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# The New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen*: Knowledge production and truth claims in post-colonial post-communist context

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**Albert Doja** 

University of Lille, France

## Abstract

In this paper, I show how some strands of contemporary Western scholarship in Albanian studies reproduce substantive empirical and methodological flaws and perpetuate imperial attitudes and othering stereotypes. In particular, I level a number of criticisms at what I refer to as the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen* that has colonized Albanian and more generally Southeastern European issues. I argue that disregard and patronizing of local scholars, and occasionally over-reliance on essentialized, insufficient or misinterpreted research outcomes, can be shown in the writings of various scholars that are representative of strategic othering, methodological essentialism, dubious deconstructionism and outright misinterpretation of Albanian foundational myths, national history, social structures, and cultural behavior. Arguably, this methodological imperialism reproduces a discourse of Western superiority that serves to legitimate Western political, economic and social control.

## Keywords

Politics, knowledge, Albanian studies, Balkan studies, Southeast European studies

## Introduction

Knowledge production is intertwined in complex networks of power relations. Political and ideological frameworks condition us all, and both geostrategic and individual interests underpin our acts of social research. Both anthropology and history have reckoned with their own productions of knowledge and a number of different scholars have raised forcefully the critique of the distorted ways of “imagining the Balkans” (Todorova, 1997). Although Southeast Europe is geographically and historically inseparable from Europe, in the imagination of West Europeans it is traditionally represented as a “savage” periphery (Jezernik, 2004). Other scholars remark more specifically that

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### Corresponding author:

Albert Doja, University of Lille, Clersé CNRS UMR 8019. Lille 59655, France.

Email: [albert.doja@univ-lille.fr](mailto:albert.doja@univ-lille.fr)

the critique of these essentialized representations has served to relativize and justify Serbian aggression and atrocities in former Yugoslavia, or to orientalize and subsequently dehumanize supposedly uncultured Balkan peoples as a whole (Boskovic, 2010: 88–90).

Anthropologists needed different, distant, exotic others as the basis for their explanatory models, and it seemed natural that new *primitive* others could be found on the margins of Europe, in the Balkans where *culture* did not seem an obvious attribute. In particular, the discursive elaboration of prejudiced international representations and their political implications in this area, as examined elsewhere (Abazi and Doja, 2016, 2017, 2018; Doja and Abazi, 2021), reveal that the main effect of the *mytho-logical* construction of a geographically close but conceptually distant identification of a “non-European Europe” is to represent in contrast a higher image of “European Europe” within a civilizational hierarchy.

This critique applies in general to Western scholarship in the last two centuries, and more specifically to the old imperial German-speaking tradition from the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, when *Südostforschung*, or *Balkanologie* and *Albanologie*, were typical of the *Kulturkreislehre* dominated by the ideology of racism and colonialism (Doja, 2014a, 2014b). In an unexpected twist, it has been also internalized by local Albanian studies in the twentieth century, especially folkloric people’s culture studies dominated by the ideology of nationalism and national-communism (Abazi and Doja, 2016; Doja, 2015).

Some strands of contemporary Western scholarship, not necessarily located in Austria or other German-speaking countries, can be referred to as a New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen* in current Southeast European studies, including current Albanian studies. From the inception of *Albanologie* by Austro-Hungarian and Prussian scholars in mid-nineteenth century to its adoption by native scholars in the twentieth century to its revitalization by the New German-speaking School in recent decades, Albanian studies had remained focused on what they consider to be the essential dilemmas of Albanian history. To this aim, much effort is employed to record or discard Albanian foundational myths and identify or minimize ethnotypical Albanian features in language, oral traditions, material culture, social structures, and customary laws. In all cases, expert knowledge produced in the West European cores, in particular the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen*, travel to Albanian margins, where local scholars appropriate it to produce knowledge about themselves, which reveals again asymmetrical hierarchies in the production of knowledge.

In this paper, I argue that the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen* reproduces and perpetuates, inadvertently perhaps, an inherited tradition of imperial attitudes and othering stereotypes both by their biased view of local realities and by their collusion with neo-liberal and post-imperial politics. In particular, I level a number of major criticisms at *Balkankompetent* scholars in the New German-speaking School that have colonized research on Albania and other Southeastern European countries, arguing that their constant disregard and patronizing of local scholars, and occasionally their over-reliance on the tenets of postmodern deconstructionism, often result in essentialized, insufficient, or misinterpreted research outcomes. To this aim, I seek to identify some of the pathological aspects of scholarship in the New German-speaking School, which I argue, are flawed by sensationalist exoticism, dismissive primitivism, strategic othering, methodological essentialism, dubious deconstructionism and outright misinterpretation of Albanian foundational myths, national history, social structures, and cultural behavior. I do not take issue with individuals. I rather illustrate these tendencies with reference to the writings of key authors in what I refer to as the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen*.

To date, building on earlier works on Albanian history (e.g., Bartl, 1968; Stadtmüller, 1966), *Balkankompetent* scholars like Gottfried Schramm, Joachim Matzinger, and Stefan Schumacher are

preoccupied with identifying the “correct” Albanian old language and history (Matzinger, 2016; Schramm, 1999; Schumacher and Matzinger, 2013). Similarly, Oliver-Jens Schmitt is striving to portray the “correct” historical character of Albanian national heroes (Schmitt, 2008). In addition, historical studies have developed in the recent decades a strong historical research specialization, especially at the universities in Vienna, Graz, Berlin, Munich, and Regensburg. They have produced a series of publications on the Albanian and wider Southeast European kinship structures or family systems in European comparative perspective (Kaser et al., 2003). Starting with Michael Mitterauer in Vienna, historical family research continued with Karl Kaser in Graz, followed by his students, whose research focus on the history of family in the Balkans. In the 1990s, all of them “colonized” Albania with their historical research on domestic organization, patriarchal structures, and tribal society (Eberhart and Kaser, 1995). A number of other scholars can be fairly dubbed with the *Balkankompetent* attributes of the New German-speaking School, for example, a German student like Stephanie Schwandner-Sivers, now based in Britain, has also colonized Albanian studies with her “findings” on Albanian customary practices (Schwandner-Sievers, 2004), or a French historian like Nathalie Clayer who also strives to identify the “correct” character of the Albanian nation (Clayer, 2007).

This argument is substantiated by what could be termed the methodological opportunity of a primary lived experience that has made it possible to monitor more closely the substance and meaning of the scholarly discourse and the politics of knowledge production in Albanian studies. I consider myself as a member of the young generation of scholars who used to work under political pressure as a junior researcher in Albania, where I gained a primary lived experience on the politics of knowledge under the communist regime, and eventually I rebelled against it. After a consequent full training in modern anthropology and significant experience working within western academia, I provided a critical examination of the folkloric archaism of people’s culture studies in Albania from “an insider/outsider perspective” (Doja, 2015). In addition, a new experiential intersubjectivity is gained from the primary lived experience substantiated in a strong record of research results and publications internationally recognized and in the cumulative expertise/experience obtained in international academia. This makes it possible to provide a critical examination and substantiate the politics of knowledge production once again from an insider/outsider perspective.

In the first section, I situate the *Balkankompetenzen* of the New German-speaking School in the wider context of mutually challenged and engendered hierarchies of knowledge between mainstream and local scholarship, which might be even more diverse and contentious. In the second section, I argue that the exclusionary practices of *Balkankompetent* scholars result in substantive empirical and methodological flaws in their own research as they deal with Albanian issues. In the third section, I show in more detail how *Balkankompetent* substantive flaws and ideological bias become instrumental to misrepresent Albanian history and foundational myths, which result in a strategic othering of Albanian history, language, religion, culture, and society. The subsequent sections illustrate, respectively, the reification of Albanian national identity as a Muslim majority in Europe and the misrepresentation of Albanian family structures and cultural behaviors that are reduced to archaic pre-modern customary practices and specific antiquated mentalities. In the final section, I conclude with remarks on methodological imperialism and the implications for further awareness. I argue in particular that the effect of *Balkankompetent* knowledge produced by the New German-speaking School on the supposed social, political, economic, and cultural long-term backwardness of Southeast European societies, particularly Albania, is to demonstrate Western superiority and provide a legitimate basis for Western politicians, bureaucrats, and developers to enforce political, economic, and social control.

## Hierarchies of knowledge and strategic othering

Anthropologists have often criticized Western representations of the other, but hegemonic classifications and some exoticizing and patronizing may still persist amongst scholars who live in the West and work on the post-socialist East. A hierarchical order of scholars replicates Cold War stereotypes and supra-colonial patterns of knowledge production, with the consequence that long-lasting paradigm shifts and actual practices triggered by the transnationalization of scholarship are ignored. Today relatively few native social anthropologists live and work in the post-communist countries, but they continue to be overlooked and not taken as equals by their West European and North American colleagues (Buchowski, 2004; Skalnik, 2002). Similar problems were faced by their British colleagues who worked outside Europe and belatedly realized that they were or were seen as part and parcel of colonialism and imperialism (Asad, 1973; Stocking, 1991). In the Balkans, the lasting effects of a similar exoticizing and patronizing Mediterranean ethnology, worked out mainly by British anthropologists, has also been heavily criticized for ignoring local scholars, especially in the case of Greece (Gefou-Madianou, 1993). It can be argued that these problems now afflict the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen*. Widespread failures to engage with native Albanian scholarship render the accounts of scholars working in this school both morally and analytically questionable, as it is difficult to defend exclusionary academic practices in the twenty-first century.

When local languages rather than mainstream imperial languages serve the goals of academic publishing, this is a proud assertion of cultural independence. However, it can also be a means of self-exclusion, which creates a two-tier system in which local scholars tend to write in isolation from their foreign counterparts, who rarely cite the work of local scholars except when it is published in English or French.<sup>1</sup> Anthropologists are supposed to have a creditable record of respecting local knowledge. This is recognized by senior western anthropologists like Chris Hann or Katherine Verdery, who share “a self-criticism” of their “arrogant and naïve disdain” for native studies in their own early field experiences in communist-ruled Europe. Especially as they may once have been used to “search for a neat pre-emptive sociological explanation for the various viewpoints articulated by their critics,” following a “simple insider/outsider classification” of the biographies of the participants in academic debates, along eastern/western lines, before “turning to the details of their comments” (Hann, 2007).

