

Political culture and democratic consolidation in post-communist Albania: Reassessment of authentic domestic values

*Florian Çullhaj*¹

Abstract

Political culture and its effects on democratic consolidation in post-communist Albania will be the explanatory axis of this essay. Ontologically, I move beyond the classical political culture conceptualization developed by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in the 1960s who argued that civic culture is characterised by congruence between the participatory culture of a democratic citizenry and state political structures and understood political culture in terms of attitude and behaviour of citizens interacting in a stable political environment. This article goes beyond political science epistemic perspectives and adopts an anthropological and psychological perspective developed by Archie Brown, Grigore Pop-Echeles, and Joshua A. Tucker. These authors argue that there are important variations between the conception of culture, politics and attitudes of post-communist citizens and citizens in established liberal democratic countries.

Keywords: *political culture, democratic consolidation, authenticity, Albania, post-communism*

¹ Contact at: fculhai@yahoo.com

Introduction

This analysis starts from a diachronic threefold perspective trying to infer the core nature of Albania's political culture. Specifically, the article will focus on the effect that the cultural legacies of the past political system and the imported Western-style institutions have had on Albania's ability to consolidate democracy from within. (Çullhaj 2017). From an epistemological perspective, this paper draws on qualitative methods employing an interpretative investigation of historical and cultural phenomena to elucidate the correlation between political culture and democratic consolidation. Integrating the cultural conceptualizations of political scientists, anthropologists as well as sociologists leads to the use of an eclectic methodological approach where the key quest is to explain the above-mentioned correlation.

Conceptual clarification

It was Gabriel Almond in the mid-1950s who introduced the term political culture in political science to explain the particular patterns of orientations to political action embedded in all political systems. In collaboration with Sidney Verba, Almond developed a typology of political cultures, specifically, employing the term *civic culture* to identify the political culture characteristics that explain the stability of the democratic political structure of different countries.

Criticism against Almond and Verba's model comes from different authors, mostly those who attempted to explain the concept of political culture from a transition society perspective. In his book *Political Culture in Post-Communist Russia*, James Alexander, based also on Stephen Welch ideas, argues that:

The Civic Culture employed inappropriate methods for explaining factors underlying liberal democratic stability. First, Almond and Verba attempted to identify comparable variables in *uniquely evolved societies*, (my italics), which makes the cross-comparison of particular societal political cultures problematic. As political cultures emerge from distinctive or specific configurations of historical influences, geographical peculiarities and varied leadership patterns – the 'web' of actors comprising a political culture that separate it from such a web in another society – makes comparison unwieldy. Often, the problem is less that societies are unique; it is rather that researchers searching for summary statistics either do

not recognise the complexities of the society or ignore them in order to make a 'clean' comparison. Second, in trying to identify political factors supportive of stable democracy, Almond and Verba confused cause for effect: Does a stable liberal democratic political system lead to a civic culture? Or, is it a civic culture that explains a stable liberal democratic system? Such circularity seriously undermines the explanatory power of Almond and Verba's claim that a stable liberal democratic system is explained by the congruence of a political culture with its political system (Alexander 2002:19-22).

Alexander (2002), in his articulated criticism, uses the anthropological approach of Anthony Cohen to the concept of culture; Cohen criticises those who assume that people are somehow passive in relation to culture; they receive it, transmit it, express it, but do not create it. Instead, Cohen argues that Western institutional forms adopted by societies with varying political cultures often bear only a formal resemblance to the institutions of the West. According to Cohen, 'communities might import structural forms across their boundaries but, having done so they often infuse them with their own meanings and use them to serve their own symbolic purposes' (Ferrara 2014: 4-5). These new institutions conform to the native political culture, rather than acting to reform traditional forms of political behaviour. For example, the submissive attitudes of Albanians toward authority free political elites from political accountability, this late value is the cornerstone value of elite political style in liberal democratic countries. In a few words, considering the political challenger as a 'personal enemy' is more acceptable in some cultures than others, or the behaviour of irresponsible political elite is more tolerable for some cultures than others.

Consequently, to understand and explain the concept of political culture, one first needs to define its core components, which have generally been defined as people's beliefs, values, and attitudes. Through beliefs, people describe what reality is, starting from a personal standpoint, which should not be confused with 'cultural belief'. 'What distinguishes the latter from the former is that the ultimate authority of the validity of cultural beliefs lies outside of individuals and those cultural beliefs are shared by other members of the society' (Gonenc 2002: 27) While values deal with other ends such as 'ought' and 'ought not', and they do not relate to descriptive statements, but to prescriptive ones. Finally, yet important, attitudes are mainly focused on emotions. Attitudes derive from beliefs and values and involve positive or negative evaluations of objects, people or situations that govern people's behaviour. Their emotional dimension distinguishes attitudes from beliefs and values. From this point of view, we may define political culture as people's beliefs, values and attitudes toward political objects. Thus, in Western

democracies, the majority of people believe that democracy is the best regime to ever exist and not only when referring to democracy in the abstract sense, but also to the democratic system in their country².

It can also be argued that they value democracy by holding that they ought to be governed by democratic institutions. As a result, they support democracy at both abstract and national level. By contrast, people in post-communist Albania believe that democracy is the best regime but only in the abstract sense, because the democratic system as it is implemented in their country has been a disappointment for them in the last decades. Furthermore, Albanians consider democracy as an 'ontic' norm and think that people ought to be governed by democratic institutions but without giving any concrete contribution in crafting democratic institutions. Over these years, their behaviour has been incongruent with democratic institutions, pushing the system almost to the limit. As a result, they support democracy only in the abstract sense but not at a national level (Whitefield 2005: 3-4). So the question arises naturally, why do Albanians exhibit this dichotomy: why do they support democracy in the abstract, but do very little to implement it in reality?

