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GREEK CIVILISATION AS A THEME OF DISSIDENCE
IN THE WORK OF ISMAIL KADARE

ABSTRACT

No country offers a better example of Europe's fractured cultural memory than Albania. Part of the ancient Greek cultural sphere and incorporated into the Roman Empire, the speakers of Illyrian became separated from Europe in the wake of the split of eastern and western churches. On the edge of Byzantine civilization, the Albanians, unlike the Serbs and the Bulgars did not form a kingdom or achieve a national church. At the point of proto-national consolidation in the late 14th century, they were invaded by the Ottomans and subjected to eastern despotism for the following five hundred years. This, at least, is one version of Albania's history. During the era of the Albanian dictatorship, the writer and commentator, Ismail Kadare, consistently used a narrative of civilisational value with reference to ancient Greece as an Aesopian mode in which an alternative, "European" civilization is implicitly recognized in opposition to the national isolationism of the Hoxha regime.

Keywords: Kadare, Albania, Orientalism, Balkanism, Dissidence, Civilisation

INTRODUCTION

No country offers a better example of Europe's complex cultural memory than Albania. Present-day Albania was a part of the Roman and Byzantine Christian civilizations. The famous Via Egnatia from Rome to Constantinople wound its way through Albania from Durres over Lake Ochrid to the Byzantine capital. The Byzantine era ended abruptly in the late 14th century, at an important time of Balkan pre-national *developments*, when the Ottoman invasion and colonization

took place that would last until the early 20th century. National liberation followed the Ottoman collapse in 1913, and after a short interregnum as a social democracy for several years, the country was brought under control of the northern tribal leader, Zog, as a monarchy, heavily dependent on Italian support from Mussolini. At the outbreak of war in 1939 the country was occupied by the Italians and then by the Germans in the early 40s. The communist partisans liberated the tiny nation during late 1944 and early 1945 and, with Yugoslav and Soviet support, established a communist government under Enver Hoxha. Hoxha survived as leader until his death in 1985, by and large uncontested, as one of the most brutal, if charming, of the Eastern European dictators. After breaks with the Soviet Union (1961) and China (early 1970s), Hoxha instituted a unique and often bizarre form of socialist isolationism in which he portrayed himself as leader and father of the nation, in the likeness of the national hero, Scanderbeg, and as the remaining true Marxist-Leninist after Mao Tse-Tung.

In the wake of socialism, in a country still grappling with aspects of political, social and cultural modernization, questions of identity are of central importance in national debates. The well-known Albanian writer and intellectual of this era, Ismail Kadare, played an important role over the duration of the post-war dictatorship as the only spokesman for a different image and identity of the Albanians to that propagated by the regime. From the period of his return from studying in Moscow in 1960 – or even before – until the end of the regime, the writer Ismail Kadare developed quickly into the alternative voice of Albanian identity, both for his countrymen and the world.

Ismail Kadare remains a controversial figure in contemporary post-communist Albania as a result of his role under the dictatorship and his readings of Albanian history and cultural identity. Kadare was hostile to the image of Albania presented by the communist regime. He consistently used a narrative of civilisational value with reference to ancient Greece as an Aesopian mode in which an alternative, “European” civilization is implicitly recognized in opposition to the national isolationism of the Hoxha regime. Nevertheless this representation of his native country’s history, like that of the regime, expresses an antipathy towards the Ottoman occupiers of Albania. For this reason, Kadare’s historical perspective has been criticized as a form of “Orientalism,” vis-à-vis his nation’s history by a younger, post-communist generation of historians.