The most dangerous implications of a posture that excludes the work of local scholars go well beyond problems of mutual understanding and communication. Often, as in the case of Eastern Europe, local languages correspond to longstanding and fully developed learned traditions to which a large part of the anthropological reading public has access. As quoting and citing are the basic stuff of academic recognition in our globalized academic world, it becomes legitimate to question whether citation failures can amount to a tool for silencing other academic traditions (Pina-Cabral, 2005: 124). This culminates in the refusal of Western anthropologists to consult their Eastern counterparts while conducting fieldwork in their countries. As suggested in a debate between Chris Hahn and Michal Buchowski, it would be inconceivable for western scholars to “learn anything about doing anthropology from backward socialist academics,” since they suppose their nationalist and positivist paradigm is simply outdated (Hann, 2007: 21).

An even more exclusionary attitude is reflected in the *Balkankompetent* practices of the New German-speaking School towards Albanian scholars, which may be taken as a particularly egregious illustration of a broader trend in citation practices. In a Vienna meeting sponsored by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, mainly German and Austrian *Balkankompetent* scholars gathered together with only “scholars who do not originate themselves from the region” to discuss the state of

Albanian historiography (Schmitt, 2009). As Oliver-Jens Schmitt provided in convening Vienna conference, the goal is “to create a solid basis for a future comprehensive discussion with Albanian scholars,” but he actually did the opposite as he confirmed that “a look from the outside was deliberately chosen” that should “exclude Albanian scholars” from such meetings and research projects (Schmitt, 2009: 9).

To take another example, a 4-year postdoctoral position starting February 2021 within the framework of a FWF project on “the linguistic history of place-names in Albania” (P.33706-G) was advertised on the EURAXESS site by the Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. According to the job description, the applicant must have earned a PhD degree in historical linguistics (focus on South Slavic languages), together with a general interest in toponymy and in the (linguistic) history of the Balkans. However, for a research project focused on Albanian onomastics, only a profound knowledge of German, English, and South Slavic languages is required, while knowledge of Albanian language and Albanian linguistic history is not expected for the application phase but “will be acquired during the runtime of the project.”<sup>2</sup> It is nonetheless bizarre to be willing to employ someone to study Albanian linguistic history without knowledge of Albanian language. As it seems, *Balkankompetent* experts of the New German-speaking School may a priori and implicitly think they are exclusively qualified to the task.

In the first case, the total exclusion of each and every respected Albanian historian from a workshop on Albanian history is puzzling. Similarly, in the second case, undermining a core expertise in Albanian language for a research project in Albanian linguistics has an exclusionary effect for promising Albanian linguists. The concern that this might indicate a pattern is reinforced by Schmitt’s opinion that Albanian scholars are “politicized to the highest degree” and their dominant patterns are “strongly influenced by the National-Stalinist ideology of Enver Hoxha dictatorship,” which must “explain the continuity of the old ways of interpretation even after the overthrow of communism.” He also believes that Albanian academic journals are “the best replication of this mental rigidity” as they “do not meet even the minimum quality standards.” Thereby “he hoped that a deliberate outside approach would have the advantage of avoiding the emotional debate and the significant politicization of history and culture in current Albanian studies,” which as he claimed, could “contribute to professional and fact-oriented scientific discussions” (Schmitt, 2009: 9).

It is striking to notice how Schmitt makes a gross generalization while maintaining a tone of authority and condescension towards both senior and young Albanian scholars, including his disparaging of an emblematic Albanian historian like Aleks Buda (Schmidt, 2005). Excluding Albanian historians and linguists from the academic discussion of Albanian history and language, or considering Albanian colleagues as unworthy at the task, is no doubt a suspicious academic practice that could rather be argued to reflect an exclusionary colonial logic. Ironically, Schmitt and his associates adopt the dichotomous way of thinking that is allegedly associated with traditional Albanian social structures and emphasized during socialism (Schwandner-Sievers, 1995), according to which it was not uncommon for scholars to be classified under the categories of natives and aliens or friends and foes.

Proficient Albanian-born scholars like other Central and East European colleagues are often disregarded in international scholarship, and expected to provide at best exegeses and footnotes to Western theorizing. As it often happens with *Balkankompetent* scholars in the New German-speaking School, the ethnic origin of local scholars often elicits condescending criticisms (e.g., Schramm, 1999), a refusal to discuss any theoretical or methodological argument with Albanian scholars (Schmitt, 2009), or as we will see below, a tendency to ignore their contributions (e.g., Clayer, 2007; Schmitt, 2008). They may also indulge in misinterpretation of arguments behind a



cloudy discourse on the so-called “international” scholarship that is usually produced by North American and West European scholarship, if not specifically by the international *Balkankompetent* experts of the New German-speaking School, and to which Albanian scholars must be taught (e.g., Schwandner-Sievers, 2009).

## Exclusionary practices and substantive flaws

The pattern of exclusion identified in the previous section brings me to discuss in some depth a number of *Balkankompetent* authors of the New German-speaking School in order to show how ignoring Albanian scholarship may undermine their own work. After the publication of a monograph on Skanderbeg (Schmitt, 2008), Oliver Jens Schmitt was reviled in Albanian media and scholarship (e.g., Ndreca, 2008; Myftaraj, 2009), which incidentally rooted his contemptuous attitude in Prussian megalomania, typical of the disparaging views of imperial German-speaking writers and historians (Frashëri, 2009). Nevertheless, Schmitt was mostly denounced for disregarding works made available earlier in print and reprint by leading Albanian historians (e.g., Frashëri, 2002; Plasari, 2010; Xhufi, 2019).

In addition, it was argued that Schmitt’s main assumptions are taken from the eighteenth-century British historian Edward Gibbon.<sup>3</sup> This link was denied in a recent interview for an Albanian TV Channel, where Schmitt simply said he had not read Gibbon’s work. During the interview he was also asked whether he had properly read Skanderbeg’s political project. Schmitt stated that he does “not agree with the interpretations of communist historiography” and he feels very sorry that “a debate took place in which many people, including very good historians, did not read his book at all,” but make “strange remarks, not very collegial and unnecessarily of a low level,” being “more worried whether as a foreign author he was paid by another country.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, he countered with ad hominem attacks on people’s ethnic origin in a local country supposed to be still dominated by backward ideology.

Karl Kaser provides another illustration of this pattern, as he responded to criticisms by “an author of Albanian origin,” complaining that his heuristic procedure is described as a savant effort to stereotype Albanian population by “anecdotic typical models” (Kaser, 2014: 100). He quotes incorrectly, however, for these are not typical but “anecdotic typological models” that claim analytical value as a simple hypothesis at a high level of aggregation (Doja, 2010b: 352). Kaser appears concerned at seeing his own typological models lined up with the old culturalist legacy of the German *Kulturhistorische* tradition, the Viennese anthropogeographic *Kulturkreislehre*, and the Albanian national-communist scholarship, which worked in much the same way. He claims that this line of critique, “of course, is pure invention” (Kaser, 2014: 100). However, when the “author of Albanian origin” used a research project conducted by the very same Kaser, he “quotes parts of my [Kaser’s] published texts selectively and ‘proves’ my [Kaser’s] alleged errors by other texts of mine [Kaser’s], which he quotes correctly” (Kaser, 2014: 100). Apparently, “the author of Albanian origin” is principally blamed for his Albanian origin. The problem here is that Kaser acknowledged that his own published texts have been quoted correctly by his Albanian critic, so one may also reasonably assume that the results of Kaser’s research may therefore prove, without brackets, his own errors. The point being made is that when “anecdotic typological models” are taken as primary sources of academic interpretation, the problem is not with the selected research data but with the conclusions drawn from them.

Southeast European scholars have systematically criticized Kaser and his interpretations of family history and family systems in the Balkans. Well-known Bulgarian-born historian Maria Todorova leveled first a criticism of the complex household of the *zadruga* type (Todorova, 1990),

which she generalized later on more theoretical levels (Todorova, 2006). Other Southeast European scholars like Croatian-born anthropologist Jasna Capo criticized further German and Austrian interpretations of family systems in the Balkans (Capo-Zmegac, 1996; Hristov, 2014). Nonetheless, Kaser and other prominent *Balkankompetent* scholars in the New German-speaking School, including Kaser's students like Ulf Brunnbauer now in Regensburg and Hannes Grandits now in Berlin, have disregarded these criticisms.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime, Brunnbauer and Grandits, backed by the exclusionary practices of the New German-speaking School, have become established as *Balkankompetent* "experts" of historical research on domestic organization in Bulgaria and in former Yugoslavia, respectively.

A similar, albeit inversed, pattern can be said of French historian Nathalie Clayer, who follows a tradition initiated by Alexandre Popovic in Paris, which reproduces an apologetic discourse or aims at revealing the supposed essence of a "Balkan Islam" (Popovic, 1986). In the footsteps of her mentor and "spiritual guide" as she called him, Clayer is an indefatigable writer in her devoted and commendable quest to document, catalogue, and describe thoroughly any index she can sort out in the category of Islam among the Albanians. She has engaged in a single-handed compilation of data on Muslim enclaves and Muslim brotherhoods in Albania and adjacent areas (Clayer, 1990, 1994), followed by a larger focus on the current situation of the historical Muslim converted populations in Southeastern Europe (Bougarel and Clayer, 2001; Clayer and Xavier, 2013). In particular, her research aims at representing the origins of Albanian nationalism and the construction of Albanian nation as a specific emanation of Bektashi Islam (Clayer, 1992), mainly along a development worked out under the influence of supposed Bektashi activists like Naim Frashëri and his brothers (Clayer, 2007: 475). Taking over insights from German scholars (Bartl, 1968), and lining with a broader trend (Gawrych, 2006), Clayer construed Albanian nationalism as the exclusive offspring of a reconstructed Muslim majority in Europe (Clayer, 2007).

