

MASTER THESIS

Albanian Question, European Answer?

What the European Union can learn from its own and other's
narratives on the Albanian-Macedonian border



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Figure 1: Play-acting Europeaness?

Preface and acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

This thesis highlights the social construction of the Albanian-Macedonian border. The Albanian nation state only forms a small part of the territory inhabited by ethnic Albanians. The borderlands at both sides of the Albanian-Macedonian border are largely Albanian-inhabited. It is suggested that in situations where a border is drawn with little reference to the ties of blood and/or culture, it is interesting to negotiate people's identity. In the past, the Albanian border situation induced aspirations for Albanian reunification along ethnic lines (i.e. a *Greater Albania*). Today however, Albania can be located in a region-wide pro-European Union discourse and the stability-seeking and (thus) border preserving EU rhetoric is gaining dominance in debates on the Albanian border, identity and territory. This thesis scrutinizes the dominant EU, nationalistic and post-nationalistic (i.e. idealist) storylines that form the border.

Upholding that nor identity nor the border are given, unalterable phenomena, we will elicit how the open-ended social project of reiterating or mitigating the border is taking place through storylines. Semiotics expressed by groups with power on bordering practices often bear an ideological package from which the interest of the specific group can be distilled. Simultaneously, to bring about association, these messages often link in, relate to or, alternatively, sharply contrast to bigger storylines.

This thesis identifies three of those bigger storylines that hold sway in the construction of the Albanian-Macedonian border. The three so called *Discourse models* (gleaned from the literature of J.P. Gee) we will come up with are: the Obsolete (the erring nationalist who seeks to reify a Greater Albania), the Pragmatist (who follows the EU and therefore holds more 'correct' or 'accepted' conceptions of how the border should be addressed) and the Idealist who believes in a cosmopolitan zone devoid of borders. The name and content of the models do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the author, but rather should be seen as tentative categorizations that emanate from the socio-spatial history of the area. The models serve us to value and locate semiotics in current discussions on the border in question.

The agents who construct and apply discourse models are in the first place, as appears from literature on the social construction of spaces, national elites – but this thesis will foreground that a lot may get lost when only focusing on this specific level. Not only because the EU acquired a critical position in managing spaces in its own Eastern European hinterland, but also because we suggest that the power to embrace, alter and subvert storylines may not only pertain to politicians, but also to people who are dealing with spaces on a daily base. Therefore, we link our models to one of the finer channels of the states' ideological apparatus, that is: education. Through a number of semi-structured interviews with geography and history school teachers, the author inquires to what extent educators are full-fledged participators in the social construction of spaces or rather should be seen as obedient transmitters of the predominant state ideology. The acquired data underpins that local interlocutors have at their disposal some power to steer, mitigate and subvert state-prompted storylines.

Before we have reached this point however, this thesis first reveals how the historic background of Albania played a vital role in constructing the contradictions and quandaries that are still rife in the storylines on Albanian territory. The most evident germ of socio-spatial problems arose when as a result of a compromise between regional contenders and great powers a national frontier was drawn that captured only a small part of the actual Albanian-inhabited territory. This sowed the seed of what is, in literature, referred to as the Albania Question. Subsequently, in the one hundred years that the nation exists now, Albania has been witnessing an intriguing history of detachment and bonding; of overconfidence and minority complexes; of internationalist aspirations and isolation and of fighting cumbersome enemies, real or imagined.

Once we have painted these shackles of history we will explain how this Albanian socio-historical background, combined with the broader historical and geographical context the country can be located in, flow into the aforementioned three models.

This leaves us well-equipped to test to what extent these models resonate with the storylines that are put forward by Albanian elites and Albanian educators. The thesis wraps up with the conclusion that the conceptions held by the inquired interlocutors cannot be fully lodged in our pre-configured models, but are much more hybrid and diffuse. E.g., the predominant model among elites assumes the shape of a more fluid Idealist Pragmatist model: a model where EU aspiration is universally carried and where pragmatism is central, but that integrates the alluring features of Idealist storylines. Educators, on their turn, tend to take for granted the importance and inevitability of the European future, but in general they not feel too much commitment to the route towards EU that elites present them. Our final suggestion is that all levels of socio spatial action matter for geographers and that, opposed to the widespread EU-support in the region, it is far from settled that the EU will offer a final answer to the Albanian question.

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Chapter I: Introduction

‘Feja e Shqiptarit është Shqiptaria’: ‘The faith of Albanians, is Albaniandom’. This is the evocative national motto of the Albanians, adopted in the first years after communism. The phrase stems from a 19th century poem by Vaso Shkodrani, a Catholic from Shkoder, who put in words his concern about the state of art of the Albanian language – one of the oldest and most divergent languages of Europe, but at the time, tormented by a poor orthography and surrounded by much stronger and better codified tongues. The fragment reads: ‘Albanian, you are killing your brothers; you are divided into a hundred parties. Some say I am Christian, others, I am a Turk [...] But you are all brothers of you. The priests and hoxha’s¹ have confused you, unite in one faith: faith of Albanians, is Albaniandom’ (Vickers, 2006, 46).

Today, the motto serves as an illustration for the axiom that the cultural identity of the Albanians is much stronger than for instance their dispersed religious identity. This Albanian cultural identity has appealed to the imagination of many pundits, writers and wanderers, and served as the central topic in numerous studies². Given the fact that – as a result of a compromise between regional contenders and the great powers in London in 1912 – the Albanian nation state encompasses only a small part of the Albanian ethnic territory, this shared identity can be found in an area that extends well beyond the borders of the Republic of Albania, most notably in Western Macedonia and Kosovo. The ethnic border of the Albanians is not coterminous with the current Albanian state border.

As Wilson and Donnan (1998) suggest, in situations where a border is drawn with little reference to the ties of blood and/or culture, it is especially interesting to negotiate people’s identity. These type of borders are pre-eminently imbued with a meaning that stretches beyond ‘shore of the administrative capacity of the state apparatus’. As constructivists argue, this meaning is not unalterable, but is perpetually created and adapted through storylines, semiotics and practices attached by humans or groups with power and interest in the border. This thesis espouses a constructivist lens, and considers the social construction of space (Paasi, 1996) as an open-ended social project. A product of three months of fieldwork, we will explore the social construction of the 191 km long border between Albanian and Macedonia, both sides of which are largely Albanian-inhabited. We will evince how this construction interweaves old ideals and new narratives, and we expound the extent to which the contradictions that have been haunting the area in the past are still relevant today.

Physically, the Albanian-Macedonian border has not undergone any adjustment since 1912, but as we will see in the following chapters, conceptions on Albanian territory have been changing continuously. The nascent republic Albania alternated the exposure to exotic influence spheres – from Italian vassal during the monarchic King Zog era and occupied territory the Second World War, to a Russian satellite state in the early Warsaw pact years, to Chinese dependent during the sixties and

¹ A hoxha is an Albanian Muslim priest. Furthermore, it is the most common surname of the country.

² E.g. Schwandner-Sievers & Fischer, 2002; Draper, 1997; Vickers, 1999; Van den Berg, 2010; Elsie, 2001, but also Den Doolaard, 1933 and the works of Edith Durham (1863 – 1944) and Lord Byron (1788 – 1824).

early seventies – with periods of virtual seclusion. Furthermore, albeit never fully absent as a background noise in political margins, ideas of Albanian reunification along ethnic lines (i.e. a *Greater Albania*) came to the fore in mainstream political discourse periodically – most recently in the decade following the collapse of communism.

Today however, Albania can be located in a region-wide pro-European Union discourse: ‘[a]t least the western Balkans is still starry-eyed about the European Union’ *The Economist* of October 15th 2011 exclaimed, referring to the eagerness that Balkan countries still exhibit to join a crises-ridden EU. When it comes to EU support, one will find Albania on the top of the lists. The latest Balkan Gallup Monitor (GBM: 2010), one of the most authoritative polls on Balkan perceptions, presents Albanians as the most EU supportive people on the Balkans (**see annex 1**)³. As the monitor offered the possibility to extricate data by nationality, we can see that this claim goes not only for citizens of the Republic of Albania, but also for the ethnic Albanians living beyond the border.

Despite the fact that the progression in the area is hampered by the lingering Macedonian name dispute with Greece, and – considering Albania proper – by wide-spread corruption and a longstanding political deadlock, the EU allurements seem to be virtually ubiquitous in the Albanian-inhabited area. Whether you are chatting with young people in a bar in Tirana, with a teacher in a village near the Macedonian border, or with a government official, ‘Europe’ is likely to be depicted as the undisputed just path to take for Albania. By contrast, when you casually mention the terms ‘greater Albania’ or ‘Albanian national pride’, people may act more conscious, wary not to feed the Western appetite for Balkan clichés or being unmasked as a Balkan nationalist. This amounts to a difference between the ‘obsolete’ nationalist and the ‘modern’ Europeanist, and hence, between two highly divergent understandings of how to deal with the Albanian territories.

This thesis puts forward the argument that it is exactly these linguistic (along with other semiotics) categorizations that construct a socio-political object, like a border. Herein, we follow Aitken & Valentine, who claim that ‘no groups, made and natural objects, type of experience and aspects of meanings [...] are naively given to us as unmediated parts of reality; instead all are framed through categorizations that enable us to comprehend them (2006, 49) Whereas a weatherman forecasts the weather without influencing it, agents with political power who dismisses a view as ‘obsolete’, try to construct a reality as much as he or she tries to reflect it. So behind this type of expressions lies an ideological package.

A widely applied political tool to ‘pack’ ideology is through the application of recognizable ‘thin simplifications’ (as Richardson (2006) puts it) or ‘frames’ (as Fillmore (1975) puts it), or ‘discourse models’ (as Gee (2009) puts it), i.e. catchy terms that recall an immediate set of associations. As an example, Richardson mentions the notion of ‘polycentricism’, that EU consciously

³ Additionally, according to the Albanian Institute International Studies in November 2010, 93% of the Albanians would vote in favor of joining the EU; this is the highest share of the Balkan (AIIS: 2010). The average Albanian sees his or her country join the EU already in 2014, no other Balkan community sees entrance in a future so near (GBM: Summary of findings: 2010).

modified from a 'neutral' analytical concept to a normative notion (Europe *should have* a plethora of centers) (Richardson, 2006). This type of stylized facts and smooth narratives, he claims, are constitutive for spatial realities (Richardson, 2006). In his book *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* Gee has developed a series of guidelines that can be employed to recognize and value this type of simplifications he refers to as discourse models. As will be unfolded in section 1.2, discourse models can be extremely useful in retracing the narratives that exist on the Albanian territory.

It would take more than a thesis however, and perhaps also more than a bookshelf, to formulate all discourse models that have been constructed within the entire Albanian territory, even if we narrow our scope to the Albania-Macedonia border. Therefore, this thesis will give body to three pre-configured categorizations gleaned from the Albanian socio-historical background, to wit: the 'obsolete' nationalist who seeks unification along nationalist lines, the 'pragmatic' Europeanist who wants to unify within the European framework and the 'wistful' idealist who wants to reify a world without borders⁴. Chapter two will form our theoretical framework, where we argue that to explain amorphous dynamics of territorial consciousness in the current multi-level governance reality we should focus on investigation narratives. The third chapter discusses the Albanian socio-historical background that, as we will argue, to a large extent created the contradiction and quandaries Albania still sees today. Arriving at chapter four, we are well-equipped to configure and refine the three discursive archetypes found in current Albania. Subsequently, we will be interested in the extent to which our models occur in official statements and documents (chapter five) and daily social practices (chapter six).

Considering our analytical chapters, we shall limit ourselves to three official discursive vehicles in chapter five: a bilateral EU funded border program, a series of statements by Tirana-based elites and a number of photographs that were taken during the fieldwork the author conducted; and to one daily social practices reflector in chapter six: education. It is no coincidence that we focus on this single vehicle, because it is widely acknowledged that education pre-eminently reflects prevailing ideologies. Marxist writers signified the reproductive potential of education, as appears from Louis Althusser's remarks on ideology: '[a school] teaches know-how, but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its practice'. As a consequence, he proceeds, '[t]he reproduction of [ideology] thus reveals as its sine qua non not only the reproduction of its skills but also the reproduction of its subjection to the ruling ideology or of the practice of that ideology' (Althusser: 1969). There is however something vexing about this stance: if all schools reproduce the same ideology to which they are subjected, the examination of one single school, will always suffice to disclose the way this ideology works in practice. Scholars who stress that spatial discourses are imposed top-down and all local agents merely dance to the rhythm of the hegemonic powers' tambourine (Ó Tuathail, Dalby & Routledge; 2006; Rumford: 2008), will therefore probably regard

⁴ To be sure, throughout this thesis the adjectives that precede names of narratives and discourses do not necessarily reflect the author's opinion, even when quotation marks are missing.

the investigation of spatial practices on a micro-level pointless. Yet, another school of academics upholds that education may as well produce its own ideological outcomes. According to Paasi, ‘regardless of the prevailing social system, education is the main institution that builds up social integration [...], and it is connected with the *production and reproduction* of dominant values and ideologies in society’ (Paasi: 1996, 56) (italics added). Textbooks, he argues, are important socializing goals transmitters and teachers can be seen as the ‘implementers of specific cultural programs and hegemonic structures’ (Ibid.). Muller (2008), goes one step further, suggesting that human geography should be open to examine the extent to which local practices challenge and subvert supra-local storylines. In section 2.4, this thesis discusses its own stance in this debate.

The central question of this thesis is: *How do conceptions with regard to the Albanian territory held by elites and educators contribute to the social construction of the Albanian-Macedonian border?* Since fieldwork was conducted from Tirana, this thesis will be most elaborate in regarding the question from an Albanian point of view, but we try to reassemble the Macedonian view on the border where possible. In answering our central question, we hope to gain insight in the reciprocal process of constructing territorial images at multiple levels and through multiple channels. To see why this insight is important, and to see why it is especially vital today, from our (European) stance and applied to this (Albanian) case, we shall now discuss the scientific and societal relevance of our thesis.

1.2 Scientific relevance

The main scientific asset of this thesis lies in the fact that it discusses the construction of space from ‘within’, that is: we do not merely focus on the ‘big cycle’ of the exchange of spatial narratives between hegemonic powers (like the EU) and domestic Albanian and Albanian Macedonian leaders, but in addition hereto, and enabled by three months of human geographic fieldwork, we are attentive to the ‘small cycle’ of narrative exchange between domestic elites and smaller veins of the state apparatus, i.e. the everyday people who ‘consume’ spaces. At heart of this latter analysis lies the discursive examination of a number of semi-structured interviews the author took with Albanian and Albanian Macedonian teachers about the EU, the Albanian nation (that is: the Albanian inhabited territory – see **annex 2**) and the Albanian nation state.

To be sure, our inclusion of local practices in analyzing spatial realities, is not to deny the eschewed power relations between Europe and its accession-aiming states. It is crystal-clear that the EU is actively involved in managing spaces in, at and beyond its shores – for instance through the European Neighbourhood Program and the 1999 Stability and Association Process for the Western Balkan. It is often argued that the major consideration for the EU to engage in these projects and programs is, hardly surprising, continent-wide security (Bialasiewicz, 2010). Arguably, we find the EU here at its most imperialist. As Hardt & Negri argue, the notion of empire is not based on force itself, but on the capacity to present force as being in the service of right and peace (Hardt & Negri,

2000). This corresponds perfectly with the EU bordering practices, or as Bialasiewicz notes: ‘the legitimizing strategies of EU do not follow the usual motto of strength: might makes right, but rather claims that its norms are right and so should be followed’⁵. So in accession aspiring states, the EU has acquired the position of the predominant screenwriter of spatial realities.

Unfortunately, the mere acknowledgement of this unequal and – indeed – imperialist power relation often obscures the question how EU projections are received in the accession states themselves. After all, self-images of Eastern-European countries are produced not only in Brussels and Washington, but also in Eastern Europe proper. Balkan leaders often see their achievements and ties to the west as a merit, and can be seriously offended when scholars regard their efforts to become EU members as colonialism or imperialism (Kuus, 2004). Reflecting upon how European territorial images are valued, discussed and reproduced ‘on the ground’ (i.e. from an accession state’s point of view) , can lead us to important insights in how domestic statecraft intellectuals see themselves, the other and their European future. These insights, as Kuus suggests, function as ‘a useful mirror of the exclusion and division that still form an integral part of the idea of Europe’ (Kuus, 2004, 484).

The metaphor of a mirror is productive, since it postulates a projector (Europe), a soil on which it projects (Albanian territory) and finally, a reflection. How Europe sends its symbols and language is widely examined, but few scholars have scrutinized how EU-semiotics are received and deliberated in countries like Albania and Macedonia, and how signals are re-emitted towards Europe. An investigation of this process, entails the inversion of the familiar view (at least for the author, as a Dutch citizen) of ‘our Europeans selves’ against ‘the peripheral other’, and offers (European) pundits concerned with the investigation of Europe and its territory vital insights in who ‘we’ are and how ‘we’ operate. Hence, this thesis interferes in the ongoing debate on making European spaces, and does so literally from an unconventional standpoint.

1.3 Social relevance

For a part, this unconventional stance is also the starting point of the social relevance of this thesis. Moreover, the lessons that can be drawn from this thesis will help to raise awareness of European elites and their electorate – and not only that of populist politicians and voters who depict the Balkans as a calculating criminal hideout that is only after our prosperity, but also of the adherents of EU’s values who, overt or covert, consider the Balkans as the unenlightened flip side of their continent to which their European values should be exported (and who thus, as Kuus argues, do not ‘challenge East/West dichotomy’ but reiterate the West as ‘the “right” side’ (Kuus, 2004, 484)). For them, it can be highly illuminating to observe the ways in which accession states commit to the European integration process.

As this thesis will elicit, the efforts of elites in EU accession states can on the one hand be prompted directly by EU-guidelines and carried out with a tight focus on the official accession criteria,

⁵ Alexander Von Humboldt lecture ; Nijmegen, November 29th, 2010;

but intriguingly, on the other hand they can also appear in the capacity of utterly misdirected appeals to ‘Europe’ or bizarre imitations of Westernness or Europeaness that may seem ludicrous in our European eyes – see for instance Figure 1, but we will come up with more examples. This is where we enter the hall of mirrors. As it seems, the concern of the Albanian discourse implementer in examples like these, is neither the immediate meaning of the discourse, nor how its meaning is valued by the European other, but forms a representation of ‘how we see from our stance the other valuing us’. This is a purely artificial and imaginary stance, and effectual feedback from the other is not required in this process. The subject is not important in its effectual meaning, but its nature is virtual and exists only, as Žižek puts it, as a ‘point in the self-relating of the signifier [...] as something that is never present in reality or [in] its ‘real’ (actual) image’ (Žižek, 1991, 15). Readopting the European lens then, the analysis of European and pseudo-European discourses in Albania, enables us to see *the other seeing us*, which confronts us with our polarizing and imperialist tendencies.

In the end, (and the fulfillment this project lies beyond the scope of this thesis, though we hope to contribute to it) the two ravels (of ‘us’ and ‘them’) can be mended, and the sharp distinction between the Balkans and the EU will be replaced by a consciousness of how both sites are integral parts of the broader, inextricable European discourse. Moreover, as Étienne Balibar argues, the situation in the Balkans is not atypical for Europe but rather constitutes ‘a local projection of forms of confrontation and conflict characteristic of all of the continent’ (Balibar, 2004, 5). Kuus suggests, likewise, that ‘we should not discard exclusionary definitions of Europe in the accession countries as a resurfacing ‘old’ nationalism antithetical to the new Europe’ (Kuus, 2004, 484). This leads Balibar to the suggestion that whereas state borders (a European invention!) produce an overlapped rather than a juxtaposed arrangement of identities, Europe has to understand that tensions prompted by political, religious, cultural and linguistic affiliations are and have been constitutive for European history (Balibar, 2004). He puts Europe to the choice:

‘Either Europe will recognize in the Balkan situation not a monstrosity grafted to its breast, a pathological “aftereffect” of underdevelopment or of communism, but rather an image and effect of its own history, and will undertake to confront it and resolve it and thus to put itself into question and transform itself. Or else it will refuse to come face-to-face with itself and will continue to treat the problem as an exterior obstacle to overcome through exterior means.’
(Ibid., 6)

Choosing the latter, Balibar claims, the EU would impose a border upon itself, dismissing itself as a secluded zone in advance of its own citizenship (Ibid.). So it must be clear for Europe that, for the sake of its own unification project, profound lessons should be drawn from how its construction, throughout history and today, ricochets on the Balkan site. The current levels of EU support in the Balkans have

forged a unique opportunity for the EU to open up, learn from and attune to their lost fellow Europeans; so the time that love might still come from both sides is now.