KADARE'S CRITIQUE OF ALBANIAN IDENTITY

There certainly were similarities between the two versions of Albanian history. Both the socialist regime and Ismail Kadare represented Albanian identity as something native and authentic over and against Ottoman, Soviet or, later, Maoist, influences. However there were important differences. The regime's socialist nationalism presented Albanian history before 1945 as the prelude to Enverism, the only socialism which had remained true to the founding fathers, Marx, Lenin and Stalin. For Enver Hoxha, Soviet developments had become corrupted, first by Yugoslav interference and then, after Stalin's death, by the ideological revisionism of Khrushchev. Hoxha broke with Tito in 1948, with Khrushchev in 1961, and even with Mao in 1972 after the latter's rapprochement with the USA and on the basis of the "Three Worlds" theory. Hoxha's Albanian socialism prized its national roots but at the same time relegated the pre-communist past to the level of folklore and museum culture, mercilessly eliminating it wherever it threatened to impinge on socialist modernity and using it merely as a platform for Enverist dogma. Kadare had already represented this process in his earliest novel, *The Town without Signs* and it remained a continuous theme in his writing until the end of the dictatorship.

Kadare's representation of an "authentic Albania" was something quite different to the regime's instrumentalization of its national identity. Kadare's original, authentic Albania is firstly a literary image, not a political or ideological one. It was an Albania submerged beneath centuries of Ottoman and then communist domination and occupation. Where Hoxha's Albania was a past which formed the basis for the classless society of the present and future, Kadare's Albania still exists but is confined under communism. Moreover Kadare's "eternal Albania" exists in a different continuum to that of the regime. It is here that we can identify the real nature of Kadare's opposition. In novels such as *Broken April* (1978), *The Three-Arched Bridge* (1979) and even the controversial magnum opus, *The Great Winter* (1974), Kadare presents Albania as a culturally and historically authentic original Balkan or Illyrian identity, but is at pains to stress civilisational links which were deeply incompatible with the regime's hermetically sealed communist nationalism.

Like the regime, he was highly critical of the Ottoman occupation, but he used this critique of the imperial occupier in order to weave the country's fortunes into a different civilisational nexus than that of Soviet communism and to imply a

similarity between the Ottomans and the communists which was politically highly dangerous. Where Enverism tied Albanian identity to a model of Stalinist modernisation, Kadare tied it to a vision of Europe, and less directly of the West, through the evocation of the country's common roots with Greece.

This argument is most clearly laid out in the late literary essay, "Aeschylus or the Great Loser," where Kadare argues for an original cultural unity in the southern Balkans between the Greeks and the Albanians. Where the Greeks "won" in historical terms as a result of the adoption of Greek literature and education by the Romans, the Albanians were lost to history, as they found themselves abandoned on the periphery of succeeding empires and civilizations. After the Romans, the Byzantines failed to enable Albania to consolidate into a historical entity, and with the arrival of the Ottomans, Albania was submerged for five centuries before a new onslaught of forces conspired against its emergence, in particular the Italians and the Germans, but also the communists conceived as the emissaries of other eastern Empires, whether the Soviets of the early years or the Maoist Chinese of the sixties and seventies. Ultimately eastern dictatorship is symbolized in Kadare's work in the figure of the usually nameless dictator – Egyptian pharaoh, Mongol leader, Ottoman Sultan, or Chinese emperor (or the sinister Mao Tse-Tung of *The Concert*), who is both Enver Hoxha and the spirit of dictatorship as a human socio-political and psychological phenomenon.

In this version, Albania occupies a distinct place as part of an ancient, original and authentic Illyrian civilization, alongside Greece and ancient Macedonia, in which the latter disappeared and the former survived, thanks to the vagaries of history. Albania was the great loser in this history, ending up on the wrong side of the Roman divide, its northern Illyrian culture falling into desuetude while Greece's legacy was saved for resurgence during the European Renaissance.¹ And while Kadare views the Albanian folk epics and the socio-legal institution of the Kanun as expressions of an authentic culture in Herderian, or romantic nationalist terms, he represents these in terms of their Greek-Illyrian roots as an argument for reconnection to a European future.

