



Research Article

© 2024 Mimoza Hasani Pllana and Agron Y. Gashi.
This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

Received: 14 September 2024 / Accepted: 28 October 2024 / Published: 05 November 2024

The Enigma of Ownership of the Balkan Epic

Mimoza Hasani Pllana

Agron Y. Gashi*

University of Prishtina,
"Hasan Prishtina",
Faculty of Philology,
Kosovo

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2024-0170>

Abstract

The Balkans, characterized by complex historical, political and cultural dimensions, presents a rich and diverse ethnic, cultural and social picture. This complexity is explored in Adela Peeva's documentary Who Is This Song?, which investigates the contested origins of a folk song claimed by many Balkan nations. The documentary is a truth about the cultural diversity in the Balkans and the difficulty to identify the belonging of almost every cultural product that belongs to the folklore of these parts. This study focuses on Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, and Macedonian folklore, using phenomenological and comparative methods to uncover common motifs, themes, and narrative structures, as well as differences. The study highlights the rich cultural heritage of the region shaped by various historical influences and contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural identity of the Balkans. From this research it is concluded that the peoples living in this geographical space have exchanged among themselves over the centuries, so that in modern times, the folklore contents that we have analyzed are so close in terms of theme, motif and narrative structure that if they are not shown in the different language it would be difficult to understand that they belong to some nations.

Keywords: Balkans, Folklore, Comparative Analysis, Cultural Identity

1. Introduction

In the realm of cultural studies, particularly within literary discourse, the Balkan region has frequently been characterized as fraught with complexities stemming from its historical, political, ethnic, and subsequently, social and cultural dimensions. Consequently, Balkan society exhibits a profound richness in terms of ethnic, religious, and social diversity. This multifaceted landscape has engendered a cultural heterogeneity that transcends geopolitical boundaries, defying simplistic categorizations or divisions. write this text with academic words In cultural studies, we are often left

without answers until we want to address who a song, legend or tale belongs to, as paraphrased in the documentary "Whose Is This Song?" directed by Adela Peeva.¹ This thematic conundrum is succinctly summed up in the documentary *Who Is This Song?* in which there is talk of a butterfly song, the melodic rhythm of which is included in several variants of the song among the mentioned peoples. The film attempts to explore the complex interplay between folklore and nationalism within the Balkan context. Peeva's cinematic journey is fueled by her quest to discover the origins of a folk song that she previously considered to be predominantly Bulgarian. Traveling across multiple Balkan countries, including Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia, Peeva encounters an interesting response among her interviewees, each claiming ownership of the song in question. At the same time, we start the research with a question: to whom do these resounding legends in the Balkans belong?

We teach Albanian and Balkan folklore in our pedagogical curriculum, recognizing folklore as a fundamental element from which different academic disciplines can be researched. The contemporary conception of folklore has evolved considerably since its inception in the early 19th century, especially when William John Thoms introduced the term in 1846, replacing earlier designations such as "folk literature". This transformation underscores the wide scope and interdisciplinary importance of folklore studies in the modern era and also stimulated scholarly work in a wide range of other disciplines.²

In this article we analyze Albanian and Kosovo (same Albanian language folklore culture), Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia legends, epic songs and ballads with a focus on the thematic expressions of heroism and common values. These oral traditions, known in the popular culture of the region, reflect the dynamics of socio-political developments and the moral codes and traditions of pre-modern Balkan society.

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this literature study differs from other scientific disciplines by avoiding fixed methodologies oriented towards achieving specific objectives. Unlike scientific research in exact fields, the study of literature does not aim to ascertain scientific truths, but rather seeks to discover literary truths within the realm of artistic and non-scientific expression. With the formalization of literary studies, the methods of literature analysis were also developed. This means that the science of literature has evolved according to epistemological criteria, which include outlining its theses, applying appropriate methodologies, using methods appropriate to the subject of study, and establishing a clear methodological framework, along with the literature. In our attempt to explore common motifs present in legends within Albanian, Bosnian, Macedonian and Croatian folklore in the context of Balkan studies, we aim to adopt a methodological approach that integrates phenomenological and comparative methods. Why we used these two methods: To find common elements, we compared the themes, figurative language, cultural contexts of legends known to neighboring peoples. We have used this combination of methods because they have helped us to derive and present research results based on our experience and to identify the similarities and differences of Balkan legends and epic songs. As the German philosopher, who is considered the founder of the phenomenological method, Edmund Husserl, in the field of literary analysis, he perceives the interpretation of literary texts as closely related to the reader's previous experiences and