This narrative overlooks or disparages Albanian historians of Albanian nationalism (Buda et al., 1959; Pollo et al., 1974; Skendi, 1967), as tinged with the ideologies of "national awakening" and "class struggle" (Clayer, 2007: 10–11). Incidentally, she does never acknowledge her collegial exchanges with Albanian-born fellow students at EHESS Paris on the historical confrontation of Albanian society with Islam (Doja, 1993). More importantly, her account ignores the critical examination by Albanian scholars of relevant historical, cultural, linguistic, religious, and local variations (Doja, 1998), including analyses of the invention and construction of Albanian historical and cultural heritage (Doja, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a), or the instrumentality of ethnic politics and the historical reconstruction of identities in multi-religious Albania (Doja, 2000b). Even closer to issues at her hand, Clayer ignores the historical development of Bektashism as examined by Albanian-born scholars in relation to the political instrumentality of Bektashi religious structure within a general ideological cultural system (Doja, 2006c), whether in Ottoman Anatolia and contemporary Turkey (Doja, 2006a), or in interwar and post-communist Albania (Doja, 2006b).

The relationship between the expansion of Bektashi Muslims in Albania and the development of Albanian nationalism within Albanian Bektashis is complex, and Clayer recognizes that Bektashism is often essentialized as a liberal and humanistic religion in opposition to Sunni Islam linked to fanaticism and despotism. We should certainly be wary of such essentializations, but Clayer remains surprisingly uninterested in the nature of Bektashism as a mystical and heterodox order within Islam. Albanian-born scholars had already examined the complex mechanisms that make it possible for social values, religious beliefs, and political ideologies to meet together in relation to the political structures of society (Doja, 2000c), together with the primarily conservative role of the preservation and the transmission of spiritual knowledge (Doja, 2006c), and its instrumental use for mobilizing a cultural movement towards nationalism (Doja, 2000b). In particular, Clayer does not consider the



possibility that the religious otherness of Bektashism compared to Sunni Islam could have been transformed into a cultural and political otherness (Doja, 2006a, 2006b).

Had she engaged more fully with this body of scholarship, Clayer could have realized that even the supposed elective affinity of Naim Frashëri to religion and specifically to Bektashism in the course of nineteenth-century Albanian nationalism may be better uncovered and articulated. Rather, along with most area experts in the standard tradition of research on Bektashism (e.g., Duijzings, 2000: 157–175),<sup>6</sup> there is a failure to understand that Albanian national activists like Frashëri did not intend so much to make a national myth of Bektashism or to provide Albanians with a unique religion. While Frashëri did indeed have a religious cast of thought, Albanian-born scholars have demonstrated that Frashëri's religious thinking went far beyond Bektashism in its heterodoxy, being a kind of liberation theology and pantheism that generated an all-inclusive attitude to Albanian identity, not one limited in any special way to Bektashism (Abazi and Doja, 2013; Doja, 2003, 2012). Frashëri's intention was to forcefully appeal for union while playing down any manifest religious division or social and cultural differentiation among Albanians, thus making nationalist ideas acceptable both to Albanian Bektashi and to Albanians of whatever religious affiliation.

Again, ignoring Albanian scholars is a consolidated pattern. In her recent book, Clayer refers to an amateur writer on "Albanian students in Austria" to argue about Albanian ecclesiastical history (Clayer, 2007: 57). Despite the merits of this writer in other respects, one might expect wider referencing when it comes to the ecclesial history of Albania, including Albanian and other scholars who have developed research exploring the issues at hand. As it appears, her arguments are often contradicted by various Albanian-born scholars, who are simply ignored, without entering into any debate.

Even more oddly, in a depiction reportedly from more senior *Balkankompetent* scholars, and stated upfront even in the title of her essay, Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers portrayed a whole generation of Albanian scholars as "virgins in a whorehouse," while assuming that local scholars treat international *Balkankompetent* scholars as "elephants in a porcelain shop" (Schwandner-Sievers, 2009). The implication was that besides the high-level status and unconditional respect they might enjoy because of the local institutions to which they are affiliated, Albanian scholars are deemed essentially incapable to comply with the established expectations of the discipline. She refers clearly to what is understood as complex theories applied in general by international scholars. More specifically, she has in mind the new fashionable international theories of critical literalism, postmodern deconstructionism, and social constructivism.

This might have been the case, as I showed elsewhere, with the older generation of scholars working in the folkloric-ethnographic studies largely inspired from the traditions of old German-speaking *Volkskunde* and Soviet *etnografiya* (Abazi and Doja, 2016; Doja, 2013a, 2015). It appears that Schwandner-Sievers sustains an ethnocentric bias in considering that some scholars rather than others can only beat some reserved paths. In a rush to display an "international" slant on the history of ideas and theories, there is a failure to correctly understand the current theoretical and epistemological debates in general anthropology, and the role of Albanian scholars in these debates. Their historical reconstruction of identities in multi-religious Albania (Doja, 2000b) or their "eloquent refutation" of Derrida's poststructuralist critique (Doja, 2006d) are recognized, but their substantive contributions are simply read as a "resurfacing of old paradigms clothed in the language of international theories" (Schwandner-Sievers, 2009: 207). Above all, she failed to acknowledge the interactionist and constructivist approach used for analyzing the instrumentality of religious shifting, since Albanian identity and cohesion are not postulated for pre-national periods and have nothing to do with later national interests, as she claims, but they are argued as action strategies for the social organization of cultural and religious similarities and differences (Doja, 2000b), better

known in anthropology as ethnic boundary processes (Barth, 1969). A tendency is again in evidence here towards patronizing Albanian-born scholars with fashionable “international theories,” and failing to take into account how they might have examined the genealogies of poststructuralist takes (Doja, 2006d) that have misrepresented actual theoretical contributions of structural anthropology to general knowledge (See, for instance, Doja, 2005b, 2006f, 2006e, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a, 2018, 2019b, 2020; Doja et al., 2021; Doja and Abazi, 2021; Santucci et al., 2020). As part of a wider pattern of international scholarship, the tendency of *Balkankompetent* experts of the New German-speaking School to overlook or ignore Albanian scholars in academic debates may result from a simple insider/outsider classification of their biographies along eastern/western lines. As a result, they fail to engage with the serious findings triggered by the transnationalization of scholarship. Just as they often denounce native scholars of being obsessed with ethnic Albanian historical continuity and national identity, *Balkankompetent* scholars are obsessed in their own turn with deconstructing anything about modernity, especially its communist variant, in joint efforts to demystify Albanian national symbols and foundational myths (Schmitt, 2009; Schwandner-Sievers and Fischer, 2002). Eventually, their arguments seem to consist in clothing the essentialist view of local scholars with a postmodernist, deconstructionist Western view, which they replace with an even deeper essentialist, yet even more elusive take on Albanian history and national identity.

Exclusionary arguments are not only morally suspect and detrimental both to mutual understanding and to the advancement of knowledge, but in this case, they are also empirically wrong. Actually, they are in sharp contrast with a number of solid anthropological studies that address the ideological foundations and political practices of scholarly production in East and Southeast Europe, which has been rising steadily since the 1990s. It is striking how Schmitt and his associates could have ignored a series of conferences organized very close to their home institutions and their collegiate interests. In these conferences convened by Chris Hann at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle/Saale (Boskovic and Hann, 2013; Hann, 2007; Mihailescu et al., 2008; Mühlfried and Sokolovskiy, 2011), mainly “scholars who do originate themselves from the region,” including myself (Doja, 2013a), gathered together with their German and Austrian colleagues to discuss the major role played by ideology, either nationalist or communist, in the formation and development of ethnography, ethnology, folkloristics, and social anthropology in many East and Southeast European countries. Similarly, several collected volumes offer “an anthropological perspective from home” to the heated debates between Western and native anthropologists disputing the current hierarchies of knowledge in the anthropology of East European post-socialism (e.g., Kurti and Skalník, 2009).

These scholars have played a significant role in establishing social anthropology in East European countries and, their conversations with Western scholars might have not led to a consensus, but they have facilitated a better understanding of different points of view, situating global scholarship in wider contexts and recognizing the extraordinary plurality of anthropological knowledge. The factors that hinder dialogue between insiders and outsiders should not be underestimated, but as Chris Hann remarked in his introductory chapter, the insider/outsider divide is too crude to capture the realities of ongoing exchanges between West and Southeast European scholars (Boskovic and Hann, 2013: 1–28). In recent decades, a willingness to explore common anthropological interests and sensitivities seems preferable to aggressive posturing at boundary markers.

Surely, the national-communist ideological bias of native ethnography in East and Southeast countries and its implications for contemporary scholarship should not be underestimated, and have been well criticized elsewhere, especially with regards to Albania (Abazi and Doja, 2016).

However, many native ethnographers in East and Southeast European countries, including Albania, do take account of other traditions, inside and outside their own countries, and they present their research results at international conferences. They may organize their field research differently, but they do not merit the Western disdain they so often receive, as happened specifically in Vienna gathering and with the New German-speaking School more systematically (Schwandner-Sievers, 2009; Schmitt, 2009). Now students may receive good teaching at home, such that they are well informed about the latest major academic trends elsewhere, which makes it no longer clear what advantages the outsider may have. As the former political constraints no longer apply, native scholars are no longer obliged to refrain from studying or remain silent on any topics and methods, while easy access to countries and theories has resulted in greater dialogue between insiders and outsiders.

At least in anthropology, significant convergence has occurred in recent decades as East and Southeast European scholars have engaged increasingly with the same bodies of theory as those used in the West (Boskovic and Hann, 2013: 23–24). Often these scholars have succeeded in bridging the insider/outsider divide and, like myself, are perhaps difficult to qualify as either “local” or “international” because of their also being proficient in West European academia. Similarly, the great majority of Western anthropologists seek to understand East and Southeast European “native points of view,” many learn local languages to a very high standard, some develop deep empathy for those they document, and some interact generously with native ethnographers.