As Johan Arnason writes, Greek culture has functioned as a repository of precedents for the generation of new developments in Western history, giving "meaning and direction to modern projects"² as well as radically questioning the idea of modernity (for example in Nietzsche's radical questioning of the Greek

tradition). Kadare uses Greek culture as a foil to Albanian identity in this long essay, linking it as the failed twin of Greek civilisation. The tactic is in this case an Aesopian critique of communism, which, for Kadare, as for many Eastern European intellectuals of the communist period, singularly failed to revive the Greek “project of autonomy based on the radical self-questioning of thought and society” that, according to Castoriadis and Arnason were central factors in Greek axial civilization (along with India and China which configured these same concepts differently).

For Kadare the seeds of this civilization lie dormant but still potential in Albanian identity. Kadare’s most powerful argument for the European roots of Albania lies in his evocation of the classical heritage and his archaeological tracing of this heritage in its degenerate form in the ancient and medieval cultures of his native country. This thinking has dominated his post-communist views, where it has also turned out to be controversial. His agenda was to present a different reading of Albania to that of the communist regime while still maintaining the cultural memory of Albania’s roots in the Greco-Roman and hence western European axis of civilization. Two characteristics lie at the centre of his reading of Greek-Illyrian civilization, namely enlightenment autonomy (the individual) and civic society (literature). Without idealizing the West, Kadare identifies these characteristics as central to European identity and Western modernity. Albanian communism, like Ottoman occupation, is a system of foreign oppression from the East. And he sees himself as a spokesman for a European Albania whose roots in western culture have been submerged, buried or frozen (his analogies) beneath Ottoman and then Soviet despotism.

He would also come to use a re-connection to Balkan Christianity – neither clearly Orthodox nor Catholic, as a symbol of redemption from the underworld of Albanian communism. In the immediate post-communist environment of a resurgent Albanian Islam, this turned out to be highly inflammatory. However it is important to keep in mind that this line of thinking and representation of his country was developed under a communist system and relied on Aesopian modes of communication. It has a rather different function in the current environment of democracy, however flawed, and freedom of speech and writing.

COMMUNIST MODERNIZATION AND THE NATION

Kadare was a member of the first post-war socialist generation, for whom the end of the war coincided with the imposition of communism, attended by considerable enthusiasm for the project of building a new society after a period of devastation. In Albania's case this also included the rejection of earlier, discredited models of Albanian identity, both the Ottoman imperial-colonial model, and the national monarchy of King Zog, with its dependence on fascist Italy. However the concept of the ethnic nation-state per se was far from discredited: in 1945 it was only just over three decades old and was still associated with the rhetoric of liberation from Ottoman Imperialism.

The confusing factor in the Albanian case is that nationhood came so late and that the issues and questions of national and civilisational identity are compressed into such a short period between 1913 and 1944. During that time, the Albanians experienced accelerated social and political development after centuries of stasis and stagnation, through the phases of de-colonization, war with encroaching neighbours and national self-identification, the establishment of the left-leaning republic of Fan Noli, political turmoil and the creation of a nationalist monarchy heavily dependent on another colonial power, this time European fascist Italy, before another annihilating war during which Albanian communism was established (as the main opposition during war-time occupation, vis-à-vis a hotchpotch of royalist, fascist and collaborationist allies. In 1944 the country was liberated by the communists aided by the Yugoslavs as Soviet emissaries. The communist regime was set up on the devastated remains of a nation prepared for statehood but desperately in need of internal structure and political order.

Over the period since the "Rilindja" or national awakening of the late 19th century, the western European nation-state appeared to offer a solution to the Albanian problem, just as it did to Kemal Attaturk's nationalist Turks after the end of the Ottoman period. The Albanian national "awakening" was couched in the terminology and vocabulary of Herderian romantic nationalism, focusing on language as the core experience of Albanianness and linking it more or less closely with territory. For the early nationalists and following generations, the Albanians had developed a sense of linguistic and cultural identity over the *longue durée* since the first appearance of the term "Arberesh" in the late middle ages. The European

nation-state was viewed as the only appropriate the ideational model for the passage of this tiny undeveloped and backward country from foreign occupation to independent identity in the context of 1913.