¹ Adela Peeva, *Whose Is This Song?* https://www.imdb.com/video/vi430752281/?playlistId=tto387926&ref_=tt_ov_vi
² J. D. A. Widdowson, *Folklore Studies in English Higher Education: Lost Cause or New Opportunity?*, *Folklore* 121 (August 2010): 125-142 ISSN 0015-587X print; 1469-8315 online/10/020125-18; Routledge Journals; Taylor & Francis 2010 The Folklore Society DOI: 10.1080/0015587X.2010.481145, <https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/0015587X.2010.481145>, p 125

knowledge. This approach acknowledges the central role that individual consciousness plays in understanding and perceiving the phenomena described in literary works. It assumes that the reader's personal background, experiences and existing knowledge significantly influence the interpretation of the text, thereby shaping their understanding of its themes, characters and motives. Recognizing the subjective nature of literary interpretation and the inherent variability in readers' responses, this style of research underscores the importance of considering the reader's unique perspective as a fundamental aspect of understanding and analyzing literary texts.³

Relying on this method, we have tried to analyze the messages, what the narrator is conveying through this legend, and we have found commonalities and differences between the messages of the narrator of the legend in the Albanian culture and the southern Slavs. We have further analyzed the characters, the symbolic language in order to draw results that these legends or epic songs deal with common themes such as heroism, the sacrifice of brother for sister and sister for brother, as well as keeping the promise known in the Albanian culture as "besa", the promise that the brother gave to his mother and sister (sister with seven brothers). We have tried to analyze the epic songs in the cultural contexts of how they can reflect the struggles of the peoples, as we have the songs about the heroics of "Gjergj Elez Alia", an epic song known in Albanian folklore, but also in Bosnian folklore.

How do we choose these legends and epic songs and not others? Themes and motifs, for example, we analyzed how cultures treat the mentioned themes or how they portray heroes, moral dilemmas or family relationships between sister and brother. We have compared how certain motifs are treated, for example mountains, what they symbolize, are they places of danger or safety, then the motif of love and revenge, how these motifs are treated in the cultures of neighboring Balkan peoples. Finally, we presented the results for possible cultural influences on the Balkan peoples, highlighting the unique elements of the legends and epic songs of each culture.

3. Crossroads of Balkan Cultural Studies

Our research is carried out in the framework of Balkan folkloric cultural studies, since we believe that these studies are important due to the fact that they have a supporting role for the study of other social disciplines in the Balkans, especially in the countries of the Western Balkans. Studies on the Balkans in different contexts have deepened in the 20th century and continued in the 21st century. In our research, we single out the book of the Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova, included in the book "Imaginary Balkan" - "Imaginary Balkan", where she brings the results of the research of the Balkan journey that are oriented towards the influence of the other in the general literary creations, it should be seen and studied and the development of Albanian literature within this context. However, in this article, we focus only on the part of popular literature, on epic songs and legends that are considered to have a common Balkan origin.⁴

Within the literary field, as we mentioned above, our research efforts have mainly focused on legends, epic songs and ballads that are claimed to have a common Balkan origin. This thematic focus reflects our commitment to explore the cultural heritage and collective narratives that permeate a part of Balkan society. We aim to discuss the cross-cultural interconnections and exchanges that have shaped Balkan folklore and identity over time by examining these popular literary forms. Through our analyses, we attempt to shed light on the complex interplay between oral traditions, regional thematic variations, and transnational influences within the rich literary landscape of the Balkans through folklore. In addition to thematic comparisons, we have also examined the transformation of

³ Richard James Calhoun, *Existentialism, Phenomenology, and Literary Theory*, Published by: South Atlantic Modern Language Association Stable URL: <http://ëëë.jstor.org/stable/3196789>