A whole other social relevance of this thesis lies in the way in which it contributes to mapping how identities are represented in Albanian and Albanian Macedonian education. Discourses in schoolbooks and teachers expressions can help us to capture how Albanian identities (i.e. their (hi)stories, their fears, their current hopes) reflect in primary education. Existing work on Albanian education is generally very much concentrated on acquiring quantitative data, or focuses on enrollment rates, financing question and management of the sector. Admittedly, Pajo (2001) has done some useful work on Albanian schoolbook discourses, especially on how the West was reproduced herein, but his analysis merely stretches to schoolbooks that were printed right after communism, i.e. in the years before the European (re-)awakening arose. Furthermore, he does not interview teachers and does not relate his findings to the Albanian question. The work of UNICEF (2009) then, is more recent and does involve identity questions, but this study is exclusively focused on Albanian Macedonia – and again teachers views are omitted. This thesis will deliver some valuable reflections on spatial identities in Albanian education – i.e., on what the Albanian children learn about themselves.

1.4 Methods

As announced, this research builds forth on the concept of discourse model, introduced by Gee (2009). A discourse model is described as a term that has travelled a certain route, and therefore recalls an immediate web of associations. It is a simplified, often unconscious and often taken-for-granted theory that is applied to bring about recognition. Gee thinks discourse models are ‘an important tool of inquiry’ because ‘they mediate between the “micro” (small) level of interaction and the “macro” (large) level of institutions’ (Gee, 2009, 71). A ‘real Indian’, ‘widower’ or ‘regular at a bar’ are exemplary discourse models. There is no once-and-for-all-test for ‘being’ one, but their existence is prolonged through acts that bring about recognition (Ibid., 23) – so a discourse model is always ‘doing’. A conception of a space can be a discourse model as well, for instance ‘het Groene hart’, ‘Suburbia’ or ‘a European Estonia’. These models are, both in name and content, evaluative, and applied consciously or unconsciously to judge oneself and others – and therefore they are through and through political (Ibid.). Through discourse models, more powerful groups in society can influence less powerful ones, and it is not uncommon that a powerful group ‘colonizes’ a discourse model (Ibid.) – see also section 2.3. A further characteristic Gee describes is that discourse models need not to be fully formed, or consistent, but can incorporate different and conflicting values (Ibid.). Hence, they are not given entities or static projects. Discourse models link to each other in complex ways to create bigger and bigger storylines (Ibid.). This complexity and hybridity however, must not deter us to embark on discursive models, since the method can help us to map the thinking and social practices of groups with power.

Once we have configured our models, we can shift to the analysis of discourse-bearers. Discourse is not only transmitted through language – it also appears through other media, like images, maps and other depictions. For the analysis of visual objects, the method of Rose (2012) may serve us well. In his book *Visual Methodologies* he develops a framework which can be of great use in retracing the meaning of illustrations. According to Rose, there are three sites at which the meaning of an image is made: the production of an image, the image itself and the audience by which it is seen. Furthermore, each of these sites have three different modalities: one technological, one compositional and one social (Rose: 2012). So for instance, when one chooses a given mode of production of an image (say – digital ‘old newspaper’ effects), he has to consider the technological (which photo editing program?), the compositional (texture, density and opacity of the effect) and the social (for instance, does another company use the same shade of sepia in its style?) modality.

However, Rose puts forward that ‘very few studies of visual culture [...] attempt to examine all [aspects] [...] in equal depth; most are driven by their theoretical logics to concentrate on one site in particular’ (Ibid., 42). Similarly, this thesis is interested in categorizations that are of relevance in understanding the construction of the Albanian-Macedonian border. So when we examine images that are spread by agents active in social construction practices, our attention will shift to how these images articulate questions of power, i.e. which social categorizations they produce (Ibid.). This means we want to understand the social (and for a part, also the compositional) modality of the site of the images itself.

Furthermore, in this thesis we want to know how an image exemplifies or undermines the presence of a given discourse model. This is why we also want to learn about the maker and the audience of the picture. Moreover, we want to understand ‘visual images as embedded in the practices of institutions and their exercise of power’ (Ibid., 257). The hyphen between the dominant narrative (see section 2.3) and its social representation within smaller veins of the institutional apparatus is scrutinized. Therefore, we will also include the social modalities of the sites of production and audiencing in our analysis.

Maps take a special and highly illuminating position in disclosing dominant ideas on territory. In their article ‘Being on the Map’, Jensen and Richardson examine how European spaces are represented on maps. They consider maps as rhetorical devices, that try to frame their message in the context of their audience. The mapmaker will thus only omit those features of the world that lie outside the purpose of the immediate discourse (Jensen & Richardson, 2003). Maps can become self-fulfilling prophecies, and once an image provides the visualization needed to depict a dominant paradigm, it may become a kind of policy icon (ibid.). For interferers in the construction of space, maps are thus a very apt device to communicate their view. Hence, geographical representations can be used to press a case for a certain policy, but also to frame a problem for policy attention. In sum, this thesis will emerge discourse models by using the methods of Gee, and subsequently, we will analyze visual (maps and images) and textual (elite expressions and interview excerpts) discourses.

The next chapter spends some more words on how to recognize and value discursive semiotics with regard to the construction of spaces.

Chapter II: The Construction of space

Chapter two forms our theoretical framework. The first paragraph discusses space as a social construct. We argue that in the complex, nodal and multi-layered modes of government, emphasis should be put on the examination of narratives. Subsequently, section 2.2 discusses why the depiction of a nation is such an approved technique for elites, and the extent to which this ‘nation’ model can be applied to other homogenizing discourse models – including the European and the cosmopolitan. Section 2.3 elaborates on how discourse models do typically appear, and how they are linked to dominant and less dominant narratives. The last section of this chapter sheds a light on the question of which parties are involved in the social construction of spaces.

2.1 Space as an outcome

‘The construction of territory’, springs from Anssi Paasi’s book *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness* (1999) in which he argues that territory is a historical product, resulting from human beliefs and actions. It involves the construction of a ‘we’ and likewise it demarcates the ‘other’ through semiotics and language implemented by leaders (ibid.). The media, sciences, art and education as well as symbols and signs are important vehicles for this process (ibid.). Furthermore, Paasi argues that discourse attaching agents demarcate boundaries through the localization of social practices; especially the act of naming (a territory) is a powerful technique herein (ibid.). National governments try to make persuasive use of the idea of a common territory, albeit nation-states commonly have another, more strictly defined type of boundaries than multi-ethnic territories have. In any case, governments try to create legitimate stories to construe a national identity among geographically diverse areas and various population groups (ibid.).

In order to do so, elites have to tune their language to their geopolitical interest. This is what Ó Tuathail et al. (1998) describe as the ‘socially structured use of language’. According to Ó Tuathail et al., geopolitical reasoning works by the active suppression of the complex geographical reality in favor of controllable geopolitical abstractions, appealing to binary distinctions found in societal mythologies. Ó Tuathail et al. set forth that (hegemonic) world powers are by definition the rule writers for the world community. They are capable of representing regional conflicts in their own terms, and they create the conditions whereby peripheral and semi-peripheral states actively adopt and use the geopolitical reasoning of the hegemon.

Paasi however, chooses another starting point. Acknowledging the strong mobilizing power of nationalist discourses, he claims that through ‘national integration and nationalism’, the nation is ‘typically represented as homogeneous – and this homogenization typically takes place in relation to the other’ (Paasi, 1999). Nationalism gives rise to ‘the absorption of smaller regions into larger units of territorial, political and economic organization’ (Ibid., 50) to obtain a sense of national kinship within political borders. Questions about nations within and among the nation-state notwithstanding, in the context of Paasi’s book nationalism is understood as a process based on state boundaries (Ibid.,

51), making the political and the national congruent and intensifying the meaning attached to the outer lines of states. Within these outer lines, nationalist elites build on unifying the nation and its constituent territory (Ibid.). Although Paasi supposes that the logics of nation building are alterable, and exposed to a number of external dynamics, including the expansion of media (Ibid.), it is not discussed in which ways the nationalist process is embedded in supra-national socialization practices. As a consequence today, in our globalized multi-level governed world where few would contest that the social meaning of borders and territory is at least for a part drafted by powers exceeding the nation state, one could ask why it is exactly nationalist nation building that should be put at heart in the examination of the construction of territories.

Therefore, this thesis upholds that within the current context of ‘multilevel proliferation of cross-border regions, transnational territories, constructed at different scales and configured by different political and economic actors’ (Richardson, 2006, 206) limiting ourselves to one single mass rallying practice (that is nationalism) is not apt to comprehend the complexity in which the construction of spaces is caught. Emphasis should not be put on the question in which single component of the global political structure the conductors of spatial realities are congregating, but on the examination of interrelated and complementary narratives, configured both at the hegemonic level and at multiple other scales within it (Ibid.). The sections below (2.3 and 2.4) will elaborate on how we can recognize and value narratives that construct – among others – nationalist, Europeanist and cosmopolitan loyalties. Still, especially within the European context, nationalism has proven to be the foremost mass-based identity forger, with some approved successes (see for instance in the Baltic struggle for independence (Van den Heuvel, 1993)) and some devastating drawbacks. In addition, it is often argued that European integration is withheld by the absence or pettiness of a nationalism-like European sense of belonging. Let us therefore first pause and reflect on the similarities and differences of the nationalist and supra-nationalist appeal in section 2.2.

2.2 Enjoy your narrative!

In the same vein as Foucault argued that there is no fundamental link between the prince and its principality (Foucault, 1991), nationalistic kinship among people who live in a given bounded space is synthetic and exist only as long as groups with power reiterate it. Elites *invent* communities rather than awakening some dormant consciousness (Anderson, 1991) and there were no nations before elites – culturally, politically and economically – came to imagine them as such (Bechev, 2006). So when Cheah asks whether a post-national or cosmopolitan consciousness can be a feasible political alternative to the nationalist imagining of political community (Cheah, 1998), the counter-question is: why could it not be, when elites alter their storylines?

Post-nationalist or cosmopolitan advocates may insist on the incongruity of this question, arguing that their very views are alternatives that incorporate the lessons that are drawn from the grim consequences of nationalism in Europe (the cradle of nationalism) in the past two centuries (the

heydays of nationalism). The alternatives they offer can be sincere and righteous, but the toolbox of the post-nationalist and cosmopolitan community maker, may essentially contain the same two instruments as the nationalist: demarcation and homogenization. Demarcation here, is the designation of the outer other (drawing a border – this does not apply for cosmopolitanism) and/or the inner other (including the antagonists of the community making process, this group can often not be territorially located); homogenization is the social act of projecting ‘sameness’ within a demarcated territory.

Equipped with these instruments, elites – who themselves may be benign or malicious, progressive or obsolete, nationalist or supra-nationalist – imagine a community. This happens, as Paul Ignotus’ suggested, when ‘a few people decide that it should be’ (Anderson, 1991, 44). A deeper interrogation of this remark (e.g. ‘*why* do people think it should be?’) could lead us to a myriad of political, geographic, linguistic and/or historic justifications. Still, this type of answer would hardly be adequate from a constructivist stance: if no categorizations are naively given, we are interested in the question why exactly these justifications fit in the embraced strategy of dealing with territory.

The proper answer to the why-should-it-be-question may be just as evident and seemingly flippant as it is confusing (for it can lead us to open a box of psycho-analytic contemplations in which a geographer would rather not get involved): *people decide it should be, because it makes them feel good*. This hints to Lacan’s theories about the ‘jouissance’ (enjoyment) of forming a homogeneous entity (Mandiou, 1998). Slavoj Žižek has linked this lacanian sense of enjoyment to nationalism. As he sets forth: ‘a nation exists only as long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialized in a set of social practices and transmitted through national myths that structure these practices’ (Žižek: 1993, 202).

Enjoyment, as Žižek understands it, can only exist by the grace of recognition, as he draws the comparison that ‘I believe in the (national) Thing’ equals ‘I believe that others (members of my community) believe in the Thing’ (Ibid.). It is in the interests of elites to bring about this shared notion, and make – within their projected territory – the political coincide with the cultural, i.e. the nation with the state. As Appiah puts it, whereas the state is a political and regulatory device, nations matter for the same reason popular vehicles as football and opera matter: as things desired by autonomous agents (Appiah, 1998). As a consequence, elites try to make the enjoyable national narrative and the political state narrative coincide. People who desire nations have shown to be especially prone to narratives about how others deprive them of their enjoyment. This is captured in a caustic remark of Žižek, who argues that nationalist elites typically build on the construction of ‘a Glorious Past and a Promising Future, whose actualization in the Problematic Present was only prevented from coming into being by Them’ (Žižek qtd. in Bialasewicz: *Forthcoming*, 14).

Enjoyment is not necessarily bereft by adjacent nations. It can also be blocked by a power from within (e.g. think of right-wing populists who feel their identity is under siege by threatening strangers), and arguably elites who supply pan-European arguments for EU enlargement, address to a sentiment of homogeneity in their own turn – be it that Europeanists see the blockade canvassed by yet

another force, that may be circumscribed as ‘narrow-mindedness’ or ‘backwardness’. On their turn, the EU builds on the creation of a ‘Europeanized spatial identity’ that ‘articulates the benefits of European integration’ (Richardson, 2006, 207)⁶. Cosmopolitanism, to conclude, addresses to enjoyment in the context of ‘taking pleasure from the presence of other different places that are home to other different people’ (Appiah, 1998, 91).

Although it is often argued that alternative forms of mass base loyalty, including the European Union, have hitherto lacked a popular grounding that is comparable to nationalism (Cheah, 1998; Axford, 2006), this thesis thus leaves open the possibility that nationalism is only one of the possible strategies that a government implements to construct the narrative of an enjoyable homogenous community. The next paragraph then, explores how these narratives, archetypically, appear.

2.3 Discourse Model archetypes

In general, the construction of territory is dominated by at least two competing and mutually dependent types of discourses:

-The model of the enjoyment-supplier. The supplier presents a route towards enjoyment, and has confiscated the power to construct storylines of enjoyment-deprivation in order to challenge and delegitimize other models and accentuate the desirability of its own direction. This is more or less what Gee understands as an *espoused model* (Gee, 2009).

-The model of the enjoyment-depriver. Here we have the flipside or counter-narrative of the supplier model⁷, that serves as the ‘subjected, structured self, produced via a set of identifications in discourse’ (Benwell & Stokoe, 2007, 30). Whereas elites tend to have the strongest tools to create depriver storylines (for instance through education, arts and media), sometimes elites are victim of these discourse models themselves – see for instance Western-European populists, who try to dismiss the elites as ‘blind for daily worries of normal citizens’.

The most powerful model of enjoyment supplying, i.e., the nearest model to ‘an all-encompassing and authoritative account of some aspect of social reality that is widely accepted and endorsed by the larger society’ (Acevedo, Ordner & Thompson, 2010), is regarded as the ‘dominant model’. The group that generates the dominant model tries to persuade their subjects of the essential ‘truth’, ‘desirability’ and ‘naturalness’ (Benwell & Stokoe, 2007, 30) of their paradigm, and has acquired the best position to do so. The towering EU support in Albania for instance, may have given (implementers of) EU-approaches to spatial matters dominance over other approaches and their

⁶ This notion of pan-European homogeneity was thoroughly applied during the kick-off of the accession process bargains between the EU and the ten associated Central and Eastern European countries in March 1998, and produced, in the words of Schimmelfennig, an ‘argumentative entrapment’ of the opponents of EU enlargement, leading to a collective outcome that would not have been expected given the constellation of power and interests (Schimmelfennig, 2001).

⁷ The term counter-narrative stems from Bamberg (2003)

implementers. Dominant frames can be considered hegemonic when they enjoy full adherence within their projected area, and when the constructed Other that recurs in counter-narratives is either: only present beyond this area; or a merely fictional or undefined notion; or is not constructed at all. However, full hegemony on one aspect of social reality is very rare.

Sometimes, a dominant thesis is literally challenged by its own antithesis. Such a case is offered by Acevedo et al. (2010) who address the notion of narrative inversion. The dominant narrative here, is explicitly identified and inverted by people outside the dominant group. Adherent use phrases such as ‘taboo’, ‘I know I should not’ or ‘I know most people won’t agree’ (Acevedo et al.: 2010, 130) to position themselves against the model in command. Sometimes, adherents of inverted narratives use ‘a colonized model that actually fits the observations and behaviors of other groups in society, to judge him- or herself and lower his or hers self-esteem’ (Gee, 2006, 83), i.e. while embracing a counter-narrative, they approve that it would be ‘better’ to link in to the dominant model. Other, more self-confident and edifying counter-narrative embracers present themselves as the whistleblowers of the perceived injustices and inequalities that are often embedded within accepted narratives (Acevedo et al., 2006). However, it is argued that counter-narratives tend to be not as neatly packaged as some authors suggest (ibid.). Moreover, dominant discourses may not only be contested by their diametrical opposite, but also by one, a few or a plethora of more hybrid models. This thesis configures three possible discourse model archetypes that exist on the Albanian-Macedonian border, so that once we proceed to our analytical chapters and gaze in the black box of national discourses, we have a firm grasp of what we think or reckon to find there⁸.

2.4 Powerful and less powerful groups at the border

In the first paragraphs of this chapter, we put forward Richardson’s suggestion that a comprehension of narratives should be put at heart in the investigation of new (Europeanized) spatial realities. Subsequently, we have discussed national and supra-national narrating techniques of elites involved in the construction of territories (section 2.2), and how these narratives appear and/or are contested (section 2.3). We have also argued that narratives are developed both at the hegemonic level and at multiple other scales within it. But how low can we go? Can the utterances and actions of the lowermost gears of the instructional machine – including those of Albanian teachers and headmasters, that will be circumstantially discussed in chapter six of this thesis – also be constitutive for spaces, or will its examination only be apt to paint a folkloristic picture of the spatial narratives that elites have drawn up?

Indeed, one could argue that teachers and headmasters are not exactly among what Ó Tuathail et al. denote as ‘intellectuals of statecraft’. Furthermore, the reliability of expressions made by individuals with little power and geopolitical agenda can be feeble. First, as Bamberg (2003) argues,

⁸ The idea to explore how empiric material draws on pre-constructed models loosely stems from Ansell (2010), who presents three discourse models on childhood and youth, and examines to what extent they recur in Lesotho’s education on AIDS. See also Smith (1991) in Acevedo: 2010.

even the subscription to a dominant narrative does not automatically result in being complicit and supportive to the institutions that implement these stories, and second, the setting of an interview may milk only socially desirable answers. Information of the interviewees may be not reflective of their authentic self. Yet, their expressions *can* be reflective of what is considered ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. This depends, again in the vocabulary of Bamberg (2003), on whether you consider individual members of society as participants who are interactively ‘positioning themselves’ in discursive debates, or are deterministically ‘positioned’ by dominant narratives. If the latter applies, citizens are merely the reliable mirrors of ideology trapped in dominant narratives. Hence, all mechanisms of power are fully and uniquely located in the institutional apparatus. Involving citizens would then be pointless (at least in our study field), since political conceptions are produced and imposed upon individuals by those in control and citizens actions do not affect this process. This stance is espoused by scholars working with the frame of Critical Discourse Analysis. A second branch of scholars who relate themselves to Conversation Analysis sees the local context as the only relevant context to understand the emergence of identities (De Fina, Bamberg & Schriffrin, 2006).

However, these frames rather represent the two outer ends of a spectrum than that they are a clear-cut dichotomy. For instance, Rumford chooses a middle ground position in his argument that on the one hand the construction of territories can be performed by ordinary citizens (Rumford, 2008), but on the other hand, this power pertains only to people in the borderlands, i.e. to the users of a border who can transform the meaning of the state border through crossing and re-crossing (ibid.). This thesis agrees with the proposition that citizens in borderlands share a unique competence in territory making that is worthwhile to be scrutinized, but we think that the suggestion that this kind of power only belongs to those who live at the nation states borderlands, puts aside the discussions about the altering meaning of both nation states and borders. Moreover, a mere focus on people on the borderlands, treats borders as ‘fixed and situated only at the outer limit of territories’ (Axford, 2006, 163).

This would obscure the impact that today’s cross border governance – with its fluid, nodal and networked dynamics – exerts on borders and territories. Balibar even observes an inversion of the relation between territory and border (Balibar, 1998). No longer, he argues, borders are the shores of politics, but they have (for instance through the allocation of border zones or border regions) become an object central to the constitution of a public sphere. So borders are not vanishing under the yoke of globalization, but rather they are being ‘multiplied, thinned and doubled’ (ibid.). Following this line, the unique position of people at the borderlands in construction practices, is not so unique after all, because borders can be encountered anywhere.

