

## THE ETHNOCULTURAL ASPECT IN THE ARTICLES OF THE NEWSPAPER “ALBANIA”

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### Abstract

The state of the Albanians in the end of the XIX century became even more worse from the Ottoman Empire which not only kept their territories under their rule but also stand a more rigorous rule by not letting anything national. This made that a good Albanian elite to start their attempts to raise national consciousness outside of Albanian territories, such case was the publishing of the newspaper “*Albania*” from Faik Konica in Brussels. In this capital work from Konica, whole chapters are dedicated to spiritual culture of Albanians, of material culture and the way of living. Konica talked about “*Besa*”, the hospitality, the bravery feud of the Albanians, few traditional crafts, the way of eating, traditional clothes and very other everyday issue of Albanians which he considered national treasure.

The purpose of this research was to highlight Konicas’s attempts as a connoisseur to the core of Albanian character by analyzing every virtue of them by believing that the nationality should be protected not only in the battlefields, but also by defending and appreciating more and more the deep meaning of the national traditions because their preservation is part of saving the national identity.

*Keywords:* “*Albania*”, national conscience, virtues, national identity.

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### 1. Introduction

Albanians and their condition in the XIX century as it came, it became even more difficult. Considering that they were the only people who had not thrown away the Ottoman rule, it was precisely the latter that put all its attention on taking the necessary measures to not allow anything national inside the Albanian territories. The created situation caused the activity of Albanian patriots that contributed to the national cause to be moved outside the national territories. Therefore, a large number of Albanian personalities who were located outside the national territories worked hard in different spheres but for a single goal, that of the progress of the Albanian people and their awareness to realize the dream goal, their state. One of the personalities who fought strongly for this aspiration was Faik Konica, one of the most prominent personalities of the period of the National Renaissance, but later he devoted his whole life to the realization of national aspirations. Although his activity for the benefit of the Albanian cause had started earlier, his most complete realization was undoubtedly the publication of the newspaper “*Albania*” in 1897, although it was ready in 1896 in Brussels. For 12 years in a row, that would be the thought, idea, hope of every Albanian and a very good guide for all those Albanians who wanted to take steps for the benefit of their national issue. The newspaper articles acted as a program that brought all revivalists together. In the pages of this Albanian aura, no topic was left untreated, it would be an encyclopedia in itself to grasp the information it brought. In this capital work of Konica, whole chapters are dedicated to the social and spiritual culture of the Albanians, material culture and way of life. Konica spoke about faith, hospitality, bravery, blood feuds, some traditional masters, the way of eating, folk clothes and every other daily issue of Albanians which he considered national wealth.

## 2. Body of Manuscript

Knowing that the newspaper Albania dealt with every element in its lines, we find praise from the most for some characteristics, but we also find some negative factors of the social aspect that have prevented the union of Albanians as a single trunk. Faik Konica throughout his journalistic activity in his newspaper has dealt with these aspects.

One of the characteristic features of Albanians that Faik Konica has harshly criticized, describing it as the greatest evil that Albania had, was the bloodiness cowardice. In order to reduce its influence and that it was no longer respected, he described it as too old and that it was part of the bad people. Based on this, Faik Konica hoped that the Albanians would have to start evaluating it as something very small and should leave aside these laws issued by the so-called "*Kanuni i Lek Dukagjinit*"<sup>1</sup>. As for these laws written in this form, the newspaper gives us information that this was not something characteristic only among Albanians and had existed in many different nations, but it was not clear why it continued to dominate only among Albanians. Important to note was the fact that this "*Kanun*" from its first edition had undergone so many changes that Faik Konica ordered that it should be left behind the same as the vast majority of "*Tosks*" had done in which blood feud had been forgotten. Although it has been more used in "*Gegs*" recently, it had started to fluctuate there as well since this part had started to be more controlled by the Ottoman Empire. The places that still used and respected the "*Kanuni i Lek Dukagjinit*" and the blood feud were the highlands constitution of the Leks and the Dukagjins<sup>2</sup>.