To answer this question this article relies on Albania's communist legacies as an explanatory variable and adopts Grigore Pop-Echeles and Joshua A. Tucker's perspective in documenting that there is important variation between the attitudes of post-communist citizens and citizens of established liberal democracies towards democracy. This variation is the result of predictable contextual factors, including socio-demographic profiles of the population, contemporary economic conditions, and political institutions and outcomes. (Eleches and Tucker 2012: 379-408); see also Osterberg-Kaufmann 2010). According to these authors, differences in attitudes in post-communist countries are due to the nature of the society in which these citizens live. Therefore, if Albania has a disproportionately high number of well-educated and underemployed citizens, new and not particularly well-functioning political institutions, and substantial economic turmoil, then these 'contextual' factors could explain why its post-communist citizens hold systematically different attitudes towards democracy and the market than citizens elsewhere.

These authors use the idea of 'context' to cover the socio-demographic framework of a society, the economic conditions in that society, and the political institutions and outcomes of that society. If this is the case, then Albanian's 'contextual effects' – be they demographic, economic, or political – could be posited to explain the divergence in its post-communist attitudes

² However, this topic should not be generalized throughout all Western societies. As Alessandro Ferrara rightly suggested 'only the ideologues à la Fukuyama and the right-wingers do that. The rest (of us) are bitterly aware that the distance between democratic ideals and the reality of neo-liberal democracy is about the same that existed between Marx's ideas and 'really existing socialism' of the Brezhnev era'

toward democratisation. The work of these authors is grounded in comparative analysis displaying divergence in attitude involving citizens not only within post-communist states but with citizens who live throughout the world. While, on the other hand, the intention of my analysis is simply to understand the attitudes held by Albanian citizens and to explain the way in which these 'contextual' factors - that are related to the experience of communist rule - can account for attitudes held by Albanian citizens in the post-communist era and the effects of these factors on the process of democratisation.

To do so I move beyond political science perspectives and adopt an anthropological and psychological perspective of Archie Brown's conception of culture in politics. Archie Brown was a pioneer in the use of this concept in the political analysis of communist states. He defined political culture as 'the subjective perception of history and politics, the fundamental beliefs and values, the *foci* of identification and loyalty, and the political knowledge and expectations which are the product of the specific historical experience of nations and groups' (Brown 2005: 182). The utility of this definition lies in its potential to reveal dissonance between political culture and prevailing political institutions and behaviour, a state in which definitions that incorporated patterns of behaviour into the political culture itself would obscure (see also Whitefield 2005; Ekiert 1991; Di Palma, 1992).

Brown uses social psychology to support his conceptualization of political culture. For example, he derived from the substantial literature on 'cognitive dissonance' the findings that 'attitude change is more likely to be brought about among active Communist proselytizers but also from the literature on 'reactance' that highly visible coercion tends to produce the reinforcement of the repressed attitude' (Welch 2005:105-124). During the course of this essay, Brown's conceptualization of political culture will be an implicit explanatory approach. Relying on Pop Eleches, Tucker and Brown's conceptualization of political culture, I will analyse the effect of political culture on democratisation. As a result, a few central questions arise about the possibility of a democratic consolidation in post-communist Albania, i.e. do past socio-cultural traditions influence the current political attitudes of the population? Moreover, is it possible only with the proper wording of the constitution and institutional engineering to establish prerequisites of democratic behaviour among Albanians? Can transition countries like Albania consolidate the democratic system based solely on the Western-style institutional system, or should democracy emerge from domestic authentic values? The answer to these questions is a huge challenge and an endeavour that goes beyond the scope of this essay. In addition, my analysis will begin with addressing the first question that focuses on the possibility of consolidating democracy under an institutional top-down perspective.

Long lasting legacies

Communism in Albania was not a mere consequence of Soviet presence. Following the end of World War II the Soviet Union played an important role in the reconstruction of the Albanian state, and the Albanian people never considered the Soviet Union to be a hostile power. (Rothschild and Wingfield 2000:174) This relationship brought urbanisation, industrialisation and in more general terms, the so-called 'modernization' that took place in the early years of 'real socialism.' This development resulted in a substantial and tangible growth in the standard of living and culture compared with the pre-communist era. However, despite this period of progress, terror against anyone who threatened Hoxha's power persists³ (Rothschild and Wingfield 2000; Rees, Apor, and Apor 2008; Pipa 2007)

This situation lasted until Albania broke up with the Soviet Union after the new policy embraced by Khrushchev who rejected Stalin's political style. Afterwards, China was the succeeding political and economical supporter until 1978. The imposition of pro-Maoist policy exhausted the commitment of even the most loyal party members. After the onset of this relationship, the Communist Party (CP) became paranoid, especially after the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985. Open political debate of any kind was virtually impossible until the tenuous liberalisation of the late 1980s under Enver Hoxha's successor, Ramiz Alia. However, Alia was mostly concerned for the security of the ruling families when the popular uprising began in 1990 rather than with the creation of a plural political environment. The first organised oppositional political movement was not founded until December 1990, much later than in most East European states (De Waal 2005; Bazzocchi and Lubonja 2004).