But still, this is an argument to consider a lot of citizens interesting when we investigate the construction of territories, as much as it is an argument for the position that a lot of citizens are not so interesting after all, because their impact on territories is negligible. As we will argue, this thesis is inclined to support the former position. Herein we follow Muller, who champions more attention on the ‘performance of discourses within social groups within micro contexts’ in human geography, for it

can give us vital insights into ‘where seemingly hegemonic discourses are contested and subverted – and where they are reinforced’ (Muller, 2008, 335). A similar bridge between ethnography and human geography was perhaps envisaged by Michel Foucault when he argued in the French journal *Hérodote* in 1976 that ‘[one] cannot confine oneself to analyzing the state apparatus alone if one wants to grasp the mechanisms of power in their detail and complexity [...] in reality, power in its exercise goes much further, passes through much finer channels, and is much more ambiguous’ (Gordon, 1980, 72). The individual, argues Foucault, plays an active role herein, because he or she has at his or her disposal a certain power. Excessive insistence on state power, he warns, leads to the risks of overlooking these mechanisms, that - as it happens - ‘often sustain the state more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximizing its effectiveness’ (ibid., 73).

Therefore, this thesis is not only concerned with the official screenplay, but we also want to expose the ways in which dominant discourses are performed and adapted by its interpreters on a micro scale. This encompasses, in the vocabulary of Paasi (1999), not only the social spatialization (of leaders), but also the spatial socialization (of inhabitants). Moreover, we will elicit whether and how the official spatial policy on the Albanian and Albanian Macedonian Macedonian area is reflected in compulsory education, and how teachers in three critical areas (Tirana, Skopje and the borderland valley of Dibër) reproduce or subvert these official categorizations to gain an understanding in how ‘different spatial contexts impact on social life and vice versa’ (Axford, 2006, 163). But first, we will sketch the events that have preceded and, sometimes, incited the rise of current discursive spatial conceptions on the Albanian-Macedonian border held by groups with power.

Chapter III: The socio-historical background: the Albanian Question

Within the scope of this thesis, history matters for two reasons. First, it is argued that space is the outcome of the genealogy of paradigms (Davoudi & Strange, 2009). These paradigms are concurrent rather than consecutive: '[n]ew ideas have rarely erased previous paradigms; instead they have often remained in competition with them for capturing new audiences and new ways of shaping contemporary thinking about space and place' (ibid.). Spaces then, are the upper layers of a long history of paradigms and conceptual views, each of which have contributed to the spatial end product. A close look to previous conceptions and terms, evinces the thinking that has been constitutive to current viewpoints in spatial governance. Especially in the second part of this chapter, from section 3.3 onwards, the discursive layers of the Albanian-Macedonian border will be peeled – through the analysis of varying approaches elites had to spaces since the border was drawn.

The second reason why we want to gain insight in the historical context is that it will help us to recognize storylines. As Ó Tuathail et al. argue, spatial discourses and categorizations contain abundant references to 'narratives and binary distinctions found in societal mythologies' (Ó Tuathail et al., 2006, 97). According to Paasi, these practices aim to depict 'continuity with the past' (Paasi, 1999, 55) and serve as a cement for a projected territory. Section 3.1 and 3.2 therefore explore the chronology of events that have formed and continue to form the Albanian nation and the Albanian nation state. This leads us to the suggestion that there is something like an 'Albanian specter' – a pattern that recurs in prevailing conceptions of spaces over time. And as a corollary, the investigation of Albanian history will equip us in pre-configuring, recognizing and valuing stories in the three following chapters.

In literature about the Albanian territory, 'the Albanian question' is a key term. It may refer to two diverging junctures. The first Albanian question emerged due to the finalization of the Albanian borders in the second decennium of the past century; the second Albanian question refers to the renewed national consciousness that arose after fall of communism, when Albanians rediscovered each other after 50 years of separations (Vickers, 2002). Below we discuss the history of Albanian spaces through the discussion of these two questions. But first we will briefly elaborate on a few central concepts of the Albanian identity, that are greedily employed in elite categorizations.

3.1 Traditional components of the Albanian identity

Two 'societal mythologies' that often recur in narratives on the (continuity of) Albanian history and identity, are that of the 15th century Christian Albanian lord Skanderbeg who defended the Albanian territory from the Ottoman expansion (leading to statements as: 'we have always been Christians' or

‘we defended European Christianity’⁹), and the Illyrian derivation of the Albanian tongue and people (which is sometimes interpreted as: ‘the Albanians are the oldest people of Europe’). Next to this ethno-genesis story and Skanderbeg myth, Van den Berg (2010) lists four other facets that can be seen as central and constitutional in the Albanian identity: the Kanun, the Albanian language, religion and Albanian folklore and cultural traditions. We will discuss each of them concisely.

3.1.1 The Kanun

The Kanun is a bundling of the Albanian custom. It encompasses a series of oral laws (to be codified on paper only in the 20th century) that prescribes very precisely how to cope with topics like marriage, livestock and property, work, trade, honor, law regarding crimes et cetera. Especially the sections on blood feud linger among the general public, and have continually fulfilled a detrimental role in Albanian image-building. Elites have accordingly tried to suppress and illegalize the Kanun already since the 1920s¹⁰. After the Second World War, the Kanun was almost completely vanished due to active oppression of the communists who adamantly opposed the obsolete customs. The wedge this created between the (remote, monarchist minded¹¹) north and the somewhat wealthier south, only became palpable after the fall of communism, when diluted applications of the Kanun regained terrain in the northern part of Albania. In 2008 it was estimated that some 1.000 children were forced to be confined in their houses because they ran the risk being killed (Van de Veen, 2009). This razor-thin reminiscence of feudal Europe forms a grateful topic of exposure for anthropologists and historians, but in current political discourse the Kanun is typically referred to as tantamount to backwardness.

3.1.2 The Albanian Language

The next element central to the Albanian identity Van den Berg mentions is the Albanian language. The narrative hereon is entwined with the ethno-genesis myth because Albanian and some foreign linguists link the language to the (largely undocumented) tongue of the Illyrians. Polemics on this claim are ongoing, but arguably Baugh & Cable hit the core of the discussion when they claim that ‘the vocabulary is so mixed with Latin, Greek, Turkish and Slavonic elements that it is somewhat difficult to isolate the original Albanian’ (Baugh & Cable, 1993, 31). Furthermore, there are no written documents in Albanian from before the 15th century, making the Illyrian link even more wobbly. Still, for a major part Albanian remains – both in structure and vocabulary – highly distinctive from any Slavonic, Greek or Turkish language.

⁹ A young Albanian scholar at an NGO told me that when she went to study in Italy, she marveled how Western Europe did not pay Albania the honor and gratitude it deserved for the obstruction of Ottomanization of Europe. Nixon (2010) as well as paragraph 4.3 of this thesis form a further elaboration on the elite employment of the Skanderbeg myth.

¹⁰ Dutch writer and wanderer A. Den Doolaard wrote a charming novel on the early years of Kanun oppression: *Het Herberg met het Hoefijzer* (the tavern with the horseshoe). Albeit largely forgotten in his home country, the name of A. Den Doolaard still rings a bell among many (young) Albanians due to recent translations.

¹¹ King Zog I of Albania, on whom we will spend a few words in a following paragraph is from Burrel, a city in Northern Albania. Communist leader Enver Hoxha was born in Gjirokastër, in the far south of the country.

The Albanian language can be considered an important unifying vehicle, as one can imagine that without linguistic fellowship, association with the national identity for Albanians living beyond the state border would be significantly lower throughout Albanian history¹². Furthermore, the Albanian word for Albania – ‘Shqipëria’ – emanates from the verb ‘shqiptoj’ (translate)¹³, and according to a popular societal myth this went to show the shared commitment of all Albanians to their mother tongue. To conclude, the purported Albanianhood of Shkodrani highlighted in the introduction is also emblematic for how the Albanian people are, albeit divided, vehemently united through their language.

The former notwithstanding, if one examines ethnic Albania from within, one might still come across a number of linguistic boundaries. Most prominently, the dialects north and south to Tirana (respectively Gheg and Tosk – Tirana proper speaks Tosk) are clearly distinct. Only in 1972, a standard Albanian language was conceived, grafted onto the Southern Tosk dialect. Subsequently, Gheg-speakers, including Albanian Macedonians and Albanian Kosovars, embraced this standard Albanian in official (written) communication, offering us a scarce witness of interaction between the Albanian community in the communist years after the Yugo-Albanian rift (section 3.3). Today, Gheg is still vivid as a spoken language, but newspapers and schoolbooks are written in Tosk (Lefebvre, 2008).

3.1.3 Religion

The next element, religion, takes a special place in the Albanian identity. Albania has no history of religious fundamentalism and Albanians claim to be proud about the longstanding harmony in which the plethora of religions in Albania live together. Contrary to the Serbian and Greek identity, the Albanian identity as such is thus not based on religion. After the catholic schism in 1054, the Albanians found themselves on the dividing line between the church of Rome and the Byzantium Church. The Shkumbin river became a religious border between the Roman north and Orthodox south (Van den Berg, 2010b). During the era of Ottoman expansionism in the 15th century, an Albanian army led by the aforementioned lord Skanderbeg, weathered the Eastern belligerence for a startling 34 years. After the fall of Durrës (1501), when Islam gradually became commonplace, religious pragmatism prevailed and the gradual entanglement of Islamic and Christian customs (so called *syncretism*) came to pass (Ibid). The Turks did not implement a policy of aggressive conversion, but they did pursue an agenda that was discriminatory towards Christians (for instance, through taxes and unfair application policies). From 17th century onwards, the majority of the Albanians was Muslim, and the nation started to focus more on the East than on Western Europe, albeit that Orthodoxy and

¹² A 19th century Albanian translator noted, accordingly, when the Greek attempted to Hellenize the country: ‘if the Albanian language is not written, in a short time there will be no Albania on the surface of earth nor will the name of Albania appear on the map of the world’ (Vickers, 2006, 46).

¹³ Additionally, the verb ‘Shqipëroj’ means ‘translate into Albanian’. However, other pundits argue that ‘Shqipëria’ stems from ‘shqiponjë’, the Albanian word for eagle.

Catholicism were never completely washed away. Nor did the complete assimilation with the Ottoman culture ever take place (Ibid.) and Albanians could preserve large parts of their identity, including their language and tolerant traditions. It is within this context that the Islamic Bektashi order gained popularity. The Bektashi order began as a pantheistic sect that offered a Shiite answer to the Sunni Ottomans and preached overall tolerance against religion (Vickers, 2006). Today, Bektashi is widespread among ethnic Albanian Muslims, and known for its very moderate understanding of Islam, which appears for instance through allowance of alcohol and abstinence from the Ramadan.

During the communist era, Hoxha added a whole new chapter to the aberrant nexus between Albanian identity and religion, declaring Albania the first country to adopt atheism as the official national religion. The virtual absence of religious intolerance notwithstanding, Hoxha promulgated a ban on all religious expressions, as he argued: ‘all religious sects existing in our country were brought into Albania by foreign invaders. [...] The history of our people demonstrates how religion engendered discord and fratricide in order to oppress us more cruelly, enslave us more easily, and suck our blood’ (Hoxha qtd. in Prifti, 1978, 158). What is more, the Albanian penal code of 1977 imposed prison sentences of three to ten years on ‘religious propaganda and the production, distribution, or storage of religious literature’¹⁴. The party advised that new festivals should replace the old religious ceremonies in order to prevent the creation of a void in the people’s lives. Accordingly, a new calendar of made-up secular national holidays emerged (Prifti, 1978). One Albanian pastor noted: ‘[when] I grew up in the midst of our one-time “revolutionary” youth, it was considered embarrassing to believe and practice [religion], to believe in the existence of God. It was considered bad to go to the mosque or to church, because ‘the faith of the Albanian is Albanian[hood]’¹⁵

Today, the Albanian national motto is generally understood as an approval of all religions instead of a rejection and politicians are frequently referring to the Albanian tradition of tolerance. The fact that in the whole Albanian area, including the ethnically scattered former Yugoslavian territory, inter-ethnic marriages are much less common than inter-religious marriages (Van Den Berg, 2010b), may be a further piece of evidence that religion does still not form the main cleavage for Albanians.

3.1.4 Folklore and cultural traditions

To conclude our description of key elements of the Albanian identity, a myriad of cultural traditions and folklore arguably hallmark the Albanian soul, among which we can list hospitality, art, music and the flag. For a foreigner, especially the ubiquitous image of the pugnacious double-headed eagle flag may grab the attention. This Albanian national flag - with an emblem gleaned from the picture of a double-headed Roman eagle under a crown that symbolized the creation of the Eastern and Western empires (Davies, 1996) and many years later adopted as a coat of arms by Skanderbeg – forms a central part in Albanian societal discourses. The constitution refers to it abundantly, schools are

¹⁴ Found on: <http://tiny.cc/zpb5f>

¹⁵ Quote stems from: <http://tiny.cc/4p4bd>

obliged to hoist it, the Albanian hymn is called ‘Flag Song’ and the independence day is designated ‘Flag Day’. Today, in political discourses the flag is often accompanied by a NATO and/or a European Union flag.

3.2 The first Albanian question

November 28th 1912 saw the pronouncement a free and sovereign Albania by the Albanian national assembly in the city of Vlorë. The proposed borders were more or less coterminous with the area where ethnic Albanians formed the majority at that time (see **annex 3**). However, international recognition for this declaration was never awarded and the treaty became a dead letter (Van den Berg, 2011b).

The border as it exists now is the product of a compromise between the great powers in the month following the Vlorë declaration, just before the centuries-spanning period of Ottoman occupation ended, and Austria-Hungary plead for an independent Albanian state to press the influence sphere of Serbia (Vickers, 1999). Initially, the dual monarchy proposed a frontier that followed the Albanian claim of November very closely. Serbia and Greece however, were highly opposed to the idea of an independent Albanian state for they saw their plan to divide the Albanian territory amongst themselves thwarted (Van den Berg, 2010b). To solve the quarrel, on December 17th 1912 ‘international acceptable frontiers’ were debated during a conference in London. The great powers, not wanting to anger Russia who supported the Serb and Greek claims, were supportive towards Albania as a separate entity, but only as long as it was small and neat. Eventually, they awarded large Albanian-claimed areas to the Balkan allies territories, regardless of their ethnic composition (Vickers, 2006), an outcome that at that point chagrined all directly involved parties.

The initial plan also encompassed the clause to warehouse Albania as an autonomous entity within the Ottoman empire, but as the Ottoman power waned (they lost Macedonia in the second Balkan war of June 1913) this became impossible. Therefore, in July 1913 the London Conference of Ambassadors proclaimed a brand new ‘Principality of Albania’. Hereby the core of the 1912 declaration of Vlorë was ratified post factum, with some crucial adaptations. First, whereas the 1912 declaration covered the entire Albanian area, the Ambassador Conference adopted the borders proposed by the Great Powers at the conference of London. Second, the Conference of Ambassadors appointed a foreign, European monarch to do the honors and replace the provisional government¹⁶. Eventually, they nominated a captain in the German General staff named Wilhelm Zu Wied. In Albania they referred to him as *mbret* (King) and he was styled Skanderbeg II, in homage to the national hero. However, he was totally unprepared for the difficulties facing him. His authority never

¹⁶ The conference emerged a gendarmerie that would be led by Sweden. However, Sweden withdrew and The Netherlands took over the mission. Fifteen Dutch officers arrived in Vlorë in 1913, including Colonel Lodewijk Thomson, who became the first Dutchman in history to fall during a peace mission when he got shot in 1915. A statue in Durrës still commemorates this *petit histoire*.

extended much beyond Durrës and ended entirely with the outbreak of World War I (Van den Berg, 2010b).

During the First World War, nascent Albania transformed in a clearing house where neighboring countries could freely pick their coveted areas. Greece confiscated the cities of Korça, Saranda and Gjirokastrë, Montenegro took Shkodër and Serbia occupied the rest of the North, including Elbasan and Tirana, but withdrew when Austro-Hungarian troops entered Albania. On their turn, Austria-Hungary occupied the lion's share of the country's territory except for the south. The Greek were forced to retreat in 1916, following the fall of the Greek monarchy, and Italy rapidly stepped into the vacuum. On 3 June 1917 Italy proclaimed the creation of an Albanian state under their protection (Marmullaku, 1975). Hitherto, the First World war had been a frightful disaster for the incipient state of Albania. One in ten Albanian citizens died, and even under their new – somewhat autocratic (see Vickers: 2006) – overlord, the surviving changes of the country looked gloomy. Yet, when Italy left Vlorë in 1920, Albania regained the possibility to exert power over their country (Van den Berg: 2010b). In the same year, by way of compromise between the north and the south, the quiescent but central city of Tirana was chosen as the capital. Ultimately, the conference of ambassadors of the victorious states re-recognized the Albanian independence in 1921, but this decision also gave substance to the 'special interests' of Italy. This came down to a possibility for Italy to interfere in Albanian domestic affairs, which could be seen as a great concession to Italy (Marmullaku, 1975; Vickers, 2006).

The document on the (virtual) restoration of the Albanian-South Slavonic¹⁷ frontier of 1913 was signed in 1925 in Florence (Marmullaku, 1975). Theoretically, this heralded the freezing of the Albanian border question until Kosovo gained independence in 2008. Notwithstanding, if the twentieth century proved anything for Albania, it would be that their position in the world was changeful. Indeed, the physical border had not modified for 83 years, but it can be argued that instead, people's psychological boundaries have altered repeatedly. To see this point, we will spend some words to the numerous influence spheres Albania has been exposed to during the border's 'status quo' in the now following paragraphs.

3.3 Communist Albania: varying influence spheres and rhetoric

As noted, after its regained independency Albania was a feeble and largely Italian-dictated state. Besides, the country was fragmented, poorly developed and nearly bankrupted due to a decade of skirmish. The dilapidated Albanian infrastructure enabled local beys to extend their land ownership by oppressive means, so that as a consequence it occurred to the people living in the periphery that the Albanian government was increasingly a Tirana-only government.

¹⁷ Marmullaku (1975) speaks of the Albanian-Yugoslav border. However, Yugoslavia did not exist before 1929. The full name of the adjacent Balkan state at that time was The Kingdom of Serbians, Croats and Slovenes.

This was the major concern of Ahmed Zogu, a wealthy Muslim who gained the reputation of a competent and intelligent leader in the Second World war and who became the leader of the Albanian Popular Party in 1922. During his incumbency, he upheld that the establishing of the Albanian state should take place prior to settling the Macedonian and Kosovar border question (Vickers, 2006). Facing considerable resistance of his fellow party members beyond the state borders, Zogu made his efforts to emerge a modern Albanian state. He saw himself forced to turn to Italy, the only country solid enough, and with the strategic interest in Albania to venture in the supply of a loan. The ties intensified when Zogu and Italy signed a pact in which friendship and mutual support were enshrined. Simultaneously, Zogu was aware of the many forces mistrusting him or wishing to annihilate him – both internally and abroad. Therefore, his country’s diplomacy became increasingly isolated from all foreign states but one (that is Italy). On 22 November 1927 a second pact of Tirana was signed, allowing Italy to base a permanent military mission in Albania (Marmullaku, 1975). Subsequently, Italian architects helped to transform Tirana from dormant Ottoman town into a dignified capital with wide, paved boulevards and a worthy royal palace-to-be – that is to say, in the Interbellum Albania was the only country on the Balkan that was not a monarchy. Uncertain of the level of support, Zogu decided that perhaps a coronation would grant his regime more security and continuity, and in 1928 Zogu proclaimed himself Zog I, king of the Albanians. Perhaps as an expression of Italy-admiration, or as a mere imitation, the central square was styled the Piazza Skanderbeg (Vickers, 2006).

The rickety young republic of Albania, that lived under the yoke of Ottomans for so many years, and got overrun by a grim World War before the awareness of autonomy could even penetrate, had found a sense of belonging, an Ego-ideal of themselves to which they could live as well as a protector that could secure their continued existence. Even nowadays, the Albanian ambassador in The Netherlands made the argument that all Albanians still remember Ahmed Zogu, because ‘he brought Albania back to Europe’, i.e. back to the Christianity Skanderbeg once defended¹⁸.