Revenge would be a complex topic and would occupy an important place in the newspaper articles, according to Faik Konica himself as well as his collaborators, and this is the only reason for the Albanians to open up and not deal with the Albanian "*Kanun*". In order to unite the Albanians for the good of Albania, it was often emphasized that it was necessary to leave the "*Kanun*" as much as possible, the blood would have to be reconciled and the handshake should be done. The Albanians would have to give allegiance, it was known how dear the allegiance was for the Albanians, they had to unite whether they were Muslim, Catholic or Orthodox and this comprehensive union had to be done as a consequence for Albania to survive. These notes, which were often made in the newspaper, apparently had a reflection on the Albanian population, who began not to decide their own justice, but to turn to the competent bodies. Such a case is given to us in an article when it was shown how two boys from two families in Shkodra had a fight. The good thing about all this was that the Albanians had not tried to administer justice themselves, but each of the family members had taken the sons and taken them to prison to be punished according to the law. Another example is given when a boy also from Shkodra killed another boy in the middle of the bazaar. The one who had committed the murder came from a wealthy Albanian family and it was thought that he would take the situation lightly, but the family members had given faith in the unity of the Albanians, so the head of the tribe from the murderer's side took the murderer and sent him to trial in basis of law. This union of Albanian families who began to give allegiance and respect started in Shkodra and began to spread to other places in Albania. This was a visible progress of the Albanians who had begun to open their eyes. The danger that came from outside caused a light to shine that saw the need for unity among Albanians<sup>3</sup>. There were also those who spoke badly about revenge as a characteristic of Albanians, presenting them as evil people. It was often emphasized in various books that all that presented the Albanians as avengers was that they did not know their customs. This is due to the fact that in the past it presented a task and replaced the police laws<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Albania 1898, B, Nga 15 gjer në 30 të qershorit. B, fq.29-30.

<sup>2</sup> Albania 1898, B, Nga 1 gjer në 15 të korrikut. B, fq.45.

<sup>3</sup> Albania 1899, C, Nga 15 gjer në 30 të gushtit. C, fq.135-136.

<sup>4</sup> Ami Boue. Shqipëria në Turqinë Europiane. Tiranë: Plejad, 2011, fq. 28.

Faik Konica did not hesitate to write in his newspaper everything related to Albanians. He gave different data from their daily life, history, customs, this is for the reason that he would make the traditions and customs more visible to the Albanians so that they practice them as much as possible and do not forget their Albanian characteristics. Also, the advertising that he wanted to do to these national features among Albanians played a role in his writings. In his writings, when he informed about marriages and congratulated the Albanian patriots, he also gave us information about what an Albanian wedding looked like. He informed that when the wedding started on Saturday, they would have to send the pie, on Sunday the pumpkin with wine and on all the days of the wedding, that is four days, the song and dance did not stop<sup>5</sup>.

One of the features for which the Albanians stand out was and continues to be hospitality, which the Albanians regarded as something sacred. In the pages of the newspaper Albania there was talk of a case where a man from Shkodra was charged with death. When the vizier asks the highlander from Shkodra mountaineer if he has seen a more difficult day than today, when he was going to die, the mountaineer answers: "*Eh!.. When my friend comes home and I have no bread left .. it's a very bad thing, when your friend looks at the door and you don't have anything to eat.. for us, Lord, the death is sweeter!*"... The Vizier listens to the words and traditions of the Albanians, he trusted the words of the mountaineer and was happy to see a poor man but with a big heart. In addition to forgiving the vizier for the sin committed by the mountaineer, he also ordered to give him a few grains of sheep, adding: "*This time I will forgive you,... take those sheep that I will give you, and... when your friend comes to you, you host him!*"...<sup>6</sup> About the Albanian hospitality, writes also Dr. P. Trager from Berlin who had traveled several times to Albania and had published several times on what to highlight the Albanian peculiarities. In one of his last editions, according to the newspaper "*Albania*" it was said that: From what I have seen with my own eyes, I have the duty to say that nowhere the foreign is not received with such honor and such joy<sup>7</sup>.

