Lahuta e Malcís and its national identity

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Abstract
The topic will be focused into the illumination of some national aspects of the monumental masterpiece of Padre Gjergj Fishta Lahuta e Malcís, which creation has had the aim to unify the north and the south of Albania into the concept and incarnation of national identity. This unification it was treated as a social, psychical-social, nation, ethnic, economic and political necessity.

Under the symbolic of a unique and autochthones musical instrument such as lahuta (the lute) and the oriented toponymic definition of the highland, the topic aims to show up Gjergj Fishta’s efforts, so-called the Omer of Albania and the national undertones of the whole ep.

Also, will be brought the intellectual and proved sight of view of best and cultivated thinkers of the epoch upon the topic, we are trying to discuss on, so that to give to our judgment an originated and direct support.

To reach the concrete and permanent conclusions the work aims to comment, to analyze, to investigate and to conclude about the ep into the components which include its Albanian autochthon national identity.

The methods we will precede will be the descriptive, the investigative and the analytic one.

Key words: lahuta (the lute) the national identity, the passport, autochthon, Pater Gjergj Fishta.

Introduction
Lahuta e Malcís, has been considered as the only national epos of our literature, and even as the Balkans’ epos. Even though it is of an epic genre, however, Lahuta e Malcís is not focused on a mere central subject, to whom the events, situations, characters and images are related. If we considered a central hero of this poem, it would be the anonymous hero, the folk. In fact, its unification is created by a hero who is sometimes obvious and sometimes implied. It is Albania’s Fate and, according to the Albanian common belief, around this ore, kinships’ ores, bajrak’s, land banks’, homes’ ores, and eventually every warrior’s and every Albanian’s ore is gathered.

These create the most pleasant ensemble of characters among mythological characters and generally in this poem, since they convey the major message of survival of the Albanian people and their nation, despite the most tragic unexpectedness that might happen in the future.

The unification in this poem is directly influenced even by fairies, one of which defines compositional unification of the poem. This is Albanian Fairy analogous to Muse in Homer’s Iliad. From the viewpoint of her role in the poem, this is in a binomial relation to the Ore of Albania.

This cluster also consists of dragons, hobs, ghosts, etc. The events in the poem are extended in time of two human generations. They date back to 1858, when Montenegro, urged by Tsar of Russia, tries to invade our territories and end up when independence of Albania was declared and London Conference decided to divide these territories in half.

Lahuta e Malcís has been conceptualized and treated as a worthy representation of the Albanian national identity, whether compositionally, structurally, in terms of characters, themes, content or ideas.

Let’s have a closer look on this topic
Firstly, it is reasonable to clarify that identity stands for the wholeness of the physical, moral and civilization characteristics of a certain nation, which distinguish it from other nations. On the other hand, civilization is the whole of results achieved by a given society during a given period in different fields of
human activities, such as manufacture, science, technics, philosophy, politics, culture, art and literature, including private and public institutions related to these fields – these results might have been achieved by society at large or by a group of nations or countries, or even by a single nation.

To the historian Kristo Frasheri, the distinction between identity and civilization is clear-cut even from another point of view. Identity is the property of a nation; it cannot be given or received or changed, while, civilization is an open-ended achievement, it can be given, received or changed.\(^1\)

The amazing strength of resistance, which has allowed this nation to go through centuries keeping its own character and authenticity, results from constant social organization and from the customary right, which has been passed over by word of mouth from generation to generation, as it had been from the beginning of history.

**Lahuta e Malcis** has been considered, since the first Bejte, as the spinal cord of Albanian national identity of Renaissance and Independence Period. Similar to Fishta who was given the title “Homer” of his nation by Albanian people (*firstly by Northern Albanians and then by Southern Albanians*), even Njegoš was given this title by Serbians, Martić was given it by Croatians of Bosnia and Mažuranić was given it by Croatians. This title has ideologically a connotation of historical need for the construction and affirmation of ethnic values in the period of the formation of the country.\(^2\)

According to Anne Marie Thierse, since 1900, European peasantries dominate all the dressing manners and rituals, richness of which can appeal to theoreticians and curios travellers alike, and their diversity allows claiming the specificity of national identity.\(^3\)

Since the publication of this poem, its echo was great. It was appreciated, reviewed and translated in fragments not only by Norbert Jokli, but also by Ernest Koliqi. Padre Gjergj Fishta himself wrote: *Ku ma ke edhe ndër literatryra të kombëve të gjyetnueme një përshkrim, paraqitur me ngjyrat që të gjalla, me shëmbëlllyra ma të përshtatuna e me një burnni ma bujare, ma fisnikë e ma të njerzishme mbë hijeshinë e një vaste, përshkrim me të cilin fatosi i rapsodisë "Martesa e Halilit" paraqet hijeshinë e Tanushës*.\(^4\)

**Lahuta e Malcis**, with its national and confirming aim of ethnic identity and genesis karma of Albanian nation, weaving in itself author’s aspirations to present it as a poem of all the Albanian people, incarnating in it all the necessary elements, absolutely Albanian characteristics and features.

