**HOW THE CUSTOMARY LAWS AND THE KINSHIP SYSTEM HELPED PRESERVE THE FUTURE ALBANIAN NATION-STATE – A CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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**ABSTRACT**

Albania proclaimed independence during the First Balkan War and its borders were defined by the London Conference of 1912–1913, which left out of the actual borders many territories of Albanian speaking populations. The Albanian territories have historically been under the attack of raids and occupations and yet throughout the history, even with the lack of strong governments, Albanians managed to keep hold of most territories. How did they manage this? Well, many arguments can pop out, but I would like to present an anthropological one, based on traditional customary laws and cultural schemas defined by the last, which touches the very core of the ideal nation-state and the inclusion of people of the same ethnicity and cultural traditions.

Albania has been largely governed by customary laws and norms of *kanun* (canon), which helped isolated tribes and larger population, preserve independence even under the long domination of the Ottoman Empire and under foreign or national governments. This canons were spread throughout the whole country, even beyond the Albanian actual borders, connecting Albanian speaking populations not only under the umbrella of the common language, but even under the umbrella of common culture, customary laws and norms. A special article in the ***Canon of Lek Dukagjini*** defines *“family”,* the core cell of this tribal societies as *made of the people of one house, which generates into brotherhoods, brotherhoods in marriage alliances, marriage alliances into kinships, kinships in flags and all get together in a wider family which is named Nation and has the same country, the same blood, the same language and customs*. It is exactly this strong claim of the ***Canon of Lek Dukagjini*** and other cultural schemas defined by many laws of this sort, which helped Albanians in a subconscious level (and not only) preserve throughout the history their territories, and which draws once again attention on the long discussion of territorial disputes about the Albanian borders, which I would like to address on a cultural anthropological approach.

***Keywords*:** *Kanun, common culture, nation-state, anthropology, customary law*

# INTRODUCTION

To talk about borders in the Balkans is like trying to open a powder-keg by hitting the lid with a metallic wedge. I actually wouldn’t go there, especially because my field of study is not history. Still, while I am proceeding with my anthropological research on inherited Albanian cultural codes, I cannot get untouched by the striking unique features of the Albanian culture and how it defined the survival course of this population. In this paper I would go through different concepts, which relate to each other, to bring to a final conclusion that the distinctive culture of tribal Albania helped preserving the territories and borders, which then turned into the actual state.

# DEFINING “NATION-STATES”AND “NATIONALISM”

Before I dig into the Albanian history and culture, I would like to start this paper by the defining *nation-state* and *nationalism.* I would avoid the debate between *modernists* and *ethnosymbolists (primordialist)[[1]](#footnote-1)* as this debate does not apply to the case: Albania borderline was set in 1913, a time when predominantly Albania had nothing to do with modernity and industrial development, rather than with a crucial surviving issue, as a nation of people of the same ethnicity.

The modern debate of a *nation* is the one approached by ***The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology:*** if it is a political, civic, and territorial unit, with no connection to *religion, race, ethnicity, or any other cultural marker,* or if it comes to life (not artificially made) by people with *primordial ties of race, ethnicity, religion, history, and other cultural factors.* The power of the last lies in the fact that it can exist without statehood[[2]](#footnote-2), a key concept to the history of Albania, not to mention that my approach is of a cultural anthropological one and not concerning political and bureaucratic formation of state.

In ***The Politics of Culture: Ethnicity and Nationalism,*** Anthony Smith introduces the concept of *“ethnie”,* which is *a human group whose members share common myths of origin and descent, historical memories, cultural patterns and values, association with a particular territory, and a sense of solidarity […].[[3]](#footnote-3)* The *“ethnie”* of Smith sounds like a term that merges both “*nation-state”* and *“nationalism”* defined by ***The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology****.* In this encyclopedia the *nation-state* is a term originally coined to define the states created on the territorial distribution of a nation, made by a group of people who have a common ancient origin, while *nationalism* represents the beliefs, idioms and practices of the territory that people perceive as a common nation, translated through politics: a doctrine on an existing or imagined nation, where cultural and political boundaries fit[[4]](#footnote-4). Friedrich Meinecke brought the definition of *Staatsnation -* political and territorial application of nationality and *Kulturnation -* pre-political cultural entity of individuals that associate to each other by custom, language, heritage, and collective memory[[5]](#footnote-5). ***The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies*** claims that the national identity refers to an imaginative identificationand that culture is a dynamic entity, which changes accordingly to history dynamics[[6]](#footnote-6). Later in this paper I would turn again to several concepts above mentioned, especially to the “*imaginative nation”* and *“culture dynamic changes according to history dynamics”*.