Throughout this period, Marxism exercised a strong influence over the Albanian Communists and the fanatic embrace of this ideology legitimated vicious kinds of behaviour against those who attempted to hinder their final goals. Pretending to possess a scientific and rational way of understanding historical processes, as well as human's development through economic relationships, the Communists' promises stated that a scientifically supported and technologically advanced industry will create economic benefits and social justice in a later phase of development. Eventually, it was important for the people to take control over economic and political processes to fulfil the imposed ideology.

³ During these years, Enver Hoxha espoused the basic political, socioeconomic, and cultural ideological institutions and programs of Stalinism. Unlike most of the other peoples of East Central Europe, the Albanians perceived this Soviet embrace as protective (*vis-à-vis* Yugoslavia and Greece) rather than as smothering, as enhancing their modernization rather than being exploitative. (Rothschild and Wingfield, 2000:121-122; see also Pipa 2007).

Another important issue was the limited development of the national intelligentsia, which retarded the development of dissident anti-communist groups compared to the other Eastern European Communist countries. Universities, for example, did not play a significant role in the rise of urban political opposition. The so-called civil society, such as popular organisations, associations and private bodies, were totally under the control of CP. As an alternative, the regime included into the Albanian society different kinds of organisations, such as youth organisation or women organisation, but they were little more than auxiliary tools for CP. They served as ‘transmission belts’ for mobilising people and creating a top-down communication model; likewise, they were not allowed to function in their environment or to express opposition to the regime. ‘Another crucial role that prevented the emergence of any normal civil society was played by the large network of informers controlled by the secret police, the ‘Sigurimi’ which did not lose its power until the regime collapsed’ (Kalsounis 2010:16). With the installation of the communist regime, Albania hoped for a change and the first generation believed in the Communists’ promises with a selfless commitment to the exaggerated demands of the leadership (Dilo 1961). Despite some changes achieved in different realms in the first years, it was clear that based on the way Hoxha treated his opponents, Albania eventually lost the opportunity to become a free and democratic country. The authoritarian political style was established through means of pure violence for all kinds of resistance which tried to ‘think’ differently from the ruling class. This kind of political style continued and consolidated over the years until the system changed in 1992.

However, the crucial question that arises here is whether the criteria employed by Communism and later on by Hoxha’s regime represented a separation from Albania’s past. Was the system installed by Hoxha - which proved to be one of the worst examples of totalitarianism - only a late form of authoritarianism or just something new? It was certain that changes existed and Marxism-Leninism was the most prominent of them, but it has been argued that some kind of similarity and continuity with the past still exists. Since the time of independence, absolutism and violence were a predominant model of political activity. In any political system experienced by Albania, all kinds of change came from above, through ruler’s decree and not through evolutionary processes. The state or the community had priority over the individual and thus the debate over the use of the power was focused mainly on the person who had to exercise the power instead of limiting his/her power. During the forty-two years of Hoxha’s government, there was no cycle of communist party reformation. Based mainly on the Stalinist model Hoxha and his successor Ramiz Alia created in Albania an atypical political environment, hostile to democratic values. (Pipa 1990: 184-185), see also (Gleason

1995; Hoffmann 2003). The internalisation of the 'new' values for Albanians, that the Communist system provided, came through severe obligations and a perpetual control over the masses. When such control ceased to exercise its power, none of those values withstood because along the years of coercion the masses opted for the other side, resistance. They behaved perfunctorily with regard to those values, without reflecting critically upon their substance which was to be refused and which was to be later discarded.

If we want to classify the Albanians' political culture in relation to the attitudes towards authority, it can only be a 'submissive one' (Mayer 2003: 12-20), which means a largely unquestioned and unlimited subjection to those who are in authority. This kind of attitude was due to Hoxha's regime, because of uprisings against authority – be it foreign or domestic – existed in Albania throughout history. Institutions that profess infallibility and ruling by divine right, which may have contributed in this respect, were absent before and after the independence. It was the Communist Party, though, that pretended to be all-knowing, and that deserved the right to lead the activities of the society in an authoritarian manner. From an ontological perspective, the legacy of the communist period has not helped in the construction of any precondition for democracy in the abstract sense, let alone as a political system. For the communist elite, the most important issue was maintaining its power with ideology as an instrumental tool to control the masses, and any kind of reform was considered valid as long as it did not threaten their political power. Probably it sounds like deterministic and somehow like a paternalistic idea that the fault lies only to the governing elite. However, the fact is that the Communist elite had all the opportunities to build a system where the central focus was the individual or even the society – since the small number of the population allowed this opportunity – and had all the opportunities to work and interact for and with them, beyond the formal aspects that were imposed by ideology. One of the main aspects that the elite not only did not develop but also worsened over the years was the perception of ordinary citizens as playing a role in politics with the big P. This was a pure oxymoron because in that period every aspect of people's life, every facet of it was politicized and the elite encouraged individuals to participate in open debates. But there was a limit; citizens could not engage in political debates outside the official ideology of the regime. For example, they could not complain for a wrong implementation of a domestic policy or for the government's foreign policy. Those who did engage in (P)olitics ended up in prison or in gulags, and such actions of the governing elite served as an example for the rest of the population of what could happen if one got involved in (P)olitical activities. These ideas were deeply rooted in people's everyday life, and even a popular expression illustrated that idea: *'with water, fire, and state (politics) do not play!'*

These kinds of attitudes that the regime cultivated over the years enabled people to view politics as something bad, something not open and transparent, and for survival reasons, they chose self-isolation instead of active participation in politics with a big P. Therefore, at the moment the communist system collapsed, the new system demanded by society precisely the opposite behaviour toward (P)olitics. People in a democracy need to be fully engaged and participate in (P)olitics to 'control' the new elite and to increase pressure for change and reforms, so the new system cannot turn into an oppressive one. Under such conditions, Albanians entered the democratic path with a significant uncertainty in different realms, except one, that their (P)olitical role in the new system would exert a much greater impact.

