

THE ROLE OF ALBANIAN FOLKLORE AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN NATIONAL CULTURE AND GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

Albanian folklore serves as a dynamic cultural medium that connects national heritage with global cultural flows. Far from being a static repository of ancient practices, it represents a living discourse through which traditions, values, and collective memory travel, adapt, and interact with diverse cultural environments. Epic narratives, ritual songs, migration ballads, and oral poetry function both as markers of identity and as channels of intercultural communication. Historically transmitted through oral tradition and later through scholarly collection and artistic reinterpretation, folklore demonstrates a continuous capacity for renewal while preserving its symbolic core. In the context of globalization, it provides a cultural bridge that allows Albania to participate in international dialogue without compromising authenticity. Its presence in literature, music, and contemporary media reinforces its role as an instrument of cultural resilience, showing that tradition and modernity can coexist productively. Albanian folklore thus emerges as both a safeguard of national identity and an active contributor to global cultural diversity.

Key-words: *Albanian folklore, cultural identity, intercultural dialogue, cultural mobility, globalization.*

Introduction

In the era of globalization, where international interactions and cultural flows intensify at unprecedented speed, the preservation and affirmation of national cultural identity have become increasingly complex. The circulation of ideas, values, and aesthetic forms across borders has created new possibilities for cultural exchange, yet it has also raised concerns regarding the erosion or homogenization of local traditions. Within this tension between openness and preservation, folklore occupies a central and strategic position.

Albanian folklore, as both material and spiritual heritage, functions as a powerful cultural anchor that connects the national dimension with broader global

influences. Rooted in collective memory and transmitted across generations, it preserves the authentic values, norms, and symbolic narratives of the community. More than a repository of traditional songs, tales, legends, or rituals, folklore represents a dynamic cultural system through which identity is continuously negotiated, expressed, and revitalized.

In contemporary society, where identity is shaped not only by historical experience but also by global media, digital platforms, and transnational cultural encounters, folklore acquires renewed significance. It offers a stable reference point, a form of cultural literacy, and a symbolic language through which individuals and communities can articulate their sense of belonging while engaging confidently with global cultural trends. Seen in this light, Albanian folklore is not merely a legacy of the past but a living instrument for cultural resilience and creative participation in an interconnected world.

1. Albanian folklore as cultural heritage and national memory

For centuries, the Albanian people have created a rich spiritual culture, comparable to that of the oldest peoples of Europe. A primary task of folklore and folkloristics is the collection and study of popular traditions, encompassing not only the beliefs and opinions that the people have cultivated regarding the phenomena of the universe but also daily customs, ceremonies, festive rituals, and aesthetic expressions of all kinds. Viewed as both an artistic and life phenomenon, folklore is as old as humanity itself (Zheji, 2004: 8).

The first layer of folklore, legends, ritual songs, fairy tales, proverbs, etc., remains a cherished relic. These creations are preserved and transmitted from one generation to another, not only as artistic works but also as essential elements reflecting a nation's originality and national identity. Folklore mirrors the life of a people and its centuries-old aspirations; thus, oral literature holds significant cognitive value. It records not only important historical events but also everyday social and family experiences that may have gone unnoticed. The importance of oral folklore lies not only in portraying the life and aspirations of the people but also in showing their talent and creative abilities.

When you live through folk poetry, you experience a sense of eternity, reality, and space. You desire to live, to love, to be born, to be a mother, to be a father, to be a son-in-law, to go to war and return from it, even to die as in a song. For many centuries, folk poetry has always been a chronicle of the Albanian people's life; it has been their history, knowledge, morality, wisdom, archive, collective memory, and a message passed from generation to generation. It replaced school, publications, newspapers, universities, and academies... This confidence arises from millennia of experience. Composed of verses, ballads, entire epics, proverbs, laments, lullabies, seasonal songs, cries, laws, games, etc., folk poetry, more than any other artistic phenomenon, reminds you of the cosmic dust from which worlds have been created and continue to be created. (Kadare, 2002: 5).

Traditionally, folklore in Albania has been the primary formation of the people's cultural life. It represents an essential part of the Albanian nation's cultural heritage and testifies to the creative capacities of the Albanian people. Folklore has contributed to keeping national consciousness alive and demonstrating the identity of the Albanian nation. Through its content, seen as a living history, it reflects the struggle for ethnic individuality, freedom, and independence. Its rich material conveys characteristics, customs, social behaviors, and gestures that have been fundamental to Albanians over the centuries, highlighting their spiritual richness and creative abilities (Xhagolli, 2013: 196).

