

*Gigliola Bejaj*

## History and Sense-Making in Present-Day Albania

### Introduction

History is not given; it is not just an accumulation of events but rather an interpretive framework constructed upon habits, shaping and producing identities, agency, and the structures of collective memory. In this regard, Albanian customary law, specifically the *Kanun*, provides a case study of how historical narratives persist, adapt, change, and exert significant influence on contemporary sociocultural and political landscapes.

The historical role of the *Kanun*, in its construction, has been to define Albanian identities, its use by different groups in different periods has varied to achieve distinct aims within a wide range of social and cultural contexts, as we will see. Thus, the *Kanun* is not simply a legal code; it is a cognitive and semiotic system that has shaped Albanian common sense, emotions, and meaning-making. For centuries, it has mediated Albanian life and historical consciousness.

This article argues that the endurance of the *Kanun* is not – by any means – solely a relic of the past; rather, it must be understood as a living modality through which Albanians continue to make sense of their lives, their collective identity, and a framework they use to bring order to their world. This cognitive dimension is particularly evident in the way the *Kanun* structures social interactions, regulates behavior, and influences collective memory.

The core question this paper seeks to answer is: how has the *Kanun* functioned as a system of historical consciousness in Albania, and what does its persistence reveal about the interplay between tradition, modernity, and historical identity? By addressing this question, the article brings the thesis that the *Kanun* functions as a traditional form of historical consciousness and customary norms persist as epistemic structures even when state ideologies attempt to erase them. The analysis will employ a multidisciplinary approach. First, it will engage with historical sources and legal anthropology to illustrate how the *Kanun* has persisted

as a normative framework and one among the foundations of Albanian origins consciousness despite various attempts at its eradication. Later, a semiotic approach will show how the *Kanun* operates as a sense-making system that structures collective memory and creates meaning. By tracing the dialectical tension between the *Kanun* and state-imposed legal censorship, this study will highlight how customary law, rather than disappearing, continues to mediate Albanian historical consciousness, reinforcing its relevance in cultural identity formation today. The thesis of this paper, as said, thus asserts that such persistence is not just historical but also sociocultural, as the *Kanun* continues to provide a referential framework for Albanians navigating both tradition and modernity. The persistent influence of the *Kanun*, despite significant ideological transformations, suggests that, in the long run, it operates as a deep structure and mechanism of meaning, an enunciative framework that shapes historical consciousness in Albania. This becomes particularly evident when exploring the ideological clash between the *Kanun*'s traditional order and Enver Hoxha's Marxist-inspired socialist reforms, a struggle that reveals the profound embeddedness of historical structures of *Kanun* in social life and collective memory.

### What is the *Kanun*

The *Kanun* is an ancient, traditional form of customary law specific to the Albanian people. This code, orally transmitted from generation to generation, governed every aspect of life for those residing in the regions of ancient Illyria, individuals who identified as a unified people, now recognized as the Albanians. The Albanian Customary Law, or *Jus Albaniense*, constitutes a sophisticated framework of normative principles governing the entire spectrum of social and economic interactions within Albanian society, from the prenatal stage to the end of life. These precepts, unlike statutory laws derived from state authority, emerge from the collective customs and traditions inherent to a specific sociocultural milieu.

Even though the *Kanun* is attributed to various historical figures, such as Prince Dukagjini or Skanderbeg, there is consensus that the customary norms it transmits emerged in different periods<sup>1</sup> and reflect diverse

<sup>1</sup> For instance, these concerns “especially that part of it that spells out the rules regulating vengeance, changed when the Ottomans introduced firearms as weapons. Because firearms made killing easier than before, new rules had to be adopted to prevent the great loss of life inflicted by their use” (F. Tarifa, *Of Time, Honor, and Memory: Oral Law in Albania*, in “Oral Tradition”, 23, 1, 2008, p. 6).

moral sensibilities – distinct morphologies of meaning regarding ethics and what is commonly referred to as “common sense” – without identifiable, conscious legislators<sup>2</sup>. Albanian customary norms have become both the foundation and the origin of collective historical consciousness, shaping social behavior much like garments that have not resulted from deliberate orchestration. The existence and effectiveness of these norms, now firmly established as ingrained customs, can be understood as the outcome of habits, recurring meanings and, pragmatically, actions that appeared necessary in circumstances deemed similar by individuals and by those responsible for interpreting them. This evokes the *Kanun*’s crucial role in shaping the historical and identity consciousness of the Albanians: it functions as a background for reality, allowing, prescribing and determining interpretations, endowing the Albanian world with meaning and structure, influencing individual perceptions, and ultimately reducing the complexity of existence to guide human action.

This intricate legal corpus evolved organically and incrementally over centuries, rooted in the collective ethos of the people, and it encapsulates a jurisprudence where the source of law is embedded not in formal institutions but within the tacitly agreed-upon norms of the community, persisting since antiquity<sup>3</sup>. In this regard, the customary norms under discussion serve as a regulatory system for behaviors, reshaping – partly through historiography, a word whose etymology is worth noting – the past and the present identity of the Albanians.

This customary law has been adopted alongside the legal systems imposed by successive foreign powers since the fall of Illyria under Roman rule in 168 B.C. Its presence continued through the feudal period under Byzantine domination, later withstanding under the authorities of Serbian, Bulgarian, Ottoman, and Yugoslav governance, with applications even into contemporary times<sup>4</sup>. The idea that Albanian Customary Law (ACL) originates from the ancient Illyrian-Pelasgian period<sup>5</sup>, rooted in the era of pagan beliefs, is linked to the *Illyrian-Albanian continuity* thesis and has gained increasing scholarly support and dignity<sup>6</sup>, especially

<sup>2</sup> See G. Castelletti, *Consuetudini e vita sociale nelle montagne albanesi secondo il Kanun di Lek Dukagjinit*, in “Studi Albanesi: III-IV”, Istituto per l’Europa Orientale – Sezione Albanese, Roma 1933-1934, pp. 65-69; P. S. Leicht, *Note alle consuetudini giuridiche albanesi*, in “Lares”, XIV, 3, 1943, p. 129.

<sup>3</sup> See I. Qerimi, A. Maloku, E. Maloku, *Customary Law and Regulation: Authenticity and Influence*, in “Journal of Governance and Regulation”, 11, 4, 2022, p. 291.