To sum up, the holistic and capillary control, coupled with irrationality and terror, left Albanians unable to encounter democratic political concepts. The ensuing backwardness toward their political world for the majority of Albanians is mainly a consequence of the long totalitarian domination and the strong isolation that Hoxha's regime implemented along decades. Therefore, it is obvious that from a sociological standpoint the past socio-cultural traditions of Albanian population had strongly influenced their current political attitudes and behaviours, and from a political standpoint the institutional structuring of the past autocratic regime continued to suppress the transformation power of the current democratic culture.

In the following section, I will address the second of this article assessing whether it is possible to establish the prerequisites of democratic behaviour among Albanians only through constitutional and institutional engineering.

Democratisation through institutionalization

Following regime change, Albania as a former communist country entered the democratisation process, which Huntington classified as the 'third wave' (Huntington 1991: 16-21⁴; Whitehead 1996: 5). The nonviolent revolution of Albania reinforced the belief in the West that democracy is an exportable good if Western democracies implement a right combination of pressure and aid in collaboration with internal political actors (Fukuyama 2005). Western pressure coupled with technical and economic assistance was domestically understood as a *conditio sine qua non* for the successful implementation of the early days' democratic reforms. However, efforts to establish democracy in Albania raised the question:

⁴ It was Samuel Huntington who coined the term 'Third Wave'; he included the countries of Eastern Europe in the same 'wave' as Iberian and Latin American democratization. Latin American specialists like Linz and Stepan *et.al* have tended to follow his example. Laurence Whitehead has been an exception among those scholars. In contrast with Huntington and others, he refers to the process of democratization in Eastern Europe as a 'fourth wave', although without elaborating the point.

will the framing of the appropriate constitution and economic system - building democratic institutions and developing positive attitudes towards them - take place among Albanians through ongoing familiarisation? Accordingly, the failure of the 1994 referendum on the new constitution, the overnight changes to the constitution in 2008 and the permanent stagnant economy strengthened the belief that a Western-style democratic constitution and a functioning market economy cannot flourish if it is not rooted in an environment pervaded by authentic democratic culture (Çullhaj 2017). As a result, determining the trajectory of democratic consolidation without taking into consideration the variable of political culture presents an incomplete analysis in terms of understanding and explaining the current stagnation of the political system. More specifically, since the beginning, democracy was not built on a solid authentic foundation but on political institutions and cultural patterns that were at best an import from the West and at worst a legacy of the past regime.

During the transition period, the Albanian society – under a barren background of democratic ideas and empirical experiences – underwent a profound transformation in manifold areas. Albania began to adopt a multiparty political system and the entire spectrum of positive freedoms was legitimated. In legal terms, the establishment of the Constitutional Court and several other reforms in the judiciary marked another step towards a democratic system. In economic terms, the first process of market economy transformation based on a set of radical reforms was set in motion. Among the most fundamental ones, I can mention the massive privatisation of state enterprises and assets, the gradual removal of state controls on most commodities, decentralisation, gradual privatisation of a large part of the economy, tax reform etc. These and many other reforms in various areas of life spread the idea that the past system was over and done, and individuals will embrace democratic behaviour because of institutional reforms. Nevertheless, this was not Albania's state of affairs.

In addition, the abiding failures of constitutional and institutional reforms to establish democratic attitudes and behaviours certified the predictable idea that it is impossible only with the proper wording of the constitution and institutional engineering to craft democratic behaviour among Albanians. This view turns to be a political maxim considering the steady political crises that characterised the transition period that persists hitherto. Moreover, this view reinforces the belief that imported formal institutions cannot flourish unless they operate in a democratic culture that is already internalised by domestic citizens. This idea seems to be accurate considering the fact that, after the new constitution of 1998 entered into force, its ability to democratise formal and informal institutions of the Albanian society from a top-down outlook appeared to be lukewarm. Furthermore, it is sufficient to recall the elites' simplicity and the

lackadaisical attention of citizens dedicated to constitutional changes in 2008, to show that democratisation through institutionalisation seems to be impossible in the Albanian political reality. Moreover, on this point, theories teach us - in a tautological justification - that the legitimacy of a regime/constitution seems to be displayed through its ability to be long lasting, but, on the other hand, its long-lastingness remains the main prerequisite for a previously established legitimacy. Therefore, as Mayer argues 'political culture sets democratic institutions rather than vice-versa' (Mayer 2003: 40).

In the following, I will continue to address the third and last issue regarding the question of whether transition countries like Albania can consolidate democracy solely through Western-style model or democracy should emerge from domestic authentic values.

Democratic consolidation: Reevaluating domestic values

Democratic consolidation in Albania has often been a contested concept because the transition problems related to its functionality persist up to the present days. Following regime change, Albanians experienced a moral and cultural crisis, which was reflected in the loss of confidence, the decline in civic values, and disinterest for public issues (Vickers 1995: 241). They perceived democracy as something that would gain functionality by its own properties and always looked for its implementation independently of their personal efforts. They continuously excluded and excused themselves from their non-democratic way of behaviour even though they knew quite well democratic core values and the way they must fulfil them. In their firsthand perception, if democracy had to be functional and consolidated there was someone else that had to behave accordingly, not 'him/her'. With some improvements, this situation persists even nowadays.