Firstly, mountainous land, from where the plot and main idea starts, high, sheer cliffs, wild nature and hardly welcoming to enemies, kings and sea monsters, welcoming to the guest, distant traveller and lost migrant. Also, the wonderful, virgin nature enters Fishta’s constitutional stylistics, in a free and very meaningful way.

Albanians’ traditions are ranked one after the other, replacing each-other and bringing out the most important ones, which are directly related to Albanian identity of the north. The good versus the evil, the existence, are all legitimized in Fishta’s style, aim and muse.

On the other hand, even though Fishta himself claimed that through this monumental masterpiece he wanted to unify the southern and northern Albania, it seems almost impossible. Firstly, as a result of dialect in which the poem was written. From the viewpoint of its conceptualization, writing style and time, the whole poem is based more on Northern Albania, like oiconym, oiconym, hydronym, which, puts aside (or doesn’t include it at all, because eventually it was impossible to do this!) the other part of Albanian territory.

Fishta accepted the fundamental Albanian issue, i.e. the need for a national language and folk’s language must be the basis for the common national language. Principally, he put efforts into a common national language, for all Albanians, but practically, he wanted this language to be the most known and approximate language to him – indeed, northwest variant (Geg variant) of Albania, which was approved by Academic Committee of Shkodra (Komisja Letrare e Shkodrës). He claimed to be unwilling to compromise, unwilling to leave his own dialect, i.e. his original dialectic speech.

Moreover, in all his publishing and literary work, his speech isn’t the general north dialect, but it is usually a closer variant, because of his being an artistically and linguistically overdeveloped creator, a creator


\(^2\)Knezovic, Oton. Fra Gvo Martic Studija Sarajevo, Hrvatsko Tiskara, 1931, pg 74.


\(^4\)Note: We preferred to leave the original words said by Fishta or other Franciscan order fellows due to the impossibility to be rightly translated. If we translated them we would not be able to transmit the same message as in the original.
who was based on folk’s creative foundations, he was convinced that his work could have another linguistic fatherland, beside northwest variants.\textsuperscript{5} He would treat in details the relationships between different regions even in Anzat e Parnasit. The following illustrate some of the lines dedicated to Nakdo Monici (Dom Ndoc Nikaj):

\begin{quote}
\textit{Eh! Zotni, t‘ngjatët Zot i jetën!}
\textit{Pa shikoje’ i herë kuletën,}
\textit{E ajo ty ka me t’kallzue}
\textit{Se shka t‘zit ti ke fitue}
\textit{Me njaty t’bukren Histori}
\textit{Qi ke shkruve përmbi Shqypni:}
\textit{Asë, idhnim pa fe nevoje}
\textit{E ndo’ i borxh edhe m’shtypshroje?...}\textsuperscript{6}
\end{quote}

Fishta’s artistic work is strongly based on folkloric (\textit{recall Qose!}), whereas \textit{Lahuta} is entirely based on epic work, and, generally on linguistic specimen of folklore, using not only its lexical, dialectic and regional forms, but also folk’s speech forms.

As such, it is difficult (\textit{if not impossible}) for this work to change or relocate “the linguistic fatherland”.

National identity of \textit{Lahuta e Malecis}, even analogically, is the same as the identity of all Franciscan Order, which approaches to religious factor as spiritual culture in parallel to national factor. Franciscan religious factor in Albanian regions is very specific, not only in relation to the period it was religiously valid, but also in relation to the impact on the psychology and mentality of people of Shkodra, its surroundings and all Dukagjini area. The whole of identification passport of Lahuta e Malecis consists of these components:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{Religion} (Muslims, Orthodox, Catholics)
\item \textbf{Pagane beliefs} – religious (Mythology, mythic figures, pagane figures)
\item \textbf{Language} (Dialects and dialectic variants)
\end{itemize}

So, if we refer to the book and the time it was written in, the great national poet, avoids (\textit{somewhat willingly}) the main topic of Ottoman invasion, primarily depicting the way against Montenegro and proclaiming anti-Slavs attitude, which deviates national main ideas, locates his visionary aims, and, even though he claimed that \textit{Lahuta e Malecis} tends to be a book that unifies the northern and southern Albania, it seems that this phenomenon is biased to the opposite, creating isolation in discussion, ideas, issues and toponyms.

So far, studies have been dominated by the idea that Franciscan scholars were rigorous collectors of folklore in general and of rhapsodies in particular and that their publishing cannot be questioned in relation to authentic character of folk copyright.

So, recent critics and studies have indirectly been announced in favor of the latter idea and native scholars estimating that franciscians were not only collectors and explorers of rhapsodies, but, in a way, they were their coauthors, more or less playing the same role as Greek monks in acritic songs' testification.\textsuperscript{7}

\textit{Lahuta e Malecis}, an unrepeatable masterpiece of Padre Gjergj Fishta, continues to be an epopee of Albanian kreshniks. A typical creation of national aspirations – Franciscan, where all national aspirations unify, cultural and religious, there is no doubt our north highlanders’ \textit{lahuta} (the lute), which represents the most ancient archetype of chordophone instruments of European continent.\textsuperscript{8}

Its title approaches to this instrument somehow ancient, not neither to prove that this poem is about it, nor to impose the its recital or to convey the lines through it, but, using animistic theories, it becomes mountains’, valleys’ and cliffs’ voice, it gains the authority and responsibility of a witness.