<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> See *ivi*, p. 290; F. Tarifa, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> The thesis of Illyrian-Albanian continuity was formulated and became the official version of the Albanians’ origin with the First Congress of Illyrian Studies in 1972. See G. De Rapper, *L’albanais, langue de Pélasges, Slovo*, in “Langues En Mouvement:

among Albanian and Balkan researchers due to its unique-perceived nationalistic character<sup>7</sup>. History exists only where there is also a knowledge of history, where testimony, documentation, awareness of origins, and contemporary events exist<sup>8</sup>, and it's not merely a sequence of past events but the fraction of the past that is made intelligible and meaningful through human perception. Jaspers further defines history as the fraction of the past that, at a given moment, is clearly visible to humans; it is the domain of appropriating what has passed, the consciousness of origins.

Origins play a pivotal role in our reflection on Albanian *Kanun* and align closely with Jörn Rüsen's theoretical framework on tradition and historical sense-making<sup>9</sup>. Rüsen argues that historical consciousness is not a mere accumulation of facts but a process of meaning-making that structures past events in a coherent narrative. It is through this process that history becomes functional, providing orientation for human actions in the present. The *Kanun*, as a customary legal system, exemplifies this mechanism: it not only preserves past norms but actively interprets them, integrating them into a framework of collective identity and moral orientation. As said before, by reducing the complexity of reality and offering interpretive patterns for social behavior, the *Kanun* operates as a historical traditional narrative that solidifies the Albanians' historical consciousness and identity. Its endurance over centuries demonstrates the function of tradition in historical sense-making as theorized by Rüsen: a dynamic process through which societies construct and maintain a coherent link between past, present, and future.

## Historical context

After being orally transmitted for centuries, the *Kanun* was then codified in the 1930s; the written form of the *Kanun*, result of the work of Gjeçovi, comprises twelve books; each book contains a varying number of articles, further divided into clauses. These clauses embody the norms and prescriptions orally transmitted which then have been formalized. The *Kanun* addresses and regulates dimensions such as family, labor, pastoral activities, transgressions, hospitality, and more, conceived as a text

changements linguistiques dans l'espace postcommuniste au tournant du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle", 52, 2022, pp. 203-220.

<sup>7</sup> See O.J. Schmitt, *Gli albanesi*, tr. it. di E. Morandi, il Mulino, Bologna 2020.

<sup>8</sup> See K. Jaspers, *Origine e senso della storia*, tr. it. di A. Guadagnin, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano 1972.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Rüsen, *Tradition: A Principle of Historical Sense-Generation and its Logic and Effect in Historical Culture*, in "History and Theory", 51, 4, 2012, pp. 45-59.

that comprehensively covers all aspects of communal life, adaptable to specific community needs. Historical sources trace the official and widespread adoption of the *Kanun* to between the 14th and 15th centuries, specifically to 1444, within the broader feudal period, although it is acknowledged to be of significantly older origin<sup>10</sup>.

Among Albanians, the *Kanun* of Lek Dukagjini is the most well-known, though many others exist<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, it is more accurate to refer to the *Kanuns*<sup>12</sup>, as each semiotic community maintained its variant, which could differ slightly from that of others. This paper examines the version associated with Lek Dukagjini, primarily due to its accessibility. It remains one of the few *Kanuns* available in Italian translation and is the most prominent within and beyond Albania. Skenderbeu (as he is called by the Albanians), the Albanian national hero, did not agree with the transmission of certain norms established by Dukagjini and, thus, he collected his own norms in the *Kanun of Skenderbeu*. One of the normative points on which Skenderbeg diverged from Dukagjini concerned, for instance, the rightful target of blood taking<sup>13</sup>. Skanderbeg maintained that blood taking should be exacted solely upon the perpetrator of the murder, whereas, in lands under Dukagjini's jurisdiction, *gjakmarrja* was extended to all male members of the family. Thus, in Albania and among communities that have adopted – and continue to observe – the *Kanun* in matters of honor, blood taking remains practiced upon all male members of the family, even upon children. Although the *Kanun*'s application spanned the territory of present-day Albania, common Albanian perception often restricts its adoption to the north and common sense leads individuals within the Albanian semiosphere to believe that the *Kanun* encounters increasing resistance as one approaches Greece<sup>14</sup>, in geographical and cultural terms. Yet, multiple *Kanun* codes exist throughout Albania, sometimes referred to as *zakonore*, the Albanian term equivalent to “customary” in English<sup>15</sup>.

As noted above, the *Kanun* is associated with Lek Dukagjini, a prince who fought for emancipation from Turkish authority, allying himself with Albania's national hero, the legendary Skanderbeg. Dukagjini sought to

<sup>10</sup> See N. Malcolm, *KOSOVO: A Short History*, Pan Macmillan, London 1998.

<sup>11</sup> The oldest known, according to historiography and Albanological studies, was called *Kanun i Papa Zhulit*. See P. Resta, *Pensare il sangue. La vendetta nella cultura albanese*, Meltemi editore, Roma 2002.

<sup>12</sup> See D. Martucci, *I Kanun delle montagne albanesi. Fonti, fondamenti e mutazioni del diritto tradizionale albanese*, Pagina soc. coop., Bari 2010.

<sup>13</sup> See P. Resta, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> See N. Malcolm, *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> See P. Resta, *op. cit.*; D. Martucci, *op. cit.*

consolidate the norms underpinning the unique social system of the *fis*, the clans that governed the lives of northern mountain communities, treating these norms as binding laws<sup>16</sup>.

Examining the etymology of *canon* here proves enlightening. The Albanian term *kanun* appears to trace its origins to the Akkadian word *qanu*, and the Hebrew *qane*<sup>17</sup>, both of which originally meant “to draw a straight line”.

This term was subsequently borrowed into Ancient Greek as *kanón*<sup>18</sup>, where it took on the meanings of “rule” or “regulation” and later into Latin as *canon*, referring to a generally accepted rule, standard, or principle for judgment. In this sense, the shift from the meaning of “straight line” to that of “rule” is at the core of the semantic transformation and the origin of the metaphorical concept of “rule”. So, during the Byzantine era, *kanun* came to mean “straight” not just in a literal sense but also structuring the “straight line”<sup>19</sup> as a metaphor for order, rule, and standard. This linguistic change contributed to the metaphorical concepts of structure, order and rule, reinforcing the idea of *Kanun* as a guiding principle. This evolution shows that the term *Kanun* originates from Byzantine Greek, where it referred to principles or laws that provided structure and guidance and, in fact, the Albanian term *kanun* derives from the Greek *kanon*.