However, from a theoretical standpoint, the current state of democracy in Albania registered several accomplishments. In particular, it fits the formal minimalist model of Schumpeter as 'electoral struggle between competing elites', albeit, it still has problems with complete system functionality. Moreover, during the last decade, Albania reached an important familiarity with democratic consolidation when political actors accepted that the broad parameters of the system had been already established. According to Offe, there are no longer major debates about the basic rules, but only within them, or in Linz and Stepan terms, the new system has become the 'only game in town' (Offe 199: 865-92). Although countries in the post-communist world pass the Schumpeter's minimalist test, O'Donnell (1992) describes and criticises them as 'delegative democracy'. Under delegative democracy 'whoever wins election is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a

constitutionally limited term of office' (O'Donnell 1992: 57). To O'Donnell, this situation is not a representative democracy because there is no accountability and no need to fulfil election promises.

Consequently, Albanians should not focus only on perfecting the new institutions through trial and error, considering the democratic functionality as an *a-priori* process. As I previously analysed, it seems that democracy is not a mere fact of just introducing new institutions like a constitution, parliament, elections, a party system, or a legal system. To understand, if or how democracy works, we must attend to what people make of it and what they think they are doing as they engage in *Politics*, or when *Politics* engages them.

The principle of democracy and democratic values are neither novel nor alien but have reliable roots in Albania's culture. Before the advent of communism, the country's tradition counts several experiences with values such as trust, tolerance, pluralism, and participation. Accordingly, several phenomena demonstrate the existence of such experience such as, the Republican self-governing values incorporated in the articles of the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, the idiosyncratic phenomenon of religious tolerance, and the cultural-ideological deliberation that took place between 1920 and 1930. Despite their heuristic importance, the investigation of all these three phenomena will far exceed the limits of this article, therefore, the analysis will be limited only to the investigation of the third one; the cultural-ideological deliberation that took place between 1920 and 1930. This reevaluation could be a solid milieu for supporting today's efforts toward democratic consolidation exposing the deliberate elision of the Albanian conceptions and practices that took place in the country before the Communist regime came to power.

The interwar Albanian intellectual discourses: Preconditions for a democratic future

The interwar period was essential for Albania's domestic developments because it was a period when the new political and cultural elites were oriented towards the West as a model for their country. The public and political debate on the Albanian future was reported in the newspapers between the years 1920-1930. In that period, as long as King Zog banned political parties, intellectuals and political elites decided to shift the debate in the Albanian press of that time, thus featuring a prerequisite of some kind of 'deliberative democracy'. It is understandable that this debate was intentionally overlooked during the communist period because of the regime's ideological fanaticism, thus the literature concerning this regard is limited. Nevertheless, my analysis is not intended to exhaustively investigate the

phenomenon at hand but simply to show its presence through one of the most important elements of today's Western democracy: public debate.

Considering the situation of Albania at that period, one of the most important problems faced by the intellectuals was the creation of an environment for constructive public debates, but more importantly, to turn the people into more active participants by involving them in the decision-making process. The public debates reported in the press emerged as a significant emancipating tool in this process. Public debate is classically understood as a series of forums where issues are addressed that concern people's opinions, interests, and expectations. Nevertheless, it would be superfluous to pretend that within that harsh political period forums could have incited active participation among Albanians. But nowadays, if we look back at that period, we will be able to view that such undertaking serves as an authentic precondition for establishing a solid ground on which to build an understanding of efficient citizenship and a functioning democracy. Such forums bear the traces of how people wish to be governed in the context of preferences and expectations that have been voiced.

In that regard, Ndriçim Kulla in his introduction to *An Anthology of Albanian Thought 1870-1945*, writes about the Western aspiration that the elite of the 1920 *tout cour* provided to the political orientation of Albania. Their most important endeavour was framing the foundation for a real and constructive public space where critical debates over culture and politics would become a normal activity among elites and lay people. (Kulla 2003: 13-16; see also Sulstarova 2009; Austin 2012; Ypi 2012). While Robert Elsie in his article *A Short Elite Brightness: The Zenith of Albanian Literary in the 30s* writes that:

'of the multitude of weekly and monthly newspapers ephemeral nationalist who came in different cities of the Balkans, was crafted a journalistic quality that served dissemination of information, whether political, cultural or literary. Despite primitive structures still operative at the time when Ahmet Zogu become Zog I, King of Albanians, the press enjoyed a certain freedom. Publishers, if they had been careful not to criticise the royal family and the foreign policy of the king could publish what they wished. Censorship existed, as in any authoritarian system, and occasionally newspapers were closed, but the situation was never as dire as in the period after 'liberation' (Elsie 1997: 478-479).

According to Elsie, the culture of this period began to show traces of a polarisation between East and West. Albania initially was affected marginally by the ideals of the October Revolution in Russia, despite a few intellectual figures who had visited the Soviet Union. The polarisation of ideologies became more pronounced with the onset of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Writers Petro Marko

and Skender Luarasi and a contingent of Albanians went to Catalonia to take part in the International Brigades. Socialist ideas penetrated in Albania, but at the same time fascist ones also.

