Identity Convergence

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Abstract

In treating the topic of Albanian identity, the approach of non-scientific publications dominated earlier. Such an approach has kept the identity issue in a status quo position, by strengthening the traditional cultural and social standard. The romantic, folkloristic concept of interpretation was tried in order to interpret the identity crisis as a loss of traditional values, such as the family, tribe, provinciality, regional forms of language, and so on, and not as a process of growing convergence, alienation, resentment, etc. There has not been realistic acknowledgement of the fact that the national identity is a legal-political category, while on the other hand it is closely linked to the existence of a cultural community. One's national identity is expressed through common institutions, duties, and responsibilities of all members of a group. The thesis also treats some of the major sociological-political approaches, by using the identity of the American nation as a reference.

Keywords: Identity, individual, collective, ethnic group, sub-ethnic, national, nation-state, national patriotism, neo-Albanianism, homogeneity, diversity, pluralistic a.

The 20th century saw growing divergences on the matter of the Albanian identity, especially in the context of where it belongs – the European civilization or rather the lasting Oriental values (Arab-Persian-Ottoman) - which is a consequence of the enduring physical and dynamic convergence. Public debate has continued along the line highlighting interpretations and universal dilemmas: Identity - who am I, who/what is he, who/what are we, and what/who are they. Even though this questions may sound likes stereotypes, yet "I" and in this case

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"Albanian" does not differ from the case of others; namely, it is the issue of the ego, with a similar social and cultural meaning, one comes across in other nations. Speaking in the context of semiotics, as Lotman would put, it the "I" structure is one of the basic indicators of one's culture. "Me" as a pronoun is much simpler in the structure than "I as a proper noun. The latter does not represent by itself a cultural sign thoroughly explicated.[1]

If this proper noun is associated with a language sign, then this is about an identifiable cultural and social reference. Thus, the cultural and social context interpretation remains an important interpretation of the phenomenon of identity, an approach embraced by Agar as well. In this case I would refer to the way he explains the American identity, as a modern phenomenon of national identity. He explains that "Me" indicates the matter bridging differences and the identity: American.[2] One of the issues that makes the cultural description more comprehensive is that the difference between an X and Y has to do with the fact that that very difference is linked to dissimilar identities, given as X and Y.[3]

It seems that when building up on his approach, Agar was influenced by the views of Moses who speaks about astonishing project of creating of a nation out of a "swarm" of "wretched fugitives" without arts, arms, talent, virtues, and courage, that is, the people that were killed as columns of strangers over the face of the earth without a single inch of ground to call their own.[4] These people, according to Moses, have the courage, as free people to establish the political body, by having been given the opportunity to set up durable institutions, while time has showed that such an opportunity and miracle could not be destroyed or even altered for five thousand years.

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[1] Jurij Llotman: *Kultura dhe bumi, translated by* Agron Tufa, electronic edition, p 21.

[2] It is worth noting that the American identity was created some 200 years ago through the merger or acceptance of a big number of different cultures. The new cultural format produced a melting-pot., Indians, Austrians, etc.

[3] Michel Agar: Understanding the culture of conversation, New York,1993, p. 126.

[4] Ibid. p. 99.

On the other hand, there is another, very well-known, theory on identity, and that is the one represented by Tajfel and Turnera. The essence of that theory could be summed up in the interpretation suggesting that the national identity of each individual is conditioned by his own or his social identity, which is based on the following fact: every individual belongs to a different social group, too. Therefore, the national identity is part of the social identity as a whole; hence it turns out by itself that the identity derives from one's affiliation, in this case the national affiliation as well. Only by being member of a group (nation) an individual can develop the feelings of being part of a national identity. One's self-confidence, the feeling of security, and social identity grows when he is member of the group, and he recognizes his values better. It should be noted that the crises of nations are coupled with the crises of identity affiliation. Moreover, even though it may seem an extreme view, Penda's theory cannot be entirely rejected. He assesses that it was violence, crimes, and wars that have brought back to the fora the issue of identity.[5]

Such an assessment is referred to the fall of authoritarian systems in Southeastern Europe. During 1990s, the demise of communist regimes was associated with public abandoning of national identities in order to seek for other forms of public identities. This was also very much the case with the Albanians of Albania, an experience that can be explained with the social theory, more specifically as a move of giving up being member of a weak and crisis-hit society, or member of a small nation. Quite many young Albanians started looking for an existential identity, that is, social, religious, and cultural identity, by converting into Greeks or by seeking the identity in a Western state. To a great extent this was also a consequence of indirect violence, but also part of the efforts to gain a new social status, by forgetting the previous ideological and social identity, which in fact suggested nothing else but poverty and clear lack of individual and collective perspective.