But as the Interbellum ran to an end, along came anxiety. King Zog was increasingly wary to give in completely to the Italian demands and whilst worries about his and Albania’s sovereignty augmented, he refused to extend the pact of Tirana in 1931 and sealed a number of trade agreements with Greece and Yugoslavia instead. Some intimidating Italian measures followed, leaving little impression on the self-proclaimed King. Yet on the eve of the second World War, when Germany annexed Austria and moved towards Czechoslovakia, Mussolini feared that Italy would become a second-rate member of the fascist axis. Therefore in 1939, Italy invaded Albania and Zog fled to Greece. Subsequently, Germany took over power in 1943, but they were defeated already one year later by a communist partisan army and thence, Albania went into history as the only Eastern European country that

¹⁸ Interview with Mr Gazhmend Barbullushi in The Hague, July 2011. Indeed, Zogu was a Muslim himself, but never emphasized an Islamic signature. Rather, he affiliated himself with the Christian Albanian national hero, witnessing the title he adopted when he proclaimed the Monarchy: ‘Zog I Skenderbeu III, *mbret i Shqiptareve*’ (Zog I Skanderbeg III, King of Albanians).

managed to throw out the Germans without the help of the Soviet Red Army (Prifti, 1978). In the same year the communist party's Secretary General Enver Hoxha, a grammar school teacher in Korçë before the war, became the leader of the country.

Albanian scholar Ramadan Marmullaku noted in his book *Albania and the Albanians* (1975) – useful as one of the scarce first hand academic sources of the Albanian communist era from within, but sometimes biased in its formulations – : ‘the struggle against the enemy in 1944 was a socialist revolution both in its character and its objectives. The peasantry and working masses were the driving force and mainstay of the revolution [...] from all points of view this revolution can be considered one of the great epics in the history of the Albanian people’ (Marmullaku, 1975, 58). This vocabulary is, both in tone as in content, very similar with the publications of Enver Hoxha himself, who perpetually wrote and spoke in terms of ‘real communism’ or ‘real socialism’.

Eventually, the firmness of Hoxha's opinions was a major determinant for Albania's decline in isolation. But back in 1948, a sanguine Hoxha envisaged a socialist future together with Yugoslavia. At that point again, Albania embraced a bigger brother to ensure their strategic and ideological interests. In an article on the Albanian inhabited area in communist times, Robert C. Austin included the following fragment of a speech of Enver Hoxha in 1945:

‘Democratic Yugoslavia is more advanced and more progressive than we are. Our interest is that Yugoslavia is strong, because with a strong Yugoslavia we will have a democratic Balkans. Is it in our interest to seek Kosovo? This is not progressive [...] When we arrive at socialism, there [Yugoslavia] and here, when the remnants of capitalism are beaten, in this situation, Kosovo will be together with the Socialist Republic of Albania. This is the line, this what Marxism teaches. We will explain this. For those who do not understand this, we are obliged to fight them’ (Austin, 2004, 250).

The underlying aspiration for international communism is indeed a thoroughly Marxist one. But as 1940s passed, the realization descended upon the communist leader that Yugoslavia itself was only aspiring to swallow the Albanian state, which prompted him to cut ties with Yugoslavia in June 1948 (Prifti: 1973, p. 45). Subsequently, Yugoslavia was fully purged from the Albanian daily life: the Yugoslav book store was closed, Tito's name was excised from all school books and his pictures were ejected from public places, rigorous measures along the frontier were instituted and Yugoslav technicians and advisors were expelled (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 1962) – i.e. Albania had to look for new strategic liaisons. Arguably, the history repeated: after an initial association with Tito's ideology, Hoxha feared that getting too close with the Yugoslav leader would result in the dissolving of the Albanian state, and hence, of his own power.

Next in order, the country allied with the Soviet Union, whose level of political, economic and military assistance and influence soon became tantamount to that of Yugoslavia before the rift (Ibid.). In his memoirs, Hoxha recited a 1949 tête-à-tête with Stalin on the Albanian question, in which – and Hoxha himself is the only source here – the Russian leader stated: ‘the problem of Kosova and the other Albanian population living [...] in Yugoslavia’ should be regarded in a ‘Marxist context’ – ‘we must not leave the Titoist enemy any way to make the accusation that we are allegedly waging our struggle to break up the Yugoslav Federation. This is a delicate matter and must be treated with very great care’ (Hoxha, 1982, 538). Whether or not these words were quoted correctly, it illustrates how Hoxha considered Stalin as the incarnation of the right Marxist view on the Albanian question.

However, after the death of Stalin Soviet-Albanian linkages became less cordial, and commitments grew apart. Whereas Hoxha repeatedly stressed ‘Yugoslavian revisionism’ was ‘the main danger to the international communist movement’ (CIA, 1962, 51), Stalin’s successor Nikita Khrushchev sought rapprochement to the Titoist Balkan country. The Albanian Labor Party interpreted his friendly dealings with Belgrade, as well as his repeated references to Yugoslavia as a ‘socialist country’, as a declaration of enmity (Prifti, 1973). This variance in conceptions resulted in the a break with the Soviet Union, a move that had serious repercussions on the Albanian economy, as the Soviet Union immediately ceased their deliveries towards Albania (Vickers, 2006). Moscow asserted that the Albanians were ‘dogmatists’, ‘sectarians’ and ‘narrow nationalists’ (Prifti, 1973, 41). Conversely, Hoxha explained his move as a gesture of commitment to internationalism. In a letter to all party basic organizations in 1962, he denoted:

‘As a resolute fighter for unity, the Party of Labor of Albania has been, is, and always will be, for the preservation and strengthening of unity in the international communist movement. Our Party has fought and is fighting not for any kind of unity in the socialist camp and in the international communist movement, but for a sound unity, based on the principles of Marxism-Leninism and proletarian internationalism [...] Precisely because it has upheld and upholds such a principled stand on the question of unity, our Party has been savagely attacked by the enemies of Marxism-Leninism and of our unity – N. Khrushchev and his supporters.’ (Hoxha, 1962)

This slightly quixotic reassertion of internationalism as well as references to ‘true’ Marxism and Leninism were central themes in Hoxha’s utterances. The communist leader repeatedly boasted how his doctrine was on par with these values. Accordingly, he reflected on the failure of reuniting with Kosovo in terms of his own Marxist internationalism against Yugoslav chauvinism. On February 13th, 1957 he wrote in letter:

‘Our Party has always maintained a correct attitude to the question of Kosova, a Marxist, internationalist attitude. But we cannot fail to point out the chauvinist attitude of the Yugoslav leadership in Kosova in order to confirm once again that it is in an anti-Marxist and inhuman position towards the Albanians of Kosova’ (Hoxha, 1957)

But with the Soviet linkages up into the air and the absence of the settling of the Albanian border question along the route that Hoxha’s foresaw, the internationalist aspiration ran the oxymoronic risk to be confined to the frontiers of the tiny nation. Yet, the Sino-Soviet split in 1960 heralded the presence of a surprising new overlord: China. Mao’s China espoused Albania as their only European sphere of influence and set up a constructive aid program, even while China’s own people were living in grim poverty and famine (Halliday & Chung, 2005). In a few years Chinese aid to Albania increased ignominiously. The Chinese found it advantageous to form this axis because they sought alternative suppliers for oil, copper and chrome, and because they understood that any support of the Chinese meant opposition to the Russians. Besides, China had its own reasons to be not too keen on Khrushchev’s Yugoslav rapprochement, reckoning that the Soviets built on a polycentric communist network that would outpace China in influence and prosperity (Tretiak, 1962).

In the first half of the 1960s, the head of the incipient China–Albania Friendship Association Chiang Nan-Hsiang, made the following statement during a friendship rally in Beijing:

‘Although our two countries are thousands of miles apart, we are closely linked by our common ideas, common cause and common struggle. [...] In the struggles to oppose imperialism, our two people, will forever inspire and support each other, maintain close cooperation and march forward hand in hand. The fraternal and militant friendship between our two peoples which is as close as the blood brothers can withstand all kinds of tests and will definitely consolidate and flourish with each passing day’ (Hsinhua, 1962).

Furthermore, repeated claims on ‘internationalism’ and ‘true Marxism’ were made, both by Chinese and Albanian officials. This clearly illustrates how the tiny satellite and its distant principal were jointly constructing a sense of shared values, or homogeneity. Likewise, the third ranking member of the party’s hierarchy Hysni Kapo stated: ‘if someone were to ask us how many people we have, our answer would be 701 million’ (Bromke & Rakowska, 1972, 209). Other Albanian leaders, including Enver Hoxha, also enjoyed to present the Albanian political clout and that of China as similar in size and importance in their language and visual propaganda material¹⁹.

¹⁹ This can be illustrated by looking at the personal pronouns in the following statement by the Albanian dictator: ‘We [The Chinese and Albanian communist party] are of the opinion that we should further intensify the struggle, the propaganda and the exposure of warmongering US imperialism, of the Soviet modern revisionists, the Titoites and their treacherous supporters. We must launch intensive attacks on their alliances, [...] to isolate US aggression, this new Hitlerism that is threatening the world with fire and steel.’ (Hoxha, 1965)

Still, the odd coalition was too feeble and skewed to make Albania gaze confidently to their neighbors. Moreover, Hoxha showed himself increasingly paranoid, witnessing a 1963 article about Khrushchev visiting Yugoslavia in the *Zeri I Popullit* newspaper, where he warned his people: ‘Khrushchev did not go to Titograd to pay a passing visit [...] He inspected the Albanian-Yugoslav border, in order to express in this way his support and approval of the profoundly hostile stand and intentions towards our people of the Yugoslav revisionist leaders’ (Hoxha, 1963). This makes vivid that the Albanian leader saw danger looming from all corners now. Architect Joseph Zegali and head of the Technical Office Alfred Moisiu were ordered to design and build shelters that could weather the unavoidable assault. Between 1960 and 1986, about 700.000 bunkers emerged²⁰. Furthermore, Hoxha ensured that a rifle was available for every family. The share of defense expenses soon amounted 80% of the state budget²¹.

In the 1970s, the alliance with China slightly stagnated, while at the same time both countries undertook efforts to normalize their international relations. Yet, the Sino-Albanian axis, that held sway for almost two decades, did not vanish overnight and as of 1977, China continued to be Albania’s main economic support (Prifti, 1978). In that juncture, Marmullaku’s *Albania and the Albanians* spoke of Enver Hoxha as ‘an outstanding figure in the country and the only Albanian of world stature [...] Enver Hoxha exemplifies the spirit of his people in many ways. Oriental culture and civilization have influenced Albania over many centuries, and Hoxha possesses an oriental cunning and political shrewdness’ (Marmullaku, 1975, 67). This went to show that hitherto, ‘Orientalism’ was still (or again) regarded as an asset²². But politically, Sino-Albanian relations were not as set in stone as in the 1960s. Hoxha strongly disapproved the Chinese U.S. rapprochement; Nixon visited China in 1972, albeit completely ignored by Albanian media. Eventually, when Tito visited China in 1978, the love between the two countries was dampened (Vickers, 2006). In the same year, all Chinese assistance programs were cancelled. Vickers interprets this rift as follows: ‘[f]or the first time in her modern history, Albania was without a foreign protector [...], reduc[ing] Albania to a degree of self-imposed ideological and political isolation for which there is hardly any modern parallel’ (Ibid., 203). Considering a remark of the Albanian Peter Prifti, who noted in 1978 that Albanians became ‘more nationalistic, wary of foreigners, and extremely sensitive to threats – whether real or imagined – to

²⁰ Designed to be indestructible, the lion share of these *kerpudhe betoni* (‘mushrooms of concrete’) is still dissipated among the Albanian landscape.

²¹ Van den Berg (2011), personal correspondence.

²² In contrast, during my time in Albania, there was a minor journalistic riot on the idiom of Ismail Kadare, Albania’s foremost writer. Kadare, a lifetime rejecter of Albanias flirtations with the East (especially Islam) (see also Cela: 2006), called U.S. ambassador Arvizu a ‘Kinezeri’ (Chinese-like) in an opinion article – to describe both his appearance and behavior. The writer of the article explained to Balkan Insight that a ‘Kinezeri’ ‘characterizes a hypocritical way of behaving that we don’t appreciate in the Balkans, being direct and honest people’. In that same Balkan Insight article, a sociology scholar from Tirana put forth ‘[Kadare’s] Orientalism, and the way he extends nationalistic Islamophobia to all other types of xenophobia, is amazing and alarming’ (Balkan Insight, 2011). I found it striking to see how the current trajectory Albanian leaders, people and intellectuals have chosen, has affected even the Albanian language.

their national existence and security (Prifti, 1978, 25), we have evidence to claim that this isolation also reflected on the Albanian people.

In the last years of his regime, Hoxha wrote two voluminous books in which all despised nations, including China, were looked back upon. In *Imperialism and the Revolution* he elaborately explains how both the ‘Mao Tsetung thought’ as Mao himself were opportunist and tantamount to Yugoslavian and Soviet revisionism (Hoxha, 1981). Furthermore, he reflected upon the development of the Albanian border question during his incumbent years, i.e. the failed unification of Albania and the Albanian population in Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia.

Let us underline at this point that Kosovo was an autonomous entity within Serbia²³, albeit this autonomy was largely theoretical: Albanians were discriminated economically and culturally, and education in the mother language was prohibited (Academy of Sciences of Albania [AOSOA], 1998, 26). The other Albanian minorities in Yugoslavia had no special status and likewise lacked the (cultural) rights of the Slavic nations. Perhaps this declares why the campaign against the Albanian national culture has been far more intensive in Macedonia than in Kosovo (Vickers, 2006). Yet, following the decline of Tito’s health and grip on the nation in the years of 1979-1980, Yugoslavia sought rapprochement to Albania. Albanian schools were opened in the Yugoslavian Albanian-inhabited area, the University of Pristina was set up and cultural activities were launched (Ibid.). Hoxha, however, was not to the slightest degree prone to this Slavic charm offensive. He denoted: ‘Tito and company cherished the old dream that through Kosova they could influence the liberal forces in Albania and, in this way, make possible the union of Albania with Kosova in the framework of Yugoslavia’ (Hoxha, 1982, 622). Hence, whereas before the Albanian dictator lambasted Yugoslav chauvinism as the encumbrance of Marxist internationalism, their abolition of chauvinism was equally suspicious. As a consequence of this stubborn attitude, Yugo-Albanian relations severed from 1980 onwards (Vickers, 2006).

Enver Hoxha died in the spring of 1985 and Ramiz Alia took over power. The new leader strengthened ties with Greece, Italy, Turkey, and Yugoslavia and implemented moderate reforms (U.S. Library of Congress: n.a.). His government began to crumble in 1989 and ended in 1991, in connection with the wider context of the collapse of communism.

3.4 Dawn of Democracy

The Democratic Party of Albania (DP), with current Prime Minister Sali Berisha as one of its foremost founding members, was formed on December 12th 1990, at the very dawn of Albanian democracy. Only one day before, the then incumbent Albanian Labor Party, agreed to legalize independent political parties (Vickers, 2006). Furthermore, it was only during this month that Stalin’s statue in

²³ The Yugoslav federation was composed of six federal republics. Three of them – Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro – encompassed a considerable Albanian minority. Furthermore, two autonomous areas were lodged within: Hungarian-inhabited Vojvodina and Albanian-inhabited Kosovo (Judah, 2000).

Tirana was removed (The U.S. Community on Security and Cooperation in Europe [CSCE], 1996). With democracy in such an embryonic phase, the foremost concern of the DP was to develop democratic institutions as soon as possible. The party vowed to base the society on the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act, and pronounced its hope to comply to the four principles of the CSCE Paris Charter, signed by all European countries but Albania, as soon as possible (ibid.).

So slowly but surely, Albania sought rapprochement to the outer world, although it was not clear from the outset that the EU was Albania's primarily focus. In a 1991 letter to the CSCE Sali Berisha claimed that the Albanians had pinned their hope 'above everything else' on the United States, stating that 'for the Albanians, like for other people, the United states represent the bastion of freedom and democracy' (Berisha, 1991, 41). Berisha concludes this letter with the words: 'like God gave Abraham the promised land for his people, this great democracy [the United States] will reward the Albanians trust in democracy by assisting them in restoring full democracy in their country' (Ibid., 43). This illustrates how Berisha attempted to paint a devout and never absent believe in America, the adherence to which he regarded as the new key to prosperity. This portentous attitude, of course, was welcomed by the United States themselves. In a 1996 lecture, CSCE chairman Christopher Smith praised Sali Berisha, then the president, as being an effective initiator of political, social and economic changes (CSCE, 1996). Furthermore, he advocated that Albania could now be regarded as a 'staunch US ally [that] has come to play an important role in the American strategy of preventing the expansion of the Yugoslav conflict' (Ibid.).

Nonetheless, the Albanian democracy was still frugally developed at that time. The country was devoid of a solid constitution, the legal framework knew severe shortcomings and the freedom of press was teething slowly. In a statement following the 1996 election, the OSCE affirmed this image: progression is being made, but rule of law was too weak to meet the conditions of a free and fair elections (OSCE, 1996). An elevation report written by the EU in 2001 put it as follows: 'immediately after the fall of Communism, Albania experienced a period of rapid growth [...] [but] the foundations of this growth were extremely weak' (Investment Development Consultancy [IDC], 2001, p. 1).

It is important to stress at this point that in the early days of Albanian democracy there were as many interwoven storylines about identity and territory as there are today. With the abolition of their diplomatic detachment, Albania not only rediscovered the outer world, it also realized that beyond their motherland significant communities with an Albanian tongue were located. An article by Barbullushi (2007), who analyzed political expressions in the Albanian parliament in this era, includes a quote of a DP parliamentarian in 1991 that gives a striking insight in the arduous relation between 'nationalism' and 'adhering to interests of great powers' at that time:

'Among the objectives of foreign policy we put first the national interests. There is no reason that this objective of the Albanian foreign policy, i.e. national interests, be conditioned by

something else, which may be ‘good neighborhood’ policy or let’s say the relations with Western Europe or with Southern America. [...] This does not mean that we are against ‘good neighborhood’ but not to the degree of inserting it as the constitutional principle of foreign policy of the Albanian policy.’ (ibid., p. 18)

This could appear quite uncanny for powers with interest (of stability) in the Balkan region. A country that contributes to (their idea of) stability interests, only as far as they fit in domestic (or ethnic?) Albanian plans, leaves the door open to a sudden flare of territorial urge. The Albanians in Macedonia could display their autonomous sentiments more overtly on the verge of the post-Cold War new world order. In March 1992, Albanian activists in Struga proclaimed a ‘Republic of Ilirida’. An Albanian Macedonian parliamentarian of the PDP party confessed to a Bulgarian newspaper that he recognized the Ilirida autonomy, and regarded it as a first step towards a federal two nations Macedonian state (Ramet, 1997)²⁴. It is argued that the fact that connection to the Albanian mother state was not sought after, was largely due to the cool relations between the Albanian Macedonian parties and DP during these years (Mehmeti, 1996).

Besides making advances to the United States and to the Albanians living beyond the border, the country also ventured to draw nearer to Europe. The first post-communist milestone of Albanian relations with the EU took place on October 26th 1991, when an Albanian delegation led by the Albanian minister of Finance Genç Ruli and the EEC signed the Trade and Cooperation Agreement in Brussels. From the mid 1990s onwards, Albania and EU coalescence accelerated and in 1996 Albania was very close to signing the Association Agreement. As Mr Shehu, then minister of foreign affairs, recalls in an 2009 interview that things went very well those days²⁵: when the EU presidency passed to The Netherlands in 1997, Albania opened an embassy in the Hague and according to Mr Shehu there was little reason to mistrust the progressive vibe Albania found itself at that time (SMEI: 2009).

But as the Albanian edifice neared the sky, its foundations collapsed. In January 1997 the country descended into anarchy, sparked by the failure of the pyramid games or Ponzi schemes, in which about two thirds of the population invested (Jarvis, 2000)²⁶. Half of the Albanian GDP – 1.2 billion American Dollars, most of which were savings of citizens – went up in smoke. Buoyed by the fact that the Albanian government explicitly pushed its citizens to invest in the schemes, the trust in democracy and rule of law, went below nil. It led to a series of protests, that exacerbated into a civil war in which the government was toppled and where over 2,000 citizens found their death (Vickers, 2006). Eventually, an Italian-led intervention initiated by the UN safety council could restore stability.

²⁴ Additionally, the leader of the PDP Aburahman Aliti, claimed that all Macedonian politicians, including president Kiro Gligorov, were wrong in believing that the option of autonomy for the Albanians did no longer exist (Ramet, 1997).