In contrast, *Balkankompetent* scholars in the New German-speaking School are characterized by a limited anthropological sensibility and a blatant tendency to perpetuate the old German-speaking tradition of colonizing historical research on Southeast Europe, including Albania. In this attitude, they transform Westernism into an important political and epistemological category, as they somehow suppose themselves to have a privileged insight into how things are, and how they should be, in this part of Europe. In addition, Southeast European scholarship is perceived to be guilty of ideological bias, and as such cannot be relevant. In practice, the implication is that any criticism from local scholars is unacceptable, as if Western location were to provide them a position of intellectual and moral superiority and an assertion of immediate access to the truth.

This was the common trend in the second half of nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century when imperial *Albanologie* was founded almost exclusively by a generation of German-speaking writers (Doja, 2014a). Much the same, it seems that *Balkankompetent* scholars in the New German-speaking School are now taking a new lead in a joint effort to repair what they believe are the culturalist mistakes of previous studies or the nationalist presumptions of local scholars. In particular, even though they consider still important the ethnic origin of scholarship (Schmitt, 2009), they claim to be paying more attention to a Southeast European-wide dimension that must not incorporate modern ethno-national schemes. Essentially, they strive to debunk native perceptions of ethnogenesis, cultural symbols, national history, and social structures, to which I now turn.

## Misrepresentation of Albanian history and foundational myths

The methods and results of native Albanian research related to the issue of Albanian ethnogenesis and history have already been systematically subjected to a detailed critique by *Balkankompetent* scholars, including inquiries into medieval sources, prosopography of the national movement, and the roots of the communist regime (Bartl, 1995; Faensen, 1980; Tönnies, 1980). An increasing number of critical approaches have also reckoned with the production of knowledge by the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen* in writing history and anthropology more

generally as in Southeast European and Albanian studies in particular Fischer, 2009; Gingrich, 1998; Gostentschnigg, 2018; Gruber, 1998; Hemming, 2012; Promitzer, 2014). However, *Balkankompetent* scholars in the New German-speaking School remain preoccupied with identifying the “correct” Albanian old language and history end up with a similar search for origins.

Whether hazy hypotheses or revealed truth, they may start the discussion anew, but use old and new arguments that are already condemned for their deployment against Albanian and for pro Slavic nationalistic purposes (Gostentschnigg, 2018: 100–127). Such endless search for origins seems unable to move away from the useless obsession with the problem of ethnogenesis. They notoriously introduce a protohistoric concept of Albanians being descended from “Proto-Albanians” (Matzinger, 2009), just as more or less humans descended from monkeys, or they consider “languages like a bacterium that splits up in two and then splits up in two again and when you have 32 bacteria in the end, they are all the same.”<sup>7</sup> In so doing, they remain far away from historically approaching political dynamic processes within actual groups and communities.

A case in point is a book arguing against the autochthony and Illyrian character of the Albanians, trying to prove their immigration from the Central Balkans into their current Western settlements probably at the beginning of ninth century (Schramm, 1999). The new hypotheses are characterized by a careful historical evaluation of philological sources, especially toponymical data shedding light on the periods of Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages for which there are only a few sources. In fact, the data accumulated by Gottfried Schramm only looks convincing, but there is no substantiated evidence, as rich archaeological data for the same periods are left out (see Anamali, 1982). Moreover, as his critics indicate, the systematic use of qualifications such as “barbarian language” or “barbarous tribes” that permeate the book, referring to everything non-Roman, non-Greek, or non-Slavic, may seem inconsiderate for an end-of-twentieth-century historian, and may at least make any reader feel uncomfortable (Gostentschnigg, 2018: 120). One is tempted to remind Schramm and his associates in the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen* that “the barbarian is first and foremost the one who believes in barbarism” (Lévi-Strauss, 1952: 12).

Another disputer of Albanian autochthony and Illyrian-Albanian continuity is Austrian linguist Joachim Matzinger, who argues that Albanian language is not affiliated to the ancient Illyrian or to any other known language in the ancient Balkans. His assumptions are based on analyses of grammar and word formation of the old Albanian language in its documented phases in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Matzinger, 2016; Schumacher and Matzinger, 2013), from which he infers that Albanian morphology is independent of Indo-European heritage. He thereby concludes that the prehistorical morphological system of Albanian language must have been lost at a given time. Following the same reasoning, he elaborates further his assumptions against Albanian autochthony, which also exclude from the equation of Illyrian-Albanian continuity the connection with the ancient Messapian language in Salento (Matzinger, 2019), even though what is known of the Messapian is assumed to be related to the undocumented Illyrian and there is clear evidence of Albanian-Messapian isoglosses. A leading Albanian linguist like Eqrem Çabej already analyzed a number of place names known since antiquity in present-day Albania and concluded that the form of these names evolved according to the phonetic rules of Albanian language, which supports the assumption that they are always pronounced by Albanian-speakers from early antiquity to present days (Çabej, 1961, 1974). This assumption has been criticized before, but in the critical analyses of the Austrian linguist there is nothing qualitatively new.

Confronted with the impossibility to refute with linguistic arguments the origin of Albanian language from the Illyrian or from any other imagined language in the ancient Balkans, Matzinger rather wields Ockham’s razor and assumes that Albanian is derived from quite another, unknowable, phantom “proto-language” (Matzinger, 2009). While there is no need to question the integrity of his

historical-linguistic analyses, there is a potential contradiction between his own assertions. On the one hand, he admits that “in contrast with the Messapians, the Illyrians *proprie dicti* did actually leave no trace of their language” and that with the exception of a few vestiges of onomastics, “there is not any single data of the historical phonology of Illyrian language, which would allow an analysis of its historical development” (Matzinger, 2015: 61). On the other hand, he posits that the linguistic autonomy of the Albanian “shows an insurmountable difference between the phonological systems of the Illyrian and the Proto-Albanian, which prevents absolutely to assume an origin of the Albanian from the Illyrian” (Matzinger, 2015: 63).

These assumptions are controversial also in matters of methodology. While Albanian autochthony might be worthy of historical investigation, this cannot be a linguistic but a population issue, which cannot be investigated by means of the external history of ancient language, simply because we cannot reasonably assume that modern Albanian is a thorough continuation of the proto-language that might have been wholly spoken by the predecessors of Albanians. As criticized in Albanian media, Matzinger takes Greek and Latin transcripts of Illyrian place names as if they were pictures of their pronunciation, which cannot allow concluding about their phonetic evolution from proto-Albanian to modern Albanian speech.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, the problem with the Illyrian theory of Albanian origin, in Popper’s sense, is that it cannot be scientifically verified nor falsified simply because Illyrian linguistic data inherited from antiquity are insufficient for general conclusions. In either case, promoting or rejecting Illyrian-Albanian continuity or Albanian autochthony is mainly based on ideological and mythological criteria.

In rejecting Illyrian-Albanian continuity or Albanian autochthony, Matzinger and his *Balkan-kompetent* associates in the New German-speaking School may be eager to claim a “neutral approach to the origin of Albanians and Albanian language with the help of a historical linguistics that is only committed to linguistic data and independent of any political motivation,” constantly stressing “the importance that from linguistic findings no territorial claims whatsoever must be derived in the present,” that “each language data is interpreted in a neutral way and regardless of national political sensitivities,” or that “the politicization of these findings from both ethical and scientific points of view is in all respects inappropriate and inadmissible” (Matzinger, 2009: 35). Remarkably, the discourse reproduces the same authoritarian and demagogic rhetoric that is shown elsewhere to be practiced by national-communist political leaders and scholars obsessed with rather promoting Illyrian-Albanian continuity and Albanian autochthony (Abazi and Doja, 2016; Doja, 2015).

Another instance of the broader demagogic pattern of the New German-speaking School is Schmitt’s monograph on Skanderbeg, the Albanian national hero, where he seeks to prove Skanderbeg’s supposed non-Albanian origin (Schmitt, 2008). He emphasizes that ethnicity did not matter, that accurate sources are missing, and that the epoch was turbulent, but despite this objective uncertainty, and much in line with native Albanian scholars that he so often denounces of being obsessed with proving ethnic Albanian historical continuity, he is also obsessed with searching Slavic origins for Skanderbeg, following a general pattern of the New German-speaking School to unpick Albanian national history and foundational myths.<sup>9</sup>

Schmitt’s disregard of the mainstream tradition of historical studies on Skanderbeg and his era is claimed to have led to both methodological and ideological bias (Frashëri, 2009). Actually, almost half of the data cited in Schmitt’s book are taken from the selection of sources by the Serbian historian Jovan Radonic, of whom he himself noted in passim that was “a representative of Serbian nationalism” (Schmitt, 2009: 490). In particular, his systematic rendering of Skanderbeg’s father and other Albanians with Slavicized names is not supported by any historical evidence but seems to be due to this over-reliance on Serbian literature (Ndreca, 2008). In addition, as noted above,



Schmitt's main assumptions appear to follow the well-known skepticism of eighteenth-century British historian Edward Gibbon towards Skanderbeg. The classic British historian suspected Skanderbeg of "revenge" and accused him of "betrayal," "forswearing," and "base dissimulation," while debased his comrades-in-arms as "unhappy brethren."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, this account seems to have already written, some 130 years earlier, the perfect "abstract" for Schmitt's *Skanderbeg*.

The parallel with Gibbon shows the extent to which age-worn stereotypes underpin Schmitt's explanatory framework, which are shown in his use of forged documents that become crucial for key interpretations. His main argument is based on a report by Milanese diplomats that Schmitt takes as if these were the actual words of Skanderbeg's envoy to Pope Nicholas-V in January 1454. Here, the diplomats clearly mix the facts with their own interpretation.<sup>11</sup> A critical source analysis, also forcefully addressed in Albanian media (Myftaraj, 2009), should have been in order here to reveal the role of disinformation and political intrigues between the Italian city-states. In the context of the Wars in Lombardy between the Republic of Venice and the Duchy of Milan and their respective allies, which lasted from 1423 to 1454, Skanderbeg was a key Venetian and Neapolitan ally, but from the Milanese point of view, he was a traitor and enemy. Understandably, in January 1454, only 3 months before the signing of the Peace Treaty of Lodi, Milan aimed to secure more concessions in the peace negotiations,<sup>12</sup> weaken the position of Venice by denigrating its allies including Skanderbeg, and prevent a Christian crusade against the Ottomans, which would rely on the Venetian fleet for the movement of armies.

