos of Albanian nation.

Rilindja fits best this need for Western precedents in national history. This is because Rilindja is the movement that formed the cultural base for imagining of an Albanian nation and its dominant ideology was shaped by European ideas of the time. In this process, Rilindja created the myth of Skanderbeg as a national hero for Albanians and demonized the Ottoman Empire as a backward despotism with Asian roots. As such, Rilindja is presented by contemporary intellectuals as a thread that links the Skanderbeg, Rilindja itself, the interwar period and the present time in a project of Westernization of Albanian nation. The counterpart is the Easternization project that is composed of the Ottoman rule and communism.

Theoretically, the contemporary Albanian Orientalism supports the argument advanced by Bakica-Hayden on the gradation of Balkan Orientalism, only by extending the term of "nesting Orientalisms" to include the "internal Orientalism" as well. The Albanian Orientalism, as it is the case with Orientalism in general, is based on binary, homogenizing and essentializing concepts that cannot serve to adequately understand the complex political and social dynamics of Albania and offers but a poor understanding of the contemporary world context. Having its roots in the imperialist endeavors of European powers, Orientalism cannot but frustrate the Albanian project of building a democratic and free society, based on the respect of human rights and dignity for all.

## MESTO RILINDJE V ORIENTALIZMU INTELEKTUALCEV POSTKOMUNISTIČNE ALBANIJE

ENIS SULSTAROVA

University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology, 1001 Tirana, Albanija  
e-mail: enis.sulstarova@gmail.com

### POVZETEK

*Albanija predstavlja zanimiv primer za preučevanje orientalizma, saj dokazuje, da je slednji predvsem kulturni diskurz, ki se ohranja v različnih kontekstih in ni niti geografsko nespremenljiv niti nima stalnih subjektov in objektov. Po Edwardu W. Saidu naj bi orientalizem prvotno pomenil predstavo o kolonialnih narodih, kakršno so si ustvarile evropske velesile, področje akademskega védenja in kulturne domišljije, prepleteno s sistemi kolonialne nadvlade; toda Said je opozarjal, da orientalizem ni sinonim kolonializma. Pojem orientalizma lahko uporabljajo tudi kolonialni narodi pri samoopredeljevanju in opredeljevanju drugih. Lahko se uporablja tudi v okolju brez kolonialnih izkušenj in znotraj Evrope. Pričujoči prispevek predstavlja načine, kako se Narodni preporod (Rilindja), ki v albanskem zgodovinoepisju označuje albansko nacionalistično gibanje iz obdobja od petdesetih let 19. stoletja do razglasitve samostojnosti leta 1912, uporablja v sodobnem orientalističnem diskurzu albanskih intelektualcev. Pred-*



stavljeni sta dva medsebojno povezana argumenta glede mesta, ki ga zavzema Rilindja v nastanku in razvoju albanskega orientalizma: (1) Rilindja, nacionalistično gibanje proti osmanskemu cesarstvu, je z vzpostavljanjem binarnega nasprotja med Albanci kot Evropejci in Turki kot Azijati omogočila epistemsko in ontološko podlago za pojav in razvoj albanske vrste orientalizma; (2) Rilindja je uporabljena kot mit evropeizma v sodobnem orientalističnem diskurzu albanskih intelektualcev, ki se ukvarjajo z vzpostavljanjem 'evropske identitete' Albancev, da bi kulturno uokvirili proces integracije te dežele v Evropsko unijo (EU). Prispevek kritizira sodobni albanski orientalizem, ker – kot velja za orientalizem na splošno – temelji na binarnih, homogenizirajočih in esencialističnih konceptih, ki ne morejo pripomoči k ustreznemu razumevanju zapletene politične in družbene dinamike Albanije in omogočajo le slabo razumevanje sodobnega svetovnega konteksta. Ker izvira iz imperialističnih prizadevanj evropskih velesil, orientalizem neizogibno onemogoča albanski projekt gradnje demokratične in svobodne družbe, ki bi temeljila na spoštovanju človekovih pravic in dostojanstva vseh ljudi.