Where in India for example, “the colonial state became the main vehicle of transition between earlier and later phases of modernity,”³ this structured channel for development remained absent from the Ottoman Albanian situation. The vehicle for transition to modernity, as envisioned by a tiny number of Albanian intellectuals and some foreign supporters in the late 19th century, was an Albanian state modeled on European concepts of congruity between language-culture and territory. This model of the state was imported primarily from Central Europe via Turkish learning and Ottoman modernization in the late 19th century. To that extent, the Ottomans provided the means of connection to outside civilisational environments, ultimately to models that were inimical to Ottoman civilisation and that would prove stronger in the long run. The realities of the formation of the neighbouring states of Greece, Serbia and Macedonia, obliged these intellectuals to engage with politics and to seek political solutions that increasingly came to focus on territory rather than language in order to draw and maintain borders. The confusions of the early years of the century and the battles over whether Albania could or should remain a nation within the Ottoman Empire were superseded by the facts of the creation of the Balkan nation-states in the first decade of the new century.

Kadare himself has always accepted the foundational myth of an Albanian identity, and he couched his language in the terms of national identity in order to mount an opposition to the Albania of communist dogma. His opponent was Albanian communism, not the Albanian nation-state. His was an early Albania that remained a frozen dream under various occupying forces, the most recent of which was Soviet communism. In reiterating the language of the earlier national movement, Kadare was recuperating for his nation the classic European model of modern nation-state identity as predicated on language and territory.⁴ But his argument was not primarily about the existence of the nation. That era of Albanian history was over by 1913 in the series of negotiations and compromises which resulted in the modern borders, in which Kosovo and parts of Albanian-speaking Greece, Macedonia Serbia and Montenegro were sacrificed in order to create an Albanian state in the context of the warring Balkan entities. In fact the

Communists built on this established nation-state during the first phase of the regime, establishing a standard language and enforcing levels of inner coherence in matters of law and other policy. This phase might be said to have ended, ironically, in 1961, when Enver Hoxha staged his theatrical break with Moscow at the 22nd Congress and after Khrushchev's "anti-Stalin" speech. There was still a great deal of internal good will and admiration for Hoxha at this stage, which underpins, for example, Kadare's controversial representation of Hoxha as a national hero in Book Two of *The Great Winter*. But Kadare was not merely asserting a different type of national identity to that realized by the Communists.

There is another aspect to this which was not so evident at this time, namely the wider, macro-structural alignment of Albania in a civilisational framework which in many ways was not primarily national in focus. Kadare began to link his national arguments to a broader set of correlates. In the early work, it is to a European understanding of the epic poem as a statement of broad civilisational identity, and in the later essay on Aeschylus of the mid eighties, the link is made explicit. This argument is about a set of civilisational values which the term "communism" itself masked.

THE CRITIQUE OF SOCIALISM AS A CRITIQUE OF CIVILISATIONS

Recent analysts have begun to ask questions about the broader aspects of communism as a form of modernization. Johan Arnason links these questions to civilisational approaches in order to "help to make sense of the Communist experience." We can use Arnason's reading communism as a form of alternative modernity in terms of civilisational analysis in order to further comprehend Kadare's development as a dissident figure in terms of broader questions relating to the role of the intellectuals in Eastern Europe.⁵ Percipient early commentators on Bolshevism, such as Franz Borkenau, recognized the inherent conflicts between Marxism as a post-enlightenment critical theory (i.e. in which values of individual autonomy and freedom were retained) and Soviet-style (i.e. Stalinist) Marxism-Leninism. Borkenau was one of the first to frame this view of Bolshevism in terms of the confluence of diverse socio-historical and intellectual streams.⁶ Later commentators identified components of old autocratic traditions in the new state

and civilisational structures. The model of Peter the Great was invoked, importing Western know-how into an autocratic pre-Enlightenment political power structure. Soviet communism thus becomes a hybrid model of Enlightenment socio-economic analysis and Tsarist conceptions of the exercise of power from above in the interests of social modernization.