Over time, this meaning influenced various legal and administrative traditions, solidifying *Kanun* as a system of rules and regulations. Additionally, *kanun* was widely used in Arabic as *qanun*, indicating laws and rules. By the Middle Ages, under the Ottoman Empire, the terms *kanun* and *kânûn-nâme* were introduced<sup>20</sup>, designating secular laws decreed by sultans in alignment with Islamic Sharia law<sup>21</sup>. So, the Albanian term *Kanun* appears to originate from a linguistic borrowing from Semitic languages, and it was introduced into Greek culture as *kanón* before being absorbed into Albanian. *Kanón* is derived from *kanna*, meaning “reed,” which traces back to Hebrew *qanéh*, Aramaic *qanja*, Assyro-Babylonian *qanu*, and ultimately Sumerian *gin*, a reference to

<sup>16</sup> See N. Malcolm, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> See M. Sellers, T. Tomaszewski, *The Rule of Law in Comparative Perspective*, in *Ius Gentium: Comparative perspectives on law and justice*, Vol. 3., Springer Dordrecht, Berlin 2010, p. 202.

<sup>18</sup> See V. Anić, *Veliki rječnik hrvatskog jezika*, Novi Liber, Zagreb 2003.

<sup>19</sup> See S. Frashëri, *Shqipëria ç'ka qenë, ç'është dhe ç'do të bëhet?*, Dija, Pristina 2007.

<sup>20</sup> See S.K. Gjeçov, *Das albanische Gewohnheitsrecht nach dem sogenannten Kanun des Lekë Dukagjini kodifiziert von Shtjefën Gjeçovi*, hrsg. R. Elsie, Dukagjini Publishing House, Peja 2003.

<sup>21</sup> See I. Qerimi, A. Maloku, E. Maloku, *op. cit.*

the *Arundo donax* reed (analogous to bamboo), suitable for crafting straight rods and sticks. This forms the first attested meaning of *kanón*. In architectural contexts, *kanón* serves as a “straight rod, rule, or measuring stick”<sup>22</sup>. Through this “rod” and this “reed” the *rules*, or *orally transmitted laws*, were applied across generations before being documented in written form. Among all the term’s various meanings, we focus on its significance as a “rule” or “norm”<sup>23</sup>.

### Customary law and historical consciousness

We have chosen to examine the origin, etymology, and semantic evolution of the term *canon* due to its earliest meanings, which originally denoted a straight line. Over time, this notion underwent a conceptual shift, giving rise to the metaphorical interpretations that persist in contemporary usage. These evolved meanings now signify a codified orthodoxy in behavior, principles, and values – an epistemic and normative framework that serves as a universal measure of order and legitimacy.

In fact, the *Kanun* was not an externally imposed law but rather a customary right adhered to with minimal resistance. Non-adherence entailed no formal punishment; however, rejection resulted in immediate loss of honor, which, in contemporary terms, signified a loss of rights and social status for the individual, typically male, and his family. Such non-compliance deprived one of fundamental values like virility and honor, underpinning coexistence, reciprocity, and order within communities lacking a centralized state system. This reality granted the *Kanun* normative authority.

Due to its performative nature, the *Kanun* was censored – without ever falling into cultural oblivion – during the almost fifty years of Hoxha’s dictatorship; a tension resulting in a friction between this traditional form of historical consciousness and socialist aspirations and, following the death of Hoxha, a revival of customary practices, particularly *giak-marrja* (also known as blood feud), was observed. With the dissolution of communism in the 1990s, the resurgence of *Kanun* norms re-emerged alongside statutory law, particularly in matters concerning feuds and blood feuds. This revival was largely attributed to ineffective state justice mechanisms and the persistence of unresolved disputes dating back to the 1950s, which had been left unaddressed during the years of commu-

<sup>22</sup> J. Assmann, *La memoria culturale. Scrittura, ricordo e identità politica nelle grandi civiltà antiche*, tr. it. di f. de Angelis, Giulio Einaudi Editore, Torino 1997, p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

nist governance<sup>24</sup>. *Gjakmarrja*, which literally means “taking of blood”<sup>25</sup> is an act of retribution intended to “cleanse the dishonor of blood” from one’s reputation. This practice involves a man, chosen by the family head, targeting another man from a different family who has inflicted a personal or social affront. The *Kanun* produces the instances in which an offense and subsequent injury to a man’s honor may occur.

Nowadays, according to the self-perception of individuals within the Albanian cultural semiosphere, it is widely assumed that *Kanun* norms and laws are no longer in effect, as Hoxha’s regime, over forty years, sought to eradicate customary practices through repression and punishment<sup>26</sup>, but this is not true. Although no longer in formal use, the *Kanun* continues to influence Albanian behavior and cultural norms, acting as a structure of feeling and unquestioned presupposition. Hoxha’s socio-cultural reform project, aimed at transforming the Albanian people, as we shall see, ultimately failed. From this perspective, Albanian history, as shaped within the traditional narrative, matters precisely because of the resistance of *Kanun*-based normative, semantic, and cultural traits, despite all attempts to eradicate them and despite centuries of foreign presence and domination in Albanian territory. Albanians proudly regard themselves as Europe’s oldest and most traditional people, a perception reinforced by the enduring presence of the *Kanun* and its contemporary legacy. However, some *Kanun*-derived norms are now perceived as more violent and negative than in the past. This variation in the perception of certain *Kanun* norms is linked to transformations in the way Albanian culture self-represents, reflecting broader shifts in societal values, ethical standards, and the past. The values within the code and many associated

<sup>24</sup> See I. Qerimi, A. Maloku, E. Maloku, *op. cit.*, p. 291.

<sup>25</sup> I will use the expression *blood taking*, translating the Albanian term *gjakmarrja* literally, as an alternative to the more common rendering *vendetta* or *blood revenge* found in literature. This translation choice aims to emphasize the retributive nature of justice as established by the KCL (*Kanun* customary law). The term *vendetta* fails to convey the full meaning of the Albanian institution known as *gjakmarrja*. Translating *gjakmarrja* as *vendetta* results in the loss of the term’s connotation of retributive action, intended to restore honor, while also neutralizing the semantic category itself; the expression in Albanian does not map isomorphically onto the Italian word *vendetta* or in the English one *revenge*. I want to avoid the retributive aspect of *Kanun* justice, which is not grounded in feelings of anger, resentment, or in the desire to merely react to something offending, to be overlooked. Semantically, *blood taking* carries the nuance of a formalized, honor-restorative action rather than a personal *vendetta* driven by anger or desire for vengeance. Here, retributive action aligns with principles of KCL – primarily honor and justice – while *vendetta* is a category produced as emotionally charged and less precise in capturing the *Kanun*’s institutional intent.