The right-left debate taking place in Europe in the 1930s was reflected in the debates of Albanian intellectuals. Opinions about the path that Albania should choose toward emancipation and civilisation were different. On the one hand, some thought that the Albanian people had to evolve with energy and courage, by adopting methods of civilization, thus not remaining on the sidelines of developing nations; on the other hand, others, whose number was greater, thought that the accelerated development would be harmful to the country and for the people. A very interesting intellectual of Albanian culture of the 1930s was Branko Merxhani, the publisher of the magazine *Albanian Effort* since October 1936. Throughout his writings, Merxhani expressed the ideas that his country was not developed in any aspect, even intellectually, and called for a spiritual renaissance, which he named *Neoshqiptarizmi* (Neo-Albanianism). This intellectual movement entered Albanian society in 1928, even if its roots date back to the national revival of the nineteenth century. According to Merxhani, Albania should create an independent national identity, an Albanian consciousness to bring people out of darkness and ignorance. In his eyes Albania was an internationally limited country but internally an infinite one. Merxhani, who for a while had even supported King Zog I, advised for a gradual and disciplined path of monarchy towards 'disciplined democracy'. Initially, by establishing a reliable press, which would form sound public opinion, afterward allowing the direct election of candidates by ballot only in the major cities, and only when time was ripe the rural population, which constituted the majority, could be enfranchised (Sulstarova 2009: 691; Kulla 2002; Austin 2012)

Even if *Neoshqiptarizmi* was based on ideological nationalism, it was inspired by the positivist ideas of Emil Durkheim and Ogyst Comt. Positivism was close to the Albanian intellectuals because of its affirming ideas for the dissemination of science and culture. These ideas, which were against feudalism, were included in the political program of *Neoshqiptarizmi*. At that period in Albania, there was a low level of social development, culture and education, therefore, in its true form *Neoshqiptarizmi* was a cultural and not a political movement, or in Merxhani's words: 'There is no Politics! Just Culture' (Elsie 1997: 479; Kulla 2002).

In his intellectual activity, Merxhani's attempt was to divide the concept of culture from the concept of civilisation to discharge the domestic culture from the fear arising in the embracement of European civilisation, which was an important process for the development of Albania. Through this division, he aimed at protecting national culture, which otherwise would merge into the assimilating waves of European civilisation since state institutions had failed to

protect it. In his view, the strengthening of national culture would be a protection from the loss of identity. He thought that only by strongly relying on these two directions - of existing among countries that previously had gained independence or who had never lost it - Albania would join European civilisation. (Kulla 2003: 361-5). However, inside the right wing, there were other factions that opposed Merxhani's vision by opting for another alternative toward modernization. Another prominent intellectual of the time was Krist Maloki who was in favour of an autocratic regime, while on the other hand, Ismet Toto was in favour of an 'enlightened dictatorship'.

Toto's assumption was that the struggle of young Albanian intellectuals was part of the world youth movement rebelling against the 'ancient regime' and his conception had many similarities with the cult of youth, which developed in the fascist milieu in Italy. Therefore, the main concern for him was how to organise the young Albanians in the same way that the Nazis assimilated all the German youth groups into one well-disciplined entity. The organisation of the youth should be part of the creation of an organic and disciplined society because 'a strong nationalist climate, a social reorganisation, a discipline and arrangement of all the classes and their interests, a strong activity towards Occidentalism, this is the ideal Albania. All this can be accomplished only by a dictatorship with an Occidental outlook. (Sulstarova 2009: 697; Kulla 2003) In Toto's view, because Albanians have never experienced democratic ideas and practices, dictatorship should be their logical starting point. It was opted for the Right type of dictatorship, as long as Albania did not fulfil any precondition for a Left one. As Toto put it; 'unless the whole Europe became communist, even if we became one million Lenins, we cannot make Bolshevik Albania' (Sulstarova 2009: 697).

Over time, *Neoshqiptarizmi* became a counterweight to most politicised socialist ideology and Left internationalism. Even if it was an Albanian creation, *Neoshqiptarizmi* must be seen in the context of other European nationalist ideologies of the 20s and 30s such as: Greek-hellênikôtêta, mainly under the dictatorship of General Ioannis Metaxas during 1936-1940, the idea of *italianità* at the time of the Italian Duce Benito Mussolini and the Hispanidad in fascist Spain of General Francisco Franco. Slowly they came together to create European fascism, which brought a brutal and inhumane dictatorship in Europe. (Kulla 2002)

On the other side of the ideological spectrum stood the intellectuals who did sympathise with the Soviet communist system, already in power. Social injustices in Albania increased even more under the rule of an autocratic regime and the invasion of fascist Italy, thus leading many intellectuals of the thirties to inquire about Soviet communism; or at least any kind of socialism that could fight against poverty and exploitation of the peasant masses.

As in the case of the right-wing current, even within this one, there are divergent ideas over the model that Albania should follow. However, the two prominent intellectuals of the left were Millosh Gjergj Nikolla (aka Migjeni) and Nonda Bulka. Through their writings in newspapers, they highlighted the desperate situation of the workers and peasants in Albania. According to them, not everything *ought to be* borrowed from the Occident: the European bourgeois society was in a deep crisis itself, materialised in the Great Depression and the rise of fascism. They suggested that intellectuals should go beyond the latest achievements in science and culture coming from the West, but should search for other alternatives, which might serve all the people and not only intellectuals. Furthermore, domestic intellectuals should pay attention to the reality of people and popular culture and should not deal with constructing abstract systems of thought. In other words, they rejected the bourgeois aspects of European civilisation as well as the capitalist system and devoted their energies to an alternative social system, which would be modern and beneficial to the people (Sulstarova 2009; Kulla 2002).