For Arnason, synthesizing earlier analyses of both Soviet communism and Russian Tsarist history, Russia was an “offshoot” of Byzantine civilization that “came under Inner Asian rule and was later transformed by successive waves of Westernization” in the period from Peter the Great onward and culminating in Lenin’s importation of European Marxism to the Russian environment. Marxism-Leninism, in this analysis, “went on to challenge the West through an alternative project of modernity which owed something to all civilisational currents of Russian history.”⁷ The model of Soviet modernization thus grew out of intercivilisational processes. “The rebuilding and restructuring of the Russian empire by the Bolsheviks after World War I was a new twist to the trajectory that had begun with early modern attempts at imperial self-strengthening through controlled Westernization, and with the civilisational inroads which inevitably accompanied and exceeded the strategic borrowings.” For various reasons, writes Arnason, “this aspect of the genealogy of Communism was widely overlooked or misperceived by contemporary observers and participants. At the most visible level, the Soviet model – finalized in the course of Stalin’s “second revolution” – represented a synthesis of imperial and revolutionary traditions, both of which had already mixed Russian and Western sources.”⁸ The Bolshevik synthesis of Russian and Western sources is thus a “civilisational fault line.”⁹

Arnason and others have demonstrated that the development of Marxism into Soviet Stalinism revealed a mixture of civilisational attributes in socialism. “There was, in short, a civilisational background to the emergence of Communism as an alternative modernity, but it was both complex and elusive, and its ambiguities were reflected in the disparate civilisational traits which observers could attribute to the Soviet phenomenon. The proliferation and differentiation of Communist regimes opened up new perspectives.”¹⁰ This was nowhere more apparent than in Albania, lying as it did along the various fault-lines of the Balkans. Here, as in the Soviet Union, modernizing progress was increasingly offset by a state-supported totalitarianism in which the intellectuals played a central role as the functionaries of the

Party – and, potentially, as dissident figures in a system whose strength depended on unity of voice in the service of the dogma of Party infallibility. However many other factors were at play as well. Albania occupies a particularly interesting place in such a model. Lying as it does on the fault-lines of Christianity and Islam, Catholicism and Orthodoxy, Western and Eastern cultures, Albania is very much a transitional identity in any civilisational model.

Kadare, and with him many of the readers of his Aesopian texts, adopted Europe during the communist period literally as a nationalist argument against Ottoman imperialism and more importantly, figuratively in Aesopian terms as a civilisational argument against communist modernization. The similarities with Milan Kundera are unavoidable. Just as Kundera appealed to a civilisational tradition of Europe against Russian oppression in his famous essay of 1984, “The Tragedy of Central Europe,” so too Kadare used this implicit argument from the early seventies onward as a form of internal opposition, an inner emigration to a Europe of individual and cultural memory.

KADARE’S “ORIENTALISM” IN THE POST-COMMUNIST PERIOD

In the contemporary Albanian environment Kadare has come under fire for this rejection of Ottoman civilization and culture (which, as we have seen, had a powerfully Aesopian component of opposition to communism) for being a Western “Orientalist.” A younger generation of post-communist Albanian historians has revised aspects of the Ottoman period in the process of constructing their contemporary post-communist Albanian identity. In this new reading, the broader phenomena of Ottoman society and culture, including Albanian Islam, and are revalorized. Where both Ismail Kadare and the communist regime during the socialist era anathematized the Ottomans (albeit in different ways), they have been rendered allies of sorts by this new historiography in which an “oriental” Albanian identity is reasserted contra the perceived “occidentalism” of both the communist regime (seen as a European import) and of Ismail Kadare.