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[5] Ivor Altaras Penda, "O identitetu kao osobno pitanje", *Sociologija*, vol XXXVI, nr. 1-2, Zagreb, 2006.

Thus, belonging to a powerful group makes an individual feel more powerful and have a broader perspective. Namely, if a person belongs to a powerful group, in this case a national group, say for instance British or American, then it will be easier for him or her to meet a number of needs related to better work and life, will be more respected and better protected wherever he may be. On the other hand, an individual belonging to an undeveloped and weak national group will find it much more difficult to meet his needs, and quite often he will be accused and seen as a problem even though he is not as such. The most common question that arises in this context would be: viewed from the aspect of social group affiliation, will members of small group be equal with those belonging to big nations, given that fact that the nations are social groups of force relying on numbers and different dynamics? Of course, one cannot ignore the argument of social theory which is represented by its authors. So, this is all about social differences in the context of one's affiliation of a social group and their strength or powerlessness, respectively.

In this very same context: what was the dominating approach of the interpretation applied in the Albanians studies on the differences and sameness. Given the social and political practice of Albanians, there cannot be even talk about a free scientific, sociological, political, and philosophical concept of treating the identity in either Albania or Kosova. In the Albanian studies, be that cultural or social ones, this topic was powerfully raised in the second decade of the 20th century, and in a sporadic way it was referred to as sociological-philosophic reference, known as neo-Albanianism, to conclude very quickly, finally in 1940, when almost all authors who treated in a critical way the idea of the Albanian identity were prosecuted and physically eliminated and their work was destroyed, as was the case with Konica, Frasheri, Merxhani, Cika, and others. Following such an intervention through ideological revolution, we saw the period of pseudo-cultural approach of the Albanian identity, by presenting it mainly as an antipode of Western culture, and as an ideological concept. The emotional and ethno-folkloric way of thinking and judging, on the one hand, and ideological class, on the other, did not provide for the

possibility of giving a full answer to the model and values of this identity. Practically, the definition of primary and secondary values of the Albanian identity was not completed, while on the other hand that was the main goal of those intellectuals, mainly scholars of culture. A question raised by Krist Maloki in the renowned magazine *Hylli i Drites* in 1937, through a political-philosophical pamphlet entitled *Oriental or Occidental*, remained open. [6]

What was the position of the Albanian identity and what did it represent? What has remained on the word identity as a result of the superficial approach that dominated for over 40 years – remarks as connotation of psychological persistence, since its meaning has to do with national, that is, ethnic association, and the alarming feeling and judgment synthesized in the form – is only the following: "I" am ""we". Moreover, "we" always had to be capitalized. From this point of view of limitations it seems that this notion involves everything, and it is impossible and even there is no need for anyone to go further beyond the collective identity. We all are only we. What we have here is precisely Penda's concept of members of a social group accepting the entirety of elements that as their signs, as they see themselves as members of the broader group and in so doing they differ from another other social group. [7]

But, what was the identity that attracted attention throughout the 20th century and continues to be as much preoccupying in the 21th century? A more conventional definition of national identity would say that it determines a wholeness of elements associated with ethnic and linguistic origin, cultural and traditional codes and tribal norms, living conditions, but also modern culture and social status. So, the word ethnic is highlighted in the self-identifying and identifying context A=A. In this context, the main approach is the one that deals with the ethnic concept, while the others derive more or less from the affiliation priority, whereas the

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[6] Krist Maloki: *Oriental apo Okcidental*, [Oriental or Occidental] Plejada, Tiranë, 2003, f.106-122.