⁴ Gjergj Shuka, *Tridhjetë legjenda dhe këngë ballkanike - Studime mbi origjinën historike*, Naimi, Tiranë, 2015.

motifs in Albanian and neighboring Balkan epics and ballads, relying on international research on types and motifs (Aarne-Thompson-Uther). According to the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification system, we have analyzed the systematic examination of common motifs in the heroes of epic songs and ballads. Through this analysis, we have noticed that it is difficult to attribute ownership to these folklore treasures due to the common narrative and thematic elements of the motifs. For example, heroes like Muji and Halili, with their heroic actions reflect common archetypes found throughout the region with the motif of their heroics. While the motive for the duel between the hero and the dragon (the fight of good against evil and the victory of good) appear in the Albanian ballad of Gjergj Elez Ali, the Bosnian ballad of Alije Đerzeleza and the Macedonian Bolani Dojčin. These narratives, we can say, are unique in their cultural expressions, but nevertheless share essential common elements.

Through this site we have also analyzed the motif of loyalty to brothers and sisters, especially the theme of the only sister and her brothers, known in Albanian folklore as a sister and her seven brothers, while in Croatian folklore one sister and her nine brothers, further illustrates the widespread cultural ties throughout the Balkans. If we classify it as a motive according to Aarne-Thompson-Uther, we can categorize it as the brother who does not forget his sister or the sister who is looking for her brother. Precisely through this approach, we emphasize how the common motifs of epic, legend and ballad in the Balkans transcend national borders, but reinforce the idea of common cultural heritage.

While there are obvious parallels between Albanian folklore and wider Balkan legends, significant differences also emerge, reflecting the unique historical and social trajectories experienced by Balkan peoples over the centuries. We examine the differences and similarities by examining the thematic nuances and motifs in a comparative perspective, between Albanian folklore and its relations with the folklore of neighboring peoples.

4. From Oral Tradition to Literary Heritage of Balkan

The Balkans, due to its strategic location, has been a crossroads of different civilizations and cultures throughout history, including influences from the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman empires. Consequently, Balkan folk literature often reflects this mix of cultural influences, as we have presented in our analysis. Which not only have an impact on the cultural life, but also the literary life, as everywhere in the world. Numerous studies have highlighted the widespread influence of folklore in contemporary literature, with fairy tales and legends serving as prominent intertexts for contemporary writers. This phenomenon, called often referred to as the 'fairy tale generation'.⁵

Balkan legends originate from the turbulent history that has constantly characterized these countries, as well as from the wars, battles and mysteries that have traversed these lands. Even the genre of heroic epics emerged as a distinctive form dedicated exclusively to commemorating glorious battles and legendary figures. Moreover, Balkan folklore is full of mythical and legendary stories, ranging from supernatural beings to gods, heroes, monsters that we have analyzed in this paper. These narratives often serve as explanations for natural phenomena, historical events or cultural customs, providing an insight into the collective imagination of Balkan societies, in this case those of the Western Balkans.

Our research paper focuses especially on Albanian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Korat folklore and only an analysis of Macedonian folklore. Our aim is to find commonalities and obvious differences in the types of legends, epic songs and ballads, as three very popular genres in these cultural traditions.

⁵ Binney, S.H., 2018. "How 'the Old Stories Persist': Folklore in Literature after Postmodernism." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, 6(2): 5, pp. 1–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/c21.69>, p.2

By examining the convergence and divergence of folklore motifs in these regions, we aim to elucidate the complex interplay between cultural heritage and regional identity within the wider context of Balkan folklore.

5. Folklore Literature as a Reflection of Balkan Identity

Our research has been challenging as the observed similarity between epics, ballads and legends across the Balkan countries does not allow us to pinpoint their place of origin or affiliation. These approximations are attributed to various historical, cultural and linguistic factors that have shaped the region over the centuries, as the Balkan states have a long history of interaction, including conquests, but also cultural exchanges, which have led to the mixing and intertwining of folklore traditions. Analyzed from this perspective, Albanian folklore has considerable potential for comparative research with Bosnian, Macedonian and Croatian folklore. Epics have dynamics of the development of events and mythic heroism, for this reason they are close to the oldest Herzegovinian songs of the Bosnian people. Bosnian and Albanian epics are both oral traditions told in different languages, but they share many similar elements. For example, both emphasize the importance of honor and respect for family members such as mothers and sisters. In these stories, the heroes always keep their promises.