Brailsford will be another author who wrote in favor of Albania and the Albanian cause<sup>8</sup>. In the same line would be the Belgian scholar De Waleffe who writes in the most popular Belgian newspapers. Among other things, he had written an article entitled "Those wild Albanians - An Albanian in Brussels". In this article, Mr. de Waleffe makes fun of all those who write and say that Albanians are wild people. Among other things, he explains why this opinion has spread and why Albania unfortunately lagged far behind other countries and emphasized that in order for the Albanian nation to start walking on the civilized path, it had to be given the same rights as other nations<sup>9</sup>.

Regarding traditions, customs, folklore and everything else that characterizes Albanians, a book written by Giacinto Simini speaks best. A book written by a foreigner from what he has experienced and seen in Albania, but it makes you feel that it was written by an Albanian hand. Every Albanian can pick up Simini's book and read it with his eyes closed without being afraid that something untrue can be said there. The author has divided the book into three parts: in the first part he talks about all the customs of the Albanians and there he mentions them all one by one showing the whole life of the Albanians, he talks about marriage, the songs that are sung during the week of the wedding and many other things; in the second part, a large number of proverbs are included, which the Albanians tell, while in the third part, he wrote Albanian fairy tales. This book was presented as a slap in the face to many others who, after experiencing the food, hospitality, faith and company of the Albanians, turned their backs, inventing various bad slanders against the Albanians<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Albania 1898, B, Nga vjeshta II gher në dimeruar. B, fq.138.

<sup>6</sup> Albania 1899, C, Nga 15 gjer në 30 të korhikut. C, fq.113.

<sup>7</sup> Albania, 1902, G, Prill-Maj, fq.78.

<sup>8</sup> Albania, 1906, Viti 10, Nr. 1, fq. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Albania, 1900, 30 Mars, D, fq. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Albania, 1900, Viti IV, Num. 4. fq. 95.

One of the most important guides that Albania has received has undoubtedly been Lord Byron. In his writings we can find the reality among Albanians. As a foreigner who wrote what he experienced and saw in Byron's writings, we can find the highest praises that have been given to the character of Albanians. Having managed to get to know the Balkan countries well, he emphasized among other things that what separates the Albanians from all the other neighboring countries was that the Albanian is not cunning, does not do tricks, does not lie, is not a hypocrite but despite all the evils that were done to the Albanians showed great openness. This virtue was among the Albanians before and after the arrival of Byron. Candor was the foundation of good habits than any evil and every endless road can find its end and hypocrisy. The beauty of all this was that the name of Albanians was associated with the word openness, this is a great praise for the nation. For openness and people of their word, he also presents to the Albanians the Commercial Charter of Albania written by the Frenchman Bianconi who emphasized that when dealing with Albanians to buy or sell there is no need to do it in writing, when the Albanian gives the word he holds it. Faik Konica tells another case when an Englishman operating in Izmir needed a writer and for a short time many interested appeared. But when the Englishman realized that among the job seekers there was also an Albanian, he immediately gave the job to the Albanian, knowing and believing that he could trust him more than any other person. So, if it is rounded, we can say that the historical character of Albanians is openness, truthfulness, keeping their word, and with these characteristics, Albanians have gained fame more than with their bravery<sup>11</sup>.

Another English writer after Byron was the friend of the Albanians, Miss Edith Durham, who did not hesitate to praise the Albanians so much. She started her journey from Korça, a city she liked very much. A very warm reception was given to her at the girls' school, from there she saw the well-arranged houses that all looked typically Albanian and the people who were very hospitable, she said that they begged me to order Great Britain because there were better people than the Bulgarians to be freed. From Korça, she continued her journey to Kolonja, Leskovik, Postenan, Permet, Tepelena, Vlora, Berat, but in all places the hospitality was the same, so she emphasized: *"in all civilized countries, an artist is well received, but I rarely have seen a reception with as much honor as among the Albanians"*<sup>12</sup>. A negative thing that caught her eye was that all the officials were Ottoman and each of them emphasized that the people in the southern part of Albania were either Greek or Ottoman, while Miss Durham replied that they are Greek and Ottoman but speak Albanian. He also heard many promises that the next year would be the year of building roads and building schools, which never happened while the Ottomans were there. There were a lot of different schools except the Albanian school and in all civilized countries an artist is well received, but I have rarely seen a reception with such honor as Miss Durham ended up among the Albanians<sup>13</sup>. The continuation of the journey of the English guide would stop in the so-called Konica's capital of Albania, Elbasan from there later in Shpat, Peqin, Durres, Tirana, Kruja, Lesh, Shengjin, Shkodra and Mirdita. In all places, something happened that this English woman remained fascinated by the Albanians. Somewhere from the hospitality, somewhere from the friendliness of the Albanians, somewhere from the love of animals, somewhere from the union of Muslim and Christian Albanians. Edit Durham's travel article would end with the words that Konica emphasized: *whoever read Miss Durham's book will understand how much the Albanians were at fault, they are victims of Ottoman betrayal, not in vain a foreign consul in Vlora told her that the Ottomans slaughtered Albania*<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Albania, 1904, Viti i 8, Nr. 9. I, fq. 175.