2. Shared cultural patterns of Albanian folklore in Balkan and European traditions

Folklore among European peoples has also produced unique phenomena, reflecting the autonomy and individuality of each culture. However, contemporary folklore faces many internal and external challenges, including the effects of integration. The idea of uniting most European states has gradually become a reality, and it seems likely that, in time, Albanians will be part of a united Europe, a long-cherished dream.

It should also be noted that certain folkloric creations extend beyond Albania, covering the Balkans, Europe, and even wider regions. There is both practical and historical evidence of an Indo-European substratum. In folklore, motifs found in fairy tales, ballads, legends, anecdotes, and proverbs are often shared among different Balkan peoples and beyond. Without focusing on the original sources of these motifs, it can be said that these shared elements include specific features that reflect the creative spirit and originality of each people. Cultural relations between different peoples have historically been relatively free. Despite the transmission of art across borders, intercultural communication and coexistence are evident.

One notable example of Albanian folklore's connection with other peoples is found in ballads. Albanian folk ballads, with their ancient origins, profound emotional content, rich imagery, and expansive artistic imagination, reflect the history, spiritual life, drama, tragedy, resilience, and heroism of the Albanian people. They testify to great creative talent that continues to transmit aesthetic and emotional values across centuries. According to researcher *Anton Çeta*, by the mid-Middle Ages, specifically the 15th century, Albanian ballads had reached significant development and wide dissemination. Their antiquity is further supported by Homeric motifs, beliefs in the soul's transition to another being, renewal of the spirit, and unfulfilled love, as symbolized in apples and pears growing over lovers' graves or in vineyards twisting around cypresses. These metaphors represent the immortality of love and the eternal continuation of emotion. Some motifs even resemble the Greek myth of Dionysus, whose spirit was renewed each spring with the greening of the vines and the grape harvest. Over centuries of oral transmission, ballads have evolved artistically, incorporating new elements connected to historical moments and gaining additional socio-cultural layers. Motifs such as loyalty (keeping one's word),

entombment (walling someone in), or family recognition are among the oldest, passed from one generation to another and even across nations.

Balkan folk creativity is highly diverse and represents extraordinary cultural wealth, especially compared to other European regions. Folk works, particularly ballads, have played a significant role in the spiritual life of the peoples. Ballads often convey profound human values, moral virtues, tales of love, and the punishment of wrongdoers. The ballads of entombment and recognition, ancient elements of Albanian and Balkan folk creativity, possess distinctive features that illuminate the moral and spiritual path of regional peoples.

Fairy tales are one of the most important and complex forms of oral prose. Their richness comes from their thematic and motivational universe, structured composition, characters from both real and mythical worlds, multiple unexpected heroic actions, symbolic language, and sublimated motifs. The universe of Albanian fairy tales is vast and shares features with many other cultures, determining their form and longevity across centuries. Fairy tales are important for study because they contain simple yet captivating subjects, essential structures, social and historical meaning, and underlying philosophy. Comparing Albanian fairy tales with those of other peoples shows that, despite local differences, they share universal motifs and narrative structures. Archetypal characters, struggles between good and evil, magical transformations, and story structures with trials and rewards belong to a shared anthropological and cultural heritage. This demonstrates the importance of comparative studies for understanding folklore, identity, and the values conveyed in oral traditions worldwide.

In *The Autobiography of the People in Verse*, Kadare writes:

Albanian folk poetry and prose remain a largely unexplored continent, with vast boundaries, spanning the real and unreal, where Greek, Egyptian, Byzantine, and Assyrian mythologies intermingle. The greatest wonders are found here, from world-scale characters such as 'Beauty of the Earth' (a kind of Miss World) to Einstein's relativity ('Three days there were like three years in this world') (Kadare, 2002: 67).