In the Albanian epic, the stories about heroes like Muji and Halili are among the most important in the entire cycle of Kreshnik songs. These heroes, along with their stories, are also found in the Bosnian epic. It is even surprising how similar are the values of the heroes in the songs of the two Balkan peoples today. For example, a comparison of Albanian and Bosnian folklore is the character traits of epic heroes, such as the courage of the brave Kreshniks in the epic song "The Marriage of Halil".

"The Marriage of Halil", known as one of the Albanian folklore masterpieces, has as its central theme Halil's determination to marry outside his village and tribe. He confesses to his brother and brave friends about his love for Tanusha, Krajli's daughter. Halil embarks on a journey to kidnap Krajli's daughter, facing many trials along the way. In the end, he is captured by Krajli and sentenced to death. At this point, reviews of Balkan folklore highlight the courageous traits displayed by the hero of the Bosnian epic song of the same name. Furthermore, the event takes place equally in the songs of the two peoples, Albanian and Bosnian. Halil is captured by Krajlin and sentenced. When asked by Krajli about his feelings as death approaches, the hero responds with words similar to those expressed in the lines of the Shipe and Bosnian song, as follows:

Verses from the folklore song "Halilova ženidba" in the Bosnian language:

Nije strašan smrtni čas.

Smrt dođe kad izgubiš prijatelja,

Smrt dođe kad besu prekršiš...

Verses from the folklore song "Martesa e Halili" in the Albanian language:

Pa nigjo, more Krajle Kapedane!

S'a ngusht njeri deri n'ditë të dekës

Deka vjen mbas mikut t'pre,

Deka vjen mbas besës s'thyme...

Listen, Krajle Kapedane!

How difficult it is for a person in the last moments of life, on the day of death

Death comes after a friend betrays you...

(Verses in English language translated)

In Boshnjak's epic, the heroes Mujo and Halil Hrnjica appear as the most honored heroes of the Hercegovina epic.⁶ Meanwhile, the heroes Muji and Halili from the Albanian epic are especially sung in regions such as Malsi e Madh, Dukagjin, Kosovo. These songs are particularly prevalent in the northern regions of the country, including the areas around the Drin River and extending to the northwest coast. Currently, demographic changes have led to the presence of these stories in places like Kruja, Dures and Lushnje, mainly among the old Kosovar settlers in these provinces. The sagas of the Kreshniks are transmitted orally to the Albanian highlanders, passed down from generation to generation, often accompanied by the traditional musical instrument known as the lahuta.

In the Albanian and Bosnian epic, there is also a well-known song whose title bears the name of the protagonist Gjergj Elez Alija in Albanian or Alije Đerzeleza in Bosnian. In the Bosnian epic in general, Đerzeleza is a worthy warrior of the Sultan who earned his merits in the battles for the expansion of the Empire and is even considered the greatest hero, who was called to defend his holy center and take part in the conquest campaigns, for example, in Baghdad:

*na prsima carevi nikšani,
more biti neko vod Stambola,
vod Stambola stojna carigrada.
Da je soja turskoga sultana, 7
(Verses in Bosnian language)*

*on the chest the emperor's nikshans,
must be someone platoon Istanbul,
platoon of Istanbul, station of Constantinople.
That it is the seed of the Turkish sultan
(Verses in English language)*

In the Albanian version Gjergj Elez Alia emerges as a rare and valiant figure, fighting fiercely to defend his country, home, and sister's honor. Despite sustaining nine grave wounds in battle against foreign oppressors, he lies on his deathbed, tended to by his sister as both their parents have passed away. However, their peaceful existence is disrupted by the arrival of a conqueror named "Bajloz i zi" from the sea. This tyrant ravages the land, slaughtering courageous warriors and dishonoring maidens with impunity. Gjergj Elez Alia, recognizing the threat to his family's honor, confronts with "Bajloz i zi" in a physical, ultimately leading to the latter's demise.