Referring to historical dimensions (\textit{slightly treated in the beginning}) \textit{Lahuta} begins with the battles near the border among Hoti and Gruda kinships and their highland harsh-alive neighbors in 1862, when Montenegro’s Prince Nikola I\textsuperscript{1} attacked Vranina, in the war against Turkish (\textit{songs 1-5}), poem’s spinal cord (\textit{songs 6-25}) is dedicated to the events in 1878-1880, when Berlin’s Congress decided to assign to Montenegro parts of Albanian territory, which urged the creation of Prizreni Confederate to protect the interests of the Albanian nation.

The third part of the poem (\textit{songs 25-30}) is about the period of Young Turks Revolution, which initially brought a hope for independence among Albanian nationalists, and about wars in Balkans in 1912-1913 which led to independence of Albania.

Gjergj Fishta’s \textit{Lahuta e Malecis}\textsuperscript{9} is important not only artistically, but it, like the guitar which as time passes,

\textsuperscript{5}Sinani, Shaban. Mythology in Kreshnik’s Epos, monographic study, (Third Edition) Naimi, Tirana, 2011.Pg 15
\textsuperscript{6}Miso. J. P. The ethno artistic role and function \textit{lahuta}, in ÇFSH-3, Tirana, 1987, pg 27.
\textsuperscript{7}The explanation on the source of the name of the Albanian ethnic instrument for implied reasons has been stopped halfway, not reaching the target meaning of stem word. The ethnic instrument, the so-called lahuta, (the lute) the instrument we have today and

\textsuperscript{1}Islamaj Shefkije. Language and Identity, Toena Publishing, Tirana, 2008, pg. 172.
\textsuperscript{2}Ans at e Parnasit, Botimat Franeškane, Shkodër, 2007, fq. 32.
can be played better and harmonizes more sounds, it gains undisputed values since it is themirror, the exact copy of life, spirit, wishes and efforts, wars and death for Albanians: that is, Lahuta (the lute) is the clearest reflection of highlanders' mores, those of North mountain inhabitants.

Fishta's highlander in compliance with the psychology incarnated in Albanian songs, according to Koliqi, firstly is governed by the axis of ancient customary laws, based on such concepts as honor, given word and manliness. Koliqi classifies the given word as one of the most divine mores, which blossoms in our mountains and valleys, with heartfelt and beautiful episodes, inspired by a human, profound, breathtaking poetry, putting the generosity of Albanians to the mountains which don't have any scientific culture. This is because ancient mores of highland kinships have been estimated to be removed from tough waves of civilization; tomorrow's reader, academic, folklorist, lawyer and history will be grateful to the Poet for the next tens and hundreds of years, who in Lahuta e Malcis left behind a reflection of Albanian, described by contemporary witnesses.

To strengthen more this element, we recall E. Çabej, when he claims that this poem, among other things, constitutes even an ethnographic document of Albanian lifestyle. Lahuta e Malcis is Albania's national ep; it crowned our authors' efforts to write the ep. Its foundational model consists of Albanian oral culture, Albanian epics, kreshnik songs (Kânet kreshnikë). This ep is not part of genre classical poetics. Fishta structuralized his text by depicting a topic in some variants, to obtain the mosaic of the events in Albania in the war against Slavs, in the war for freedom.

According to Padre Zef Plumi, Fishta used the sarcastic whip to rebuke and urge Albanians to go toward civilization and dignified in his poem the skill to mock, which sometimes is used among us to hurt hearts and to cause misunderstandings and troubles. Lahuta e Malcis is characterized by the numerous, monumental and usually legendary actions. Its discourse is mainly heroic, while situations are dramatic.

All this produces a dynamic text, despite its epic broadness. Fishta lives within the text as a structuring discoverer/creator and reviewer. The structuring poet ties the threads of the wide inter textual network that lives within Lahuta e Malcis; the creator decides on the discourse, figure, articulates the emotion, marks the discourse under the subjectivity, intervenes weaves the text and hypertext, orates in authorial songs (like Lugati); the reviewer puts the network of ideas and open declarations against situations.

Conclusions

The poem, in itself, interlocks dilemmas and statements:

- The unification of the poem is based on the national aspiration, which identifies the ordinary people and political celebrities in the period of Renaissance through independence;
- The artistic means of the poem are encountered in Albanian ancient and historical epos, elements that the author has also provided with Homeric ones.
- The proof to the approach include: 1) Albanian traditional folkloric motives, 2) Customary mentality and developmental psychology, 3) elements of identification passport like the given word, manliness, blood feud, etc.
- Mythological world of the poem must be conceptualized in its function and as a necessary initial material: fairies and other beings of our mythology, like lugati, kucedra, dragons, etc.
- Figures of speech constitute the most powerful literary part, starting from unusual hyperboles to idyllic powerful descriptions.
- Individualized battles, diplomats' debates, kings' backstage, and the presence of mythological figures make the plot, its essence and the whole ep more understandable and at the same time more perceptible.
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