There is no document in the Vatican Archives to corroborate the information reported by Milanese diplomats, and for obvious logical reasons, it is unlikely that something like the last sentence reproduced from this report could have been said or heard before Pope Nicholas-V. At that time, the Papal State was committed to uniting Italian city-states and other European powers in a crusade against the Ottoman advancement into the West and Skanderbeg was on the first line to confront Ottoman threats.<sup>13</sup> The main request made by the Albanian ambassador on Skanderbeg's behalf was to accelerate preparations for the European Christian forces to join his army in Albania. The Albanian envoy could by no means have told the Pope that Skanderbeg was waging war, as Milanese diplomats reported, "not out of faith, because he is still unfaithful, but for personal hatred against the Turk,"<sup>14</sup> in other words, Schmitt seems to suggest, for typically Albanian personal revenge!

Clearly, the source from the Milanese Archives used by Schmitt is typical of diplomatic disinformation, similar to what we know on a larger scale from the intelligent services of modern states and the fake news of contemporary media. Nevertheless, its uncritical use reinforces Orientalizing and Balkanizing stereotypes of the purported Albanian tribal laws and blood feuds in representing a fifteenth-century character. This distorts the historical portrayal of the Albanian national hero by mixing history with present-day ethnicized pigeonholes.

Schmitt's ethnicized projection of both Albanian history and Albanian scholarship is typical of the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen*. Schwandner-Sievers was among the first Western anthropologists to write on Albanian customary practices in the 1990s, initially in German language, and she also served from 1997 to 2003 as the first Nash Fellow for Albanian Studies at SSEES University College London. In this capacity, she was among the first scholars to revitalize academic interest in Albanian issues (Schwandner-Sievers and Fischer, 2002). In contrast with more anthropologically sensitive approaches that address the historical and political complexity of local practice and oral discourse (e.g., (Resta, 2002; Voell, 2004), Schwandner-Sievers's work was instrumental in promoting narratives of sensationalist exoticism and dismissive primitivism by which the so-called reemergence of Albanian customary practices came to occupy Western imagination in the 1990s.



In particular, Schwandner-Sievers persists in describing the reemergence of the customary law frequently and stereotypically subsumed under the Ottoman term of *Kanun*, as a “magic word,” referred to legitimize violence in post-communist Albania (Schwandner-Sievers, 1999: 134). This misses the point of the wider phenomenon, and she may even typify the practice of physical violence and blood-feud killing as simply deriving from “aggressive male behavior” (Schwandner-Sievers, 1999: 140). Again, she strives to “demonstrate that identity-constitutive recourse to specific pasts, particularly to tropes of pre-communist north-Albanian customary law,” have shaped Albanian ideas and power relations to “justify social and political exclusion and inclusion as well as practices of resistance and subversion.”<sup>15</sup>

There is certainly much to blame in national-communist Albanian studies and historiography, and thorough critiques are already provided elsewhere by Albanian-born scholars (Abazi and Doja, 2016). In particular, even though the treatment of customary practices remains descriptivist, historicist, and survivalist in much of native Albanian scholarship, Albanian anthropologists have also provided thorough critiques on contemporary invocations of customary practices and blood feud in post-communist Albania (Bardhoshi, 2012; Doja, 2011). They view it as a separate response, recalling pre-established norms in renewed processes and logics, in order to respond to current social issues that relate to state imposed judicial inefficiencies, endemic corruption, and the ongoing transformation from a totalitarian communist dictatorship into a market-oriented democratic system.

However, *Balkankompetent* experts in the New German-speaking School largely ignore these works and persist in ideological prejudice. The tendentious readings of Albanian history, culture and society by *Balkankompetent* scholars mystify Albanian historical characters (Schmitt, 2008), reify Albanian family structures (Kaser, 2000), refuse to recognize the trans-religious construction of Albanian identity as it is constructed since the nineteenth-century nationalism (Clayer, 2007), including the logics of social and cultural transformations in the political conditions of post-communist Albania (Kaser, 2014; Schwandner-Sievers, 2004). There is often an evocation of exoticized primitivism, of a Muslim Other in the Balkans, emphasizing the exclusive “birth of a nation of Muslim majority in Europe” (Clayer, 2007), which reinstates Islamism and Ottomanism in Albania and the Balkans anew, to which I turn in the next section.

## Reification of a nation of Muslim majority in Europe

Like many other experts who can be dubbed with the attributes of the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen*, Clayer criticizes native Albanian scholars for being obsessed with reconstructing Albanian identity in historical imagination out of nationalist mythology. This is accompanied, however, by an obsession with framing Albanian nationalism as a Muslim movement, or “nation of Muslim majority in Europe” (Clayer, 2007). Religious division was a real threat to Albanian unity, and Albanian activists had no choice but to build a national identity on grounds other than religion. Classical works of Albanian historiography have already highlighted the regional and confessional disparities that almost thwarted the development of Albanian nationalism (Skendi, 1967). By contrast, *Balkankompetent* scholars like Clayer unduly overestimate local, social, political, cultural, dialectal, and religious diversity, which may be more or less observed anywhere else, or the multiplicity and fluidity of the mechanisms of identification, which prevail absolutely everywhere.

Clayer is aware that a great number of Albanian Muslims, despite their “divided loyalty” (Skendi, 1967: 469–470), willingly severed links with the Muslim Ottoman Empire. However, to demonstrate the apparently essential role that religion is supposed to have played in Albanian culture, society, and history, she anachronistically targets the rhetoric of communist, nationalist, or

religious propaganda, concerning the essentially tolerant and progressive character of certain religious groups within a multi-religious and syncretistic Albania.

It appears that Clayer fails to ask what a religious movement could be, and how to analyze and explain its historical transformations in social, cultural, political, or other terms. While Albanian identity is constructed in the nineteenth century following a nationalist mobilization towards a common language and against religious division (Skendi, 1967; see also Doja, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a), Clayer seeks to dissolve and sublate the national essentialism of local Albanian scholars into an even deeper essentialist, and even more awkward and anachronistic claims about Albanian identity, allegedly “born” out of the efforts of nineteenth-century nationalists to create “a new nation of Muslim majority in Europe” (Clayer, 2007). The choice of a research “hypothesis” is never innocent, for “facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is she who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context” (Carr, 1961: 11). When looking for the “birth of a European nation of Muslim majority,” it is not surprising to find a “Muslim Albanian identity” at the root, and thereby contribute to its construction.

The guiding research project of Clayer’s work was to show the representation of Albanian nationalism in the Albanian print media from the end of the Crimean War (1853–1856) to the beginnings of the Balkan Wars (1912–1913) leading to the independence of a contracted Albanian state in 1912. Remarkably at that time, however, the use of Albanian language was forbidden, and printing, teaching, and even learning in Albanian was a crime against the Ottoman state. This means she could only focus on the Albanian diaspora media and West European consular reports, which could not provide an accurate indication of the development of Albanian nationalism, simply because the evidence was conditioned by the political interests of both Balkan states and West European powers. Given that Balkan states were not supportive of Albanian nationalism, and often sought to incite regional and religious division among Albanians, one might expect that Ottoman sources could take a more important place in Clayer’s study. She admits she “could not use more sources from the Ottoman archives” and “could not use the English archives” (Clayer, 2007: 16). Probably, both Ottoman and British sources might have invalidated her claims, while the French consular sources she used could be more biased. Despite her claim that “France was not a more neutral actor,” France became actually a major supporter of Greece and Serbia, two Balkan states whose interests were set in opposition to Albanian nationalism.

These methodological issues make problematic Clayer’s account of the “birth of a European nation of Muslim majority” and cannot be resolved by having recourse to theorists that consider the nation as an invention of nationalism in the modern conditions of state consolidation. A number of explorations in the patterns of national identity development show that an insurmountable obstacle arises in applying this model to the Balkans (Markovich, 2013). There were impressive improvements in the last few decades of the nineteenth century in all Balkan societies, but religious-lingual communities had come to a degree of national self-consciousness in a structureless environment. This applies in particular to the Albanian case from 1856 to 1912. Under the Ottoman Empire, Albanian society was outside of European modernization processes, which in keeping with theories of nationalism should have enabled the birth of a nation. Hobsbawm escaped this trap by discarding the Albanian case as too complicated, while he noticed in *passim* that the demand of Albanian nationalists to seek an Albanian cultural identity in a common language written in Latin alphabet “was obviously irrelevant to people who could read no script” (Hobsbawm, 1992: 115). To some extent, he did the same with the other Balkan nation states, which after secession from Ottoman Empire remained backward rural societies until the mid-twentieth century.

A trap specific to deconstructionism is exemplified in Clayer’s work emphasizing the Muslim character of Albanian nationalism, but also characteristic of the wider pattern of

*Balkankompetenzen*, in that it mystifies by labeling “myth” whatever it wants to deconstruct, and then subjects it to a preconceived and biased examination of the issue at hand. In particular, when Clayer claims that the Albanian national movement is a “myth,” she ends up contributing to its deconstruction and cancellation. Her systematic claims of deconstructing Albanian identity do not only essentialize and reify Albanian nation, othering it as Muslim, but reconstruct it as “a nation of Muslim majority in Europe,” which make it implicitly the perfect ally of Islamism and terrorism. Ultimately, there is a risk that this contributes to civilizational drifts within Europe and its Southeastern margins. This may also be in line either with the radical ethno-religious ideology, occasionally embraced by the notorious brand of Serbian ultra-nationalist propaganda, which frames Albanian separatist movement in Kosovo in particular, and Albanian identity and culture more generally, as Islamic terrorism (see Doja, 2019a; Pokalova, 2010).