To understand what was the right path to follow, Albanians, first, had to understand who they really were themselves. Albania was on the edge of a deep abyss of backwardness and state construction had to start from scratch. Albanian writers of the thirties were attracted and amazed by the West and tried to discover and establish the role of Albania in Europe. A large number of intellectuals had been abroad and had been in contact with the Western society. Nevertheless, the *West* for Albanians had a somewhat vague meaning given that the Western country closest to Albania was Mussolini's fascist Italy. On 7 April 1939, intellectual discussions on the role of Albania in Europe became redundant after the Italian troops landed in Durres, Vlora, and Shengjin to invade Albania.

The polarisation of ideas in the New East and the New West, namely in communism and fascism, brought the final confrontation in Albania and elsewhere in Europe, during which the country was subject to the ruthless will of political and military extremists, and writers and intellectuals of all political wings were forced to kneel.

According to Elsie, it is not an exaggeration to say that the Albanian intellectual and cultural life had reached its zenith by mid-thirties until the first half of the forties. For the first time in Albania, there was a modern-contemporary literature of quality. This period was a kind of golden age which brought some developments, but only for a short time because soon after Albania found itself under the threat of an impending disaster that was going to cut off all literary and cultural production for many decades to come. (Elsie 1997)

In Albania, the selection of the ideologies that flourished in the Europe of the 30s had to be based on sound reasons. There was a long political vacuum due to the lack of an Albanian independent state, thus leaving room for errors when

dealing with various political situations. These errors were a reasonable concern to the intellectuals of that era calling attention to the role of the press in the interwar period, which, with all its complexity, vicissitudes provide to be a great tool of socio-political emancipation.

This historical period was characterised by the flow of European philosophical thought through which domestic intellectuals claimed to raise awareness among Albanians. The press gave voice to this period's ideas as well as to advanced philosophical reflections that intellectuals brought up in daily debates. Major socio-historical problems were highlighted and simultaneously offered for Albania's political orientation. The period between the two world wars - in the political, social and cultural realm - was the most important, because it established the foundations of Albanian citizenship and its European identity.

Ultimately, this article argues that the period between the two world wars, as in many other spheres, was a zenith in terms of critical thinking when compared to previous as well as following periods. Besides pluralism of views and critical thinking in many areas of life, it can be affirmed that the greatest achievement in this context is the high level of expression of diverse views concerning the modernization paths that Albania should follow. Undoubtedly, this period marks one of the brightest stages of Albanian cultural development.

Conclusions

During these last twenty-five years of experimenting with democracy, a plurality of models has been presented to Albania and each one of them has successfully failed. This failure occurs for not taking into account the developmental paths that preserve the mark of Albanian civilisation distinctiveness. The cultural legacy of dictatorship, the inability of individuals to internalise democratic values through a top-down model of democratisation and the limits of the imported democratic models to produce real political culture are some of the variables that affected the process of democratic consolidation in post-communist Albania. Nevertheless, as emerged from the above analysis, it is clear that Albania based on its internal values holds the prerequisites to produce a consolidated democracy. What is needed is to wash away the dust of forgetfulness, to free our reasoning from the ideological bias rooted in communist regime propaganda as well as from today's Western wise partisanship, thereby, granting to these values the possibility to unfold their impact on the process of democratisation.

Consequently, a holistic effort is considered necessary to establish these preconditions in which Albanians could realise democracy as a way of living, contributing to its improvement day after day in their micro world. In my opinion,

this major change should be realised mostly by politics or in Moynihan's words '... politics can change a culture and save it from itself'⁵ (Lawrence E. Harrison, Samuel P. Huntington, 2000, pp. xiv-xv). It is politics that should make Albanians understand democracy as an ongoing interactive process, rather than some clearly defined end goals. In this sense, it is impossible to be entirely satisfied with the very concept of democracy prevailing in Albanian politics, which implies completion as a form of closure in the similitude of the Western model. As Alessandro Ferrara argues 'Democracy has a chance of becoming a truly universal political form only if democratization will not forever remain synonymous – as it has been for a long time – of Westernization and will truly open up to diversity, rather than consisting in the exportation of the Western institution and traditional forms' (Ferrara 2014: 3).

In conclusion, attempts to simplify Albanian history and to sharply distinguish the country's development from other European states where democracy has been consolidated are highly problematic due to the formlessness of historical legacy. Contemporary political unaccountability as well as social apathy, whether rooted in political culture or institutional interests, is not easily explained by the weight of Albanian history. However, this does not mean that contemporary institutions operate unconstrained by historical cultural legacies but only that these legacies need to be explained and clearly linked to the choices made by present-day actors.

About the author

Florian Çullhaj, Ph.D., is a political scientist educated in Albania and Italy. He is currently a lecturer on theories of democracy at the University of Tirana and the European University of Tirana. Florian's research focuses on political culture and democratization and he is the author of the book *Democratization from Within: Political Culture and the Consolidation of Democracy in Post-Communist Albania*, (Editore: Nuova Cultura, Collana: Crossroads No. 81, Roma, 2017), as well as of several articles published in local journals.

Bibliography

- Alexander, J. 2000. *Political Culture in Post-Communist Russia Formlessness And Recreation In A Traumatic Transition*, Published By Macmillan Press Great Britain
- Austin, R. 2012. *Founding a Balkan State: Albania's Experiment with Democracy, 1920-1925*, University of Toronto Press

⁵ Perhaps the wisest words on the place of culture in human affairs are those of Daniel Patrick Moynihan: 'The central conservative truth is that it is culture, not politics, which determines the success of a society. The central liberal truth is that politics can change a culture and save it from itself'.