Albanian folk tales feature characters similar to those of other peoples. For example, *Katalani*, a well-known figure in primitive demonology, appears under different names across cultures. In Albania, he is known as *Tatëgjysh*, *Katalla*, or *Syqennjeri*; a giant blacksmith with one eye, wild, knee-less, with straight legs like a tree, who devours humans. Fr. Shtjefën Gjeçovi identified him with Homer's Cyclops Polyphemus, while Mjeda first associated Polyphemus with the Illyrian tradition. Scholars such as Hackamani, Skileri, Bolta, and Bendësi support the temporal independence of the cyclops motif among non-Greek Balkan peoples, including Illyrians, compared to the Greek myth. Other names include *Vigan*, *Gigant*, *Div*, *Dif*, *Lutran*, *Lutura*, *Katalla*, *Symoll* (Çabej, 1982: 106).

Syqenëza, a female monster in Albanian folklore, resembles the Erinyes (Eumenides) of Greek mythology. *Beauty of the Earth* symbolizes the aesthetic

ideal of physical and spiritual beauty found in folk tales worldwide. Albanian fairy tales convey moral and educational lessons about respect, justice, and the individual's role in the community. Modern adaptations of these stories in visual, audio, and digital forms, such as online cultural heritage platforms, demonstrate that folklore can preserve its authenticity while interacting with global cultural flows (Xhafa, 2018: 76).

In the Albanian *Epic of the Kreshniks*, we find many thematic, motivic, and stylistic similarities with ancient epics such as the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Iliad and the Odyssey, the French epic The Song of Roland, the Nibelungenlied, and others. Similarly, it contains the cult of the warrior, the cult of bravery, the cult of the horse, and the cult of the beautiful woman, corresponding to the cults found in the aforementioned epics (Berisha, 2006: 46–47).

Parallels can also be observed between Albanian lyrical folk songs and those of other Balkan peoples. Lyrical songs occupy a unique place within the entire folk heritage of each Balkan nation. Their poetic content not only expresses the most intimate and subjective feelings but also provides depictions of social and familial relationships across different periods. In particular, love lyrics convey not only the feelings between two young people but also reveal interpersonal relationships across generations. A comparison of lyrical songs from several Balkan peoples shows numerous similarities, with some examples being nearly identical in terms of motifs and psychological content. In this respect, the only distinguishing factor is the language in which they were created. This indicates that the creators and transmitters of these lyrics borrowed, adapted, or enriched each other's works over time (Vinc, 1996: 157).

Similarities are also found in wedding songs and the associated rituals, which are common to several Balkan peoples, for example, the adornment of the bride and groom, the bread rituals, and the bride's entry into the groom's house. Proverbs are another broad area of study where significant similarity exists between Albanian proverbs and those of other Balkan peoples and beyond.

Today, folklore increasingly serves as a bridge between national culture and globalization. Globalization is a complex and multidimensional process that has evolved over centuries. The term “globalization” was first used broadly by the American diplomat and scholar Robert Strausz-Hupé in the 1930s to describe a world becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent, encompassing economic, political, and cultural ties. Culturally, globalization has promoted the exchange of ideas, languages, traditions, and practices. Folk culture, music, and technology have spread widely, exerting a visible influence on lifestyles worldwide. Globalization has become a sort of “magic word” in our everyday life. It is also evident that political and cultural identities are increasingly separated from territorial identity (Appadurai, 1996: 182).

3. Folklore as a cultural bridge in the age of globalization

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Globalization and national identity are important realities in today’s world, from which we must derive benefits without abandoning spiritual foundations, as neither the global market nor the information system can replace identity. The phrase “globalization and national culture” is highly significant, as it juxtaposes the process of globalization with the cultural heritage of each nation (Kycyku, 2021–2022).

The numerous social changes and new influences have impacted people’s lives in general and have left marks on the cultures of European peoples. They have contributed to the revival or decline, renewal or creation, of folk life in each nation. Albanian scholars believe that the integration of European countries, despite their diverse cultural backgrounds, can be achieved, among other ways, by preserving each nation’s cultural identity, uniqueness, and originality. These distinctive features constitute a factor where cultural diversity can act as a unifying element.

This can be realized through various means, such as organizing joint scientific activities; developing comprehensive projects, for example, computerizing folklore materials using uniform and adapted criteria; publishing folklore in different genres and forms, initially at the Balkan level (including the compilation of catalogs of fairy tales, legends, ballads, etc.); exchanging information; conducting joint research expeditions; and holding as many international folklore festivals as possible, based on scientific platforms established by folklorists (Xhagolli, 2013: 205).