²⁵ The interview was carried out by the Strengthening the Ministry of European Integration Project [SMEI] and published in an EU-funded booklet called *The Pre-Accession Dialogue EU-Albania* (see the works cited section)

²⁶ Pyramid games lure investors with very high returns paid out of the funds received by later investors. Hence, scheme is insolvent from its start. The schemes offered by Xhafferi and Populli attracted nearly two million depositors—in a country with a population of 3.5 million.

The uprising affected the Albanian nation and its nascent democratic aspirations deeply. Negotiations with the EU on the Association Agreement were suspended (to be re-addressed and signed only in 2003), and it was doubtful whether the impoverished and disillusioned people would accept any legitimate power any time soon. In the meanwhile, both Prime Minister Meksi and President Berisha resigned, and with no one in power the necessity for new elections was so high, that – as CSCE admits – norms of free and fair elections had to be condoned for a moment (CSCE, 1997). Eventually, the Socialist Party won the June 1997 election and Fatos Nano took office as the new Prime Minister.

3.4.2 After the uprising

The elections may have marked the end of the 1997 insurgency, but the post-communist nation building era was – and is – still ongoing. As will appear below, discussions on the tension between national(istic) interests and international stability continued. Although pro-American and pro-European discourses were also pursued in these years, Albanian nationalism was considered a valid threat to Balkan stability on the eve of the 20th century²⁷. In 1998, Albania accepted a new constitution, the eighth article of which read: ‘The Republic of Albania protects the rights of the Albanian people outside its borders [...] [and] assures assistance [...] in order to preserve and develop their ties with the national cultural inheritance’²⁸ – a formulation that may not help to reassure powers that seek to soothe ethnic consciousness. In the same year of 1998, the most important scientific institution of Albania, the government-financed *Academy of Sciences of Albania*, spread a controversial pamphlet that included a number of statements that emphatically advocated the unification of the Albanian area²⁹. And when in 1999 a meeting between Albanian Prime Minister Fatos Nano, and the leaders of Kosovo and Albanian Macedonia engendered international unrest, the Albanian PM declared – cryptically – that the movement ‘will be [...] not in support of a Greater Albania, but will serve the great European Albanians’ (International Crisis Group [IGC], 2000, 9). As we will put forward, the pendulum swung in an internationalist direction only from 2002 onwards (Van den Berg, 2009), when nationalist aspirations became less conventional in mainstream discourse. As from 2009, Albanian is a full-fledged member of NATO, and as perpetually appears in polls (see introduction), it is the most EU supportive country of all Balkan countries. Likewise, Albanian Macedonians are the most EU supportive ethnicity in Macedonia.

²⁷ See also IGC:2004, p 1.

²⁸ *Nota bene*, these paragraph stem from (the slides of) a presentation called ‘the official role of Albania in regional politics’, held by Albanian ambassador Gazmend Barbullushi as part of the ALBFACT project. The slides can be retrieved at <http://tiny.cc/do7n9>

²⁹ The conclusion of the pamphlet commenced with the following words: ‘If the big powers will condemn this fierce and freedom loving people to remain under occupation [...] the Balkan Peninsula will never find peace, because the Albanians will never give up fighting for their national independence. On the contrary, if they will recognize to the Albanian their national rights, Albania will be a contributing factor to the peace in the Balkan’ (AOSOA, 1998, 48).

This chapter described which successive conceptions of space prevailed within monarchist and communist Albania and in the first decades after the new world order when pluralism made its appearance in the Illyrian state. The Albanian border, drawn in 1912 to demarcate a new Ottoman province, but upgraded to be a nation state border before the ink of the agreement even dried, has witnessed considerable shifts in the meaning attached to it. Interrupted by two world wars, the consecutive leaders in the first few decades of Albanian independency saw no priority in settling the border question. Mr. Zogu's foremost concern was to tackle the vexing lack of a political and infrastructural framework to replace ramping feudalism by centralism – reckoning that this would be a better strategy for the continuation of independency and the acceptance of the European commune than territorial warmonger. Wary of the possibility that an independent Albania might be transient phenomenon, cordial dealings with Italy turned into anxiety of being beset.

Arguably, two decades later, this pattern repeated as Mr. Hoxha, found it pointless to interfere in the Albanian border question, upholding a Marxist rapprochement to Yugoslavia would lead to the dissolution of any border and hence, any border-related quandary. Reality however, was more stubborn, and anxiety of being besieged prompted Mr. Hoxha to fortify his borders. Gradually, the country retreated into its shell building tons of bunkers and cutting ties with all former allies, near and far. Only after the fall of communism, Albania slightly reopened and international as well as pan-Illyrian aspirations revived.

One can wonder whether today we will come across an Albania where the pro-EU trajectory is fully embraced, and where the pro-EU integration elites in power have acquired a hegemonic discursive position, whereas anti-integrationists are categorized as enjoyment-deprivers. Or are there perhaps also other storylines to discern on Albanian territory, and if so, who then is developing, merging and/or reproducing these models? In order to answer these questions, the next chapter manifests three pre-configured discourse models that help us to recognize storylines: the nationalistic Obsolete, the focused and EU-compliant Pragmatist and the wistful Idealist.

The models link to Albanian history, not only because they represent the upper layer of the iceberg of spatial paradigms (see the introductory section of this chapter), but arguably, in a Hegelian sense, also because we have seen that the history of the republic – at least concerning leaders – evinces an evocative pattern of wistfulness (dreams of fading borders and (Marxist) coalescence), choosing focus (appointing and anointing a protector) and nationalist fortification. Although Detrez (2003, 61) warns pundits who embark on the history of Albania not to err too much in the direction of hard to gauge subjects such as national character and champions a focus on an 'investigation of actual political, economic and social conditions', this thesis upholds that it would be a missed opportunity at this point not to seek the connection between former and current Albanian spatial conceptions, even more so because this chapter of communist history is so poorly described in academic literature.

Chapter IV: Three Discourse Models

In this chapter we will give body to current storylines on the Albanian-Macedonian border through the configuration of three tentative spatial discourse models. Following our theoretical section, we expect that this narrative is formed by at least two discourse models: one of enjoyment and a one deprivation. To start with the latter, the typical depriver of pro-EU discourse is an obsolete, nationalist, ethnocentric person who is designated as too short-sighted to see the progress and benefits that the EU offers. Our first discourse model therefore, will be the errant and not-yet-enlightened ‘Obsolete’. Since our models are interwoven and mutually dependent, the configuration of the first model will flow into the next one. Eventually, the Obsolete model will be accompanied by the focused and EU-adhering ‘Pragmatist’ and the unfocused EU/post-nationalism-admiring ‘Idealist’.

This chapter explores the spatial categorizations that are being employed within the last decade, a decade that brought Albania a clear shift of commitment towards the EU³⁰. For each of them, we will at least try to discuss their envisaged future of the Albanian-Macedonian border, their position with regard to other models and the ways in which they seek enjoyment.

4.1 The Obsolete

As argued above, the model of deprivation within the Albanian pro-EU narrative is the Obsolete model. Here we are talking about a spatial discourse model that is no longer fashionable in spatial fixation acts. Useful language for creating the Obsolete, and likewise for dismissing this category as outmoded and undesirable, are terms such as ‘fantasy’, ‘historical problems’, ‘narrow-mindedness’ and ‘xenophobia’ (Kuus, 2004, 474; Cheah, 1998, 20). The obsolete discourse model is sometimes conspicuous only by its absence; through the weakening or suppression of a spatial reality that is no longer convenient. As Kuus sets forth, leaders of Eastern Europe want to fight the cliché image that East European countries are still embroiled in nationalistic fantasies, and want to prove themselves as ‘well brought up Europeans’ (Kuus, 2004, 475). Arguably, leaders of Albania, nowadays configure the quest for a greater Albania – i.e. border redrawing – as Obsolete.

However, border redrawing has not been painted as an immature and irrational practice forever. As unfolded above, even after the 1997 uprising, nationalism and the quest for unification existed as main stream discourses. A further illustration for this claim is delivered by an article by Boom (2000) in the Dutch magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer*, who observed that the spatial policy of the Albanian government showed striking similarities with the writings of Ali Jakupi, an Albanian professor from Tetovo, Macedonia, author of the book *Two Albanian States and National Unification* in 1995. In the 2000 article, Jakupi explained that the foundation of one Albanian state is ‘nothing spectacular, because [Albania] is not claiming anything that does not belong to them’. Furthermore, he

³⁰ This is not to say that for instance U.S. commitment or Euro – Atlantic commitment have vanished. Moreover, I think these type of orientations flow in the same channel as EU commitment (adhering to ‘the West’, a power that is associated with prosperity), and their impact on the social construction of territory will appear on the radar of this thesis only when they are intertwined with EU-related storylines.

linked the term Greater Albania to stability: ‘No Greater Albania? This will lead to unrest! In this process, a delay will serve no one. The Albanian nation will never give up her just, realistic and legitimate demands’. If we recall Žižek’s nationalism archetype of a Glorious Past, a Promising Future and a Problematic Present and Other (section 2.2), we can check off the similarities. Jakupi and other Greater Albanian advocates (notably the aforementioned Academy of Sciences of Albania) present a model that links the unification of the Albanian territory to ratio, pragmatism and stability. This sends a tacit appeal towards the stability-seeking international community: anyone who tries to preserve the situation of ethnic division is a servant of unrest and instability, i.e. an enjoyment depriver. In the same *De Groene Amsterdammer* article, the Flemish Balkan-historian Raymond Detrez points out he saw stability and unification related exactly the other way around: ‘the only way to prevent new bloodsheds, is to ensure that Balkanists collectively move away from the idea that nations have to be united in a perfectly homogeneous state. But that is like waiting until the Adriatic Sea falls dry’.

However, in the last ten years this nation-centric vocabulary has been pushed to the background. The Adriatic sea did not fall dry, but Albania has made an interesting move towards Europe in the last decade. A new Military Strategy adopted in 2002, put forward how Albania could turn into an international player and exporter of stability through the observance of territorial integrity and preservation of the Albanian state-borders (Van den Berg, 2009). It heralded a new way of thinking in the country. In a 2004 report, the International Crisis Group observed that: ‘at the present time, few Albanians press the issue of forming a single political unit’ (ICG, 2004, 31). Instead, the report argues, the Albanians have become accustomed to living in separate entities. As mentioned before, nowadays the preponderance of the Albanian elites and people adhere to a narrative where Europe, and not Greater-Albania, is the stability and prosperity bringer.

At the Macedonian side of the border, the Obsolete template may refer to a Macedonia with segregated and separated ethnicities, i.e. an ethnocentric Macedonia. The Obsolete Albanian Macedonian would see his enjoyment deprived by the existence of Others within Macedonia proper: there is something ‘between them more than themselves’ which prevents them to achieve full identity with themselves (Žižek, 1993, 203) and therefore should be contested. However, whilst irrendentist nationalists may be deliberately painted as Obsolete by statecraft intellectuals in Albania proper, advocates of ethnic segregation may face this same fate in Macedonia. Accordingly, in the last decade Albanians in Macedonia have largely turned their backs to nationalism. Perhaps, most citizens would rather not turn the clock back to 2001, when Albanian Macedonians and ethnic Macedonians were lined up right against each other in an armed conflict. The 2001 Ohrid treaty then settled the insurgency, granting more rights to the Albanians, and prompting the ethnic Albanians to give up any separatist demands (ICG, 2004). Today, Albanian Macedonians rather differ from their fellow Macedonian citizens in their degree of EU support (which is higher among Albanians) than in

nationalism (which is equally high among all Macedonian nations) (GBM, 2010)³¹. This illustrates that Albanian nationalism seems not to be much of a fanciful discourse in Macedonia either.

4.2 The Pragmatist

So if the enjoyment-depriver gets its substance in the Obsolete discourse model, who then is the enjoyment-supplier that has an interest in constructing this model? Applied to our case, the possible answer might be the ‘Pragmatic European’, who links pragmatism and stability to European integration. A Pragmatic European understands that European alterity can be achieved only through listening and adhering to ‘Europe’ as closely as possible. He shows him- or herself well aware of official criteria and country reports on European enlargement, and tries to embrace and implement them – as far as they speed up the accession process. Below, we will discuss a number of reasons why we expect to encounter this Euro-Pragmatism especially in Albania and, subsequently, we will explore how the Pragmatist sees his road to enjoyment and what this would mean for the border.

The first reason why a Pragmatic European model might be prevailing in Albania and Albanian Macedonia is the outrageous level of EU support, both among elites and citizens. For politicians, the EU has: ‘turned into the unquestionable highest priority of every Albanian government [...] a symbol of national identity, a political taboo, and an almost universal national dream’. All too often, Europe has become synonymous with ‘good’, and politicians are blamed for being not ‘European enough’ (Kajsiu qtd. in Musha, 2009, 1). This EU-enthusiasm is not only carried by elites – as we have learned from our introduction chapter, the discourse is backed by the highest level of popular support of the Balkans.

The second reason why we think we will retrieve a tide of Albanian Euro-compliance, connects to the socio-historical background of the country. As unfolded in chapter two, the Albanian culture has been perpetually prone to conquest, and as a part of their mechanism of self-protection, they alternated between either connection or seclusion. Of late, Albania can be located within the ongoing discussion of Balkanism, that is, the discussion on the tension between a Balkans self as opposed to a European other, instigated by Maria Todorova (1997). Her central argument is that nationalists across the different Balkan countries, sharply configure the Balkans as the site of ‘backwardness, perpetual strife, tribal warfare and resistance to modernization’ (Todorova, 1997, 14), and try to accentuate their cultural superiority over orientalized ‘Balkan’ others, raising the banner of their own imputed ‘Europeaness’ and ‘Westernness’ (and as Bechev (2006, 22) suggests, we should bear in mind the EU is engaged in shaping the semantic as well as the spatial definition of this value through expressing semiotics and through ‘institutional practices of controlled inclusion’).

This Balkanist consciousness does, however, not fully coincide with Pragmatism. Here we encounter a vital distinction – a distinction between Europe as a myth and Europe as the EU (see

³¹ Furthermore, a Euro Observer poll held in November 2010 showed that ‘while the vast majority of ethnic Macedonians (72 percent) do not trust the European Union's policy towards Macedonia, a similar proportion of Albanian Macedonians (74 percent) believe the EU to be a trustworthy body’ (Jovanovska, 2010).

Rakipi: 2003). A Pragmatic European is merely focused on the latter, and for him or her, ideas of Balkans backwardness and European progression are embraced only if they contribute to the target of EU-accession. Hence, the interest of the Pragmatist is to achieve progression in the accession trajectory, through compliance with the European guidelines that, for instance, can be found in the Copenhagen Criteria, bilateral projects and official statements. Pragmatists are aware that taking part in the game means complying with its rules, and that reform should take place prior to entrance.

So in contrast with Todorova's earlier mentioned archetype of nationalistic Balkan elites, the Pragmatist does not derive his or her enjoyment from outpacing their unenlightened neighbors, but from showing compliance or alterity towards an esteemed power. A leading theme of a Pragmatist is the quest for recognition, and this goal is thwarted by anyone who has not seen the light of EU compliance: in the Pragmatist's narrative anti-Europeanists are dismissed as an obstacle on the road to progression.

We shall now take a look into what the adherence to the Pragmatist model entails for Albanian elites. Is the Albanian Pragmatist one-sidedly prompted by the EU (Copenhagen) accession criteria, ticking of the checklist point by point? It is likely he or she will come to the conclusion that a more calculating attitude could spare energy. First, the way to obtain entrance, as well as the pace of acquiring entrance, is largely optional or has a deliberate character. Secondly, the EU is fragmented and has shown to be poorly convincing both in formulating shared principles and in acting in compliance with their own principles. Especially when it comes to security, and hence, to border policy, short term interest may win over well-intentioned universal criteria and principles. The Pragmatist has to be attentive to all types of EU-speak, including official statements and programs.

The current state of art is that the EU sees Albania's contribution to making European spaces sharply related to Balkan security and stability – i.e. to the preservation of existing borders. Contorting Balkan borders, as Obsolete nationalists advocate, shudders most EU elites, foreseeing endless new quarrels on the drawing board. Looking at some recent claims by the international community, Albania is fulfilling its role as a European state well indeed³². Along with being an important psychological and practical recognition for Albanian elites (AIIS, 2011), their utterances indicate that the country has adopted its role of obedient learner.

Let us move again to the other side of the border. Although Albanian Macedonians generally are supportive towards EU integration, ethnic Macedonians evince somewhat less enthusiasm on this topic. Reinforced by the lack of progression in the last five years and an unresolved name dispute with Greece (Koneska: 2009), the conflict between ethno-nationalism and state-based bureaucratic nationalism might be a cumbersome factor. Balkan journalist David Jan Godfroid put it as follows:

³² A selection to attest this claim are as follows: 'The country is strongly committed to regional cooperation; it plays a constructive regional role and participates actively in regional initiatives' (EC on Albania, 9-11-'10); 'The Netherlands appreciate Albania's contribution to the regional stability on the Balkan' (Maxime Verhagen, 10-8-'08); 'As a NATO partner and an advisor to other Balkan countries aspiring to join NATO, Albania plays a crucial and proactive role advancing regional integration and stability' (Hillary Clinton, 21-11-'10). These quotations can be found on the same slides as referred to in footnote 28.

‘Macedonian president Gruevski uses his comfortable majority to implement discourses that fabricate sense of unity’ (Godfroid, 2011)³³. These efforts are not counteracted by EU, since a united Macedonian people contributes to Balkan stability in its own right. The Pragmatic template for Macedonians then, may be a combination of official EU-commitment and the reification of a common identity as an answer to inconvenient ethnocentrism.

4.3 The Idealist

The last template is that of the Idealist. Language associated with this discourse can diverge from ‘hopeful(ly)’ or ‘it is our dream to’ to ‘in the far future’ and ‘some people dream of’. The Idealist is akin to cosmopolitanism; the emergence of a zone where each individual belongs to the wider world of humanity and where the meaning of borders is obscured (Held, 2002). However, the scale starts elsewhere, and it may start just beyond the tangent of Europe as EU and Europe as a myth.

Counter-intuitively, leaders do not always try to minimize their efforts and maximize their progress to obtain their ends. Prompted by domestic electoral considerations - or sincere dreams - the zeal of complying to the EU, is often accompanied by the zeal of meeting *all the good that is associated with EU*. But why would one expect to encounter such high-blown ambitions in a country like Albania? Again, the explanation lies in a commitment to polish the stain of their geographic location, to overcome their secluded history, to find belonging and recognition from an outer entity – as well as the recognition that comes with contributing to these self-imposed (so not by the EU) rules.

Such a commitment can be found striking from a European standpoint, but it is not without compare. It is argued that in the national political arena of accession states, Europe is: ‘not a reality; it is rather a promise or delusion’ (Paasi, 2001, 11). Leaders may spend a lot of time to construct shiny images and narratives of their ‘European self’, addressed to a receiver that only exists as a perception. The fragmentation and internal confusion of EU, makes the construction of an unambiguous and sustainable pro-European message almost inherently impossible.

An evocative example in how this point is often missed by elites, is delivered in Nicola Nixon’s article ‘Always already European’ (2010). Here, the myth of national hero Skanderbeg is discussed. This narrative is now emphatically employed to depict a seamless continuity of Albanian Europeanness from the sixteenth century to the present, and aims to present Albania as the historical defender of the boundaries of ‘Christian Europe’. As the writer argues, this constitutes ‘a misdirected appeal to Europe, led by the overestimation of European Christianity and by the underestimation of the internal incoherence of the nation of “Europe”, seen from the perspective of the European Union’ (Nixon, 2010, 16) – therefore, she proceeds, elites gaze in ‘a mirror of western civilization that is internally confused’ (Mazower qtd. in Ibid.). This exemplifies, as we remember the quote from Žižek

³³ This thesis does not contest the word ‘fabricate’ in the light of our theoretical framework, and especially the section on elites inventing communities. However, it should take some more words if one should put forward whether or not the Macedonian identity should be dismissed as being more artificial than its surrounding nations.

in section 1.4 of this thesis, how the European Union can be created as a merely fictional point in the self-relating of the signifier.

So the Idealist we expect to find in Albania is not necessarily committed to a peaceful world government devoid of borders (i.e. cosmopolitanism), but rather he or she is someone who claims to look beyond opportunistic adherence to fugitive EU-ukases, for the benefit of the creation of a ‘utopian synthesis between pan-European idealism versus temporarily national European technocratism’ (Paasi, 1999,4). More concretely, if an Idealist in Albania follows the EU, he or she does so only because this act will facilitate a Euro-Albanian zone, where ethnic struggle, borders and hostile others are replaced by mutual understanding and superior values. Above all, nationalism is no longer required, because Idealism will give Albania their promising future, and more: the shared enjoyment will be universal instead of confined to state borders.