# THE FOUNDATION OF THE INDEPENDENT ALBANIAN NATION - A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE ALBANIAN HISTORY FROM ILLYRIAN TRIBES TO THE LONDON CONFERENCE

One of the best foreigner researchers on Albanian matters is definitely the Canadian-born German scholar Robert Elsie, who departed 2 years ago and devoted his life to the Albanian literature, folklore and history. According to Elsie, the southwestern Balkans on the Adriatic coast used to be home of Balkan tribes, which were called Illyrians. It is not certain that Albanians descend from ancient Illyrians, because very little is known on the Illyrian language. But assuming that these tribes used to leave in this area before the Slavic invasions, the connection between Albanians and Illyrians would follow a logical argument[[7]](#footnote-7). Anthony Harding notes that there is no written proof of Illyrians invasions, which brings to the conclusion that Illyrians should have already been living in their territories in the 3rd millennium BC, which according to him, fits with the political claim that the Albanians derive from the Illyrian state[[8]](#footnote-8). As for Albanians, Elsie claims that the first signs showed on the early years AD, but the official *traditional designation, appears from the 11th century in Byzantine chronicles as Albanoi, Arbanitai, and Arbanites, and from the 14th century in Latin and other Western documents as Albanenses and Arbanenses[[9]](#footnote-9).* Peacock states that when the Robert Guiscard’s Normans entered to Elbasan, which at the time was called Albanopolis, finding it difficult to pronounce the native “shkypetar” (shqiptar) adapted an easy word after the place: Albania[[10]](#footnote-10). Stephen Hill claims that “Albania” as a concept should not have been significant to the Illyrians of the 4th-11th century and that in the Balkans is very difficult to define Albanians in particular[[11]](#footnote-11).

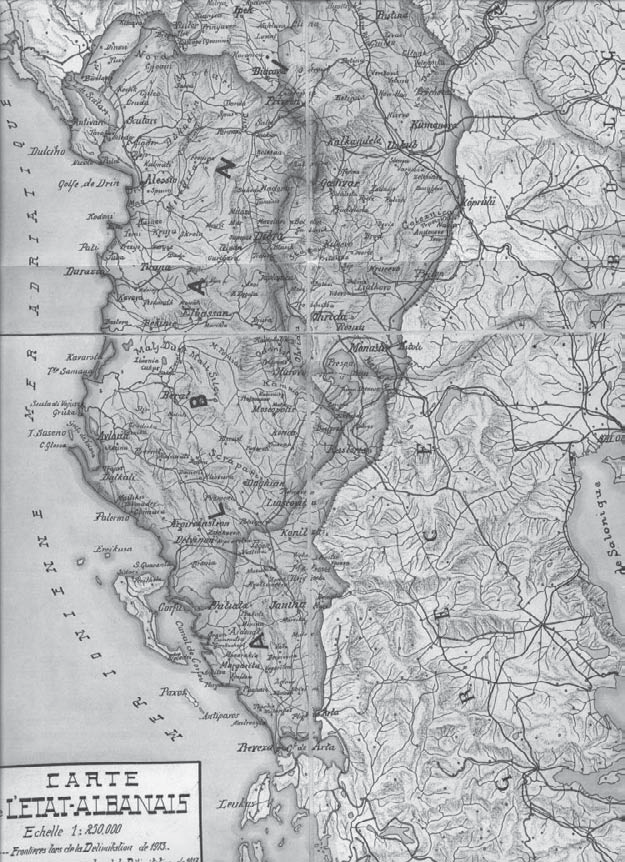
Elsie claims that the Albanians were herders. Hammond writes that Illyrians and Greeks clashed with each other as seamen and colonizers[[12]](#footnote-12). Stephen Hill claims that they were shepherds and pirates. Hill even pretends that when Rome attacked the Illyrian tribes, the initial motive was not expansion, rather than a response to the indigenous piracy. Hence, I couldn’t help a smile on my face, when I read the formerly private secretary to H.B.M. Charge d'affaires in Montenegro and consul-general in North Albania, Wadham Peacock depiction of a tribe man he had known in north Albania in 1914, who during summer time used to farm in the mountains, and in winter worked as a boatman on the coast. The money he earned as a boatman enabled him to carry better arms than the other mountaineers, who did not leave the villages[[13]](#footnote-13).