The new historiography seeks to restore to view those aspects of Albanian life in the Ottoman period that were hidden from view during the socialist decades. As the leading Albanian intellectual and the only figure with a global profile,

Kadare has been attacked by this generation for having jettisoned five hundred years of Ottoman Albanian history as inauthentic. For the Tirana University historian, Artan Puto, son of the leading communist historian, Arben Puto, Kadare betrays Albanian reality in order to mount a political argument for entry to Europe. It is shamelessly utilitarian and hence betrays the real Albania that was changed by half a millennium of Ottoman occupation, and that must accept and integrate this “eastern” identity into its self-understanding in terms other than loathing.¹¹ For commentators such as Puto and Fatos Lubonja, the earlier historiography made a mechanistic and unsustainable distinction between foreign (Ottoman) and indigenous (Albanian), a critique also made of Huntington’s civilisational model. Thus Ottoman civilization is seen to overlay Albanian culture, and interchange, continuity or hybridity is not admissible in the model of cultural contact and historical representation. Kadare’s intellectual crime of “Orientalism” is defined by these figures as the “modernizing discourse of the Albanian local elites that objectify the Albanian reality based upon the West-East dichotomy, where West and East represent two completely opposite and very simplified categories of meanings, values and symbols; West symbolizes progress, light, knowledge, freedom, and everything good in general, while East is the very opposite, regress, darkness, slavery, ignorance and evil in general.”¹² Others are slightly more lenient. Cela speaks of a “mutated form of Orientalism.”¹³

These writers base their arguments on the foundational text for this view of the Balkans, Maria Todorova’s highly influential study, *Imagining the Balkans*, in which “Balkanism” is understood along the lines of Said’s “Orientalism” as a form of imagining and articulation of a subaltern socio-cultural identity by a dominant and hegemonic identity. Todorova’s “Balkanism” is an orientalist discourse in as much as it creates a stereotype which becomes politically and culturally instrumentalized in a disadvantageous power-relationship. In fact Todorova rejects the term “Orientalism” for the Balkans (meaning predominantly the Balkan Slav groupings) and her discussion of the Balkans is ambiguous, since she argues that the Ottomans remained disengaged from local culture while speculating that there was substantial integration. But the problem with this term, as with Said’s “Orientalism” remains its reductive binarism. In relation to Kadare and Albania, the faults in this argument become obvious.

It requires some imagination to accept the Ottomans as the disenfranchised “other” of Europe in the Albanian or Balkan case. Ottoman colonialism as a brutal occupation, was no different in this respect from other colonial regimes. The entry of the Ottomans into the Balkans along the coastlines of Greece and Albania in the late 14th century, and their subsequent five-hundred-year occupation of the peninsula as far as Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, left behind powerful cultural traumas and memories, if not much else in the way of infrastructure, whether physical or intellectual. And like other colonial powers, they drew relatively large amounts of human and other resources from an already poor country. There is thus a certain perversity in condemning the colonized for rejecting the colonizer. But at a deeper level, the controversy about Kadare’s “Orientalism” reveals a gap in understanding of the situation under the socialist regime, a failure in historical comprehension of the necessity of Aesopian communicative structures under the dictatorship. For in that environment, Kadare’s critique of the Ottomans had a quite different resonance.

The triangulation of fronts in the post-communist articulation of Albanian identity – of a new Orientalist sympathy, of Kadare’s “Occidentalism,” and the largely discredited communist nationalism of the socialist regime – can best be viewed through a different and clearer lens than that of Said’s Orientalism or Todorova’s Balkanism, namely a “civilisational” lens derived from Arnason, which both explains Kadare’s historical position and clarifies the similarity of this situation an intellectual under communism to that of other dissidents in the Eastern European environment. This latter point is extremely important, given the ongoing controversies about Kadare’s role. Inherent in Ismail Kadare’s essays and fictional works is a set of civilisational arguments, coherently revised and reiterated since the 1980s regarding the fate of Albania.