This Idealist enjoyment shelters – yet again – in the quest for homogeneity and recognition. Given the aspiration of all-inclusiveness, borders play no role anymore. Instead of contortion or preservation, the Albanian border is waiting to vanish into a bigger entity. Yet, we should not be all too surprised when Idealists themselves employ the very technique of demarcation to dismiss their antagonists – reckoning that this method will pave the path to Idealism. This happens when inclusiveness is formulated as a normative goal, instead of an effective guideline (just as the Soviets put a (temporarily) repressive communist party in service of a larger vision that was in collision with its mean: equality).

Not only elites embark on Idealism; it can also find grounding along a grassroots trajectory, and this may help to configure Idealism at the Macedonian side of the border. As Appadurai suggests ‘sub-national and local groups could seek a post-national answer to the states venture to bind all people to an artificially homogeneous identity, and this answer will challenge the nation-state’s cultural hegemony and contribute to its crisis’ (Appadurai qtd. in Cheah, 1998, 31). Especially the Albanians in Macedonia, who may feel tethered by the artificial Macedonian identity that is being constructed, will be sensitive to this answer. For the Albanian Macedonians, the Idealist discourse model then refers to a post-national zone where people subscribe to an ethnicity at the cultural level, while at another – moral – level, they meet the other in shared cosmopolitan values, so that no one imposes one culture on another anymore. This Rawlsian consensus on cosmopolitan values may, however, be coined as ‘only suitable for wistful intellectuals’ by domestic leaders, who would rather try to block flirtations between Macedonian Albanians and Albanian dwellers³⁴.

³⁴ I learned in the Albanian border village of Peshkopi how Macedonian elites hamper Albanians that want to enter an Albano-Macedonian university (the University of Tetova is twice as close as Tirana is for Peshkopians) by setting impossible conditions to enroll. According to an Albanian Macedonian academic I spoke in Skopje, this example fits in the picture of a Macedonia fearing the recrudescence of ethnocentrism. See also footnote 51.

The scheme below summarizes the discourse models associated with the three categories, conceived by the author:

categorizations →	“Obsolete”	“Pragmatist”	“Idealistic”
<i>Albanian spatial discourse models</i>	A Greater Albanian: cultural fellowship among everyone with an Albanian tongue; <i>redrawing state borders to be convergent with ethnic borders</i>	An EU obedient Albania: Albania as a stabilizing factor in the region; <i>preserving borders</i>	A cosmopolitan Albania: All Albanians meet in a cosmopolitan borderless (EU) zone; <i>borders evaporate</i>
<i>Macedonian spatial discourse models.</i>	An ethnocentric Macedonia: (Re)demarcating boundaries within the state	A citizenship-centric Macedonia: The Macedonian identity must be created/ preserved; <i>fixing the state borders</i>	A cosmopolitan Macedonia: Ethnicities find common ground in cosmopolitan values; <i>borders lose their ontological meaning</i>

Table 1: typological table of archetypes³⁵

³⁵ Hence, while gesturing lightly to the articles mentioned in footnote 8, the categories as well as the discourse models depicted in the typological table of archetypes are of the personal design of the author.

Chapter V: Our Templates in Official Policy

In chapter five we will use the three templates to achieve a better understanding in a number of social construction practices present at the Albanian-Macedonian border. Since even our idealized templates already suffer from overlapping and interrelation, we can hardly expect the analysis to lead to clear cut categories, but the central act associated with discourse models is recognizing. This chapter questions how our discourses are reflected in official programs and statements so that, when we proceed to the investigation of Albanian education, we can distinguish the extent to which discourse models are in check with official lines. The first section expounds the spatial policy on the Macedonian-Albanian borders in official policy guidelines. Subsequently, we shift our attention to official visual material (5.2) and statements (5.3).

5.1 Templates in official policy documents

We have already pointed out how since the Military Strategy of 2002, border preservation and protection have been formulated as leading principles in the regional policy of Albania. When it comes to the border central in this thesis, policy is enshrined in the EU-funded 2007-2013 IPA cross-border program on the Macedonian-Albanian border. The document is published by the Macedonian ministry of Local Self Government and the Albanian ministry of European integration. It puts focus on three Albanian and three Macedonian administrative regions located at the 191 km border line. As we see on the map below, this creates six ‘border regions’. This makes vivid Balibar’s argument about the inversion of the relation between territory and border (section 2.4): the program present ‘border zones’ instead of a mere ‘border line’, so that instead of building forth on a world without borders, frontier lines are diluted and duplicated in social constructivist discourses.



Figure 2: six border zones (CBC/ IPA:2007, p. 6)

The program dedicates no words to (chances and consequences of) the demographic fact that the Macedonian regions harbor a substantial number of ethnic Albanians. Rather, the program claims that ‘due to the history of the countries and the mountainous feature of the border region, this particular program is not building on an old tradition of partnership and joint initiatives’ (IPA CBC, 2007, 5). Is

the program here suggesting that we could travel across a mountain ridge and visit two different worlds of mentalities along the national border line? Or does this sentence merely refer to the rough landscape where remote and insulated communities are dissipated through the border region? It is hard to find a final answer to this, and even more vagueness was encountered when reading that the program described the multi-ethnic population as ‘an asset, [...] [that] provides a solid base for the development of cross border programs’. What here precisely is the asset and where lies this solid base? This is not specified. However, if we recall Appadurai’s suggestion that multi-ethnic locals can defy the emergence or continuation of cultural hegemony, we can perhaps suspect that the program tries to be one of those post-nationalist answers that: ‘challenge the nation-state and provide nonviolent institutional grounding for larger-scale political loyalties, allegiances, and group identities’ (Cheah, 1998, 33). This leads us to the question whether this bilateral program is, overt or covert, constructing a reality where the alliance between multi-ethnicism and post-nationalism can flourish, borrowing aspects from the Obsolete (surpassing the ethnic cross border ties) and Idealistic model.

The probable answer to this question is that it does not. The program is not leaving its agenda concealed: ‘The goal of both countries is to join the European Union’ (IPA CBC, 2007, 5). The underlying financial instrument IPA, stands for ‘Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance’, and describes itself as ‘a unified European Union’s financial instrument that brings all pre-accession support into one single funding instrument aimed at aiding the Pre-Accession process for Candidate and Potential Candidate Countries in preparing for their accession to the EU’ (Interact, 2011). So the program is presented as bilateral, yet it is strongly seized by European guidelines. It adopts the attitude identified by Bialasiewicz: ‘our norms are right and so should be followed’ (see section 1.2), and adapts it to ‘our Albanian and Macedonian norms are in check with EU-norms and so should be followed’. In doing so, the program is active in the construction of the Pragmatist model.

5.2 Templates in official policy statements

The second subject of analysis is the language of Tirana officials, and the extent to which their statements fit in our discourse models. Again, leader’s commitments will not always be so crystal-clear that we can bluntly warehouse them in the Obsolete, Pragmatist or Idealist cohort, and perhaps we encounter more hybrid models.

The Albanian head of government, Prime Minister Sali Berisha, has shown a vigorous commitment to EU strategies, when he claimed in November 2010: ‘I consider holy the national interests, but at the moment I believe the national and European interests are the same’. Strictly seen however, this statement does not renounce the twenty year old line that was reproduced in the quote of the DP parliamentarian in section 3.4 – the line that prescribes that Albania follows the interest of the Great Powers only as far as it coincides with Albanian national interest. Today however, the catch is in the fact that Berisha paints these interests as fully convergent. In the same vein as the nationalists who attempted to depict ethnic unification as the most *pragmatist* solution for the Albanian question

(section 4.1), Berisha presents himself as a EU-pragmatist who suggests that for the moment EU-adherence is the most *nationalist* thing one could do. Rather than constructing a dark flip side of the (whether or not Pragmatist) espoused discourse model, the Prime Minister tries to swallow his counter-narrative, as if to say: nationalists, we are well aware of your interest, but if we pursue our agenda, it will serve yours likewise.

Conversely, in the following quote on the subject of border redrawing, Berisha disentangles pro-EU and nationalist interests: ‘Who thinks that with the reunification of Albania and Kosovo the Albanian question is settled, he either makes a mistake or aims to start the conflict [...] Borders redrawing would mislead us away from Europe and bury our ambition [...] to integration into EU’³⁶. Here, Berisha is clearly giving substance to a fictional/anonymous Balkanist figure, similar to our configuration of the Obsolete, who threatens the Albanian question in a misguided and potentially quarrelsome way.

During a visit to Kosovo on December 16th 2011, the Prime minister attached an additional sub-story on this narrative: that of the potential hazard of territorial losses when border redrawing is assented. He declared: ‘The vital interest of the Albanians is to preserve the current borders, and the Albanians should not accept, at any cost, to lose a single square meter of the land they are entitled to. Another redraw of the borders would mark undeserved losses of the Albanian territories. We must be patient, free, and should not undertake any action that threatens territorial losses.’ To clear any doubt regarding the envisaged discourse for Albania, he added: ‘The only unification project for the Albanians is the EU integration’ (Top-Channel, 2011). The adopted attitude of depicting border preservation and obedience to the EU’s rules as ‘appropriate’ and choosing for reunification as ‘inappropriate’, is in striking accordance with EU’s security policy. This amounts to a Pragmatist Prime Minister. Simultaneously, he smoothens his narrative through the reference to nationalist sentiments, posing that border redrawing will be tantamount to the hemorrhage of Albanian ethnic territory. This exemplifies again how Berisha tries to persuade adherents of the Obsolete model.

This theme recurs in statements made by other politicians. To highlight one example, the then foreign minister Ilir Meta argued in an interview with the *South Eastern European Times*: ‘in the Balkans, all nations are made up of majorities and minorities. The only way to fix minority problems is to follow European standards’³⁷. Again, this line of thought represents the Pragmatist value of being an obedient learner³⁸.

When critically reading through numerous interviews with Tirana officials, we could also discern evidence for Nixon’s claim of overestimation (of EU as unitary actor). Former minister of

³⁶ Quotes derived from the same source as footnote 28.

³⁷ The interview, token on March 25, 2010, can be retrieved here: <http://tiny.cc/4p4bd>

³⁸ This goes to a lesser extent for one of his predecessors, Paskal Milo, who stated interview for a book on the myth and reality of a Greater Albania: ‘Albanians of Albania have cultivated a higher developed political culture and education than Albanians in Kosovo or Macedonia. Living in the mother country, they have conceptualized their future [...] towards Euro-Atlantic structures’. Although this quote is slightly seasoned (it stems from 2003), and made while in the capacity of Member of Parliament, I found it quite evocative that it builds on an additional nation-state-nationalistic yet EU-pragmatist narrative (the quote is from Barbullushi, 2007, 13).

interior and incumbent Tirana mayor Lulzim Basha daydreamt: ‘to make Albania part of the European family is a dream [...] [to] be part of the most developed and secure space in the world, which carries the most advanced values known to men until nowadays, all of these do not need comments [...] Good will is not enough. The EU has its own rules of which we are aware, it also has what has been created over 50 years of existence and which we have to adopt, adapt and implement’ (SMEI, 2009, 66). Again, the European rules are conceived as the mission cards and its compliance will seamlessly lead to the achievement of superior European values. The (intention of) adherence to EU-rules is Pragmatist, but the high-sounding language (‘European family’ and ‘it is our dream’) blends the enjoyment of the Pragmatist (being recognized as a staunch ally of the European Union) and the Idealist (linking in to a utopian like-minded zone).

Since this EU trajectory is hardly contested among Albanian domestic politicians, their EU-speak sometimes appears to be routinely, and officials sometimes seem to forget to whom they want to send an appeal. For example, former minister Ermelinda Meksi stated, upon asking why Albania created a Ministry of European Integration: ‘[EU integration] is a very important issue that will help to improve our image and at the same time, helps Europe to improve its view of the relationship with Albania’ (SMEI, 2009, 52). In the first part of this statement (before the comma) is unclear who precisely holds the image that the minister is trying to improve, and in the second clause, it is not specified whether ‘Europe’ is considered as a unitary actor, or for instance as a sum of perceptions. Based on this claim, it is tempting to suspect that the creation of the Ministry was a signal directed to the same unspecified and imaginary other as the Skanderbeg discourses (section 4.3) or the Albanian Fried Chicken (section 1.2). If so, this statement fits well in the Idealist model.

All in all, we can see that Tirana officials are borrowing many aspects of the various storylines. However, some common ground can be observed. Virtually all elites see the importance of EU-entrance. And although the nature of the benefits of entrance is contested (ranging from the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream to a mere mean to overcome a number of daily problems), the coupling between EU-entrance and EU-adherence is consistently made. So on aggregate, the Albanian elites are open for pragmatism but not always indifferent to the Idealist Europe myth.

5.3 Templates in the government’s visual materials

Visual references to the EU and the promise of ‘Europe’ have appeared ever since the collapse of the communist era. According to Vickers, already during the March 1991 elections, ‘the walls were covered with DPA³⁹ campaign posters including symbols that echoed those of the European Community. One even showed Albania as an extra star on the EC flag’ (Vickers, 2006, 222). Accordingly, while conducting human geographic research in Albania, visual discourses were widely implemented as bearers of political meaning. This section discusses visual discourses spread by elites,

³⁹ sic, DP is a more common designation for the Albanian Democratic Party – the DPA generally refers to a Macedonian party

Minister, and no symbols of the DP are displayed. However, even without these symbols, it is not hard for Albanians to guess that the poster forms part of the DP propaganda. First, the posters were spread on February 20th, the day that the statue of Enver Hoxha was toppled in 1991. At present, the day functions as a DP public holiday. The ruling party organizes numerous events on this day each year, including concerts and rallies. Secondly, the posters were placed right in front of the presidential palace. The poster displays a girl who holds a passport and an ‘e-ticket’. The text reads ‘We made Albania like the rest of Europe’. As much as this may expose the existence of an inferiority complex

towards the rest of the continent, it indicates the undisputed convergence of ‘Europe’ and ‘progression’ or ‘the right way’. (Arguably, it would take some effort to think of another example of a region where a continent’s name is used in such a promotional fashion⁴⁰).

The poster here left was located at the Skenderbeg Square, the main square of Tirana. The caption atop reads: ‘under the auspices of the Albanian Prime Minister Prof. Dr. Sali Berisha’. The capital letters in the middle read, from the top to the bottom: ‘Gala Concert; Tirana-Sarajevo and back; Organized on the occasion of free movement in Europe for the two countries Bosnia and Albania’. The undermost text displays the participants, date, place and time. Again the incumbent government is celebrating their merits and complimenting upon themselves, and again these expressions are accompanied by abundant references to the EU.



Figure 6: European Gala Concert

Accordingly, the background map not only displays the cities of Sarajevo and Tirana, but it depicts the whole core zone of Europe, in which Tirana now forms a part.

In sum, the Albanian government is applying the European discourses in visual material for electoral profit, but simultaneously, Berisha and his party are building forth on the storyline that the European way should be seen as right and redeeming. As we have seen in this chapter, the discourse model

⁴⁰ Likewise, during my fieldwork I had the pleasure to join the editors of news show of the Albanian national television channel. That very day Berisha was campaigning in the remote city of Kukes, and the national television was covering this rally. He stood on the stage, yelling short catchy phrases with his raspy voice, evoking the cheer and excitement of his audience. According to one the editor, his catchphrases said: ‘Do you want a European Kukes? And do you want European roads? And do you want European houses?’.

adopted by Albanian domestic elites is Pragmatist in some ways, endorsing that EU has its rules to which the government has to conform. It is also Idealist, since Europe is repeatedly depicted as a unitary and homogeneous actor, the goodness and joy of which goes without further reflection. For a part, politicians may implement these Idealist expressions to persuade adherents of the Obsolete model. Moreover, whereas loyalty to the nation can be enjoyed like an opera or a football match (as is argued in section 2.3), loyalty to a supranational cooperation project may not provoke these sentiments. Therefore, it is interesting to see that domestic elites who have the geopolitical interest to let 'Europe' be enjoyed like an opera, organize an opera-like setting (a gala concert) to communicate the joy of Europe. Hence, the dominant model among domestic elites is not purely Pragmatist, but blurs Pragmatist and Idealist aspects to forge an enjoyable European storyline that expands well beyond the Pragmatist vocabulary of 'adherence in service of EU-entrance in service of ratio and self-interest'.

Chapter VI: Our Templates in Albanian Education

In chapter six we will retrace the use of our three discourse model in Albanian compulsory education. The author conducted his fieldwork in March and April at nine schools and a number of relevant institutions, located in three core areas regarding (the development of) education at the Albanian-Macedonian border: Skopje, Tirana and the Dibër valley. The information was derived from Albanian schoolbooks, interviews with teachers, headmasters and politicians, leaflets, reports and so forth – in each of the three areas. Furthermore, UNICEF has recently done work about Albanian-Macedonian schoolbook texts on the inter-ethnic relations in education, which led to a number of highly relevant observations. The first section of this chapter elaborates on the characteristics of the Albanian and Albanian Macedonian education system. The following three paragraphs discuss the presence of our models in respectively schoolbook texts and maps in schoolbooks (section 6.2) and teachers views and statements (section 6.3 and onwards).

6.1 Compulsory education in Albania and Albanian Macedonia

Elementary education is compulsory in Albania. It is provided at so called ‘nine year schools’ (shkolla 9-vjeçare), from the age of six to the age of fourteen. During the last two decades, the Albanian education system has witnessed profound reforms. In the years after the fall of communism, depoliticalisation of curricula was one of the showpieces of the ministry. However, being trained in the communist era, the skills and competences of most of the teachers were poor. Furthermore, the ministry was ill-equipped to develop ‘neutral’ curricula. Since the West was considered a beacon of free education, many American and English textbooks were translated without reflection on its content or on the level of knowledge of Albanian students (Mati, Petrela & Mati, 2001).

From 2005 onwards, some crucial educational reforms have been enforced. Today, the competition for schoolbooks is open, which implies: every publishing house can write and apply schoolbooks, pending the Ministry of Education’s consent. Yet, the Ministry still faces problems to attune the level of the professional development of teachers, due to a lack of comprehensive legislation on the training and qualification of teachers (Ministry of Education and Science [MoES], 2009). Furthermore, adequate methods to monitor curricula are yet to be developed. According to the Ministry these methods will, when they are drafted, encapsulate the observance of ‘the overall political goal of providing proper capacities to integrate the country in the EU’ (Ibid., 25).

However, explicit goals on how to present the EU in the curricula themselves are not formulated, as little as any other elaboration on the lesson’s content is given. However, the official purpose of compulsory education, as formulated by the Ministry of education, reveals that Albanian education must be on par with governmental narratives: ‘The national educational service is a service sector to provide the future Albanian citizens with adequate knowledge, skills and capacities so as to be educated and committed to implement the national, economic and development plan’ (MoES, 2009, 33). A document called ‘the national plan’ or ‘the development plan’ however, could not be retrieved.

Admittedly, it is no great surprise that a government want to have their education compatible with their official goals, but the obfuscatory formulation leaves room for arbitrary decisions in the allocation of school material (the question which publishing house methods will be implemented), and likewise, makes it hard to review current materials in a structured way. However, since this thesis has offered a picture of the official storylines on Albanian territory, we are well-equipped to proceed to the interrogation of how storylines on this specific topic recur in education.

But let us first spend a few words on education at the other side of our border. Albanian children in Macedonia from seven to fifteen years of age attend primary education for a compulsory eight years. As fixed in the Ohrid agreement, the law prescribes that education for communities with a language of instruction other than Macedonian, is provided in the language and alphabet of that community (IBE UNESCO, 2011). In 2009, UNICEF conducted a research on the Macedonian legal education framework and schoolbooks concerning the position of multiculturalism. The legal framework, they argued, contain provisions that promote respect for the other, but the focus is only on forbidding discrimination as opposed to the promotion of these principles (UNICEF, 2009). This may illustrate that when it comes to tolerance and respect for ethnic difference, Skopje's heart is still not in it. Below, we will discuss where the hearts of Albanian and Albanian Macedonian textbook writers and, subsequently, teachers and headmasters lie.