<sup>26</sup> See D. Martucci, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

practices appear preserved in cultural memory and, at most, there has been a renegotiation of the meanings underlying the code.

The *Kanuns* are proposed as safeguards of Albania's cultural and regional identity, with adherence to norms embedded in the way these laws were envisioned and transmitted over centuries. The idea underlying this paper is, as indicated before, that the *Kanuns* have shaped Albanian historical consciousness and identity, forming the semiotic sphere of Albanian culture and society. As noted, customary norms cover all aspects of daily life, and *Kanun* practices are still evident in various cultural activities such as marriage and funeral rites, which adhere to strict and crystallized rituals grounded in the principles of *besa* (trust, a man's word of honor), lineage, and honor (*nderr*). The *Kanun's* value system represents, following its etymology, a form of universal justice perceived and thought as divine, embodying a set of enduring practices that remain alive within the Albanian cultural memory.

Given the present paper semiotic theoretical framework and conceptualization of culture as the Lotmanian mechanism of collective consciousness<sup>27</sup> and as a non-hereditary collective memory expressed through a system of prohibitions and prescriptions<sup>28</sup>, it is appropriate to describe how the transmission of the *Kanun* has shaped Albanian identity, forming the backbone of Albanian culture through concepts such as a man's honor.

The "law of the mountain", before becoming foundational to Albanian culture and traditions, long existed as a "peripheral formation"<sup>29</sup> within the socio-cultural landscape of Balkan peninsula and present-day Albania. Within this geographic delineation, a distinct cultural split existed in Albania: the southern culture, Orthodox and influenced by Hellenic and Byzantine traditions, and the northern culture, organized along tribal lines and shaped by Slavic cultural influences and the Catholic faith. Albania, even by the 15th century, had been under the domination of various powers for nearly a millennium. From this initially peripheral northern culture, a dynamic exchange of information began, ultimately enriching the southern cultural sphere. Notably, the Albanian *Kanun* culture remains one of primary orality<sup>30</sup>, with its tenets orally transmitted over centuries until the written codification in the 1930s. Yet, this cultural fabric remains deeply oral in form; thus, the *Kanun* – though written – remains

<sup>27</sup> J. Lotman, *La semiosfera. L'asimmetria e il dialogo nelle strutture pensanti*, Marsilio Editori, Venezia 1985, p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> See J. Lotman, B.A. Uspenskij, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> J. Lotman, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

<sup>30</sup> See W.J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*, Melthuen, London and New York 1982.

highly interpretable through its interpreters, designated men tasked with traveling across Albania to enforce and elucidate the law in complex or ambiguous cases. The *Kanun* endured thanks to adaptations within successive “present” moments, which, though they seem past to us, reference models from tradition that have woven connective structures within cultural memory. According to Giuseppe Schirò, most norms are expressed in formulaic maxims and proverbs, with “conceptually and syntactically evolved definitions”<sup>31</sup> appearing as later additions. This oral nature enabled the renegotiation of meanings after the dictatorship’s censorship, producing new interpretations within diverse interpretive communities.

One significant feature in this case study is the nature of customs, which arises in fact and is not compromised by documentation, as oral culture crystallizes meanings, maintaining their permanence<sup>32</sup>. The transition of norms from oral to written form – executed by Gjeçovi and others after his death – participates in the mythologization process within Albanian culture: the *Kanun* of Lek Dukagjini, known in Albanian as *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit* (or *Kanuni i Lekut*), where Lek’s identity is solely defined by the *Kanun* in its entirety. This is a process Lotman and Uspenskij aptly describe as a *semiosis of nomination*<sup>33</sup>.

### Enver Hoxha’s Socialist Attempt to Erase Cultural Memory

Albania is a country of recent formation and demarcation, whose past appears to encompass a dual dimension: a mythic past, one that extends into storytelling, alongside a historical dimension, embodied in the dictatorship and studied as a text-document. Albania seems to be the last nation in Europe to conclude the 20th century under a distinctly “tribal” framework<sup>34</sup>. These premises make the study of the Albanian *Kanun* cultural space particularly complex, as Albania has historically positioned itself between East and West.

From the outset, Hoxha’s ambition was focused on the creation of the utopia of the “new man”<sup>35</sup>, of the “perfect man and woman”, free from what he regarded as savage and primitive traditions, although his structures of feeling and cultural lens were not foreign to the ways in which

<sup>31</sup> G. Schirò, *P. Gjeçovi e la prosa del Kanùn di Lek Dukagjini*, in *Le terre albanesi redente. Kosovo*, Reale Accademia d’Italia, Roma 1942, p. 185.

<sup>32</sup> *Passim*. R. Sacco, *Antropologia giuridica. Contributo ad una macrostoria del diritto*, il Mulino, Bologna 2007.

<sup>33</sup> See J. Lotman, B.A. Uspenskij, *Tipologia della cultura*, Bompiani, Milano 1975.

<sup>34</sup> P. Resta, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

the historical, social, and cultural experience of other Albanians was organized: Hoxha's approach to leading the country – positioning himself as the head of all Albanian lineages – can be traced back to the familial structure and segmentation as textualized in the *Kanun*.

In a period of intense social upheaval, Enver Hoxha launched a socialist ideological campaign against KCL, labeling it as archaic. Lotman and Uspenskij examination of social change periods<sup>36</sup> demonstrates how Hoxha sought to reshape the country, eradicating from collective memory – and thus from Albanian practices – the norms previously transmitted. This approach essentially amounted to an attempt to erase and annihilate a specific cultural identity and belonging with the purpose of substituting it, and in this period, Albania experienced significant internal resistance to Enver Hoxha's efforts to suppress the *Kanun*. Thus Hoxha, aiming to establish a centralized communist regime, viewed the *Kanun* as a threat to his authority and sought to eliminate its influence. Following this trace, we can say that Enver Hoxha's program made possible the emergence of a tension between innovation and tradition and this very tension is still interesting today: was Hoxha the subverter of the *Kanun*, or perhaps its final – or penultimate – incarnation? Viewing Albania as a conglomerate of small pyramids and regional communities that never coalesced into a unified, hierarchical society endowed with a comprehensive singularity, the answer is no. Enver was the leader of an Albania that, rooted in the *Kanun*, had never truly known a supreme ruler throughout its history. However, if one considers that Hoxha co-opted his men from the clans of southern Albania, to which he was intimately and familiarly tied, and that he upheld the accountability of each clan member whenever one of their own committed an act against the law, it could be argued that non-negligible remnants of clan-based structures – typically *kanunarian* – persisted within an Albania that aspired to be Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist<sup>37</sup> and which described (and still describes) itself as the most ancient European culture because of the *Illyrian-Albanian continuity* thesis<sup>38</sup> already mentioned in this paper.