KADARE, ALBANIA, AND THE “CIVILISATIONAL” MODEL OF DISSIDENCE

During the Cold War era, the model of “heroic dissidence” developed in association with figures such as Havel and Solzhenitsyn, in which the stand-off between independent thinkers and post-Stalinist regimes was an issue of black

and white, oppression and the spirit of freedom. However the reality was rather more complex. From Milovan Djilas onward various versions of the theory of the rise of the new intellectual class in communism were developed to explain the role of this central group in the communist dictatorships. Detailed historical study reveals that there were shades of grey in the phenomenology of dissidence especially after the Khrushchev period, referred to by Havel, Heller and Féher as post-totalitarian, in which these forms of dissidence, opposition and maintenance of pockets of intellectual freedom in these environments could form in an environment that no longer was as direct and physically threatening as Stalinism. We can use this model to discuss the phenomenology of dissidence throughout Eastern Europe.¹⁴ Recently the left-liberal sociologist, Ralf Dahrendorf revalorized the concept of “inner emigration” in order to gain a broader understanding of the nature of dissidence and dissent in authoritarian regimes.¹⁵

While literary works have been recognized as essential to the dissident traditions of Eastern Europe, relatively little work has focused on literature as a means of expressing dissidence in this environment and drawing on a deeper and longer tradition. The Aesopian aspect of literary dissidence, as the name implies, is almost as old as literature itself. The work of Cornelius Castoriadis comes close to identifying the way in which literary thinking relates to dissidence in a political environment. The use of Aesopian strategies of literary language in order to represent “imagined alternatives” in Castoriadis’ sense is central to Kadare’s literary vision. Like the Czech writer, Milan Kundera, who first mounted an influential “civilisational” critique of both West and East in his article, “The Tragedy of Central Europe” in 1984, Ismail Kadare finds the core value of western autonomy in the literary tradition, the mode of writing which imagines alternative futures and alternatives on the basis of evocations of the past and the present. His most pressing concern throughout his writing life was, hence, to remain true to the literary voice, even over and beyond the living, biographical voice. He repeatedly refers to the “second chronology” of the writer, which is the chronology of the *longue durée* of the nation and its civilization – its roots, its forebears and its network of related identities and cultures – beginning with Homer and continuing into the present. It is the timeline of literature rather than history, where literature creates continuities of meaning over time, as opposed to history which documents change. In those continuities of meaning which Kadare constructs with remarkable consistency over the

duration of his writing life, he links the personal to the nation and the nation to its civilisational context. Kadare refers to this lifeline as his “second chronology”. Under the dictatorship it was his “real” life and its environment or homeland was not a nation or even a people, but a civilisational identity.

Under the communists, Kadare’s representation of the Ottomans provided the key to his Aesopian language, for his literary Ottomans are both the historical occupiers of the land in the past and the ideological occupiers of the nation in the present. The beauty of his writing lies in the subtle manipulations of this allegorical material in order to realize a devastating critique of the communist regime from within. The attribution of a crude and reductive model of “Orientalism” to the writings of this period – i.e. of Kadare’s unchanging adulation of the west vis-à-vis the east – obscures the finesse of Kadare’s political writing. In the political allegory of the Ottomans, Kadare both identified this aspect of power as the refusal to allow the existence of alternative voices and hence of complete deadly conformity, and represented it in such a way as to render it symbolic of both the past and the present. Of both the historical Ottomans and the contemporary communists. He did so by setting up a political symbolism of freedom and domination in terms of east and west, originally borrowed from the historical reality of the Ottoman invasion from the East. In works such as *The Palace of Dreams*, this “eastern” unfreedom is projected onto the socialist regime. But it identifies only one aspect of the regime: its unfreedom. It becomes Kadare’s means of criticizing that aspect of socialist modernization which failed to embrace ideals of autonomy and freedom. This is the aspect of socialism which is associated with the Soviet tradition as opposed to the Enlightenment tradition of Marxism. In the rewritten ending to *The Great Winter*, where the events of 1961 in Moscow are woven into an epos where they become tiny steps in a history much greater than the novel’s protagonist, the hapless Besnik Struga, the dictator’s heroic gesture of opposition to Moscow, or even world communism itself. The cosmic perspective of Kadare’s ending is that of a civilization, not just an individual or a nation at the crossroads of history. Will history allow progression or regression for the individual, the nation, the greater collective? No answer is given in this novel although the final image of a populace struggling for connection in the blizzards of history suggests one. But most importantly the question remains: where will Albania go to from here?