**Ključne besede:** Rilindja, orientalizem, Albanija, intelektualci, diskurz

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alpion, G. I. (2002):** Images of Albania and Albanians in English Literature from Edith Durham's High Albania to J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter. *BESA Journal*, 6, 2, 30-44.
- Alpion, G. I. (2005):** Western Media and the European 'Other': Images of Albanian in the British Press in the New Millennium. *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 1, 1, 7-27.
- Bakic-Hayden, M. (1995):** Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia. *Slavic Review*, 54, 4, 917-931.
- Buchowski, M. (2006):** The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 79, 3, 463-482.
- Çirakman, A. (2001):** "From Tyranny to Despotism: The Enlightenment's Unenlightened Image of the Turks". *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 33, 49-68.
- Fleming, K. E. (2000):** Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography. *The American Historical Review*, 105, 4, 1218-1233.
- Frashëri, N. (1967):** Histori e Skënderbeut [History of Scanderbeg]. Tiranë, Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësisë.
- Frashëri, S. (1999):** Shqipëria ç'ka qenë, ç'është e ç'do të bëhet [Albania: Past, Present, Future]. Tiranë, Mësonjëtorja e Parë.
- Gerber, H. (2003):** Zionism, Orientalism, and the Palestinians. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 33, 1, 23-41.
- Jansson, D. R. (2005):** "A Geography of Racism": Internal Orientalism and the Construction of American National Identity in the Film *Mississippi Burning*. *National Identities*, 7, 3, 265-285.
- Kadare, I. (1998):** Kombi shqiptar në prag të mijëvjeçarit të tretë [The Albanian Nation at the Door of the Third Millennium]. Tiranë, Onufri.
- Kadare, I. (2001):** Shqiptarët në kërkim të një fati të ri [The Albanians in Search of a New Destiny]. Tiranë, Onufri.
- Kadare, I. (2004):** Poshtërimi në Ballkan [Humiliation in the Balkans]. Tiranë, Onufri.
- Kadare, I. (2006):** Identiteti evropian i shqiptarëve [European Identity of Albanians]. Tiranë, Onufri.
- Kadare, I. (2010):** Mosmarrëveshja: mbi raportet e Shqipërisë me vetveten [Disaccord: On the Relations of Albania with Itself]. Tiranë, Onufri.
- Kajsiu, B. (2006):** Integrimi si pengesë për demokratizimin [Integration as an obstacle to democratization]. Polis, 2, 7-13.
- Khazzoom, A. (2003):** The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel. *American Sociological Review*, 68 (Aug), 481-510.
- Makdisi, U. (2002):** Ottoman Orientalism. *The American Historical Review*, 107, 3, 768-796.
- Misha, P. (1997):** Duke kërkuar rrënjët... ose kthimi i shqiptarëve në histori [Searching for Roots... or the Returning of the Albanians to History]. Tiranë, Toena.
- Misha, P. (2006):** Keqkuptimet e Qoses për identitetin e shqiptarëve [Misunderstandings of Qosja About the Identity of Albanians]. *Shqip*, 23. 5. 2006, 8.
- Nano, M. (2006):** Kultura perëndimore dhe qytetërimi lindor i shqiptarëve [Western Culture and Eastern Civilization of the Albanians]. *Shqip*, 22. 5. 2006, 8-9.
- Ngjela, S. (2006):** Reformë shqiptare [Albanian Reform]. Tiranë, Enrico Cuccia.
- O'Donnell, J. (1999):** A Coming of Age: Albania Under Enver Hoxha. New York, University of Columbia Press.
- Piterberg, G. (2001):** Erasures. *New Left Review*, 10 (Jul-Aug), 31-46.

**Plasari, A. (1992):** Vija e Teodosit rishfaqet: Nga do t'ia mbajnë shqiptarët [The Line of Theodosius Reappears: Which side will Albanians choose?]. Tirana.

**Qosja, R. (2006):** Ideologjia e shpërbërjes [The Ideology of Disintegration]. Tirana, Toena.

**Said, E. W. (1978):** Orientalism. Harmondsworth, Penguin.

**Sulstarova, E. (2007):** Arratisje nga Lindja: Orientalizmi shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja [Escape from the East: Albanian Orientalism from Naim to Kadare]. Tirana, Dudaj.

**Sulstarova, E. (2009):** Albanian Orientalism. *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 5, 2, 93-118.

**Todorova, M. (1997):** Imagining the Balkans. Oxford - New York, Oxford University Press.

**Wolff, L. (1994):** Inventing Eastern Europe. Stanford, Stanford University Press.

**Ypi, L. (2007):** The Albanian Renaissance in Political Thought: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism. *East European Politics and Societies*, 21, 661-680.

**Zeydanhoğlu, W. (2008):** "The White Turkish Ma's Burden": Orientalism, Kemalism and the Kurds in Turkey. In: Rings, G., Ife, A. (eds.): *Neo-Colonial Mentalities in Contemporary Europe? Language and Discourse in the Construction of Identities*. Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 155-174.