The dictator waged war on names associated with Albanian tradition and those with religious origins. This aligns with Lotman's theory that periods of upheaval bring about an increase in the semioticity of behavior<sup>39</sup>. Custom was “identified with ignorance, backwardness, ‘ossification’”, whereas the “rational and progressive” were conceived solely as “regu-

<sup>36</sup> See J. Lotman, B.A. Uspenskij, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>37</sup> See E. Marino, *op. cit.*

<sup>38</sup> See O.J. Schmitt, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>39</sup> See J. Lotman, B.A. Uspenskij, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

lar.” The state’s activity was seen as the introduction of “regulations,” resulting in the reorganization of life according to the model they provided. This suppression led to the formation of various local resistance groups, including the “National League of the Mountains”, “Liberty”, “Skanderbeg”, “Call”, and “National Unity”. These groups emerged in response to Hoxha’s policies, striving to preserve regional autonomy and cultural traditions rooted in the *Kanun*<sup>40</sup>. This response did not shift Albania’s political trajectory, as the government condemned, censored and banned every form of adherence to *Kanun* norms as an act of betrayal. Furthermore, in pursuit of his socialist cultural agenda, Hoxha enacted a sweeping ban on all religions in 1967, establishing Albania as the world’s first officially atheistic state. Hoxha’s objective was to cultivate a form of patriotism and historical consciousness distinct from the traditional loyalties forged in the independence struggles of the late 19th century, one that would break with the past and align with his vision of a unified socialist identity. Hoxha sought to reshape Albanian nationalism into a secular, socialist framework. Unlike the patriotic fervor inspired by anti-Ottoman independence movements, Hoxha’s envisioned patriotism was meant to be rooted in loyalty to the state and to his socialist ideology rather than to ethnic, regional, or religious ties. Yet in practice, he made no effort to create the “perfect men and women” he touted in his propaganda; the common sense and the cultural lens of the population remained deeply anchored to the *Kanunarian* system and structured upon the KCL. During the dictatorship, however, censorship did not completely halt research on the text of *Kanun*<sup>41</sup> and, immediately after the regime’s fall, a resurgence in interest emerged around *Kanun* traditions, perceived as a “relic of the past”<sup>42</sup> to recover, preserve, and conserve. Concurrently, the final dissolution of the Iron Curtain compelled Albania to face the new demands of globalized markets and Western-driven democratization.

The country’s geographic location and historical context contributed to a dual identity. Albania, characterized by its pluralism and peaceful coexistence of Islam, Catholic, and Orthodox Christianity, lacks well-defined geographic borders. Territorial conflicts between “the land of the eagles” and neighboring countries are well-documented<sup>43</sup>, as are ethnic conflicts occurring in border regions to the north and south. This instability in physical-geographic boundaries contrasts sharply with the *apparent* solidity of the country’s ethno-cultural boundaries.

<sup>40</sup> See <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1951v04p2>.

<sup>41</sup> D. Martucci, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-51.

<sup>42</sup> P. Resta, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> O.J. Schmitt, *op. cit.*; N. Malcolm, *op. cit.*

## ***Kanun* as a strategy for the formation and delimitation of Albanian historical consciousness and culture**

As previously noted, Hoxha's censorship aimed to alter Albanian common sense, identity, cultural memory and belonging, and an enunciative praxis embedded in the *Kanun*'s norms and the behaviors they prescribe. Over time, through oral transmission, these norms acquired an anonymous yet universal dimension rooted in myth, forming the encyclopedia and general archive<sup>44</sup> accessible to all community members who shared and claimed the same culture, even with the heterogeneous needs and instances that composed it. Defined by Eco as a semiotic postulate<sup>45</sup>, the encyclopedia functions as an episemiotic regulation, that is, as a model whose regulatory capacity operates on a global level without deriving from a subjective intentionality capable of determining effects and consequences. Rather, it remains a diffused and plural instance<sup>46</sup>, an ever-evolving network of knowledge in which signification emerges not from a univocal center but from the dynamic interplay of interpretative processes. According to Anna Maria Lorusso, a text functions as a model of culture and, in a sense, encapsulates the culture to which it belongs in miniature, thereby shaping cultural life and even influencing behaviors. At times, it takes on a normative function, which is among the essential roles of memory<sup>47</sup>. The cultural homogeneity observed in Albania is a semiotic effect produced by the strong normative character of the *Kanun*, which, although interpreted in ways that accounted for group-specific traits (subsistence economies, geological features, climate, etc.), did not diverge in fundamental principles and values. The coexistence of diverse regional customary codes did not, therefore, create sharp divisions in practices, values, and beliefs, according to scholars.

With the regime's collapse and the end of political repression, *gjakmarrja* re-emerged across the territory. Hoxha's attempt to eliminate the *Kanunarian* praxis, and *gjakmarrja* in particular, failed because he overlooked that cultural memory had imbued behaviors and rituals with meanings that had crystallized<sup>48</sup>. These meanings had lost their event-based or sub-

<sup>44</sup> See A.M. Lorusso, *L'utilità del senso comune*, il Mulino, Bologna 2022, p. 111.

<sup>45</sup> See U. Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, Einaudi, Torino 1984, p. 109.

<sup>46</sup> For a profound semiotic reflection on the theory of personal enunciation, on the mechanisms and semiotic structures underlying subjectivity, and on a theoretical inquiry who encompasses the effects of semiotic homogeneity in cultures, see C. Paolucci, *Persona. Soggettività nel linguaggio e semiotica dell'enunciazione*, Bompiani, Firenze/Milano 2020.