On the big debate related to the passage from Illyrians to Albanians, beside that “the territory” argument claimed by Elsie, is the other argument of the “language” brought by Tom Winnifrith, who writes that despite *Albanian patriots are anxious to stress this origin, the existence of the Albanian language [as a distinctive language in the area] provides fairly strong evidence[[14]](#footnote-14).* Still, Anthony Harding pretends that Illyricum where lived “real Illyrians” was larger than the Illyricum Roman province, but it cannot be clearly defined if Illyricum was called as such due to one tribe, naming a wider group or if this name was connected to a language unit, spoken by different tribes[[15]](#footnote-15). According to Nicholas Hammond, Illyrius the eponym of the Illy,.-ii, a tribe inland of Lezhe (an actual Albanian city), from which the Greeks extended the name to all peoples of similar speech[[16]](#footnote-16). According to Hill, in the 5th century Hieronymus called the Illyrian language the “barbarian” language[[17]](#footnote-17). But, besides the common “territory” and “language”, W. L. G. Joerg, writing for the ***Bulletin of the American Geographical Society,***in 1913, right after the decision of the Conference of London on the new Albanian borders, claims that *the extraneous nature of the Albanians has been recognized; they have been segregated from the other peoples and established as a separate [ethnographic] unit[[18]](#footnote-18).* Same is supported even by Harding: *to themselves, as to the Greeks and Romans, the Illyrians were a race apart[[19]](#footnote-19).*

In the consideration of the foregoing, let’s go through a fast historical overview, from Illyrians to Albanians. Elsie claims that in the beginning the herders tribes used to live in the most remote areas of the Balkans, but with their distinctive nature, which is characterized by *innate vigor, unconscious persistence, and much luck[[20]](#footnote-20),* Illyrian tribes spread in the south and in the western territories, starting from 10th-15th century, taking the western coast, spreading up to what is today western Macedonia and half of today’s Greece. According to Hammonds, Illyrians lived in small tribes, distinguished by name and tattoo-patterns and they moved forth and back from mountain in the summer, to plains during winter with their herds. There were cases of clustered small tribes in a larger one, united by a common name[[21]](#footnote-21). Even today Albanians are divided between Gheg in the north and Tosk in the south. Even though researchers have been tried to divide them into two different populations, Gheg and Tosk have a common language with dialectal differences. Brandon Doll claims that the death of Theodosius brought to a clear division between north and south tribes, due to religion introduced in the area. When the Roman Empire divided in two in 395 AD in the north started to strengthen a catholic community, while in the south an orthodox one[[22]](#footnote-22). In the meanwhile the country was attacked by Goths and Huns in 4th century[[23]](#footnote-23), Slavic tribes in 7th century; Bulgarians in 9th century, and Prince Dusan attack of 1340, which made north Albania part of the Serbian Empire[[24]](#footnote-24). Still on every invasive attack, Albanians used to seek shelter in the barren mountains, where they could preserve untouched their ancient language and customs, which were vital to their survival, while the lower lands suffered influences, by widening differences between south and north[[25]](#footnote-25). Tom Winnifrith compares Gheg and Tosk to the Scots, claiming that the language differences were alike the Lowlands Scots and English, and cultural distinctions of the tribal structure of the Gheg was like the one of the Scottish Highlands, while Tosk, even due to geographical structure left behind the strong kinship system and embraced urbanization and influences, keeping traces of the ancient culture[[26]](#footnote-26).

After the defeat of the coalition of Balkan forces on 1389, the Ottoman Empire started spreading in Albania until the early 15th century. Albanians continuously resisted the Ottomans but the most famous resistance is the one of George Castriotta Scanderbeg, who repulsed 13 incursions, but this hard-earned independence came to an end with the death of the national hero. Albania became a Turkish subject for 400 years and this colonization changed the country culture. In a way it prevented Albanians to suffer ethnic assimilation by the Slavs[[27]](#footnote-27) and as Winnifrith states, Albanians when not fighting each other, spent most of their time fighting with the Turks rather than against them[[28]](#footnote-28). Peacock justifies this sort of alliances with the ancient atrocities of the Slavic invasions: *this explains why the modern Albanian has always been more friendly with the Moslem Turk than with the Christian Slav. The brutalities committed by the Turks were trifles compared with the atrocities of the Slav[[29]](#footnote-29).* Still, the Ottomans found it easier to force their religion and culture mostly in the center and south region, where they found a semi-broken tribal system[[30]](#footnote-30). The Ottoman Empire always tried to play the division card of religions and tribes, but any attempt to denationalize Albanians was a failure. Whatever his status, an Albanian will always remain an Albanian[[31]](#footnote-31). Other important resistance attempts were the ones of Pashas of Bushati in the north and Ali Pasha of Janina in the south[[32]](#footnote-32). They both happened in the 18th century, during the Ottoman Empire decay, but the sultan power restored and the following Tanzimat reforms brought more uprising, especially from the tribes of the north mountains[[33]](#footnote-33).