If deconstructionism has been described as a “terrorist obscurantism,”<sup>16</sup> in some extreme opinions voiced in Albanian media, both Clayer and Schmitt are taken to produce a new kind of writing history described as “methodological terrorism” (Myftaraj, 2009). Not because they are nonsensical, but because they give a demonized connotation to the target of their attacks. Ultimately, Albanian cultural identity is constructed by a perception of the exclusive “birth of a nation of Muslim majority in Europe” (Clayer, 2007), or the customary patterns of cultural behavior (Schmitt, 2008), in which nationalist mythology supposedly developed. Calling for transcending the Albanian nation, when for most this provides the only key interpretive framework, amounts to silencing them, or canceling out Albanian history, culture and society. Similarly, disrupting the Albanian tradition of modern research may surreptitiously provide essentialist justifications for further exclusivist identity politics

## Misinterpretation of savant typologies

Another related methodological problem for *Balkankompetent* scholars of the New German-speaking School may be a definite moral-ideological position and orientation on Albanian patriarchy, which is very much in line with Western academic “good citizens” for whom “patriarchy” is the ideological bogeyman, just as communism and nationalism are for the neo-liberal free-marketer. In this context, the study of family structures is of relevance, though less developed in anthropology than history, where a number of historical works have widely explored western European family and household structures or the transmission of familial property through generations in its consequences on social structure and economic development. They also address questions of kinship structures, the composition of traditional complex families and the principles of household formation in the Balkans.

Over the course of discussions about the essence, nature, geographic spread, and historical roots of family and kinship models in Southeast Europe, they use a number of family rituals and cultural practices as a token of archaized social structures, considered typical of the Balkans, and radically different from the rest of Europe. Especially Karl Kaser has developed, together with his followers, a strong historical research specialization identified as “Balkan family project,” producing a series of publications on the Albanian and wider Southeast European kinship structures and family systems in European comparative perspective aimed at isolating a “Balkan family pattern” (Kaser, 2012). The speculative nature of a number of interpretations contribute to a racial essentialization of social structures and cultural practices in the Balkans, misrepresenting the complex households of the *zadruga* type as an immanent South Slavic institution and the Albanian family as a general Muslim phenomenon. They are not simply reminiscent of the exoticism that fed the work of earlier

ethnographers and anthropologists (Keesing, 1989). They also encouraged a particular kind of evolutionist interpretation in terms of ethno-cultural hierarchy.

The existence of complex households of the *zadruga* type is often attributed to an undifferentiated, common, and communal Slavic mentality, contrasted with eternal Germanic and Anglo-Saxon individuality and sophistication (Todorova, 2006: 153). The same line of reasoning, but with an opposite evaluation, may also contrast Slavic peaceful and democratic cooperation with Germanic individualism, egoism, and aggressiveness. In particular, village celebrations of family patron saints like *slava* in Serbia and *sluzhba* in Bulgaria are viewed as an “ethnographic curiosity,” as a still-living specimen in “the *Volksmuseum* of Europe” (Hammel, 1980). Similarly, a common topical issue is the view that associates cultural practices and customary behaviors like the *Kanun* with Albanian extended family structures, rigid marriage patterns, high fertility rates, and the cultural myths and ideologies of honor and blood. The supposed evidence of many children within the so-called clan structures of the supposed patriarchal Albanian family is commonly constructed and conveyed as an ideological myth in academic writings, the media, and stereotyped opinions (Doja, 2010b).

These “myth-making” activities attempt to situate family structures, village celebrations, and customary behaviors in the framework of a social ideology described as “Balkan patriarchy” (Kaser, 1992). The assumption is that village celebrations dedicated to family patron saints and customary behaviors are aimed at backing kinship and family structures, which for a long period must have represented a common ideal for Balkan people (Kaser, 1993). They are interpreted as a Christianized form of a pre-Christian ritual celebration of the lineage ancestor, which is supposed to provide a sacred identity, unity, and solidarity to extended descent groups and multiple family households in the Balkans (Kaser, 1994a, 1994b). In this sense, South Slavic family celebrations and Albanian customary behaviors are deemed an indicator of patriarchal values and a sign of tribal relations preserved in the Balkans (Kaser, 1995).

A century ago, Jovan Cvijic delineated the so-called “patriarchal civilization” in the Balkans, the marker of which was the family *slava* feast, along with patrilineality and pastoralism (Cvijic, 1918). His racial anthropogeography is still considered “pioneering” in the study of patriarchal social structures in the Balkans by a number of *Balkankompetent* scholars in the New German-speaking School associated to the “Balkan family project” (Halpern et al., 1996: 429). In particular, by equating *zadruga* with complex family households, according to Todorova, these scholars shift into an ahistorical and nominalist approach, which attributes a structural permanence and cultural coherence to *zadruga* as a pillar of Balkan family (Todorova, 2006: 205–206). Like Cvijic, they look into the origins of family formations in patricentrism, including the ancestor worship as a relic of tribal relations. They think the celebration of the household patron saint is a “cult-justified patrilineality” (Mitterauer, 1966: 390), the core ideological-religious basis of “Balkan patriarchy” (Halpern et al., 1996: 436), a founding cultural principle in the creation and reproduction of social relations, and the most obvious sign of a “Balkan family pattern” and “Balkan patriarchy” (Kaser, 2008). However, linking the *zadruga* so directly to ancestor worship poses the question of the spread of complex family households of the *zadruga* type in regions where celebrations of the household patron saint did not have the same central importance (Todorova, in her comment to: Kaser, 1993: 123–129).

Still, a tribal variant of the patrilineal system, identified in interwar Yugoslavia in the Dinaric mountains and characterized by overvaluation of the male line and ancestor worship (Erllich, 1966), is often “extrapolated and presented as the typical Balkan pattern” (Todorova, 2006: 206). This becomes a cornerstone for explaining the otherness of family systems in the Balkans (Hristov, 2014: 5). An East European family model, fundamentally different from the West European family model, was

outlined as early as the 1960s (Hajnal, 1965), and is thought again to be indicative of a shared “Slavic tradition” (Hajnal, 1982). Another version of the same taxonomist approach postulated later the uniqueness of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic *Sonderweg* in the individualistic West European small and nuclear family (Todd, 1999). In all cases, as expected, two opposed values define the opposing types of nuclear and community family (Todorova, 2006: 161). The nuclear family goes with individualism, liberty, and inequality, whereas the community family cherishes virtues of equality in uniformity, conformity, and authority.

The *Balkankompetent* works in the recent tradition of the New German-speaking School largely reproduce these old patterns of cultural particularism and cultural determinism. Well versed as they are in using empirical evidence from a wide range of sources, as I showed elsewhere in more detail (Doja, 2010b), they seek to divide and typify cultural areas in West Europe and in East and Southeast Europe, which is clearly reminiscent of the anthropogeographic *Kulturkreislehre* of the old Vienna school. These typologies proceed along the lines of purely demographic criteria confined to the evaluation of quantitative data taken largely from birth, marriage, and death registers or census lists. In doing so, they mirror the racial *Kulturkreislehre* of the imperial German-speaking tradition of *Südostforschung*, or at best the common approach of “butterfly collecting” that was once unforgettably denounced by Edmund Leach for older forms of anthropology (Leach, 1961: 2). Whatever may be the criteria of simplification used, any typology of unusual patterns ends up, in practice, striving to single out exoticized patterns of traditional social structures.

This kind of evidence becomes flawed when it essentializes a “Balkan family pattern,” supposed to be characterized by equal partible inheritance and a multiple-generational household cycle rather than an individual life cycle. In addition, while in a northern variant scarcity of land and high population density seem to be the decisive factors, the southern variant turns out to be characterized exclusively by a distinctive patriarchal cultural background, where institutional factors and ideological elaborations are muddled up in what is reified as “Balkan patriarchy” (Kaser, 1992). All this ends up reducing the Albanian family to “a general Muslim phenomenon” of late demographic transition (Kaser, 2014: 97), which makes it possible to amalgamate the “Balkan family pattern” with the kinship system and gender relations of Muslim Anatolia and the Near East into a curious mixture of “patriarchy after patriarchy” in the Balkans (Kaser, 2011: 284–326; 2008). Albanians are framed as caught up into their agnatic dyadic relationships or their supposed tribal organization and tribal laws (Kaser, 2003). These include ancestor worship, complex family structures with many children, birth customs, cradle betrothal, bride purchase, honor killings, predatory warfare, blood feud political culture, and other “savage” customs of the like.

Without disputing the notion of the Albanian family system being patriarchal, it seems that cultural myths and ideologies associated with patrilineality are being conflated with the actual practices of patriarchy (Kaser, 1995). Patriarchal language and discourses that symbolically support patrilineality do not result uniformly in outcomes and practices that can be simply reified as patriarchal. A more careful reading and systematic critical analysis of demographic data, historical sources and ethnographic evidence show that the Albanian family has long been confronted with particularly low fertility rates and with a relatively high average age at marriage for women (Doja, 2010b). Similarly, a more analytical approach to the alleged segmentary organizational pattern of parallel agnatic groups of men in Southeast European societies, including Albania, also reveals that the segmentary structure of social organization appeared inadequate to support the assumption of a patriarchal extended family (Doja, 1999c).

In addition, a more experiential understanding of ethnographic evidence (Doja, 2013b) suggests that social behavior can be another indirect indication of women’s agency to reassert their role in social reproduction and work around traditionalist frameworks of patriarchal ideology



(Doja, 2008c). This can be shown in attitudes related to sex selection at birth,<sup>17</sup> the ways of expressing labor pain at childbirth (Doja, 2005a), or the drastic reduction of fertility rates from the mid-twentieth century onward mainly achieved with traditional contraceptive means (Doja, 2010b). The ideological construction of patriarchal myths, especially the supposed evidence of many children within the so-called clan structures of the supposed patriarchal Albanian family, may be no more than an essentializing myth, fabricated by *Balkankompetent* scholars of the New German-speaking School in Albanian family studies.