*P'a prej vorrit, Gjergj, ti konke çue...?
Pse me m'qitë, bre burrë, n'ket fushë t'mejdanit?
Sa mirë trimi i ka përgjegjë balozit:
- Të lumët goja, baloz, mirë po thue!
Qe nandë vjet qi kam marrë rrugn e vorrit,
Pak pa mrrijtë baloz, ti m'ke dredhue.
M'ke lypë motrën...
Se ne t'parët nji kanu na kanë lanë:
Kurr balozit motrën mos m'ja dhanë,*

⁶ Mirsad Kunić, *Usmeno Pamćenje i Zaborav Krajiška epika i njeni junaci*, Centar za kulturu i obrazovanje Tešanj, 2012 p.73.

⁷ Mirsad Kunić, *Usmeno Pamćenje i Zaborav Krajiška epika i njeni junaci*, Centar za kulturu i obrazovanje Tešanj, 2012 p.130.

*Për pa u pre n'at fushën e mejdanit!*⁸
(Verses in Albanian language)

*George rose from the grave
Why did you banish me as a man to this dueling field?
How well the brave answered the Baloz:
Baloz, you said it very well
For nine years I have been bedridden and suffering from serious illnesses
You, Baloz, woke me up and challenged me to a duel
Because you want to kidnap my sister...
But our ancestors left us a legacy
They said: Never give sisters to Baloz,
but let's fight with her on the dueling field
(Verses in English language)*

Per the findings of scholarly investigation of Albanian folklore, Gjergj Elez Alia of the Albanian epic has no similarity with the Bosnian epic except for the name of the hero, while in terms of the theme it is closer to the Macedonian epic, entitled *Bolani Dojčin*.⁹

*Jer ga Arap privatiti ne će
Bez Jelice baš tvoje sestrice;
A ču li me, bolestan Dojčine,
Ja ne mogu ljubiti' Arapina,
Ču li brate, za života tvoga.“
Tade reče bolani Dojčine:
Hej Solune, ognjem sagoreo!
De u tebe ne ima junaka,
Da iziđe Arapu na mejdan,
No mi ne bi umrijeti s mirom..¹⁰
(Verses in English language)*

*Because the Arab will not privatize it
Without your sister Jelica;
And did they hear me, sick Dojčine,
I can't kiss an Arab,
Do you hear, brother, in your lifetime.
Then the sick Dojčine said:
Hey Thessaloniki, burned by fire!
There is no hero in you,
To go out to the Arab at the Maidan,
But we would not die in peace..
(Verses in Macedonian language)*

6. The Ballad of the Sister with Seven Brothers or the Sister with Nine Brothers

An Intriguing relationship in Balkan folklore songs is relation between brother and sister. As we discussed above about the topic, when the sister is protected by the brother, but we also find ballads when the sister is left at the mercy of fate, such as the song in the Albanian language, Sister with seven brothers or in Croatian, sister with nine brothers. The care for the sister described in the

⁸ Bernardin Palaj dhe Donat Kurti, *Visaret e Kombit*, vol. II, Tiranë, 1937, p. 42-48

⁹ Gjergj Zheji, *Folklori shqiptar*, Argeta-LMG, Tiranë, 1998, p.166

¹⁰ Bolani Dojčin pjesme, <https://www.prelepapoezija.com/bolani-dojcin/>

following song is also closely related to the fulfillment of a commitment. The ballad " Motra me shtatë vllazën" in the Albanian version and "Braća i sestra" in the Croatian version. The song is characterized by the same motive, that of fulfilling the promise of the younger brother to bring his sister to his mother after she is married off far away. In both stories, after the sister got married, a tragedy struck the family, and all the brothers passed away. The youngest brother, hearing his mother's voice urging him to promise to bring the girl back when necessary, rises from the grave and fulfills his promise. This legend highlights the significance of keeping one's word within the family and the care that a son has for his mother and a brother for his sister.