On 3rd of March 1878, at the end of Russian-Turkish War of 1877–1878, through the Treaty of San Stefano Russia imposed to the Ottoman Empire the independency of Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania, and added territories to Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia, by taking parts of Albanian-speaking lands. As a response, on 10th of June 1878, Albanians coined The League of Prizren, which was sort of a failure, because it *prevented the annexation of much Albanian territory by Serbia and Montenegro, but it did not succeed in its objective to unite the whole country into one vilayet […], a major prerequisite for a certain degree of autonomy[[34]](#footnote-34).* On 13th of June to 13th of July 1878, The Congress of Berlin, held by Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria–Hungary, and Italy should revise the Treaty of San Stefano, and was chaired by Bismark, who was supposed to be impartial. I would like to cite Wadham Peacock on what happened in that Congress in regard to Albania: *Bismarck, with his brutal disregard of facts which did not suit him, asserted at the Berlin Congress in 1878, "There is no Albanian nationality." The Albanian League, even while he was speaking, proved that he was wrong, and now, more than thirty-five years later [1913], when the work which the Congress of necessity left unfinished has to be taken another step towards its logical end, the Albanian nation provides one of the most serious of the questions to be solved by the Court of the Great Peoples[[35]](#footnote-35).* The congress affirmed the independence of Serbia, Montenegro and Rumania, decreased the confirmed independent Bulgarian territories and returned the Albanian territories to the Ottoman Empire[[36]](#footnote-36). Soon after that the League of Prizren was oppressed by the Ottoman Empire, but in 1912, four centuries of foreign rule brought a mass uprising and the proclamation of independence on 28th of November 1912. North and south were each fighting battles with respective enemies: north against Serbian occupation, south against Greek forces, but they united toward the independence of a nation-state[[37]](#footnote-37). This reminds me of Hammons claim on Illyrians tribes behavior, *which were generally hostile to one another, but they always combined for a common purpose[[38]](#footnote-38).* The unification of the Albanians under specific circumstances has always impressed foreigners, who almost never saw it coming, and such a reaction was the report of the Italian Consul on the Independence Day in Albania, claiming that the Albanians in front on *new, unexpected enemies that could have condemned forever the existence of the Albanian nation, […] got rid of all antagonism and gathered around a man quite superior for intelligence, experience and cleverness, and struggled to save themselves declaring their independence […] I was pessimistic and incredulous as long as possible: now I believe I can declare that the Albanians should be supported without doing any harm to justice, but rather as an honor to mankind[[39]](#footnote-39).*



*Figure12 –* ***Map of the newly created Albanian state, contrasted with Albanian-settled territory, 1913***

*(photo taken by the Elsie’s* ***Historical Dictionary of Albania****, pg. xxiv)*