[7] Ivor Altaras Penda, vep. cit.

non-critical thinking was interpreted as historic origin or as the origin of the individual-collective, as a noble tradition. But, this has not to do solely about the standard of thinking but also about communications. Identity, any sort of identity, is supposed to involve the impossibility of negation, and it also involves the communication aspect, which is treated by Lotman in his book *Culture of Boom.* Namely, Lotman points out that tradition imprints in the minds of the people the idea that the human conscience moves in the course from the individual (the sole) toward the general. If with the individual we understand the ability to multiply the number of differences in order find in the differences, then this is one of the main relationships of cultural progress. It should be noted that the ability to tell the difference in the sameness and to change the sameness in the difference are two inseparable sides of a unique process of conciseness.[8]

Difference and non-alteration. This notion is encountered in other cultures, which was further strengthened by being the notion *ethnic* in the form of pragmatic differences. Moreover, more than ethnic one can encounter the use of the notion ethnic group, which in Albanian has the meaning of an ethnic community – a community of people with common identity built on the foundations of the same culture, tradition, religion, history, language, ethnic descent and other features. The words *ethnie* in French and *etnia* in Italian have a meaning more or less similar to the word ethnic at in English.[9]

That ethnic conciseness is a system of values associated to a historic communicating continuation seems to be a natural process. But, as the social practice proves, a macro-entity involves many sub-entities (incomplete communities), yet they do not exclude one another, and moreover, in a way they keep many of the differences alive. So, by staying true to this approach, the collective Albanian identity could be for a long

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[8] Jurij Llotman, vep. cit. p. 22.
[9] Ethnic identity, however, is not idenified, even though there are many comnon points with the national identity. Ethnic identity is a socilolgical-politic concept first treated in the Anglo-American studies. The notion points out to the common historic and cultural origin of a community

time judged as something that has in common with the merger in the social nucleus – family, gender, tribe,[10] people, and finally nation. It can be noticed that this is a kind of group identity, as social identity, a cognitive–intellectual–emotional collective category. In the modern understanding, identity has a number of distinguishing elements which are still not fully expressed in the less developed societies or regions. Gilroy notes that we are constantly informed that identity division is the basic difference of national, racial, ethnic, regional, and local level. Identity is always unique and distinguishing. It marks the division in our social level and helps define the border between differences, local effort to help a meaning in the world. Sociality can also be expressed in the context of Penda's definition as the wholeness of elements that member of a social group accept as their own sign - with this they see themselves as members of a broader group and differ from other social groups. [11]

On the other hand, not many people speak about human identity. According to Gilroy the concept directs the thinking from any intervention with basic and anthropological similarities. He argues, "It seems that we can expect from the term identity will be cultural specificity and that on occasions we expect from identity and specificity to work interchangeably."[12] In this context, according to this author, one can find an answer to the identity issue in the questions of power and authority when a group seeks to express its political realizations. This can be in the spirit: a nation, a state, a movement, a class, or some unsteady combination. [13]

The cultural approach of identity differs from the social one. When it comes theoretical definition of identity, Malinson applies the same approach, by adding to these factors the mental fiction which provides for common goals and actions of

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[10] The one who knows not his own tribe, he will not be admited by to his son and daughter, he will be a stranger, therefore not an Albaniana. This is is said in "Kanuni i malevet" [Canon of Mountains], "Bota Shqiptare ", 1943, p. 66.

[11] Ivor Altaras Penda, vep. cit.

[12] Paul Gilroy: *Against race*. HUP, Massachusetts, 2000, p. 99.

[13] Ibid.

an entire group, all of them interlinked to national tradition of education. In addition to this definition of Malinson, it would be useful to point out specifically to a definition, which is one among many of the kind, which prefers the psychological approach, given by Bayat. He defends the thesis that every nation was established under the pressure of a number of basic subjective factors, above all, the human emotionality. Identity, according to this theorist, is strongly linked to the national conscience, and it has reflections on specific feelings and even different forms of nationalisms, as also the spiritual, mythical, religious, traditional, and inherited manifestations. All these subjective elements, no matter the extent of transformation, have an impact on objective levels. If one looks at the history of the Balkans, he must admit that the ethno-cultural model of identification was dominated by the self-pride and self-greatness, collective conscience, and mobilization to stain then others, as well as an extreme position of entrenching into myths, ideology, stereotypes, that is, prejudices. Even though in some case this is denied, yet when having a critical assessment this model of identification remains in the contexts of sentiments, by using national patriotism and romanticism as main forms of expression. The typical model of this spirit in the Balkans is the one used in the Serb national philosophy, which seeks identity in myths and in references suggesting extermination of other nations, by making efforts to depict themselves as superiors compared to the others and with the inherited right to achieve such goals, even by restoring to violent actions, if necessary.