Folklore song in Albanian featuring a sister and her seven brothers:

O, lum për ty;
bre, ore, i lumi Zot-e, heu! O, po ku jâ:n-e shta:t vllaznit e mî:-e, heu!
O, i motër t'mi:r-e vllaznit, po, e kain, heu!
E, jau ka:n ly:p, tho:t, begle:r e zotni.
O, çka po tho:t, he, motra po e shkret-e, heu: -
O, merrnie vesh-e, vllazën, po u ka thân, heu!
O, pasha i Zot, po, mua ç'i m'ka dhân, heu!
O, dua hyzmet-e, vllazën, për me u bâ:, heu!
O, nuk dua bu:rr, bre, vllazën, për me ma:rr, heu!
O, Zo ku ish kiê:n, bre, Beg-o Brahim Begu, heu!
E, por, n'Utbi:n, bre, n'konak-e u ka ra:, heu!
O, por, çat çik-e, vllazne, po jau lyp-e, heu!
E, shumo rixhê-e, ej, Begu-e u ka bâ:, heu!
Oh, ku, o, me i pa: shta:t vllaznit e shkret:t: heu!
O, rêd me rêd, po, tu motra-e po shko:jn, heu!
O, shu:m rixhê-e, he, motërs-e po i bajshin, heu!
O, ku:rr dobi:, he, me tâ nuk u bâ, hee-u!
E, po ku ish kiê:n, he, vllau-e ma i vogli, hee-u!
O, po ay për ê:mn-e Aga Isuf Aga, hee-u!
O, po ay tu motra, po, Isufi-e po shko, hee-u!
O, shu:m rixhê-e, he, motrës-e po i bâ: hee-u!
O, merre, motër, Beg-e Brahim Begun, hee-u!
O, diç po dua, motër, po me t'thân, hee-u,
O, por, na jem-e shta:t vllazën t'mi:r, hee-u,
O, por, shta:t nuse, mo:tr-e, kur t'i marrim, hee-u,
O, po ato ty:-e, he, motër, t'keshin, hee-u,
O, nuk t'tho:n vllazne hyzmet-e u ke bâ:, hee-u,
O, po ato t'tho:n, he, çyçe, he, je kiên, hee-u,
O, kurkush ty:-e, çik-e, nuk t'anko, hee-u.
O, po a m'digio e motër e Hajku:n-e, hee-e
O, diç po dua, po, motër, me t'thân, hee-e,
O, merre, motër, Beg-e Brahim Begun, hee-e,
O, po shta:t vllazën, motër, ç'i jem, hee-e,
O, për xhî:th ja:v-e ka nja po t'vi:m, hee-e,
E, po ta ap-e i be:s-e, por, t'Zotit, hee-e,
E, kur t'bâhet taman po i ja:v, hee-e,
O, ka me t'a:rdh Age Isuf Aga, hee-e!
O, ku m'e pa:-e Hajkunën e Ba:rdh, hee-e, Ou, çat-he:r mêden, po, vllau e ja the, hee-e,
O, çat-he:r fjalën, he, vllaut e ja êp, hee-e.
O, Isuf Aga, he, n'ku:ll-e ç'i shkojke, hee-e.
O, çaty, o, Begut për hajr e ja bâjke, hee-e!