But, the early years of independence lacked of a strong government and especially of diplomacy[[40]](#footnote-40). Albanians fight to keep their territories, language and customs, were overshadowed by stronger and more agile populations in diplomacy. Peacock takes a simple example of authors writing about Albanian neighbors: *So, the five hundred years' struggle of Montenegro against the Turks has often been told in enthusiastic language. The more than a thousand years' struggle of the Shkypetars against the Slav and the Turk has always been passed over as an incident of no importance[[41]](#footnote-41).* And such circumstances and approaches were crucial to the Conference of Ambassadors in London, where the Great Powers recognized the independence of Albania and after giving living Albanian speaking lands to Montenegro, Serbia and Bulgaria, set an international border commission to delineate the south frontiers of the new country. In the end, *more than half of the Albanian-speaking territory and about 30 percent of the Albanian population were excluded from the new state[[42]](#footnote-42).* The head of the state wouldbe the German prince Wilhelm zu Wied, but *the Albanian people were not grateful for the assistance of the Great Powers, and Wilhelm ruled only from March to September of 1914, when he was forced by a popular uprising to flee the country[[43]](#footnote-43).* Tom Winnfrith writes that the Conference might have chosen distinguished Albanians figures at the head of the country, but they opted for the comic choice of a still controversial figure, such as the one of Prince Wilhelm of Wied, not to mention that the Albanian throne was even offered to the England cricketer C. B. Fry, a tragic insight when you think how irrelevant was the fate of this nation in the eyes of the Great Powers[[44]](#footnote-44). In the report for the ***Bulletin of the American Geographical Society,***after the decision of the Conference of London, W. L. G. Joerg writes that Greece profited most, with almost doubling her former area; next in order of increase was Serbia, growing by four-fifths of her former area, and Montenegro, which has augmented her territory by three-fifth[[45]](#footnote-45), a process fulfilled without proper anthropological experts which would lead in the future extreme ethnic tensions, such as the ones of Bosnia and Kosovo[[46]](#footnote-46) or the actual open debate of Chameria. To close this part I would like to cite Peacock: *Perhaps, after all, the Shkypetars were right and the European sovereigns were only chiefs of Frankish tribes, who took advantage of the quarrels among the Sultan's subjects to further their own petty aims. All other countries seemed vague and unreal, and only the politics of the rocks and lowlands of Albania appeared of any consequence[[47]](#footnote-47).*

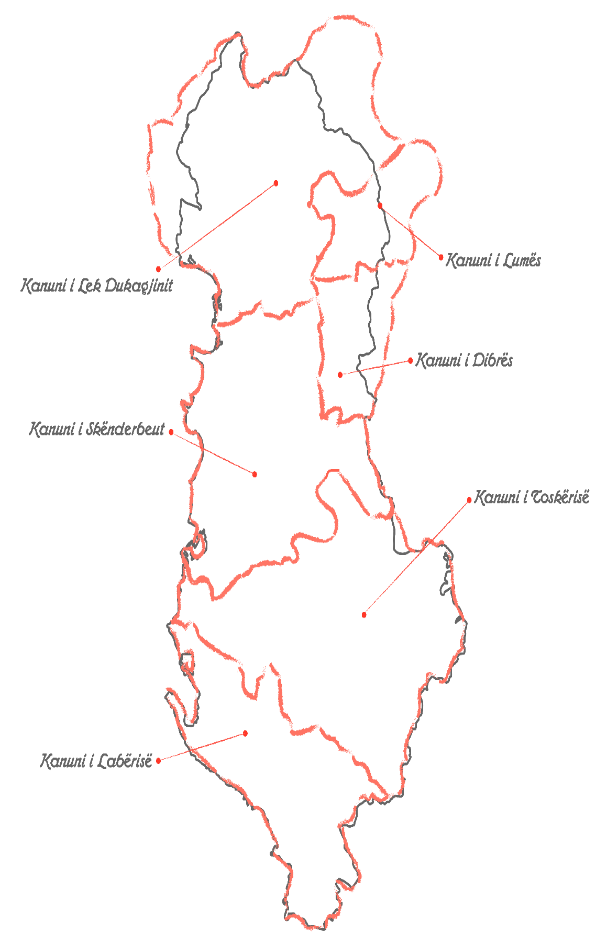
# FOCUSING ON THE ALBANIAN TRIBAL SOCIETY AND HOW THE CUSTOMARY LAWS GOVERNING IT PRESERVED THE FUTURE NATION-STATE

Let’s recall the last passage: *“chiefs of Frankish tribes”.* What does this statement really mean? Does it make sense to anyone who does not know nothing about Albanians? Is it a literary figure of speech? Well, no, at the time it was a pure cultural reality for an Albanian.