<sup>12</sup> Albania, 1905, Viti 9, Nr.1, fq. 13-15.

<sup>13</sup> Albania, 1905, Viti 9, Nr.1, fq. 13-15.

<sup>14</sup> Albania, 1905, Viti 9, Nr.3, fq. 58-62.

Faik Konica wrote in his newspaper about every writer who wrote about Albania, either when they wrote well or badly when he opposed them. The book by the Hungarian Baron Nopcsa with the title "Squyenia Catholice e Naelte" (Das katholische Nord-Albanien) with 56 pages written in German is a book that praises the Albanians and speaks so well of them that it whitened their face in civilized Europe. The book talks about history, language, "Kanun", clothing, body shape, religion, names, about the Albanian woman, etc. He begins by saying that if anyone wants to visit the Catholic Albanian part, don't listen to what the slanderers have written, but let them make this trip, which is like a trip around some of the biggest cities in Europe, with the most charming nation that he knows. He also gives an accurate overview of the cultural aspect where he emphasized that a part of Albanians are unfortunately uneducated, while those who are educated and able to write something write in many different letters, which he sees as an element of banning national civilization. He talks both about the "Kanuni i Lek Dukagjinit" and about revenge. Another element that had caught his eye was the hospitality when he emphasized that if someone comes as a guest even if you don't expect him, there is no greater meanness among Albanians<sup>15</sup>. Nopcsa also speaks of the woman's readiness as a lady to do heavy work, the men are presented as brave men who were fat, handsome but also men of faith<sup>16</sup>.

Seeing that many trips were made by foreigners to Albania, Faik Konica in various articles of "Albania" also gave some advice on how Albanians should behave with foreigners. This advice, according to him, was quite important since a traveler would bring other travelers and their number would increase and foreigners would know Albania from their own eyes and not from others. All the advice would be important for the Albanians to know how to welcome the visitors, since they came and went but their words and judgments remained and were spread. In this regard, Konica suggested that his advice to be respected as well: it was the duty of every Albanian to praise the good qualities of Albanians to the traveler. What should stand out above all would be the praise of the bravery of the Albanians and having this with some stories about how the Albanians have fought for their country. Other virtues such as kindness, faith, loyalty of the Albanian woman should also be part of discussions with foreigners, so that they get to know them better<sup>17</sup>.

Regarding bravery, in addition to the fact that Konica suggested to be in the daily discussions of the general mass with foreigners, he himself presented the stories about Albanian bravery in the many articles of the newspaper "Albania". The strength of the Albanians was known in every corner of the world and history had proven that the bravery of the Albanian people should not be discussed. In the face of danger, their greatest strength was bravery when they could only have stones in their hands. The Albanians presented fear to the enemies when they did not have weapons and it is not disputed that the fear increased when they were armed. The bad thing about Albanian bravery was that it was wasted on foreigners without having the opportunity to fight for themselves, their nation and their state. Although they fought for others, even then they showed the strength and character of an Albanian, which did not go unnoticed by foreigners. Regarding this, in an article from Albania, it was written how Grumbkov, a German in a Viennese daily *Neue Freite Presse* wrote that Albanians are strangely brave. Until that time, he had not seen braver born than the Albanians, noting that: "balls and bullets falling on them like hail, they climbed up from the forts singing"<sup>18</sup>. Apart from bravery, foreigners also wrote a lot about other general features of Albanians. On the other hand, negative opinions were often written by the opponents and enemies of the Albanians, but in order to oppose them, they were written by external guides who did not aim to either insult or praise Albania, except to present

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<sup>15</sup> Albania, 1907, Viti 11, Nr. 3, fq. 57-58.