6.2 Discourses in Albanian and Albanian Macedonian schoolbooks

This section questions the presence of (post-)nationalistic and/or EU-supportive models in Albanian and Albanian-Macedonian schoolbooks. Admittedly however, little recent publications exist on this topic, and the Albanian language proficiency of the author is not adequate to conduct this research in a structural way. Therefore – for a part – this section relies on the scarce existing research material on discourses in Albanian schoolbooks and – next in order – we will put emphasis on the examination of visual materials. But let us first discuss the findings from a number of interviews the author took with Albanian discursive architects of education curricula.

6.2.1 Textual discourses

Albanian textbook curricula are developed at IZHA (Institute of Education Development), a public institution subsidiary to the Ministry of Education. On identities in schoolbooks, a director of the official curricula development institute renounced Obsolete storylines, as he argued: 'in our curricula, nationalism is never considered as a good thing'⁴¹. Furthermore, a bureaucrat at the Ministry of Education specialized in reviewing curricula, asserted that because of the 'Balkan national and ethnic problems' the Ministry has to be 'very very careful with regard to historic difficulties'. Yet he stated that in current Albanian education curricula, nationalism has been pushed to the background due to the ambition of European integration: 'when we are in the European Union we don't have any border, so

⁴¹ Interview with Mr Astrit Dautaj. Tirana, March 15th 2011

there is no point in teaching children about the nationalism right now'⁴². Hence, this bureaucrat reckons that the emphasis on the benefits of European integration will bring about a natural outflow of nationalistic discourses. The following paragraphs examine the extent to which this presumption applies.

Like Albania, the multi-ethnic republic of Macedonia also has the official aim to phase out nationalism. According to the aforementioned UNICEF study however, Albanian language textbooks at Macedonian schools 'do not promote multiculturalism as an important characteristic of society' (UNICEF, 2009, 39). This conclusion is not drawn on account of the abundant representation of ethnic stereotypes, but rather because of the almost complete absence of non-Albanians in primary education literature. Discourses of patriotism and love for the fatherland (that is Albania) are widespread, for instance in the introductory words in Mitrush Kuteli's story 'I Would Die For My Country' (ibid., 41):

'Lucky is the one that fights and dies for his country, his tribe, for freedom. His name will live forever'⁴³

This pompous and belligerent language seamlessly fits the Obsolete model. Correspondingly, the UNICEF study concluded that '[o]verall, the textbooks are found to encourage an ethnocentric attitude, rather than providing common ground for building a shared and civic national identity' (ibid., p. 49). Detached from the question whether the emergence of a civic Macedonian identity is desirable, this finding is in utter contradiction with the Pragmatist discourse model we anticipated to find in Albanian education discourses. The biggest challenge, according to a UNICEF project officer, lies in bolstering interaction between the separate ethnic groups⁴⁴. However, on their turn, it may be noted that UNICEF is not engaged in any cross border project, so their efforts deliver no (or maybe even a negative) contribution to the interaction between Albanian Macedonians and their ethnic motherland.

Additionally, the fieldwork of the author could verify the presence of reveries about the motherland in Albanian Macedonian schoolbooks. At the very first page of a fourth grade schoolbook, under the caption 'Dita e parë e shkolles' ('My First Day at School'), the following patriotic poem by Naïm Frashëri was posited:

Ju Shkëmbej e ju male,	Your rocks and mountains
Dhe ju lumenj ngadale,	Your rivers rippling slowly
Ju fusha gjelbërore,	Your green farmlands
Shqip te flisni përherë	Albanian is spoken everywhere
Thjesht' e të papërzjerë	Pure and unmingled ⁴⁵

⁴² Interview with Mr Ndrëcim Mehmeti. Tirana, February 25th 2011

⁴³ Osmani, Z. & Bojku F. (2009) *Albanian language for 7th grade*

⁴⁴ Interview with Ms Emilija Jovanova Stoikova. Skopje, March 2nd 2011

⁴⁵ Hoda, H., Ajrullua, B., Shehu, G. (2009) *Albanian language for the fourth grade*, with thanks to a nice librarian in Skopje for the translation

Again, the mother country is portrayed as a beacon of quaintness. Albeit less heroic and militant, the poem poses linguistic pureness as an asset, which will arguably be little constructive for the purpose of a Macedonia without ethnic dividing lines.

6.2.2 Visual discourses

Let us now shift to the analysis of a number of illustrations displayed in Albanian schoolbooks. Below we see a scanned detail of a poster format map, bought on a market in Pristina, Kosovo. The map is printed in 2008 in Tirana and bears the title ‘Physical Map of the Ethnic Albanian Territories’.



Figure 6: poster format map of Albania

The map is part of a series of compulsory education material printed by the Albanian publishing house UEGEN. The audience of the map is Albanian children at primary schools. Its poster format reveals that it is developed to be visible to a broad audience. The full map depicts the Albanian nation state, Western-Macedonia and Kosovo and large parts of Montenegro and North-Western Greece. Arguably, the inclusion of these areas may deliver a contribution to ethnic kinship. If we look close, we see a thin foggy yellow line around Podgoricë and Southern Serbia. The line serpentine halfway Macedonia,

east of the cities of Skopje and Bitola⁴⁶, and follows the Southern Albanian border from a distance of about 35 kilometers into Northern Greece. The line is not listed in the legend, and no further explication or justification for the line is given, nor does the legend offer any further information on the titles' claim of being an 'ethnic' map. Yet, the line coincides exactly with the borders that were proposed during the 1912 declaration of independence at the assembly of Vlorë. The dim delineation of this border as well as the omission of any further explanation may be set to leave the teachers elaboration on what this line means optional.



Left, we see a map of Albania on the cover of a ninth grade geography book that was used in a school in Tirana. Strikingly, not only Tirana is depicted, but also, again without a word of further explanation, the biggest Albanian-inhabited cities of four other Balkan countries (Tetovo in Macedonia, Pristina in Kosovo and Ulqin in Montenegro) are on the map. Furthermore, the designers choose to include the entire Albanian area, again in its broadest possible interpretation, with the whole Vlorë-proposed territory included. Still, the states beyond Albania proper are left blank, and no additional lines to indicate the course of the Albanian territory are drawn.

Figure 7: Cover of an Albanian Geography book

In sum, the makers of the two maps did not take a final stance on the Albanian question. However, in a Pragmatist vein, especially with regard to the claims of the education bureaucrats on the natural outflow of nationalistic models, it is striking that the map makers offer the possibility for teachers to tell about the ethnic borders and the main hearths of Albanian ethnicity beyond the state border. Below, we will scrutinize whether teachers seize this opportunity to challenge the dominant model, and to what extent we can see their additional storylines impact on the creation of spaces.

6.3 Discourses in Albanian education employees' statements

From this section on, we will focus on the analysis of the semi-structured interviews the author took with geography and history teachers and headmasters in the Albanian area, mostly accompanied by an English teacher for translation. All interviews have been taken in March and April 2011, at four

⁴⁶ The map lists the cities in their Albanian designation, respectively Shkup and Manastir. The slightly archaic name Manastir stems from the Ottoman era. The city is of importance for Albania because of the Congress of Manastir (in English literature: Monastir), where the modern Albanian alphabet was defined (Van den Berg: 2010, p. 55).

schools in Tirana, two in Peshkopi and one in Skopje. Literature on the discursive construction of teacher identities, prescribes that it is ‘the analyst’s task [...] to explicate [...] displays rather than impose pre-given categories on the data in a top-down fashion’ (Johnson, 2006, 214). Therefore, while conducting the interviews, the author tried to approach his interviewees as open ended as possible and leader’s categorizations were addressed to only after an interviewee came up with that term him or herself.

6.3.1 Linking in to the Obsolete Model

During all conducted interviews except one, the teachers showed clear commitment to the Albanian nation. At our first school, the Avni Rustemi school in Tirana, the interview took place in a geography class. There was map on the wall with the Albanian ethnic territory. The author asked her – naively – why all school maps in Albania included the entire surface of two countries, Albania and Kosovo. The extract below starts with her answer hereon:

Fragment 1

- 1 Geography teacher: we teach children that Kosovo peoples are like us and we should love them and care
2 for them.. they are like our brothers and no one denies this. We think it is a truth
3 Me: Yes
4 Geography teacher: Albanians.. we are the same blood and we have the same flag you know, the
5 national flag.. despite politics and despite the developments through the years in
6 the history, people have known always that Albanians are the same, despite living
7 everywhere in different countries

And a few minutes later:

- 8 Geography teacher: Even in the text it is seen, for example ‘our Kosovar nation’ our eh we are a
9 community so ‘our Kosovar brothers’

Interview at Shkolla Avni Rustemi. Tirana, April 5th, 2011.

So the teacher is, almost in a patronizing way, concerned with the Kosovar fate. And despite the fact Kosovo adopted a blue and yellow six stars flag after its their independence in 2008, the teacher draws up all Albanians ‘living everywhere in different countries’ under the same flag. As the interview went on, the author asked her how she would think on actual unification:

Fragment 2

- 1 Me: [pointing to a map] Would you be supportive if this border disappears?
2 Geography teacher: You mean ethnics Albania? Great Albania?
3 Me: Yes, yes
4 Geography teacher: Uhh individual opinion? Or as a teacher? Because you know uhh things are
5 Me: Oh uhh, is there a difference

- 6 Geography teacher: Yes [short discussion in Albanian] Uhh the unity of both countries doesn't depend on
7 us, that's why, you know that's why
- 8 Me: But it depends on your children!
- 9 Geography teacher: Uhh okay, this unity of Albania and Kosova, is going through integration in the
10 European country
11 [discussion in Albanian]
- 12 Geography teacher: Now uhh we can not talk as teachers about this border. Because it is in favor of
13 Serb politics and that's why, they can use it, this idea of a Greater Albania, and
14 now we cannot talk about great Albania because the Serbs they can use it in their
15 favor you know
- 16 Me: But do the Serbs...
- 17 Geography teacher: These are things that are not up to us and we do not decide. We just uhh told
18 something about the idea how it might be, but you know, we cannot go further to
19 what we would like to be
- 20 Me: Well okay, I see, but can you also.. well the question I wanted to ask was: how would
21 Serbia use this as an argument..
- 22 Geography teacher: Me falni! Me falni!⁴⁷ [loud Albanian discussion with translator]
23 Now uhh. would you like to go to the classes or do you have any other question?
24 Bbecause the teachers have lessons now and...
- 25 Me: Okay, okay

Interview at Shkolla Avni Rustemi. Tirana, April 5th, 2011.

Reading this extract, one would almost think that the teacher is concealing something hideous, and that reflections on the border are an absolute taboo. Intriguingly, we see the teacher asking whether the question is directed to her as an individual or as a teacher (line 4). Hence, she implicates that in her capacity as a teacher, she is positioned by the dominant discourse, whereas as an individual, she might escape it. After a further investigation, she briefly reproduces an official and Pragmatist narrative of the government: the unity through integration narrative (line 10-11). Subsequently, she tries to close the topic, with the argument that further elaboration would be 'in favor of the Serb' (line 13-23). This clearly illustrates how in reality, her commitment towards the Pragmatist European narrative is not that warmhearted after all. Still, she leaves her own ideas deliberately concealed, but since she does not adopt the vocabulary of the dominant model Euro-Pragmatist model to justify this choice (which would be for instance: 'let us not focus on my personal ideas, because they would block European integration'), she is not showing herself colonized. Rather, she creates her own storyline, that of the sly Serb that maneuvers through every channel in order to pick up signals that he might use in his own advantage.

The image of the (sly) Serb recurred in three of the four Tirana schools I visited. A history teacher on the Siri Kodra School explained that there is a sense of hatred between Albanians on the

⁴⁷ Albanian for: 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry'

one side and the Serbs and Greeks on the other, because Albanians who live in these countries have always been treated very badly. Conversely, she explained Albania is a tolerant and peaceful population that will always lodge people from any nation. Another history teacher at the Hoxha Tashim school set forth:

Fragment 3

- 1 Teacher: Albanian nationalism has never been that strong that it caused struggle, it has always
2 been soft. The only problem is how our Balkan neighbors will interpret our sense of
3 nationalism. So if we compare Serbian nationalism and Albanian nationalism, there is a lot of
4 difference. I mean, they could be rough, because the Serbians use their nationalism to start
5 struggles, to kill people, to make tensions. Their nationalism is reflected in burning the
6 Albanian flag or Kosovar flag. I don't think the Albanians are that rough.

Interview at Shkolla Hoxha Tashim. Tirana, April 7th, 2011.

So according to this teacher, the Serbian Others derive their nationalist enjoyment not from their own showing the flag, but from the deprivation of Albanian nationalistic activities. This is a further indication that while largely absent in the official discourses, images of the predatory Serb are still deeply rooted in Albanian micro scale contexts. Furthermore, both at the Siri Kodra and at the Hoxha Tashim school, narratives on the Serb were linked with the term 'real history'. A teacher at the latter school declared: 'As a teacher, I try to give the real version [of history] to the student, that is, what we know, not what the books are saying'. This goes to show that at least some teachers do not take official narratives on identity and territory in education curricula for granted, but try to apply their own knowledge and/or common sense to it. Below we see to other fragments from which appears that teachers believe that curricula writers keep the 'real history' concealed. In the former fragment, a teacher is asked which curricula improvements there can be made, and the latter reproduces a conversation following the author's request to show some maps of Albania used in geography classes.

Fragment 4

- 1 Teacher : So, there are things to improve according to the nationalism. There are things to improve
2 in the nationalist war, that did happen before the communist period, I want to see much more
3 regarding this
4 Me: Because this is important to understand current Albania?
5 Teacher: Because the things the people fought for are important now for Albania
6 Me Is this ethnic consciousness?
7 Teacher: Eh yes, you can say that. But.. there are specialists on the Ministry of Education and they
8 write what they want
9 Me: The version of history that is convenient for them?
10 Teacher: Of course. But it has been worse

Interview at Shkolla Hoxha Tashim. Tirana, April 7th, 2011.

Fragment 5

- 1 Teacher: Albania is only representing its real borders now, but not its borders outside uhh
2 [Albanian discussion]
3 Me: Do you? do you?..
4 Teacher: Uhh, even though they are Albanian borders, they are not represented anymore
5 Me: Do you regret this?
6 Teacher: Of course, of course, because our history includes all these borders and this isn't fair for us.
7 However, I don't think we can change it now at this time
8 Me: Okay, but are we talking..
9 Teacher: but we don't like conflicts between countries

Interview at Shkolla Siri Kodra. Tirana, April 5th, 2011.

The above fragments give evidence that actors on whom dominant narratives are imposed (via curricula), can partly circumvent these narratives, and in doing so, their dominance may be impaired. Still, none of the subversive claims above unveil that teachers are directly constructing their own narrative. They rather, like in fragment 4, resign themselves to dominant models by signaling the lack of provided material that bolsters ethnics consciousness or, as we see in fragment 5, by the partial adoption of dominant vocabulary, arguing that a 'fair' depiction of history provokes a conflict (the claim posited in the lines 9-10 is arguably the clearest example of the willful lowering of self-esteem that is associated with Gee's understanding of being colonized – see section 2.3). Yet, the teacher in the extract below seems to be more determined to interfere in constructivist practices:

Fragment 6

- 1 Teacher: There will be a great Albania, meaning a unique union, a cultural union, a spiritual union, this is
2 why Kosova is treated in our books
3 Me: But that spiritual union !HAS! to be emerged? It is not here yet?
4 Teacher: Yes, so talking about the nationalism, we are working with the students to unite them
5 economically, culturally. That is why during March we have the connection between two
6 schools, so we are working together in many towns, Peja, Struga⁴⁸
7 Me: Struga? So also Macedonian Albanian towns?
8 Teacher: Yeah, Yeah, they use the Albanian language
9 Me: Yeah yeah yeah, of course
10 Teacher: Also, we made the connection with schools there, with Albanians living in Struga, and we saw
11 that the nationalism in Struga. We were amazed by their nationalism, so everything was
12 special for them, the language, the customs, everything was linked to their Albanian..
13 Me: Okay, so there is strong ethnic nationalism in...
14 Teacher: Yes ethnic nationalism, and if we make the comparison with ourselves and the Albanians in
15 Kosova and Macedonia, you see they are much more proud, so it's very important to learn

⁴⁸ Pejë: a city in North-Western Kosovo; Struga: a town near lake Ohrid, Macedonia

16 from them

17 Me: These connections, are they initiatives of the school?

18 Teacher: They were in connection with the ministry of education, that made available the connection

19 between two schools, there was like.. twin, creating twin schools, that's what they call it, so

20 giving students the opportunity to rise this sense of nationalism, that's why we support these

21 connections

Interview at Shkolla Hoxha Tashim. Tirana, April 7th, 2011

Although it turned out that the ministry of education facilitates the project, the teacher's vocabulary of 'rising the sense of nationalism', 'learning from their pride' and 'great[er] Albania' is clearly Obsolete, and therefore, in collision with the official discourse the government constructs. It is especially striking to see that the teachers (both the translated history teacher and the translating English teacher) envisaged a whole new spiritual, cultural union that unites the Albanian territory and has to be emerged apart from existing structures (line 1-5). Arguably, initiatives to take children across the Albanian border, accompanied with narratives of nationalist unification, contribute to the mitigation of the state border (and perhaps also to the enhanced meaning of ethnic borders). This idea of grass-roots border softening also occurs in an article by Muller who highlights: '[t]hough unable to escape the formative effect of the hegemonic discourse, local practice [can make] symbolic border "softer", [...] transgressing and subverting the divisive logic of separate spaces which emanated from official, text-based narratives' (Megoran qtd. in Muller, 2008, 36). However, the Hoxha Tashim school seems to walk exactly the opposite way: the practice of border crossing is initiated by the Ministry of Education, and in pursuing this action, the meaning that these locals attached to it subverts the 'formative effect of the hegemonic (or dominant) discourse'. The practice is carried by officials, the storyline rejected.

As we remember from section 2.4, Rumford sees a special position in space making practices for the people in the borderlands, so if we are looking for grass-root initiated space making practices perhaps they are to be found at that site. Therefore now, we will discuss a number of fragments of interviews the author took with teachers at border village of Peshkopi in the Albanian Diber region. Here we are dealing with one of the most remote areas of Europe. Although situated only 50 kilometer from Tirana as the crow flies, it takes five hours to cover the distance between Peshkopi and Tirana by car. The nearest cities for Peshkopians are Gostivar (three hours) and Tetovo (3,5 hours), both in Macedonia.

The Dibër valley where Peshkopi is situated is transected by the Albanian-Macedonian border. At the other end of the border lies Dibër e Madhe⁴⁹, a village of about the same size as Peshkopi.

⁴⁹ In Macedonian: Debar. The official Albanian name for this Macedonian village is Dibër, but this leads to confusion because the Albanian county where Peshkopi is situated is also called Dibër. Therefore, Peshkopian address Macedonian Dibër as Dibër e Madhe (Great Dibër – despite being about as big as Peshkopi). To make

Whereas all Albanian neighboring villages and cities are mutually connected through ‘furgons’ – private vans that offer cheap transport – Dibër can only be reached by taking, consecutively, a ‘furgon’ to the town Maqellare, a taxi to the border and a taxi from the border to Dibër e Madhe. While conducting interviews with teachers from Peshkopi, the author asked them what their thoughts were on this circuitous route to their neighbors. Below two fragments hereon; the former reproduces a statement made by the translator of one of the interviewees and the latter stems from an English teacher at the Nazmi Rushiti School.

Fragment 7

- 1 Translator: Of course, it is very important for children to see something tangible.. I cannot see how we
 2 would send children now to Dibër e Madhe, because the community is not contributing, but
 3 also the institution is not contributing. And she [the teacher] mentions another small problem
 4 which is economic and logistic, that is: families cannot provide children’s passports. Families
 5 don’t have enough money to buy these passports for children.
 6 Me: Yes, and it is also an infrastructural problem, not only administrative
 7 Translator: Yeah yeah, they are linked huh?

Interview at home by a translator/NGO employee and an English teacher. Peshkopi, april 24th, 2011

Fragment 8

- 1 Me: Are children to any level conscious about the Albanians in Macedonia? Do they interact with
 2 them? Do they get taught about them? Are there trips organized by the school to for instance
 3 Dibër e Madhe?
 4 Teacher: Yes, I think this, ‘po’⁵⁰. Maybe trips once a week I think
 5 Me: Once a *week*?
 6 Teacher: Once a uhh sorry, once a *year* sorry, I’d wish it was. So it’s better to organize much more,
 7 because we are uhh we have been the same country. (.) And I’d like to have projects that uhh
 8 will – how do you say – will have the two, especially with the youth, with the young
 9 generation, to have with youth of Debar and of Dibër here, Peshkopi, but I couldn’t find
 10 financial support
 11 Me: Because, what was your plan?
 12 Teacher: I was planning a project with the youth over two countries but same people, you know?
 13 It was a good project, but I couldn’t find financial support

Interview at Shkolla Nazmi Rushiti. Peshkopi, April 25th, 2011

In both fragments, the importance of stimulating cross-border consciousness among children is acknowledged, and both fragments mention the financial, administrative and social burdens these

the confusion complete, sometimes Peshkopi is designated as Dibër as well. I had the opportunity to visit the region along with two geologists from Tirana.