For several centuries Albanians were self-governed by ancient customary laws and norms, inherited in unwritten form through generations. The most important and well preserved set of laws and norms is the one of Lek Dukagjini, named after a medieval law enforcer, but several other set of rules have been detected throughout Albania. Today there are several canons with a common core, but many differences, as a consequence of social, economic, political, migration exchanges and development. The main canons are ***The Canon of Lek Dukagjini, The Canon of Skanderbeg, The Canon of Dibra, The Canon of Toskeria, The Canon of Laberia.*** Despite differences these customary laws include several important institutions, which show heritable cultural codes, cultural patterns and schemas and define the typical behavior of Albanians, even nowadays. There is no proof when these customary laws emerged, as they were never written until the years 1898-1899, when Shtjefën Gjeçovi started collecting, writing and codifying the first *kanun* - ***The Canon of Lek Dukagjini***. According to Edith Durham, it is true that the laws are attributed to Lek Dukagjini, who lived in the 15th century, but their origin is much more ancient[[48]](#footnote-48). Leonard Fox in the introduction of ***Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit – The code of Lek Dukagjini,*** writes that the codifier Gjeçovi found many similarities between the canon and the ***M-anava-Dharmaś-astras (Manu's Code of Law),*** which shows that the origin of this customary laws should be very ancient and similar to the Manu’s laws.[[49]](#footnote-49) Olivelle writes that the academics always considered Manu’s laws as a slow and gradual process through several centuries of consecutive orally collectors and conductors of idioms, moral principles and legal axioms***[[50]](#footnote-50)*** and the same path seems that have been followed even by Albanians.

I would like to go back to the concept of the *“dynamic cultural change accordingly with the history dynamics”*. Elsie in ***The Tribes of Albania: History, Society and Culture*** writes about the conversation of an old man from Shala (a village in the Albanian highlands) and Rose Wilder Lane, where the old man tells the American traveler that all they know, they learned from their fathers, who learned from their father’s fathers and all this knowledge was very old and unwritten in books, and that made them true. According to the old man, the young boys learning in the cities, despised fathers’ knowledge and forgot it, but what they used to learn by the fire, by experience and what they used to consider when they walked on trails, was not much, but really worthy knowledge[[51]](#footnote-51). I brought this passage to show that due to this fanatic conservation of old customary laws, these tribes flourished, enlarged and managed to keep untouched their whole cultural setting, until the unfortunate times of the communist regime, through oppression and propaganda achieved in 40 years what the invaders and colonizers couldn’t for centuries: the deep damage up to the downfall of the last tribal societies of Europe[[52]](#footnote-52). So the old Albanian culture is able to prove how a culture can resist to change in front of historical dynamics.

In Figure 2, I have tried to draw the borders of the canons jurisdiction areas in Albania, following the borders claimed by the collectors and codifiers, but I am totally conscious that there are several inaccuracies. First, because the canons collection and codification is not yet complete and many of them overlap or merge within the most important ones; second, because the map I worked on is the one defined by the Conference of London and does not follow ethno-cultural principles. From the research I could understand that in many cases the borders of the canons were defined by natural landmarks, such as rivers or mountains, which I attempted to follow in the process. I want to once more stress that this map is an elementary one, because I needed such a structure for my research on inherited cultural codes through Albanian dramaturgy, but I do not hold this as a final scientific structure.



*Figure 2 –* ***Albania divided according to the Canons***

One of the main institutions of the canons, which was key to the national survival, was the tribal nature of the society. Especially in the isolated north Albanian highlands, Albanians lived by the severe rules of the agnatic kin, with father blood heritage through males, with really strong family ties to the main core. This happened due to survival needs and included under the same roof even non really close family members. Nopcsa calls this kind of kin system a primitive feature and according to him, people are inclined to believe that when a civilization is not fully developed, like the north Albania case, even the kinship structure of the area is an old institution, which never changes. But there are changes and they are constant and considering the fact that the Albanian north kept for centuries this structure intact, it means that this society is not primitive, but has an ancient origin[[53]](#footnote-53). Durham states that even Europe once was made of kin systems, which through times contributed to the actual nations[[54]](#footnote-54), and at the time Durham was visiting Albania (1903-1921), the Albanian north tribes, structured with chieftains and counselors were the last tribes in Europe[[55]](#footnote-55). Robert Elsie claims that in the beginning they were isolated family groups, which evolved into self-governed tribes with common culture and very often even common origin, connected by the same social models. Not only the north, but even south Albania, had kinship structures, but they were not as developed as in the north[[56]](#footnote-56), where they were strongly preserved thanks to isolation, independency from authorities and self-governing canons. These untouchable self-governing canons, are in exchange strongly related to the kinship setting, and according to Salvatore Villari, the strong tribal and kinship connection is a very important concept for the canon itself, because as he claims, *it has been proved that out of the kin, the canon does not exist, or loses its value at the point you cannot recognize it anymore[[57]](#footnote-57).* The Ottomans tried to weaken the Albania tribes and their chiefs, by oppression (Sultan Mahmud II liquidated 36 Albanian clans, while his son, Abdulmejid I a higher number[[58]](#footnote-58)) and by inventing a political position of *bajraktar – flagbearer* (Hasluck confirms through a document of 1403 that this position did not exist before the Ottoman occupation[[59]](#footnote-59)). But Albanians, proved to be really creative in their survival efforts, by creating a unique sort of kin. In ***The Tribes of Albania: History, Society and Culture***, Elsie describes the Albanian *“fis”* (tribe or clan) as a merging of two different concepts. The first concept relates to the kin group generating from the paternal blood line, which not necessarily implies a geographical territory. Being related by blood they were exogamous and didn’t marry within the kin[[60]](#footnote-60). The second concept is the one of *bajrak,* (also can be translated as tribe or clan) which is more a political structure and was mainly defined from a specific geographical territory. So, *bajrak* meant territory, while *fis* blood descent. Still, the majority of the clans had their own territories, clearly bordered, which they protected from other clans and foreign enemies[[61]](#footnote-61). A north Albanian *fis* might have one or more *bajrak*, which had joined their forces and a *bajrak* might have members of more than one *fis*. The overlapping of both concepts brings the creation of a specific structure of these northern clans, making it quite often impossible to fully grasp[[62]](#footnote-62).