## Methodological imperialism

The arguments put forward in the above sections, based on a critical survey of selected works, show that Albanian and Southeast European studies in the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen*, represented as value-free and sophisticated, raise serious methodological, theoretical, political, and ideological concerns. The question is not whether there is a deliberate purpose of othering and exclusion, or a direct determination of research for political containment and eventually direct intervention. Simply, there cannot be inattentive reproduction of stereotypes in scholarship. This academic discourse appears indebted to civilizational hierarchies inherited from a complicated center-periphery framework upon which these studies are premised, and which reproduce a folkloric romance that is potentially racist and certainly power-laden.

We have seen above how international *Balkankompetent* experts of the New German-speaking School often disregard the work of scholars from the Balkans, especially from Albania, and how they claim to teach them internationally accepted theories and methodologies. In addition, *Balkankompetent* scholars like Schmitt may project current stereotypes into their foundational myths, while Clayer, Kaser, and Schwandner-Sievers misrepresent their national history, social behavior, and current transformations. Regardless of intent, the collective effect of this body of scholarship is to construct Islamic backward others of European civilization, which may legitimate or facilitate economic and political control.

West European and North American traditions of Southeast European studies, like area studies more generally, are invested with politics and imperial history (Boodrookas, 2018; Cumings, 1998). The old German-speaking tradition of *Südostforschung* and *Albanologie* in the geopolitical position of German-speaking countries towards Southeast Europe and Albania are understood as a variant of the colonialist relationship between knowledge and power (Doja, 2014a, 2014b). It is not a mere coincidence that teaching of Southeast European studies was institutionalized for the first time in Austria.<sup>18</sup> The extent to which one should be sensitive towards the meaning of place and the geopolitics of knowledge production and power has already been argued extensively, for instance, with reference to the differential development between Southeast European studies in Southeast Europe, in non-Southeast European countries, in transcontinental post-colonial powers like France and Britain, in the metropolitan cities of Germany and Austria with a continental-imperialist tradition, and even between cities like Munich and Regensburg or Vienna and Graz (Fischer, 2009).

With the advent of Socialism in East Europe, the West had an interest in seeking leverage within the Southeast European periphery of the East European Bloc. Institutional shifts followed political and economic developments in the region, and the advent of the Cold War, ensured that Southeast European studies created synergies between politics and research. From the mid-1980s, the Austrian politician Erhard Busek addressed historical connections between Vienna and Southeast Europe. This happened within a general, liberal-conservative discourse on *Projekt Mitteleuropa*, intended to help strengthen various local dissidents and groups in their endeavor to fight and topple their respective communist regimes. Such endeavors were aimed at securing Austria, as the core of the



former Habsburg Empire, a convenient position as intermediary in the political rollback in East Central Europe (Busek and Brix, 1986). About a decade later, after he was Vice-Chancellor of Austria (1991–1995) and an important reformer of the Austrian universities, in his subsequent book on *Österreich und der Balkan*, he pleaded for refreshing the old links (Busek, 1999). Incidentally, in 2002–2008, he was also to become the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.

Although Austria was not a conventional colonial power, its attitude towards the other regions of the former Habsburg Monarchy is often treated as colonial and postcolonial (Feichtinger et al., 2003). In particular, Austria's attitude towards its southern neighbors has been frequently criticized as neocolonial since Austria became EU member in 1988 (Petrovic, 2009: 57–58). Southeast Europe is cited as one of Austria's priorities during the EU presidency in the first half of 2006, and Austria remains one of the most important investors in the region. Interestingly, its contemporary presence on the Southeast European market is explained by its historical (i.e., imperial) presence in the region, and its activities are legitimized and embedded within the framework of a common history, namely by underscoring the links of the Habsburg Empire to Southeast Europe before the First World War, including the Austrian impact on the independence of Albania. Much as in the imperial past, the region is seen as an area of special economic and financial interests for Austrian elites (Promitzer, 2014).

Austrian politicians and journalists explicitly mention the historical legacy arising from Austria's expansion to the Southeast and the shared experience with Southeast European countries. Shared historical legacy and expert knowledge are two complementary arguments that support the statement on the official web site of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintaining that Southeast Europe is a priority issue in Austrian foreign policy.<sup>19</sup> Due to centuries of political, cultural, and economic interrelations and thanks to its profound knowledge of the region, Austria claims a position to contribute effectively to any crisis management (Petrovic, 2009). Austrian foreign policy attaches particular importance to the Southeast European areas and has traditionally played a very proactive role in the EU measures to assist Southeast European countries in overcoming their supposed problems. The arguments are frequently highlighted in Austrian political and media discourses, suggesting a continuity between contemporary Europeanization discourses and nineteenth-century colonial practices (Gingrich, 1998).

After the breakdown of Socialism in Southeast Europe, during the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and following European Union enlargement, the topical foci of Southeast European studies shifted again. The Orientalizing and Balkanizing discourses of identity politics and mystifying histories, or the creation of predictive problem-solving knowledge, immediately ready-made for decision-makers, became a dominant paradigm in approaching Southeast Europe (Dale et al., 2016). In particular, echoing wider debates in international academia revolving around the issue of decolonizing approaches, the persistence of culturalist and essentialist understandings of national myths and histories seems to put into question the utility of Southeast European studies.

In recent decades, in the course of what is often called the period of post-communist transition, a complex network of international political strategies has been set up in most East European countries with the aim of teaching governance in conformity with West European standards of civilization in terms of citizenship and democracy. This program concerned institutional establishment as well as the creation of a civil society sensitive to human rights, democratization, market economy, rule of law, security and stability, regional cooperation, and so forth. In June 1999, following the escalation of Kosovo War and NATO intervention in Serbia, the Southeast European Stability Pact was launched at the initiative of the European Union under the headship of the Austrian scholar and politician Erhard Busek.<sup>20</sup> Driven by outside partners such as West European

states and organizations, stability of Kosovo and European security were among the primary objectives. Members of the West European and North American political and economic elites advocated various internationally accorded political, economic and ultimately military interventions.

Addressing the complex and often competing chains of relations between different nongovernmental organizations and agencies, including the United Nations and its agencies, the European Union, the World Bank, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and other key actors in aid and development has now become a common concern in the literature on Southeastern Europe and beyond (McMahon, 2017). A new security and development agenda brings together humanitarianism, peacebuilding, biopolitical interventions, and forms of social and political engineering “from above” within a developing “duty to protect” (Duffield, 2001). They increasingly link the faith in “liberal peace” to a new public management, including societal civilization, nongovernmental projectization and local subcontractualization, as part of a more general global governance (Sampson, 1996; Stubbs, 2003).

By doing so, new forms of globally organized post-colonial and post-socialist topographies of power and expertise, as can be shown especially in relation to Albania and Kosovo (Doja, 2001), are located within new transnational regimes, humanitarian organizations, and international institutions, including specific segments of local elites. While the emergence and function of these tendencies must be examined at another time, they are transferred into the local political field of power and they operate in networks that spread across the private and public spheres. They are disguised by discourses of Europeanization, modernization, marketization, and democratization typical of the globalist transitional rhetoric. They are canonized as models of governance that legitimize the right of interference and intervention, the rhetoric of institution building, and a Western, neo-liberal, forced democratization of the Southeast margins of Europe. The power they wield is real, superimposed as it is onto bureaucratic procedures and intergovernmental negotiations, transforming itself into a new form of transnational domination.

In particular, the discourse on the accession of the “Western Balkans” to EU membership re-introduces a region that has been traditionally understood as Europe’s periphery, in need of supervision, guidance, and training provided by the West (Hammond, 2007; Petrovic, 2009). This context re-actualizes long-established patterns of German and Austrian colonial practices in the region (Doja, 2014a, 2014b), or the colonial discourse of West European domination more generally (Abazi and Doja, 2016, 2017, 2018; Doja and Abazi, 2021). It also enables the political elites in both European Union states and Southeast European countries to openly articulate and appropriate a new colonial discourse of Balkanism, legitimated in the accession process to EU membership.

In this context, the works of *Balkankompetent* scholars, and more generally the New German-speaking School of *Balkankompetenzen*, appear to prepare the ground for a new research activism determined by neoliberal programs of institutional building and the installation of a new public space. Southeast European studies are at a historical turning crossroads. This process of transformation seems to be linked to European Union enlargement, Western capital engagement in post-socialist economies, and global transformation processes in academia. Academic teaching is increasingly oriented towards professional applicability that tends to privilege in a kind of “tanked up thinking,” expert knowledge and advocacy on topics of social policy, political strategy, or economic issues (Doja, 2016). In the market of knowledge production, what in German-speaking countries used to be labeled *Balkanologie* is now sold as *Balkankompetenzen*, which is becoming a profitable business in which private actors sponsor special Masters programs that attract new students to old and new universities (Fischer, 2009). Southeast European studies courses combine economic interests, post-war migrations, and the taste of a new generation for things Southeast European, with

knowledge resources and a free-floating academic population with Southeast European experience or Southeast European background.

More than anything else, Southeast European studies invoke the diverse cultural attractions of a seemingly forgotten region that now, after the end of Communism and the ensuing Yugoslav Wars, has got rid of various ideological obscurations. Such a discourse reiteratively reinstates Southeast Europe as a buffer zone between the West and the Rest. While associating Southeast European post-socialism with a distant past and exotic charm as with various non-European and non-modern political conservatisms, esthetic traditionalisms, and romantic nationalisms typical of a new postcoloniality, West European and North American scholars associate themselves with civilizational progress and metropolitan centers.

In particular, the common historical legacy shared by Austria with Southeast European countries is the basis for *Balkankompetent* scholars in the New German-speaking School to invoke a special knowledge of the Balkans and appropriate a special role as *Balkankompetent* “experts” of Southeast Europe within the European Union. Local intellectual, cultural, and political elites in Southeast European countries, including Albania, are also interested in the transition from socialism, which is framed as a “return to Europe.” If the old Austrian *Projekt Mitteleuropa* was reactivated as early as the 1980s to encourage dissent in Slovenia and other East European socialist countries, Slovenian intellectuals embraced the idea and actively promoted their own claims of belonging to *Mitteleuropa* (Petrovic, 2009). Similarly in Albania, a spate of joint commemorative conferences and proceedings celebrate the Austrian impact in Albanian scholarship and state-building (Koçi and Kasmi, 2019; Marashi and Rakipi, 2013), or more specifically *Albanologie* in German-speaking countries as a model for the contemporary development of Albanian studies (Ismajli, 2017; Pistrick, 2016).