Why such huge hatred and animosity among the peoples living for so long in a small social and cultural space, if there can be more common points than differences? A number of scholars, as is Gilroy, have made efforts to find the source of this phenomenon. He suggests that different people are certainly hated and feared but the timely antipathy is nothing compared with the hatred turned toward the greater menace of the half-different and partially familiar. To have mixed is to

have been party of great betrayal.[14] On the other hand, the political language of identity remains tense and a source of conflict, since there are distinctions between chosen connections and given particularities: between the people you chose to be and the things that determine your individuality by being thrust upon you.[15]

Certainly, in most of the cases, particular approaches do not sum up the entire complexity of this topic, which as seen, especially by in Albanian publicists who treat this issue in a superficial way, including sometimes with fatality and drama. These approaches do not entirely shed light upon the darkness of identity, or the identities, which, like anywhere in the Balkans, are interrelated and have in many cases had a long-term source of conflict which starts from the position that everything among us is right, but the problems come from outside, from the others. We are good, but they are bad.

This flaw has been emphasized in a very open and comprehensive way by the Albanian intellectual Koste Chekrezi. This interpretation does not correspond to the folkloric judgment developed for a long time by the Albanian pseudo-science on the eternal evil that comes from the politics of powerful countries, tackled by Koste Chekrezi in his studies. He thinks that "Albanians are inclined - and this is a psychological factor – to curse the Great Powers for their intrigues and treason and to swear at their 'hungry' and 'bloodsucking' neighbors, because of attempting to root out the Arbnor [old Albanian] race through their 'satanic' plans. Nevertheless, the Albanians forget that every nation has its own worm of wound. For this reason, they do not like to bear in mind the fact that they themselves, or their leaders, give reasons to the foreigners and neighbors to take benefit from their internal arguments and disagreement, from a divided nation."

The issue of identity is, therefore, brought up, and it should be seen more within the issue itself. What is the real subject?

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14 Ibid, p. 106.
15 Ibid.

What is the relation between the subject and object? The critics of Bayat's concept raise the question: How to accurately measure the extent of human consciousness and emotiveness in earlier stages, therefore in a dark and enigmatic past? In this sense, it is not possible to have a sufficiently critical mass of approach, and for this reason, the identity, in a historical frame is in most of the cases emotive, irrational, and confrontational. The complexity of this topic is demonstrated by continuous archaeological discoveries that indicate to numerous differences in every area, expressed through a diversity of material and spiritual cultures. It should be accepted that a serious research, could come to the conclusion that the Albanian identity in the context of European and Western context as a whole, has not been studied enough, and has remained far from inter-disciplinary research. It is not possible to study the identity from one disciplinary aspect, as it used to be the case so far, therefore not even from the aspect of language-linguistic, historiographic, ethnologic, politico-logical, geographic, philosophic, cultural, socio-logic, and so on.

Let us turn once again to the prevailing approach in explaining the Albanian identity, which was historiographic, ideological, linguistic and literary-publicistic. This approach has not brought forward any scientific distinctiveness. Being neither journalism nor science, theses debates, polemics, in most of the cases remain pending, producing a confusing motive for the identity, known among Romans as the repetition of the same, or repetition of the known. Associating the identity with the nation, namely the position of the Albanian nation, is the key methodological tinge of publicist-literary treatises, which has in fact been the most prevailing approach. This contributed to the treatment of sometimes cultural-political aspects, to have the emotional message in the first place, as a shift of history and grandeur of folklore identity. Smith describes this as the emotion of choosing - the common history. This approach does not take place by accident. The absent or missing state was the main and the most dominant preoccupation of the Albanians, and for this reason there was

the ethnic model, as this model appears where the nation was affirmed before the state.[16] Therefore, with nations as a reference, and the nation-states as the ideal, which also corresponds to an essential period of social and economic prosperity and modernity, approaches have not succeeded in avoiding the emotional interpretation.