He, çyr, o, çka bâ, bre, Beg-e Brahim Begu, hee-e,
O, po i ka xje:rr, po, pêsçid-e dukat, hee-u,
E, po ka i xje:rr, he, shami:, po, una:z, hee-u,
E, përr tri:, o, ja:v, he, vaden po ja da, hee-u.
E, çat-he:r
Begu çua e kiêka kiê:n, hee-u,
Çat-he:r Begu, po, n'kâ:m-e na u çua,
Ë, çata vllazën Begun p'e përcjellin,
E, n'shpi: t'vet, he,
Begu, he, â ra:.
Ani-e, ka njâ, more, po, ditt-e po shko:jn,
E, o, vadjâ e nuses meihe:r po vje.
E, po i thî:rr Begu treçid-e dasmo:r,
Ani, por, tu miku-o Begu-e i çoi.
O, po, me i pa: shta:t vlla:zn-e t'mi:r:;
Hej, muhabet, haj, po shu:m-e po u bâ:jn,
Ehe, po n'koçi:-e motrën-e jau shtî:n.
E, tek jâ:n çua, he, treçid-e dasmo:r,
He, o, çata vllazn-e, çaty, e i përcjellin.
E çka bâ hej,
A:ge Isuf Aga:
He, o, po i përcjell dej n'maje t'bje:shks,
Heje, çat-he:r diali, po, dre:dh-e çî â,
E, po, ka psy;-e bie:shkve pjedipo:sht;
He, n'xhy:s t'bje:shks, at-he:r, kur bje,
.....
E, shta:t haxhi-e përr
Çabe jâin nis, Hej, i lumi Zot-e derxhën jau ka çua,
E, me harç tân, bre, po, n'dhe:-e i kem shti:;
Eu, përr shta:t ja:v, he, ka nja-e jan de k.
E, ah ku je:, bre Hajku:n, ore motër!
Hajt n'ku:ll-e, motër, përr me hî:;
E se dova:, he, vorreve po u bâj!
O, ou, po, Isuf Aga tu vorri-e â da:ı,
Ou, kjo Hajkuna te kulla-e â vo:jt.
E, i lumi Zot-e, o, hak-e çî â;
Eu, pej-o vorrit zogu-e â da:ı,
E, po, m'â hî:, he, A:g-e Isuf Aga, E, i lumi, o, Zot-e, vorrin e ka pshe:l.

E, fill n'kalê:, he, çika, po, â vo:jt,
E, po ma kçy:r-e oborrin e vet,
E, plot me ba:r, he, oborri-e â bu:sh,
Ej, me vet-veti, çika, po kujto:
E, o, jarabil-e, ky ba:r-e çka â?
E, po, a thua vllaznit pse kshtu e ka:n rue:jt,
E, po, oborri, besa, me u barua?»
E, ou, m'â hi:p-e shkallave përpje:t,
E, dej te giuni, ehe, pluhni-e n'to.
E, me vet-veti Hajkuna-o po flet:
E, po, ku ini-e shta:t vllazën-e t'mî:!
E, ou, shta:t nuse ju-e i kini ma:rr, Ej, xhî:th kët pluhën-e n'shkalla e ka:n lâ:n?»?

E, de:rn e o:ds-e çika kur e çeli,
E, tu oxhaku nâ:nn-e e ki xhe:t,
E, at-he:r nâna me go:j-e ki fo:l: -
E kush je: ti-e de:rn-e ç'i p'e çe:!?
E, at-he:r çika me go:j-e po flet: -
E, û jâ, po, Hajkuna e Bardh!
Eu, ku jân nâ:n, he, shta:t vllazën e t'mî;
E, po ku jân, he, shta:t nuset e tyne?
E, nâna e vet-e at-he:r i ka thân: -
E, po t'shta:tt-e je:t-e ka:n drrua,
E, astenja, he, loke, s'jan martua!
E, po ty: ktu, he, lum nana-e, kush t'prûni?
Po, â dre:dh, he, çika-e i ka thân:
E, ou, mua m'pruni A:g-e Isuf Aga!
E, at-he:r nâna ç:ikn e p'e përve:t: -
E, po, Isufi, lum nâna-e, çka u bâ:?
E, oh, m'a dre:dh-e çika-e po m'i tho:t:
E, o, tu vorret, bre, nâ:n-e u dalua,
E, o, dova:, he, vorreve me u bâ:!
Hej, nâna e shkret, ehe, n'kâ:m-e na u çua:
E, ama dorën-e, ç:k-e, lum nâna, -
E, e tu vorri, he, û t'shkoj!
E, at-he:r dorën-e çika-e ja êp,
E, ou, përdere, he, da:l-e ç'i jâ:n,
E, po, tu vorret-e ba:shk -e jâ:n shkua,
E, as nuk ka, he, Isuf as kurkush!
E, ah m'e pa:, more, i çu:d-e t'vo:gl-e:
O, po, çka foli nâna, po, e shkret: -
E, i lumi Zot, ou, hak e ç'i je:,
E, me m'bâ: mua, besa, gugu-isuf,
E, me m'bâ: mua, besa, gugu-istref!
O, e i lumi Zot-e, ou, hak-e ç'i â,
E, aty shpêd, he, nânën e ka bâ:,
E, <<gugu-isuf>> e xhithmo:n-e ç'i tho:t!
E, «gugu-istref» e xhithmo:n-e ç'i tho:t!
E, po çka foli Hajkuna e Ba:rdh:,
E, e n'dova:, he, duert-e i çoi:
O, i lumi Zot-e, ou, hak-e ç'i je:,
E, me m'bâ:, mua, çyçe-e përrrêma,
E, çyçja û, xhithmo:n-e me bâ:,
E, xhithmo:n <<ku-ku>, he, jeta-e me m'shkua!
E, i lumi Zot, ou, hak-e ç'i â, 280 E, edhe, ata, he, çyçe-e i ki bâ:!
E, kshtu ka:n thân, he, atje s'jem kiên,
He, o, mos me kiên, bre, hallku nuk e kto:jn, hee-o!"