CONCLUSION

Kadare represented a type of argument against socialism that can be called “civilisational” rather than ideological or national. He did not criticize from the perspective of a critical Marxism vis-à-vis Marxism-Leninism or Stalinism; he did not claim reference to values such as cosmopolitan enlightenment, human rights and freedom of speech as Vaclav Havel and others did; nor did he use the national arguments that proved so dangerous in the oppositional environments of other Balkan nations and which could be manipulated into convergence with new forms of ethno-national supremacy and oppression. As an intellectual living on the limes of so many civilisational boundaries (eastern and western Europe, capitalism and communism, Christian and Muslim, Orthodox and Catholic, north and south, modernizing imperialism versus stagnating imperialism, dynamic versus traditional and progressive versus regressive), in a country of extremes and of very late national development, Ismail Kadare was highly susceptible to the implicit recognition of civilisational models and arguments, and implicit recognition which has become increasingly explicit, controversial and even at times shrill in the environment of post-communism with its extremely unclear outlines and its potential to regress to atavistic structures and models of behaviour.

A “civilisational” reading of Kadare’s opposition provides a more nuanced understanding of this writer in terms of the specificities of Albanian history and provides a broader theoretical framework for a phenomenology of dissidence in Eastern Europe which takes account of the grey areas between “heroic dissidence” and conformity. This is much more nuanced than the reductive and conceptually foggy concepts of “Orientalism” and “Balkanism.” To view Kadare’s historical views in terms of “Orientalism” and to ally them with the communist representation of national autonomy and rejection of Ottoman influence, is to forget the realities of the communist situation as well as to ignore the brutal realities of Ottoman domination. Working with a concept of the nation born of European 19th century romantic nationalism, both Kadare and the communist regime rejected the Ottoman heritage as something foreign to Albanian identity. But they did so in very different ways and for very different purposes. Precisely the power of Kadare’s writing lies in the implicit argument that the socialist regime replicated Ottoman oppression. This cannot be ignored in the environment of

contemporary debates about Albanian identity, no matter what the current political climate demands. By demonstrating Kadare's identification in a tradition of (literary) opposition different to, but not necessarily less influential than that of "heroic dissidence," I hope to both refocus attention onto the achievements of this great writer of totalitarian socialism and to suggest ways of incorporating his work into a broader phenomenology of dissidence in terms of a civilisational rather than narrowly political frame of reference.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 For a full explication and analysis of Kadare's argument in the Aeschylus essay, see Peter Morgan, "The Wrong Side of History: Albania's Greco-Illyrian Heritage in Ismail Kadare's *Aeschylus or the Great Loser*," *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand): A Journal for Greek Letters* 14 (2010): 92-111.
- 2 Arnason, *Civilisations in Dispute*, 328.
- 3 *ibid.*, 323-359.
- 4 On the linkage of vernacular language and community identity see Wittrock, "Early Modernities," 27.
- 5 Arnason, *Civilisations in Dispute*, 334.

- 6 *ibid.*, 332-33.
- 7 *ibid.*, 327.
- 8 *ibid.*, 332.
- 9 *ibid.*, 334.
- 10 *ibid.*, 333.
- 11 “The Balkan Project,” Interview with John Feffer, March 24, 2010. <http://balkansproject.ips-dc.org/?p=1036>, accessed 7 July, 2011
- 12 Cited in Kajsio, Review of Sulstarova in *Albanian Journal of Politics*, 67.
- 13 Cela, “Orientalism’ in Service of Contemporary National Identity Building,” 4.
- 14 Arnason, *Civilisations in Dispute*, 355.
- 15 Dahrendorf, *passim*.