The first article on family in ***The Canon of Lek Dukagjini*** defines *“family”,* the core cell of this kinship societies as *a group of human beings who live under the same roof, whose aim is to increase the number by means of marriage for their establishment and the evolution of their state, and for the development of their reason and intellect. [...] the family consists of people of the house; as these increase, they are divided into brotherhoods [vllazni], brotherhoods into kinship groups [gjini][[63]](#footnote-63), kinship groups into clans [fis], clans into banners [flamur], and all together constitute one widespread family called a nation, which has one homeland, common blood, a common language and common customs[[64]](#footnote-64).* Returning to the “*imaginative nation”* concept, here is the proof that the Albanian nation concept was not imaginative, but well defined and fundamentally inherited through generations. This explains why these tribes all over Albania, south and north, had this instinct of getting together and fighting for the nation, any time they felt substantially threatened of being eradicated by colonization or occupation.

And last, but not least, there is a core institution essentially connected to the old customary laws: *besa*. Elsie defines *besa* as the *word of honor, a sworn oath, a pledge, or a cease-fire. In Albanian culture, the besa was regarded as something sacred, and its violation was quite unthinkable[[65]](#footnote-65).* Lopasic claims that *besa* is the strongest Albanian symbol of honor and honesty, and in agnatic kinship societies like the Albanian ones, without honor is not worth living. This concept is so strong, that it has survived even among Albanians outside Albania. *Besa* is a pure institution and heritable cultural code and as such *it is not limited by space, time or distance[[66]](#footnote-66). Besa* served even as connecter in times of foreign threats: when a national *besa* was called, Albanians left behind internal wars and blood feuds and fought to keep the nation intact. It was so important that you can even find *besa* in important national leagues names, such as *Besëlidhja e Lezhës* (League of Lezhe) a military alliance of Albanian chieftains under Scanderbeg against the Ottomans or *Besa-besë* (Pledge for a Pledge) otherwise known as the Albanian League of Peja, which aimed to create a national blood-feuding truce and concentrate all the Albanian power to defend the territories from Bulgarians, Serbs and Montenegrins[[67]](#footnote-67).

# CONCLUSION

To cite again Peacock, this British diplomat that unlike his compatriots of the time, was truly sympathetic toward Albanians: *many conquerors have passed over it [Albania], but the stubborn race which is now known as Albanian has survived them all[[68]](#footnote-68).* In this paper you saw the unique features of this population and the strange survival course as a unique nation, under the conditions of being stateless and even hostile to each other. But as their distinctive culture unfolds, one can easily find the keys to explain how was possible for them to get united, to keep their territories and even to define the borders of their future (truncated) nation-state. But the most interesting thing is how they achieved since ancient times to address and pass through generations, by means of culture and customary laws the very core concrete concept of the *nation*, even though they had always been stateless.

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63. *I have to note that the translation of Fox is not accurate regarding* gjini*, as* gjini *is not a kinship in its classical concept. An Albanian kinship is only from the father blood line, so more accurate for* gjini *would be* marriage alliance*, as English is missing the specific term Albanian language has.* [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
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