<sup>47</sup> See A.M. Lorusso, *Semiotica della cultura*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2010, p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> See J. Assmann, *op. cit.*

jective character, becoming invisible through their persistence<sup>49</sup>. Thus, *gjakmarrja* is built as a semantic code arising from an internalized model of tradition and stands as an institution that *Kanun* knowledge considers unquestionable. The *Kanun* served as the foundation of a cultural identity through a body of texts that circulated within a dynamic cultural environment, never static. This movement facilitated the elaboration of new information exchanged between the semiotic sphere of the initially peripheral northern culture and that of the southern culture<sup>50</sup>. Albanian culture emerged from the transmission and accumulation of information inherent in norms that governed the social and individual practices of those who identified with a shared cultural unit, transcending ethnic and religious divisions. The historical definition of *Kanun* helped delineate a cultural space opposed to the “non-culture” of Turkish rule and its texts. The boundaries of the Albanian semiotic sphere evolved over a lengthy period through a dynamic process of negotiation among diverse instances, which collectively pursued the same vision and agenda for building a shared historical and social identity.

The knowledge, beliefs, and norms articulated within the *Kanun* are assumed by individuals as habitualized constructs, emerging from premises beyond rational control, changing very slowly, and whose acceptance depends on the encyclopedia and the cultural universe of reference<sup>51</sup>. Although their origins are attributed to Lek Dukagjini and the enunciating instance ascribed to Father Gjeçovi, as discussed earlier, the set of norms within the *Kanun* – actualized, enacted in practice, and orally transmitted over centuries – constitutes an ensemble of habits, an impersonal enunciation, understood as an assemblage and *agencement*<sup>52</sup>.

## Personal honor and identity in shaping historical consciousness

Here, we will delve into a semantic category that articulates the fundamental values of the *Kanun*-based Albanian patriarchal society, male honor. Honor (*nderr*, in Albanian) is a semantic category that varies across cultures, with internal nuances influenced by various factors. In the *Kanun* and Albanian culture, honor is textually divided into personal and collective facets. This dual nature of honor as articulated in the *Kanun* is not exclusive to this code but is characteristic of many cultures,

<sup>49</sup> See A.M. Lorusso, *L'utilità del senso comune*, op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> See *ivi*, p. 131.

<sup>51</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> C. Paolucci, op. cit.

where personal honor is perceived as the sense of one's social worth, while social and collective honor refers to the evaluation others make of an individual's moral and social standing<sup>53</sup>. Honor's normative character in the *Kanun* legitimizes retributive vengeance through blood-taking, or *gjakmarrja*, as a response to affronts. This textualises that honor necessitates murder in cases where it is removed, as if it is a good, through actions outlined in the *Kanun*'s eighth book.

Personal honor emerges as a normative semantic construction that, on one hand, seems to be a birthright for men (and not for women) but, on the other, can be stripped away. The *Kanun* posits that no distinctions should exist among males, as they are born equal, regardless of wealth or physical health. This implies that personal honor is a natural attribute within *Kanun* culture. However, Article 601 addresses the ways in which a man can be dishonored, thus presenting honor as a "possession" that can be lost – a concept that contradicts the notion of it being intrinsic and natural. Men are born equal, but throughout life, they can lose their honor in the eyes of others, or it may be forcibly stripped from them.

The *Kanun* comprises various articles that draw a distinction between personal honor and honor within society, between the sentiment of self-worth, translated into terms of honor, and the perception and opinion others hold toward a specific person. The points selected from the corpus clarify and construct personal honor, the reasons a man might lose it, and the imperative to avenge such an offense, under penalty of shame and social exclusion. According to the normative custom of Albanian traditional consciousness, each man has the right to seek vengeance through bloodshed, and what in Western societies is considered and valued as violence is, in the ACL context, seen as legitimate and is not perceived as violence. The *Kanun* assigns a prescriptive nature to "bloodshed" (*gjakmarrja*) and the restitution of honor, for "in the eyes of the law, a dishonored man is as good as dead," with the loss of honor (*nderr*) viewed as the worst possible state for the individual and his family. In the *Kanun*'s cultural universe, a man's loss of honor corresponds to a series of regulated practices and behaviors to which others in the community must adhere to mark the dishonor<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> See F. Antolisei, *Manuale di diritto Penale. Parte speciale vol.2*, Giuffrè, Milano 2016; V. Manzini, *Trattato di diritto penale italiano*, vol. VIII, Utet, Torino 1986.

<sup>54</sup> Article 645 of KLD states that "[t]o anyone who has had their guest offended, until the disgrace suffered has been avenged, everything must be handed to them with the left hand and passed under the knee through the leg". The following article further elucidates this symbolic gesture, adding that "[t]he left hand is considered by law as humiliating [...] [all translations from the *Kanun* are mine]". This codified ritual language emphasizes the centrality of honor and retribution in traditional Albanian legal and ethical culture, where

As remarked earlier, in a nation that has long lacked a central state authority and has continuously fought for its cultural and political autonomy, the *Kanun* has served as both legislation and a social contract, binding individuals and communities. The norms governing hospitality and honor function as guarantees of security and reciprocity within an oral culture, where a man's word, his commitment, and his promise hold paramount significance. Within the *Kanun*'s semiotic sphere, a man's social honor is intrinsically linked to his capacity to protect and honor any person who enters his home seeking aid and hospitality. The head of the household, as the family patriarch, is bound to protect his guest – even if that guest is the murderer of a family member – and to assume responsibility for any implications to his honor. Indeed, in the event of *gjakmarrja*, or blood feud, liability falls upon the host.

The failure to uphold these duties, as prescribed by the *Kanun*, is explicitly categorized in the text as an act of betrayal, warranting the ultimate punishment of execution by firing squad – an exception in severity compared to other transgressions within the code. The punishment for betrayal is not textually codified as a death requiring blood repayment, for the most grievous act a man can commit within the semiotic world of the *Kanun* is the betrayal of a guest. This form of punishment stands apart from typical instances of *gjakmarrja*, or blood repayment, underscoring the absolute sanctity of the host-guest relationship within the cultural logic of the *Kanun*. In this context, betrayal represents a moral violation so severe that it transcends the usual mechanisms of retributive justice, positioning the act as an irredeemable breach of trust and honor. Such differentiation reflects the profound ethical weight assigned to hospitality in Albanian customary law, where the guest-host bond is treated as a foundational social pillar. This moral hierarchy within the *Kanun* reveals that betrayal – particularly of one under one's protection – is seen not merely as a transgression against an individual but as a violation of the entire community's ethical fabric. Consequently, the punishment for betrayal is framed not as a matter of blood debt, which might imply an equalizing response, but as a categorical repudiation of the offender's social and moral standing. This perspective sheds light on the *Kanun*'s prioritization of relational *besa*, a specific cultural dimension of Albanian loyalty, and the extent to which individual actions resonate across the collective, thereby reinforcing a model of justice rooted in the inviolability of *besa*, trust, within communal life. This codification not only reinforces the imperative of honor in the Albanian cultural context but also high-

gestures and modes of interaction carry a precise normative and prescriptive significance.

lights the depth of social responsibility and moral weight placed on the individual's role within a larger, communal framework. In this way, the *Kanun* emerges again as more than a set of rules: it is an enunciation, an articulation of collective and anonymous ethics, where personal integrity and the safeguarding of social bonds are woven into the very fabric of legal and moral consciousness.