Perhaps, one should also bear in mind the period of the creation of nations, which is also related to the big converging processes. The fear was whether there would be convergence or the processes would go towards full destruction. Successful practices converged on the former. One should also not ignore the fact that in this period regions of a nation came together, national language became standardized, national education and culture appeared, market expanded, financial market became functional, dispersed values and potentials rationalized - modern national, social and economic institutions were set up. This is not only a historic period that creates the spirit of European nationalism as a driving force behind social and economic development. As McNeill states in his book *Polyethnicity and National Unity in World History*, the triumph of nationalism is a well-known story. The superior power of free, equal and brotherly French nation-state was clearly demonstrated.[17]

If we further refer to this author, we could notice that the special balance between the homogeneity and diversity that few Western European nations were able to create at the end of the 18th century, and that they kept until 20th century, was an interim phase. However, this author emphasizes that creation of a European identity has not ended to this day. The European nation-state, with ethnicity at its centre, has never existed, except as an ideal. Since the world wars of this century, this objective has simply gone out of use. It cannot be taken as an implementable solution this time either. Therefore, in one way

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[16] Paul Garde: "Dykuptimësitë e kombit dhe si mënjanohen ato", in *Identiteti evropian i Kosovës,* Forumi 2015, Prishtinë, 2007.

[17] William H.n McNell: *Poly-ethnicity and national unity in world history*, University of Toronto Pressw, 1985, p. 34.

or another, the ethnicity is taken into consideration after leaving aside all of its disadvantages and difficulties.[18]

So, in our context, the overwhelming part of the Albanians, being occupied, lacked these values of nations and of European identity. Sub-ethnicities dominate macro-ethnicity, and given that the position of writers is in most cases was based on sub-cultural background, dilemmas about identity turned bigger than in reality and consequently, their treatment much narrower. One cannot also exclude the fact that macro-identities and sub-identities are in a constant process of change, and being conservative and lacking ability to follow these changes, the writers defend traditional stances that do not correspond to the critical approach of the identity in the modern society. To illustrate this, if an Albanian is not wearing a plis [white hat], it does not meant that he lost his identity, or if he does not speak the standard Albanian, but one of local dialects, the nation is disappearing. Macro-ethnic Albanian identity should be accepted with all of its cultural, religious, social diversity and pluralism, otherwise it will not be at all a national identity. After all, even inside an individual or a person there are many identities interrelated.

If one was to look for the possible reasons that contributed to the emergence of sub-cultures in certain stages, the reason should mainly be seen in the position of Albanians, namely the relation between the Serb minority as colonizers and Albanian majority as the colonized nation. This relation has produced a cultural, ethnic, political, economic complexity, and that specific social interaction. Therefore, the relation is complex because the Serbs represented an ethnic group, an ethnic community, decision-making and dominant, although they were an extreme minority in the macro-ethnic space of the Albanians who were an overwhelming majority. In the meantime, their privileged position enabled them to have the macro-ethnic force, and the state impact. Even before this occupation, one should list the long-term goals of pre-Ottoman, Roman, Byzantine, Bulgarian, and so on, with numerous

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[18] Ibid. p. 84.

consequences left behind by each of these conquerors. Furthermore, these long-term occupations, paraphrasing Hubert, as was the case with the long connection with Byzantine, left the Albanians without political identity. If until now mainly, the focus of studies could give some elements of crisis in the Albanian society and the Albanian nation, due to complex socio-political position, it has mainly had an impact on the observation of this phenomenon as identity crisis.