Local elites actively participate in self-colonizing aggrandizement and exoticization (Kiossev, 2011). In this way, Albanians become the target of sensationalist exoticism, dismissive primitivism, and outright misinterpretation of their foundational myths, national history, social structures, and cultural behavior. They are effectively isolated, strategically othered, and eventually excluded from access to the advantages of modernity and from other, more brutally material and authoritative forms of power. This relationship is often articulated in the iconic guise of a national culture aggressively refashioned to suit West European values, as once promoted by German and Austrian models (Doja, 2014a). Many native scholars, especially those educated or established within German-speaking academia, willingly perpetuate the folkloric essentialism of historicist philology typical of old *Albanologie* (Abazi and Doja, 2016; Doja, 2015).

Far from a simple crypto-colonial situation (Herzfeld, 2002), both the Albanian national pride of native cultural essentialism in local scholarship and the deconstructive reduction of Albanian historical and cultural heritage by the New German-speaking School are rather a mark of political necessity. This is visibly substantiated by the transitional rhetoric of Europeanization processes in the discourse and practice of West European states towards Southeast European countries. This does not mean that Western scholarship supports West European states in a conscious pursuit of the expansion of the European Union in order to re-impose European civilization on the countries of Southeast European periphery. However, in the process of EU enlargement, the use of norms, practices, and standards of behavior leading to homogenization are similar, if not identical, to those included in the historical standard of civilization (Stivachtis, 2008). Membership conditionality is a continuation of older practices, which serves the primary interests of West European states in ensuring effectively both EU integration and EU neighborhood security.

Likewise, research accounts provided in the New German-speaking School exemplified by *Balkankompetent* scholars have some similarities to the narratives that reproduced the historical standard of colonial research and served to legitimate the intervention of international politics in the

Balkans. They are ultimately a continuation of old hierarchies of knowledge and a part of the same spectrum of intervention discourses, practices, and instruments employed in the name of both academic and democratic standards, which serve the primary interests of Western institutions in maintaining academic and political hegemony.

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### Notes

1. This situation might have been created by problems in mutual understanding and communication, given that scholars within Eastern Europe may not always show a good command of West European languages, while those from outside Eastern Europe may show remarkable lack of proficiency in native languages. Surely, English-speaking fellow anthropologists do always help to meet a plea of “please try to arrange for editing by a native speaker,” just as a plea to foreign scholars who adorn their texts with words and phrases in local vernaculars might be “please try to arrange to have them reviewed by a native speaker because frequently they are rendered incorrectly” (Buchowski, 2004: 198, in his Reply to Chris Hann).
2. See EURAXESS, “Postdoc Position,” Job ID: IHB103PD220, 22/09/2020, <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/560785>
3. Pellumb Xhufi, “Traditë dhe risi në mendimin dhe veprimin politik të Gjergj Kastriotit-Skënderbeut.” Konferenca Ndërkombëtare Albanologjike kushtuar Gjergj Kastriotit-Skënderbeut në 550-vjetorin e vdekjes, Tirana, 28 May 2018.
4. Oliver-Jens Schmitt, in: A Show - Syri TV, 23/02/2021, <https://www.facebook.com/Adi.Krasta.A/posts/2845598705707884> (Full “A Show” at <https://www.syri.net/web-tv/406232/live-adi-krasta-ne-a-show/>).
5. Jasna Capo, Personal Communication, 22 June 2021. Cited with permission.
6. Ger Duijzings is now at the University of Regensburg, fully dubbed within the New German-speaking School of Balkankompetenzen.
7. Stefan Schumacher quoted in “Austrian Scholars Leave Albania Lost for Words,” Balkan Insight, 25/03/2011, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/austrian-scholars-leave-albania-lost-for-words>
8. Ardian Vehbiu, “Protoshqipja në Ballkan,” Peizazhe të Fjalës, 16–18/10/2012, <https://peizazhe.com/2012/10/16/protoshqipja-ne-ballkan/>, <https://peizazhe.com/2012/10/18/protoshqipja-ne-ballkan-ii/>.
9. At about the same time, Nathalie Clayer also subverted the origins of Albanian nationalism as “a nation of Muslim majority in Europe” (Clayer, 2007), like Karl Kaser was striving to construct anecdotic typological models of the “Balkan family pattern” reducing Albanian family to “a general Muslim phenomenon” that mixed “patriarchy after patriarchy” in the Balkans (Kaser, 2008). Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers also strives to enact traditional references of the times past misrepresenting the social order in present-day Albania (Schwandner-Sievers, 2009). Similarly, in relation to a wider Southeast European area, Austrian historian Ulf Brunnbauer also published a conference proceedings in Bulgaria on the pictorial representation of the Ottoman massacre after the April Uprising of 1876, claiming that “this never happened” in Batak (Bulgaria) but was reconstructed in historical imagination out of nationalist mythology (Baleva and Brunnbauer, 2007).
10. Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. LXVII (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1788–1789; Verbatim reprint in four volumes, London: Frederick Warne, 1887, vol. IV,

- pp. 469–471, <https://archive.org/details/declinefallofrom04gibbuoft/page/470/mode/2up>; see also Project Gutenberg eBook updated 2021, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25717/25717-h/25717-h.htm#chap67.2>).
11. “In these circumstances came Skanderbeg’s envoy to the Pope and said that *because of personal hatred against the Turk...*”(Schmitt, 2009: 57). The diplomats write: “Qua è gionto uno cavaliere ambasatore ... di Signor Xanderbech ... e richiede al Papa che lo faza forte de X.M homini e lui li volle metre tuti li suoy subditi in maior numero asay per andare contra el Turcho; e questo non per fede, perchè ancora lui è infidele, ma per hodio privato ha cum el Turcho, lo quale Turcho fece morire lo padre de quel tal Signore e questo tal Signore ha facto morire uno fratello del Turcho...”(Facsimile reproduced in the appendix of Schmitt’s book).
  12. At that time, relations were also deteriorated between Pope Nicholas.V and the Duke of Milan after the Pope concluded the Concordat of Vienna in 1448 and crowned the German King in 1452 as Holy Roman Emperor, in spite of Milanese protestations. German Emperors usually claimed suzerainty of the Kingdom of Italy and threatened the independence of the Duchy of Milan.
  13. For 25 years, the Albanians had fought under Skanderbeg’s leadership (1443–1468) to resist Ottoman annexation, for which he earned the papal commendation of *Athleta Christis* by Pope Callixtus.III (1455–1458) and was expected, again, by Pope Pius.II (1458–1464) to lead the attempted crusade against the Ottomans in 1464.
  14. Schmitt remarked in footnote that this detail is corrected later. There is no wonder that either Milanese officials or the source Editor also considered it unbelievable and a forgery.
  15. Introduction to her PhD-by-(assembled-tables-of-previously)-published-works, Department of Social Sciences, University of Roehampton, 2012, <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.570437>
  16. According to a remark on Jacques Derrida made by Michel Foucault in a private conversation with John Searle, in: John Searle, “The Word Turned Upside Down”, *The New York Review of Books*, 27 October 1983. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1983/10/27/the-word-turned-upside-down/>. See also “Reality Principles: An Interview with John Searle,” *Reason Magazine*, 01/02/2000, <https://reason.com/archives/2000/02/01/reality-principles-an-intervie/print>
  17. The response to the question addressed by the World Value Survey about sex preferences at birth in Albania, 51.3% opted for a girl, for 13.2% it makes no difference, and only 32.2% opted for a boy (World Value Survey Online Analysis, Wave 3, 1995–1999, Albania, V97, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp>).
  18. Likewise, there is apparently no reason why Austrian history is not so much preoccupied with Austria proper but with a wider region to be sought in the residual idea of a Greater Austria that encompasses exactly these regions.
  19. “The Western Balkans: A Priority of Austrian Foreign Policy,” <http://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/european-foreign-policy/foreign-policy/europe/western-balkans/>
  20. In February 2008, it was replaced by a Regional Cooperation Council, aimed to be a more “regionally owned” cooperation framework. The new institutional framework appears as a far-reaching effort aimed at strengthening peace, democracy, human rights, and economy by promoting “mutual cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic integration” of this part of Europe (<http://www.rcc.int/>), but still with continued Western support and advice, while acting as a forum for the continued involvement of the international community engaged in the region.

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## Author Biography

Albert Doja is currently a University Professor at the University of Lille, France, and an Ordinary Member of the National Academy of Sciences, Albania, holding the first Chair of anthropology. He was awarded with distinction a PhD in Social Anthropology in 1993 from the Paris School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS) and a Professorial accreditation (*Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches*) in sociology and anthropology in 2004 from Paris Descartes University, Sorbonne, qualifying for full University Professorship within the French academic system. He has been a former Visiting Research Scholar at Harvard University, an Honorary Fellow of the Department of Anthropology at University College London and on temporary assignment posted to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as the founding Vice-Chancellor of the new



University of Durrës in Albania. He has held several academic positions in France, USA, Britain, Ireland, and Albania, lectured in social anthropology and conducted extensive fieldwork research in many other countries. He is on the editorial board of international academic journals and he has so far published a couple of books and many original articles in international peer-reviewed and indexed journals. Special interests include politics of knowledge, power, and ideology; political anthropology of symbolism and religion; intercultural communication, interethnic relations and international migrations; cultural heritage and social transformations; social moralities and intellectual productions in the context of global religious pluralism and diversity; international politics of hegemonic representations; comparative politics of identity transformations; instrumental politics of civic ideas and ethnic motivations; comparative politics of European identity and European integration; identity structures, discourses, practices, and processes; political technologies of the self, personhood, gender construction, kinship organization, and reproduction activism; anthropology of politics and history; political-anthropological theory, structural analysis, post-structuralism, and neo-structuralism. (<https://pro.univ-lille.fr/en/albert-doja/>).