Such principles reveal a profound respect for reciprocal trust and an intricate system of accountability, underscoring the *Kanun*'s role as a dynamic cultural institution that was capable of sustaining social order in the absence of a centralized legal authority. This emphasis on reciprocal duties and the sanctity of one's word as the guarantor of communal harmony invites reflection on how the *Kanun* formerly shaped the Albanian category who encompasses the moral landscape, embedding within it a model of justice deeply attuned to the values of male honor and mutual protection.

### ***Gjakmarrja***

As said, an offense within the *Kanun*'s normative framework demands an act of restitution, typically achieved through the shedding of blood or, alternatively, through forgiveness – though this latter form of reconciliation requires an individual of extraordinary honor and remains exceedingly rare. Similar to the “*vendetta*” in Sardinian *barbaricino* culture, yet meticulously procedural in its design, the *gjakmarrja* functions as an institution aimed at containing conflict and rectifying breaches of social norms<sup>55</sup>. Before the advent of democratic governance, *gjakmarrja* was neither perceived nor experienced by the community as an act of violence. This perception is due to the pervasive influence of cultural frameworks, which shape cognitive structures and filter the moral imperatives of societies. Indeed, within the collective understanding of the *Kanun*, *gjakmarrja* was viewed as a moral obligation – a practice signifying adherence to the social pact<sup>56</sup>.

At the same time, *gjakmarrja* often took on a tragic, yet unavoidable dimension for the families involved, given that every killing required a monetary offering to the nearest clan and resulted in a steady diminution of male family members due to retaliatory killings, the origins of which were sometimes long forgotten<sup>57</sup>. This relentless cycle of familial

<sup>55</sup> P. Resta, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>56</sup> Ivi, p. 101.

<sup>57</sup> In Ismail Kadare novel *Broken April*, for instance, the cycle of killings that one of the

loss and reciprocal killings to reclaim honor did not foster forgiveness, ritual brotherhood, or a cessation of blood-driven vendettas. When faced with the choice between sacrificing family members to “cleanse” honor or facing social obliteration, families typically opted for the former.

To this day, in cities like Tirana, Shkodër, and other areas across Albania, *kulla* – stone structures traditionally used as safe houses where men would isolate themselves – can still be found. In modern Albania, however, any building can be re-semanticized to serve the purpose of a *kulla*<sup>58</sup>. Many men continue to live in seclusion, though accurate estimates of such cases are unavailable. In these instances, it is women and girls who venture outside to perform errands, shopping, and work<sup>59</sup>, as Article 124, clause 897, states that women and priests are not subject to blood revenge<sup>60</sup>.

This enduring structure of *gjakmarrja* underscores a cultural commitment to honor, albeit one that binds its participants in a web of tragic reciprocity. It highlights a distinct social ethos where honor is paramount, and the individual's role is deeply embedded within a larger communal structure. The persistent presence of *kulla* in Albanian space reflects the continued resonance of *Kanun*-based principles in contemporary Albanian society, despite modernizing influences. The ongoing phenomenon of voluntary seclusion raises compelling questions about cultural identity, social cohesion, and the enduring power of customary law to govern even

protagonists must partake in originates from the murder of a guest of his ancestors. This guest, after being escorted to the place he had requested, is killed immediately afterward. Kadare writes that the face of the corpse, as verified by the village community, is turned in the direction of the host's home. Because of this, the blood of the slain guest – although he was no longer within the household – still falls upon the host. This episode underscores the profound weight that the *Kanun* places on the bond between host and guest (where the second occupies the role of God), where obligations of protection extend beyond physical separation. The communal interpretation of the guest's body orientation highlights the symbolic continuity of responsibility that binds the host inescapably to the guest's fate, reflecting a legal and moral system in which the honor textualized in the norm is prescribed not only in reference to a place, but to a large, enduring commitment. Kadare's narrative thus captures the tragic inevitability and the rigid moral codes that define the world of the *Kanun*, where obligations to adhere to norms persist, often regardless of practical limitations.

<sup>58</sup> In Albania, certain buildings could not be demolished to make way for new construction projects, as they shelter men involved in blood vengeance (*ne gjak*), entangled in the chain of killings within the blood feud cycle.

<sup>59</sup> Several national Albanian news broadcasts, for instance, have featured reports documenting the testimonies of men marked for blood vengeance or families entangled in *gjakmarrja*, some of whom have lost young male children, even those of school age. See <https://youtu.be/I24toaD-02I>, <https://youtu.be/-z4XvKtN-sA>, <https://youtu.be/ig-3GvLDM5M>.

<sup>60</sup> See Art. 28.

in the shadow of state authority. In contemporary democratic Albania, as said, collective judgment toward *gjakmarrja* has evolved, though not uniformly across the country, and it is now commonly perceived as an inhumane and unjust practice, even if still practiced<sup>61</sup>. However, contemporary changes in perceptions of *gjakmarrja* appear to be public manifestations that lay on a superficial level and have not altered fundamental adherence to tradition or Albanian common sense, nor compromised Albanian ethnic and cultural identity.