If an individual in a collective with its first or second identity, lives in a social climate of crisis (social, cultural, etc) then can we talk about an identity crisis? And the opposite. Let us presume: has the psychological situation of an individual and of the collective, in the context of expression of individuality, an impact in the context of the national identity as well? Can the identity crisis be expressed in a rational and real manner? Some determining factors are universal. There are civilization obstacles that are expressed in the creation of identities as a consequence of the crisis of modern society, which is in fact an identity crisis of the contemporary individual. The individual identity crisis should not be undermined either. In a situation of personal crisis, according to Bauman, the individual will replace the personal identity with the national identity. In addition, his pragmatic concept, "nation creates nest for the lost and for the confused ones," is very well-known. Is the Albanian identity, an identity of the crisis, influenced by different civilization changes that it went through in the 20th century? There can be a relative agreement on this matter. We can also agree with the assessment of Mandala, when he approaches the crisis of Albanian identity, to suggest that in general the moment of crisis corresponds to the difficulties to finish transition between the historic stage that should be finally and another one that we want to approach, but which scares us with its unexpected and unknown aspects.[19]

In simple terms, crisis from long occupation and low cultural and education standard of Albanians coming out of this

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[19] Mandala: Analysis… Gazeta Shekulli, Tirana, 18/06/2006.

occupation, made the independence more fragile, but also the creation of national-state identity with not always sustainable and primary values. During the rule of King Zog, there were many conflicts and bloodsheds as a consequence of legal and illegal political pretensions, as was the case in June 1924 when the authority was toppled through popular violence; or during and after World War II when Albanians were involved again in the fragile civic war which continued through 1990 as a conflict between different layers of society; or in 1997 when we saw again an internal conflict as a wild passion of deep social conflicts and extreme stratification, as well as irrational appetites of the politicians. These conflicts have contributed to constant attacks on values of the identity or delay in creation of new values that came out of the globalization process.

The crisis of Albanian identity should more be seen in another context that has rarely been mentioned, and it has to do with great industrial changes, which in fact are not present among the Albanians, or little present until the second part of the 20th century. Industrialism has been the main factor of modernization of the nations, and this example can be seen in the entire Western Europe, in the United States, Japan, and in other countries involved in the dynamic process of industrialism. Industrialism, as a process of liberal societies, could not be implemented fully in the Albanian state either. The crisis of the totalitarian regime, with introgene premise, which reduces the national sovereignty in order to strengthen the ideological sovereignty, was a factor of reducing the level and of causing the identity crisis. The fact that the Albanian nation is subject to the process of internal political, social, and sometimes also religious interrelations, should not be ignored either.

Despite this specific position, there is no doubt that the Albanian nation and the national identity in the 20th century had tendencies to become a modern phenomenon. However, in general, the Albanian nation as an institution appeared later than it was the case with other European countries, due to the long occupation and difficulties that accompanied it in the process of achieving freedom, even after 1912, when Albanian got its independence. Full constitution followed delay in the

most important period, throughout the 20th century, also as a result of the division of the nation in half, on one hand, and poor institutional organization, the Albanian state, on the other. More micro-identities appeared in the post-independence Albania too, in many cases unclear and confusing, which have made constitution of the Albanian nation more difficult, as a modern phenomenon, in the sense of similar phenomena of European nations.

Irrespective of contexts, the Albanian identity is changing and will change further, especially in the process of political, economic and cultural restructuring of the creation of a real European space, without letting aside the convergence problems: the Occident and the Orient. Not only in the physical sense, but also of spiritual values, as Maloki suggests. It is a grave mistake to hear that Orientalism came for the first time from Asia, or through the Mohamedan [Muslim] religion, or even the Turkish people. Not at all, our orientalism is a fatal gift of Christianity, although a Euro-Asian Christianity.[20]

Recently, the concern of the defenders of national identities focuses on the problems that are created in the process of globalization, which is also thought to reduce some values and features of the state-national sovereignty, but also of the national culture. Perhaps it will be much more important to focus the research on other sources that have an impact on the identity crisis, unclear definition of political, economic, and social priorities, as well as in those related to the action of radical neo-ideological leftist and rightist groups, radical religious groups, and so on. Radicalization of actions by these groups would consume a great deal of creative national energy.

In treating the topic of Albanian identity, the approach of non-scientific publications dominated earlier. Such an approach has kept the identity issue in a status quo position, by strengthening the traditional cultural and social standard. The romantic, folkloristic concept of interpretation was tried in order to interpret the identity crisis as a loss of traditional values, such as the family, tribe, provinciality, regional forms of

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[20] Krist Maloki, vep. cit p. 111.

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