- Baker, G. 2002. *Civil Society and Democratic Theory Alternative Voices*, Published By Routledge, London
- Bazzocchi, C. Lubonja, F. 2004. *Intervista Sull'albania: Dalle Carceri Di Enver Hoxha Al Liberalismo Selvaggio*, [Fatos Lubonja, Interview on Albania: From Enver Hoxha's Prison to Wild Liberalism] Bologna: Il Ponte
- Brown, A. 2005. 'Conclusions' In Whitefield, S, (Ed.), *Political Culture and Post-Communism*, Basingstoke and New York
- Çullhaj, F. 2017. *Democratization from Within: Political Culture and the Consolidation of Democracy in Post-Communist Albania*, (Editore: Nuova Cultura, Collana: Crossroads No. 81, Roma
- De Waal, C. 2005. *Albania Today, A Portrait Of Post-Communist Turbulence*, (Published By; I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd
- Di Palma, G. 1992. 'Legitimation From The Top To Civil Society: Politico-Cultural Change In Eastern Europe', In Nancy Bermeo, Ed., *Liberalization and Democratization*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
- Dilo, J. 1961. *The Communist Party Leadership In Albania*, Washington DC: Institute Of Ethnic Studies, Georgetown University
- Ekiert, G. 1991. 'Democratic Processes in East Central Europe: A Theoretical Reconsideration', *British Journal Of Political Science*, 3
- Elsie, R. 1997. *Histori e Letërsisë Shqiptare*, [History of Albanian Literature] Published by Arban Blandi, Përkth. Abdurrahim Myftiu, Tirana
- Ferrara, A. 2014. *The Democratic Horizon: Hyperpluralism And The Renewal Of Political Liberalism*, Cambridge University Press
- Fukuyama, F. 2005. *Esportazione Della Democrazia, State-Building e Ordine Mondiale Nel XXI Secolo*, Pubblicato Da Lindau S.R.L, Trado.S. Castoldi, M. Passarillo
- Gleason, A. 1995. *Totalitarianism: The Inner History Of The Cold War*, New York: Oxford University Press,
- Gonenc, L. 2002. *Prospects For Constitutionalism in Post-Communist Countries*, Published By Kluwer Law International, Netherlands
- Harrison, L. Huntington, S. 2000. *Culture Matters How Values Shape Human Progress*, (Published By Basic Books
- Hoffmann, D. 2003. *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press
- Hoxha, E. *Laying The Foundations Of The New Albania, Memories And Historical Notes*, Printed And Published By The Workers' Publishing House 172 Wandsworth Road, London Sw8, England. The Year of Publication Is Not Available
- Huntington, S. 1991. *The Third Wave Democratization In The Late Twentieth Century*, Norman University Of Oklahoma Press
- Kalsounis, Th. 2010. *Democratization of Albanian, Democratization from Within*, (Published By New York, Pelgrave Mcmillan
- Kulla, N. 2002. *Neoshqiptarizma një model i braktisur*, [Neoalbanianism a neglected model] (Shtëpia Botuese "Plejad", Tirana
- Kulla, N. 2003. *Antologji e Mendimit Shqiptar 1870-1945*, [Anthology of the Albanian Thought 1870-1945] Shtëpia Botuese Plejad
- Mayer, L. 2003. *Politikat Krabasuese, Kombet dhe Teoritë në një Botë që Ndryshon*, [Comparative Policies, Nations and Theories in a Changing World], Përkth. Ymeri. K, Gazheli. R, Sh.B, ORA

- O'Donnell, G. 1992. *Delegative Democracy?*, Working Paper 172, University Of Notre Dame, Kellogg Institute
- Offe, C. 1991. *Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe*, Social Research, Vol. 58, No. 4
- Osterberg-Kaufmann, N. 2010. *Preconditions Of Democracy the Impact Of Social Capital And Communist Legacies*, Humboldt University Berlin/ Berlin Graduate School Of Social Science
- Pipa, A. 1990. *Albanian Stalinism*, New York, Published By; East European Monographs 1990
- Pop-Eleches, G. Tucker, J. 2012. *Communism's Shadow: The Effect of Communist Legacies on Post-Communist Preferences, Evaluations, And Behavior*, Introduction, Comparative Politics, 43 (4)
- Rees, E. A, Apor, B, Apor, P 2008. *The Sovietization Of Eastern Europe - New Perspectives On The Postwar Period*, Washington DC: New Academia Publishing
- Vickers, M. 1995. *The Albanians, A Modern History*, I.B. Tauris Publishers I.London • New York, 1995, 99
- Welch, S. 2005. 'Political Culture, Post-Communism and Disciplinary Normalization: Towards Theoretical Reconstruction', *In Political Culture and Post-Communism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Welzel, C. Inglehart, R. Klingemann, H. 1999. *Casual Linkages Between Three Aspect Of Modernity*, Georgia, Report Hold In Annual Meeting Of American Political Science Association 1999
- Welzel, Ch. Inglehart R. Klingemann H. 2003. *The Theory of Human Development: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*. (European Journal of Political Research. 42
- Whitefield S (Ed.). 2005. *Political Culture and Post-Communism*, Basingstoke and New York
- Whitehead, L. (Ed.), 1996. *The International Dimensions Of Democratization: Europe And The Americas* Oxford University Press
- Ypi, L. 2007. *The Albanian Renaissance in political thought: between the Enlightenment and Romanticism*, East European Politics and Societies, East European Politics and Societies, Vol. XX, No. X, pages XX-XX, the American Council of Learned Societies