<sup>16</sup> Albania, 1907, Viti 11, Nr. 4, fq. 76-77.

<sup>17</sup> Albania, 1906, Viti 10, Nr. 8, fq. 163-165.

<sup>18</sup> Albania, 1897/8, 30 Prill-30 April, A, fq.203.

it as it was. One of them would be a German scholar, Dr. Traeger, who denied all the infamous writings on Albanians. Among other things, he emphasized: "it was not at all dangerous to travel to Albania, where you were welcomed with friendship and love everywhere". His impressions were also published in a German newspaper, Vossit, where he wrote about the characteristics of Albanians as brave and very hospitable to foreigners<sup>19</sup>.

Faik Konica, in addition to the bravery of men, also reveals the bravery of women. It presents the high number of brave Albanian mothers which were surprising and perhaps few countries can boast of brave women like those among the Albanians. A characteristic of poor peasants or highlanders was that they had many children to raise. It often happened from different situations and in most cases after the men were recruited, they were left alone. The woman left alone with the children works, hangs, suffers for years to raise her sons and never does the Albanian woman think of giving up her duty<sup>20</sup>. The difference of characters between the women and men of Albania is surprising, it is not for nothing that it is emphasized that the women of a country are the same as the men. According to Konica, in Albania all the delicacy of the mind, heart and all the beauty of character and behavior had fallen only to women, therefore Albanian men also took from them<sup>21</sup>.

### 3. Conclusions

Despite all the difficulties he had, Konica managed to realize his goal of several years, the announcement of a temporary newspaper. Although he was not the first patriot to start publishing newspapers since there were many others before him who took this step, he will undoubtedly be the person who set the pillars of modern Albanian journalism.

Konica stood out from all others for his sharp mind and his hand that wrote what came from it, without gloves and directly. The years of the life of the Albanian colossus will be the key to the contribution to the national issue, the Albanian language, education and culture, while the years of existence of his most important monument to the newspaper "*Albania*" lies in the fact that it deals with the long and difficult path that the Albanian people went through. This whole 12-year journey revealed to the internal and external opinion not only the sacrifice that this people went through but also the pride they had to feel having a rich and diverse history. Precisely even the national virtues would take an important place in the leaves of this aura. In addition to talking a lot about the positive qualities of Albanians, he also brought to light some of his negative findings about Albanians, such as their empty arrogance, hot-bloodedness, and individualism, a trait that has had fatal consequences for the unity of Albania. His courage was seen in the fact that he defended the opinions he had even if they conflicted with others, but his goal was to highlight his identity in every field. But on the other hand, he defended them and shouted loudly for positive values such as: bravery, courage, stability, energy, hospitality, dignity, faith, love for the country, clothes, morals and the Albanian character.

Konica's opinion was that only by dressing well, eating well and speaking well in front of others would transmit a positive image for Albania. This is how this patriot fought for the national issue, according to him the contribution to the nationality should not be made only on the battlefields but also by protecting, discovering and appreciating more and more the deep meaning of national traditions since their preservation is part of the preservation of the national identity.

Analyzing every virtue of the Albanians, he shows us that he knows the Albanian character to the core. In order to defend his positions in the articles of the "*Albania*" newspaper, he also presented numerous testimonies of foreign authors, which he considered national wealth. All

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<sup>19</sup> Albania, 1900, 15 Mars, D, fq. 43.

<sup>20</sup> Albania, 1905, Viti 9, Nr.5, fq. 90.

<sup>21</sup> Albania, 1906, Viti 10, Nr. 9, fq. 169.

these works but also another larger part realized by Faik Konica after the years of publication of "*Albania*", respectively after 1909 made his name to be marked among the most important names who contributed to Albanian national history.

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