⁵⁰ ‘yes’

efforts entail. Still, especially the second teacher is not a priori resigning herself to dominant divisions of space and she proposes her own cross-border programs. Herein she operates apart from the elite screenplay, as she told me that the once-in-a-year trip to Dibër e Madh is fully canvassed and financed by the school. The restrictions that her cross-border ambitions encounter show how (social) *spaces make people* by constraining them (Benwell & Stokoe, 2007)⁵¹. But the mere top-down initiative of visiting nearby yet remote village of Dibër e Madh once a year by arranging own transport, shows in a very modest vein also how *people make spaces* (Ibid.), i.e. how a grass-roots initiatives contribute to the construction of space and border softening practices.

Altogether, dominant discourses turned out to be widely contested amongst almost every school that was visited. Alternative narratives often link in to the Obsolete discourse model, pressing for the reconsideration of the Albanian national border for the good of an pan-Albanian state or Albanian ‘spiritual union’. Although sometimes, parts of the Pragmatist storyline are embraced (‘uhh okay, this unity of Albania and Kosova, is going through integration in the European country’ – fragment 1, line 12), most of the teachers cited in this section see the emergence of stronger ties across the Albanian ethnic territory as a priority. Herein, we can draw a distinction between trespassers of official storylines who build on the depiction of a problematic other (e.g. ‘the aggressive Serb’), hereby strongly demarcating a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and those who simply find the spatial reality of a bordered ethnic area undesirable, and try to find ways to circumvent this situation.

6.3.2 Linking in to the Pragmatist and Idealist model

The Obsolete template may be amply represented in Albanian education discourses, Albanian teachers are not neglecting the promises and prosperity Europe might bring. Moreover, in almost every interview, the EU was displayed as something very good, and none of the teachers who proposed Obsolete-compatible ideas, declared that their ideas would bring in danger the European integration process. So in general, despite being more nationalistic than their leaders (that is, how leaders present themselves), the Euro-supportiveness of the interviewed teachers was more or less at the same level.

In this paragraph we try to disclose the nature of their EU commitment. Do they, in a purely Pragmatic fashion, want to see their daily struggles lifted? Or are they hoping that the EU integration process is part of a wider mental and physic shift, like the Idealist would? Arguably, the headmaster in the extract below adheres to the latter:

⁵¹ My Peshkopian interviewee, an English teacher, told me another strong example of this type of spatial restrictions, be it not in primary education. Initially, she wanted to study at the University of Tetovo in Macedonia, which is the nearest academic institution for Peshkopians. But even while Albanian is the only official language at this university, Macedonian authorities blocked the enrollment of Albanian citizens. On being asked, she declared that there is probably a Skopje discourse underlying that aims to fence off ‘their’ Albanians from the mother state to suppress nationalism.

Fragment 9

- 1 Headmaster: Even the use of Euro in our everyday lives, make you feel proud.. eh better, being a European
2 citizen, even though we have still the Lek, but we use it as money.
- 3 Me: But even countries that are not part of the monetary union, like Kosovo and Montenegro, can
4 decide to use the Euro as [the] only valid currency. Would you be supportive if Albania..
- 5 Headmaster: Yes we support, because it is one of the points.. [short Albanian discussion with translator] it
6 may give problems with the standard of our living if we pass from the use of Leku, our money,
7 to the use of Euro
- 8 Me: Because things are getting more expensive?
- 9 Headmaster: Yes, but still it will make us feel good, because we belong to this part of the European Union

Interview at Shkolla Skender Çaci. Tirana, April 6th, 2011

Here we have a clear example of the enjoyment associated with the belonging to Europe. Even though it is at odds with rationality and self-interest, the joy of play-acting a European outweighs all objections. At this same school, a there was poster on the wall that listed the ‘Rights of the European Citizen’. These were not the official rights of European Citizenship laid down in the Treaty of Maastricht (like, the right of voting in European elections and the right of petitioning the European Parliament), but were a mixture of official and non-official rights that the teachers saw obtained once integration was accomplished – or how the teacher put it: ‘the rights that the European Union wants to achieve in our country’. This type of unfocussed starry-eyedness clearly belongs to the Idealist template (for it does not follow official EU guidelines).

Also at the Skender Çaci School, the teachers put the spotlight on the autodidactic attitude of their pupils:

Fragment 10

- 1 Teachers teach the children what they want to know about Europe, and then, they exchange this information
2 that they get not only just from the book, [but also] from internet, from television, so the children are well
3 prepared about European countries

Interview at Shkolla Skender Çaci. Tirana, April 6th, 2011

This DIY-adage for pupils in the provision of information on the European Union recurred at two other Tirana schools:

Fragment 11

- 1 Pupils are very interested and have many discussions about the EU integration of Albania. They are really
2 interested [in] the news. And they know what they should do to be part of the EU. They try to be good citizens
3 and do their contributions in being part of the European Union.

Interview at Shkolla Siri Kodra. Tirana, April 5th, 2011

Fragment 12

- 1 The students take the necessary information about the integration in the European Union, and they know what
- 2 the European Union is; they know the criteria and the conditions and they know the political structure. And I was
- 3 surprised to hear students, they knew everything of the structure of how the EU functions, and I was reality
- 4 surprised.. We are happy that students take this necessary information, because tomorrow they'll be part of
- 5 this.

Interview at Shkolla Hoxha Tashim. Tirana, April 7th, 2011

What is striking here, is that the teachers paint a situation where children take their responsibility to cram themselves for their 'European future', in their free time. So whereas a school prepares a child for his or her personal future, preparation for their 'European' future is in their own hands. The underlying presumption then seems that 'good citizenship' or 'being a good European', eventually pays off in EU entrance. This presumption intriguingly blends the Pragmatist and Idealist, by imposing the Pragmatist notion of 'working hard and focused to meet EU's criteria' on a group (children) that for the moment does hardly dispose of any influence in the accession process. Alternatively, the above statements can be an implicit complaint about the lack of EU information in schoolbooks, but upon asking about the possible improvements in Albanian curricula, no teacher came up with this point.

Our final extract then, does not stem from a teacher, but from a translator in Peshkopi that took the word when we were talking about boundaries in Albanian Macedonian education:

Fragment 13

- 1 Translator: I think we could say that we are people who really don't think a lot about nationalism. We
- 2 think a lot about European Union
- 3 Me: You think a lot about European Union?
- 4 Translator: Yes, that we think and we hope to join. In each family, we speak about European Union,
- 5 so much.
- 6 Me: Why?
- 7 Translator: We like, we like because we've been very isolated and now we want to be free, and we
- 8 think freedom for us means European Union.
- 9 Me: And do you think - I think it's safe to say the Peshkopi area is a remote area because the
- 10 infrastructure is bad, and there's a border, maybe, do you think that's why the support for EU
- 11 in Peshkopi is extra high?
- 12 Translator: Of course. And we hope that European Union will choose this problem of Diber area to be
- 13 better, not to be called rural, or remote, but to be the same as other towns, and with cross-
- 14 border cooperation we get partnership with other countries and then we could develop better
- 15 Me: Okay, that's

16 Translator: To feel the same as in Tirana and other towns

Interview at home by a translator/NGO employee and an English teacher. Peshkopi, april 24th, 2011

The translator meets all ingredients to be the kind of ‘Idealist Pragmatist’ that is archetypical among elites: the daydreams, the equalization of EU with freedom, the hope that with the EU a benign foreign entity will come and set his people free from the last reminiscent of isolation and the desire to be a homogeneous people within a borderless space. However, the primary border that fences him is the boundary between his peripheral town and Tirana. So whereas Tirana elites see in EU integration the accomplishment of European standards, this man links the process to the accomplishment of Tirana standards. In the light of this thesis, this stance is yet another interesting variant on our pre-configured models, and yet another prove that a mere focus on the storylines written by a hegemonic or dominant power, criminally obscures a thousand other storylines that – together – form a nation.

VII Conclusion

In this thesis we explored the narratives on the issue of the Albanian-Macedonian border. We retraced them not from the European point of view, but from the standpoint of the people living in the region and their leaders. We marshaled the amalgam of territorial storylines into three categorizations: the Obsolete, the Pragmatist and the Idealist. These models were a useful starting point in exploring the loyalties of Albanian officials and served to guide us in the process of recognizing with which border-related storylines teachers throughout our area of examination comply. The tacit hypothesis, derived from locating Albanian in a Balkan-wide pro-EU discourse, was that the dominant model would be opportunistic yet obedient EU-adherence, i.e. the Pragmatist model – and that this model could be contested by educators as lower-scale spatial agents in the state apparatus.

Below we will address how the Albanian-Macedonian border is represented by these two interlocutors, elites and educators.

Albanian elites

In chapter five, we evinced how on the one hand EU discourses expressed or implemented by Albanian elites – especially those in spoken and visual material – were often imbued with images and reveries that celebrated the joy of European integration, whereas concomitantly, leaders and official programs were emphatically putting forward a more focused notion of ‘preserving state borders for the time being’ – which resonates with EU interests. The dominant storyline amongst elites roughly unfolds as follows: listening closely and adhering to the European Union, to settle the quandary of the Albanian border question construes, in the *longue durée*, a desired-after borderless EU-zone. The temporal fortification of the Albanian border this EU adherence prescribes should be put in service to this end.

This predominant discourse model among Albanian elites then sees its enjoyment, as the Pragmatist would, in being recognized as obedient fellow European unionists, but also gestures to the Idealist poster child of belonging to a utopian borderless entity. It turned out to be very hard for a politician to narrate upon the joy of the European accession process without a reference to the joy of the myth ‘Europe’. Therefore we have suggested that the template that holds sway among Albanian elites can be styled the ‘Idealist Pragmatist’ model: a model where pragmatism is put in the center of gravity, embellished with the allurements of Idealist storylines. As we have seen, at the same time elites try to swallow nationalist storylines, by suggesting that through the EU a *de facto* (instead of *de jure*) Greater Albania emerges, without the involvement of armed forces. Within this zone, cross-border and inter-Albanian cooperation can flourish, while at the same time the old specter of inferiority and isolation is ousted.

This temporal reiteration of the border for the good of eventual unification as well as the dismissal of cross-border practices as an alarming sign of revived nationalism as well as the ambiguity towards chauvinism and the admiration of a prosperity and recognition bringing Other, strongly echo

the contradictions King Zog and Enver Hoxha faced when they danced the thin rope of seeking recognition and belonging versus the delusion and the fear of being swallowed by a power that turned out to be only after extending its influence sphere. Therefore, without providing a license for right or left wing populism, the author would very much welcome a more critical domestic elites attitude towards the EU, an attitude that does not deny the practical and – optionally – psychological assets of the integration process, but that does question the legitimacy of the European Union as a standard setter (see also Bechev: 2006), especially on a border that does not even one-sidedly appertain to the EU.

Albanian teachers

Chapter six of this thesis demonstrated that conceptions held by Albanian elites are not always carried by the people ‘on the ground’ – that is, by primary school teachers in Tirana and near the Albanian-Macedonian border interviewed by the author. Some of the questioned teachers discarded the border as a historical unfairness and welcomed Albanian nationalism as a way towards reunification with their brethren that could be fostered through education. One Peshkopian teacher, who encountered the border as a burden in her daily radius of action, endeavored to allay its impact by setting up a grass-roots cross border program for her pupils.

So we saw dominant storylines that dwell on the temporal reiteration of the Albanian-Macedonian border being contested, subverted and escaped. But strikingly, at the same time all teachers showed some level of commitment to ‘Europe’, ‘being a good European’ and ‘being prepared to join the European Union’. Sometimes, EU-related claims of educators had the appearance of being made dutifully, to countervail the impact of bold (Obsolete) expressions intrusive to dominant narratives. Most of the times however, their EU-adherence seemed sincere, and genuine nationalism and even xenophobia were seamlessly interlaced with EU-supportive storylines. Hence, the necessity of the coupling between border preservation and EU entrance was not made so sharply by educational interlocutors as that it was made by elites. Educators tend to take for granted the importance and inevitability of the European future, but in general they do not feel much commitment to the elite route to get to this point. Therefore, we may locate them in our archetype scheme as ‘anything but “Pragmatist” Europeanists’. But like it is very hard to attach one of our pre-configured archetypes to a given set of interlocutors, it may be just as inappropriate to tag them with a new made to measure label.

Finally, we formulate our recommendations for the different groups mentioned in our societal and scientific relevance section can draw from our work. What elites engaged in Albanian education should learn from this thesis (apart from possible curricula revising improvements as stressed in section 6.1), is not that there are trespassers to official discourses in Albanian education who need soon recalibration. Moreover, they should draw – along with all other Albanian and Albanian

Macedonian elites – the lessons that EU’s security agenda notwithstanding, reiteration of nation states border is a geopolitical choice that impacts upon people – especially when the border forms a tangible reality in their daily lives. After all, however holy the EU is considered to be by some domestic elites, it emanates from the dialectics of Albanian history that the European Union can be just as temporarily a well-loved overlord as Italy, Yugoslavia, Russia and China have been in the past century, and EU support can again turn into skepticism about the extent to which its presence threatens the independency of the country.

What we want to provide to scholars examining European spaces, is that whoever elaborates on the (hegemonic, dominant or imperialist) nature of EU discourses, must also take in account that ideas on territory are not only designed by enlargement seeking Eurocrats or ‘wistful’ pan-Europeans, but are, in the accession states proper, – at least in the case of Albania and Macedonia – also developed by domestic elites and locals, who create their own dominant ideas of the identity, values and enjoyment associated with belonging to a nation, country or continent. Therefore, the author would warmly support further geographical fieldwork across the European continent by any scholar or student who ventures to experience European spaces from the ground, to obtain a fuller picture of these smaller-vein-dynamics.

Save from this contribution to the European governance, territory and identity debate, this thesis also wanted the EU and its officials to reflect upon the full gamut of agents involved in constructing European territories. In accordance with Balibar’s suggestion, we have argued that the problems the Balkan have faced after the fall of communism should not be dismissed as hiccups of the communist era, but should be seen as a product of a shared European history. Therefore, when EU officials get to know about the many faces of the Balkan, they learn about the many faces of themselves. Therefore, Europe should not espouse a policy of bordering itself away from the Balkans, to open up their fences only if one country succeeds in being ‘European enough’. Instead, when Europe wants to be a continent ‘united in diversity’, it should learn from the myriad of storylines that it encompasses, so that will grow not towards a obedient uniformity, but towards a home to adherents of the Obsolete, the Idealist, the Pragmatist and of all storylines in between.

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Annex 1: Gallup Balkan monitor, November 2010

Generally speaking, do you think that [COUNTRY]'s membership of the European Union WOULD BE a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good or bad?

EU-entrance	Albania	Albanian Macedonians	Albanian Kosovars	Serbian Kosovars	Macedonians	Serbs	Bosnians
A Good Thing	81%	80%	93,4%	12,6%	55%	44,1%	61,8%
A Bad Thing	5%	5%	1,8%	59%	10%	17%	12%

Source: Gallup Balkan Monitor (2010)

Thinking of the last 15-20 years taking everything into account overall how would you describe the International community's role in [COUNTRY]?

International community	Albania	Albanian Macedonians	Albanian Kosovars	Serbian Kosovars	Macedonians	Serbs	Bosnians
Helpful	72%	61%	82,1%	4,2%	38%	22%	32%
Harmful/not helpful	14%	34%	5,8%	66,9%	55%	68%	62%

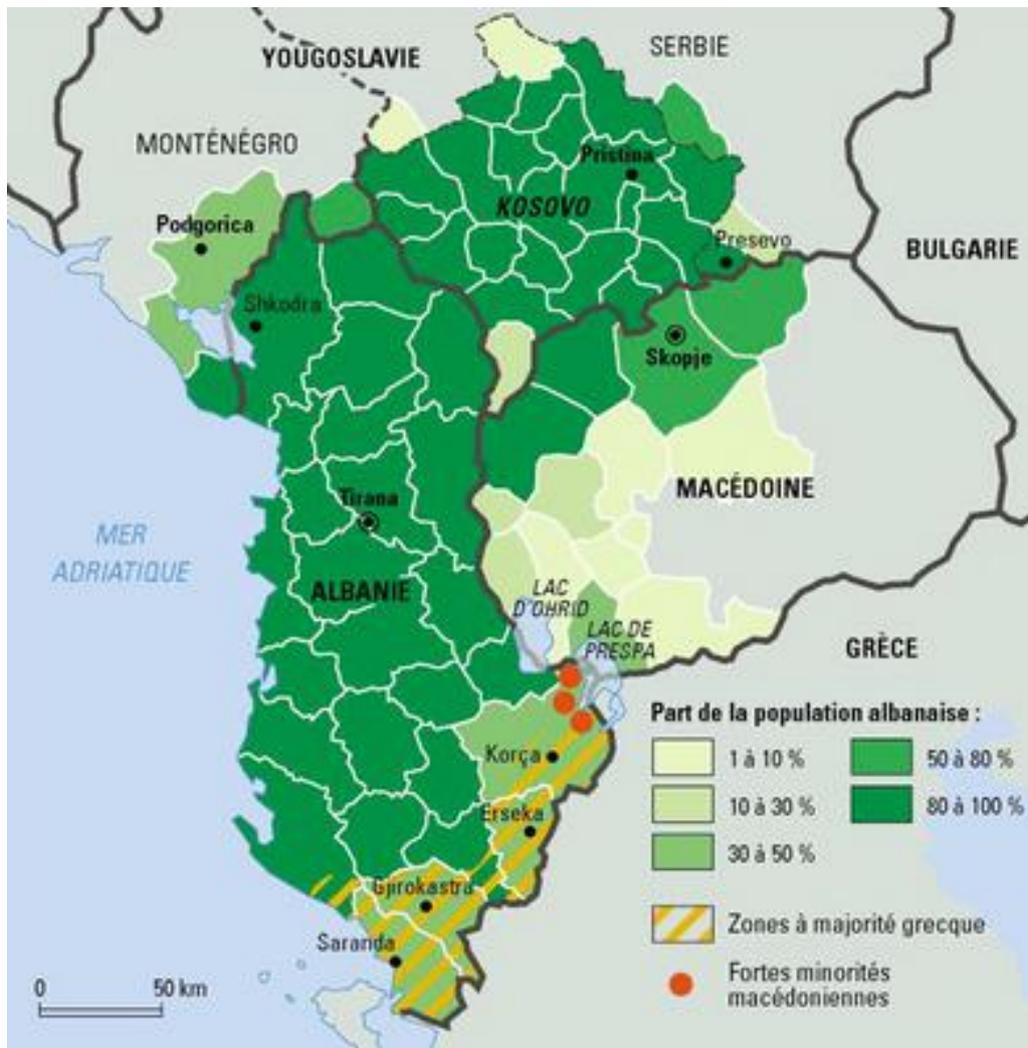
Source: Gallup Balkan Monitor (2010)

How strongly do you identify with Europe?

European identity	Albania	Albanian Macedonians	Albanian Kosovars	Serbian Kosovars	Macedonians	Serbs	Bosnians
Strong	44%	51%	61,7%	50,2%	29%	19%	17%
Moderate	44%	40%	33,1%	39,7%	50%	61%	59%
Not at all	8%	6%	3%	7,1%	19%	18%	18%

Source: Gallup Balkan Monitor (2010)

Annex 2: Places where Albanians live



This map depicts the part of the population that has the Albanian ethnicity. Unfortunately, it does not display the considerable Greek minority along the southern border (nor the Italian diaspora).

Annex 3: the Albanian ethnic surface along the Vlorë-proposed borders

HARTA E SHQIPËRISË

GJENDJA E SOTME E KUFIJVE ADMINISTRATIV
DHE GJENDJA REALE E TROJEVE HISTORIKISHT ETNIKE SHQIPTARE



Explanation: the frontier designated by the arrow reading ‘Shqipëria etnike historikisht’ (‘Historic ethnic Albania’) indicates the borders that were proposed at the Vlora convention of 1912 (see section 3.2); ‘Shqipëria e sotme’ (‘Albania today’) points at the current Albanian nation state.