### Tradition and sense-making

The formation of Albanian historical consciousness has relied upon a supposed archaic foundation tracing back to the era of the Illyrians. The Illyrians are thus considered the forebears of modern Albanians, and their existence has been established as the seminal point from which the entire trajectory of Albanian history unfolds. In this way, the Albanian historical narrative and sense of origins<sup>62</sup> rests upon the notion of an Illyrian-Albanian continuity – a thesis that, though frequently referenced, remains debatable and lacks precision from various perspectives. Beyond outlining the current state of debate regarding the Illyrian-Albanian continuity thesis, it is particularly intriguing to examine how the people who have internalized *Kanun* as a cultural lens constructed their own historical narrative. This narrative drew upon a sense of origins that allowed them to explain, give meaning to, and ensure continuity<sup>63</sup> even in more modern events. The Albanian appropriation of the historical narrative surrounding the Illyrians facilitates the development of the historical consciousness, a consciousness that contributes to the formation of their identity.

Up until now, the term “tradition” has been employed here without scrutinizing the conceptual complexities it entails. According to Rusen<sup>64</sup>, tradition serves as the most fundamental principle in the construction of historical meaning, functioning as the primary framework upon which other ways of interpreting and making sense of the past are grounded. In this capacity, tradition provides continuity amid temporal shifts, allowing societies to maintain a coherent worldview despite the inevitable move-

<sup>61</sup> See S. Voell, *Kanun in the City: Albanian Customary Law as a Habitus and Its Persistence in the Suburb of Tirana, Bathore*, in “Anthropos”, 98, 2003, pp. 85-101.

<sup>62</sup> See K. Jaspers, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-79.

<sup>63</sup> *Passim*. *ivi*.

<sup>64</sup> See J. Rüsen, *op. cit.*

ments, passages and changes that occur over time. Rüsen's view<sup>65</sup> underscores that tradition is not merely about preserving the past; it is a dynamic, interpretative tool that enables societies to perceive and manage change without experiencing disintegration or a loss of identity. Albanian *Kanun*, as a tradition, allows a form of historical interpretation where change and stability coexist. By shaping how people perceive and react to changes in the human world, tradition and *Kanun* helps Albanian society and communities to anchor themselves in a familiar order, ensuring that cultural, social, and ethical norms persist through historical transformations.

This function of tradition as a sense-making principle implies that it operates selectively, emphasizing certain aspects of the past while marginalizing others. It often transforms historical facts into narratives that resonate with collective identity and values. In this sense, tradition does not merely reflect the past as it was; it literally interprets it – in the peircian semiotic sense of the term – in a way that reinforces a community's continuity and resilience, offering a lens through which past, present, and future are interwoven. This concept positions tradition as both a preservative force and a creative act, a crucial aspect of historical consciousness that allows communities to navigate the tensions between change, transmission and permanence<sup>66</sup>. This is interesting for understanding how the *Kanun* has been transmitted and endured from ancient times to the present day, despite not being codified in writing for centuries. Human societies consciously gather and interpret the past, imbuing it with meaning in the present and creating new significance for events that, in their original form, may have lacked such meaning<sup>67</sup>. This process of historical interpretation underpins tradition in its broadest sense, as has occurred among the people inhabiting the lands now called Albania, a designation that itself is relatively recent. This idea also raises questions about the limitations of tradition: what is lost or altered in the effort to maintain an “unchanging order” amidst change? What aspects of history are selectively emphasized or suppressed, and how does this selective memory affect a society's openness to reinterpret the past in light of new experiences? Tradition, as Rüsen proposes, is conceived thus as a complex mechanism that simultaneously conserves and shapes historical understanding in cultural systems, balancing continuity with the demands of the changes of the world.

So, tradition emerges as the principle in generating historical meaning – a foundational mode of sense-making upon which all other inter-

<sup>65</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> See K. Jaspers, *op. cit.*

preted structures of the past are built; it also acts, as stated before, as a stabilizing force, allowing identities, subjectivities and societies to interpret temporal changes without losing coherence in their worldview, thereby preserving an “order of the world” despite inevitable transformations. Within Albanian historical consciousness, this principle is manifest through the enduring relevance of the *Kanun*, this complex normative system imbued with reciprocal duties, moral imperatives, and deeply embedded codes of honor and hospitality, thus sustaining a coherent cultural ethos even in the absence of centralized state governance. This attachment to an ancient normative structure, and the myth of the Illyrian origins, illustrates how the Albanian sense of identity and historical consciousness is grounded in a mythic continuity – a constructed narrative that transcends temporal ruptures. By rooting themselves in an imagined Illyrian heritage, Albanian culture can sustain its own metarepresentation aligning ancient, medieval, and modern experiences into a unified and coherent description. Rüsen’s conception and interpretation of tradition as a principle of “sense-generation” highlights that this continuity is not passively inherited but actively necessary and made. The *Kanun* codifies values that regulate not only interpersonal conduct but also collective memory, emphasizing the host-guest relationship, the duty of blood feuds (*gjakmarrja*); such tradition transforms historical events into semiotic structures, where values and principles are continuously reinterpreted within a cultural logic that favors resilience over rupture. Thus, tradition in the Albanian context functions as both preservation and creative reconstitution, enabling individuals to navigate the tensions between enduring social obligations and the fluid demands of contemporary life. In this way, the *Kanun* – and, by extension, the broader Albanian historical consciousness – is coherent with Rüsen’s view of tradition as a mode of historical continuity that both reflects and reinforces a communal identity capable of withstanding the passage of time.

The Albanian historical past, thus, assumes an idealized, mythical attribution – a model from which the societies and culture of Albanian semiosphere continually draw to reinforce a cultural and social sense of temporal continuity. This framework allows Albanian communities to root their present identity in a coherent narrative, shaped by the semiotic codes of the *Kanun*, where principles such as *nderr*, *hospitality* and *besa*, have not only been preserved but actively reinterpreted across generations, and will be interpreted in the future. Tradition here functions as a dynamic process, where the mythic past becomes both a cultural anchor and a living organism and source of meaning, one that persists in constructing and sustaining a shared sense of identity and purpose

amidst the flux of historical change. No value judgment is intended here, neither positively nor negatively axiologizing the practices and customs prescribed and transmitted through the *Kanun*, such as *gjakmarrja*. This study is an attempt to further illuminate the historical consciousness of a semiotic community – diverse and heterogeneous – where the invention and construction of concepts like justice, morality and violence, and consequently their perception by individuals who adhere to and consent to such constructions, can be considered as given facts, without necessarily judging them. It would be particularly intriguing to explore the extent to which *Kanun*-based violence is perceived as such, considering how it appears as violence to a more Western sensibility than the Albanian one. Here, “Western” should not be understood in any essentialist sense but rather as part of the East/West opposition, functioning as a shared reference category within the encyclopedia of both the writer and the reader.

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