The better the culture of each people is known, the more naturally connections are created among different peoples, starting with neighbors and extending to other Europeans, while preserving individuality and overcoming nationalist attitudes, the more effectively European integration can be realized. Peoples need to recognize and experience the skills, values, and identities developed and transmitted over generations. Cultural standardization, a feature of globalization, is promoted through the internet, television, and advertising. Its cultural impact on younger generations is strong worldwide and can be integrated into national culture. Yet, language, traditions, and national culture remain decisive for cultural identity. National culture, literature, art, religion, folklore, music, and history must never be erased. How we manage globalization alongside national identity will determine our future in Europe.

Cultural globalization allows for the emancipation of an extraordinarily large number of cultures and civilizational heritages, a wealth available to all humanity. Cultural connections and influences provide dynamism to cultural development and social progress worldwide.

In an era of globalization, where cultural, economic, and technological processes have intensified international interactions, the challenge of preserving and affirming national cultural identity has become more visible. Albanian folklore, as material and spiritual heritage of a people with a long and complex history, represents an important instrument for linking global dimensions with local cultural consciousness. It is a dynamic medium expressing the values, norms, and perceptions of the Albanian community, offering a counterbalance to the homogenization often accompanying globalization. Through songs, fairy tales, legends, and rituals, folklore provides a unique identity that can communicate with the wider world without becoming a mere object of consumption, serving as a cultural bridge between the national and global spheres.

Scholars such as Hobsbawm and Appadurai have emphasized that globalization should not be seen solely as a loss of diversity but also as an opportunity for interaction, where national cultures can engage in dialogue and assert themselves on the global stage. Albanian folklore, with its flexibility and capacity to adapt traditional narratives to contemporary contexts, can function as an instrument of this dialogue, preserving indigenous features while integrating new influences.

For example, traditional music adapted into modern forms or fairy tales presented through digital media demonstrate that cultural heritage can coexist with global trends without losing identity. Moreover, folklore serves as an educational and identity-building tool, helping Albanian communities understand their roots and develop a strong cultural awareness in a world where global influences often blur cultural references. In this way, it preserves collective memory, fosters innovation, and encourages dialogue between different cultures.

By studying and promoting this heritage in modern contexts, Albania not only protects its identity but also contributes to global cultural diversity, demonstrating that tradition and modernity can coexist and reinforce each other.

Conclusions

In this context, Albanian folklore should be viewed as a strategic and functional instrument for affirming national culture in the era of globalization. It provides a communication bridge between local identity and global influences, contributing to the preservation of cultural diversity and the strengthening of national consciousness. Its promotion in modern formats, inclusion in digital media, and intercultural interactions are essential steps toward this goal. In conclusion, Albanian folklore is an irreplaceable cultural asset, linking tradition with modernity and serving as a model for asserting cultural identity in a globalized world.

Our analysis also demonstrates that Albanian folklore is not merely a remnant of the past, but a dynamic system of cultural expression capable of adapting to contemporary social transformations. As part of a broader European and Balkan cultural continuum, it shares motifs, structures, and archetypes with other traditions while preserving distinctive national features. These parallels illustrate long-standing cultural exchanges, historical coexistence, and the interconnectedness of regional traditions.

At the same time, Albanian folklore maintains a significant role in shaping identity, transmitting values, and strengthening collective memory. In an era defined by rapid globalization, shifting identities, and the expansion of digital communication, folklore emerges as a stabilizing cultural reference point. It enriches intercultural dialogue, contributes to cultural diversity, and allows communities to reaffirm their heritage while engaging openly with global cultural flows.

The study confirms that globalization does not necessarily imply cultural erosion. Rather, through conscious preservation, adaptation, and promotion, folklore can become a productive interface between tradition and modernity, fostering both cultural resilience and international visibility.

Strengthening the role of Albanian folklore today requires focused efforts in digital preservation, through accessible online archives and coordinated projects among cultural and academic institutions. Further interdisciplinary and comparative research is needed to position Albanian folklore within wider Balkan and European traditions. Its integration into school and university curricula should be enhanced with updated materials and interactive methods that deepen cultural awareness. At the international level, folklore should be promoted through exhibitions, festivals, and collaborative initiatives that reinforce Albania's cultural presence. Community participation is essential, with support for tradition bearers and opportunities for youth to engage creatively with folkloric forms. Finally, these initiatives should be accompanied by coherent national policies aligned with UNESCO standards and supported by stable funding for the safeguarding and promotion of intangible cultural heritage.

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