¹¹ Zymer Ujkan Neziri, Motra me shtatë vllazën, Epika legjendare e Rugovës, Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës, Prishtinë, 1997, p. 251-261

Interpretation of the meaning of the Albanian ballad "Sister with seven brothers", in English language:

The verses begin by describing the sister's mourning for her seven brothers: "Oh God, where are my seven brothers?"

An only sister crying for her brothers."

The narrative then describes the separation of the sister from her brothers and mother as she marries far from home:

Brahim Beg, a wealthy gentleman living miles away from the girl's house, asks for the hand of the sister of seven brothers. The girl refuses, complaining that it is too far, and she won't be able to visit her mother as often as she wants. Her younger brother Yusufi begs her to accept the proposal, promising that he will visit and bring her to their mother whenever she wants. Yusufi gave his word to his mother that whenever she wanted to see her daughter, he would bring her.

Years passed, and her brothers died one by one. The poverty-stricken mother cried and one night lit a candle on the graves of her seven sons. When she reached Yusufi's grave, she lit two candles and, in pain, called out to her dead son, "Where is your promise? Now who will bring me my daughter?"

That night, Yusufi rose from his grave, turned his coffin into a horse, and flew with the wind across unknown places until he reached the village where his beloved sister lived. He saw her children playing and asked them where their mother was. When she saw her brother, she hugged him tightly. He asked her to get on the horse with him to take her to their mother, dressed as she was.

During the journey, birds circled them, saying, "The dead ride with the living." The sister asked Yusufi many questions about his moldy clothes, dusty hair, and pale appearance. He explained that it was the journey that made him look that way.

As they approached the village, Yusufi asked his sister to continue on foot towards the house while he made an excuse to return to his grave. When she reached the house, she saw all the lights off and knocked on the door. Her mother asked who was knocking so late. "It's me, your daughter!" she replied. Her mother asked, "Who brought you here?" She answered, "Yusufi."

The mother then asked where Yusufi was. The girl said he had stopped at the cemetery. They went to find him, but Yusufi was not there, nor did they see anything. The mother began to pray, "Oh God, make me Gugu Isuf," a bird known in folklore as Gugu-Isuf. From her pain, she turned into a bird forever.

The story underscores the importance of keeping promises, exemplified by Yusufi, who rose from the grave to fulfill his promise to his sister and mother.

Folklore song in Croats featuring a sister and her nine brothers:

*Rani majka devet mili sina
I desetu šćercu mljezinicu;
Ranila ih dok ih odranila,
Dokle bili sini na ženidbu,
A đevojka bila na udaju,
Nju mi prose mlogi prosioci
Jedno bane, drugo dženerale,
Treće prosi iz sela komšija
Majka daje u selo komšiji,
Braća daju s preko mora banu,
Još su braća sestri besjedila:
Ja ti pođi, naša mila sejo,
Ja ti pođi s preko mora banu,
Mi ćemo te često pohoditi:
U godini svakoga mjeseca,
U mjesecu svake nedeljice."*

To je sestra braću poslušala,
Ona pođe s preko mora banu.
Al' da vidiš čuda velikoga!
Ja Bog pušća od sebe moriju,
Te pomori devet milih brata,
Sama osta samorana majka.
Tako stade tri godine dana.
Ljuto pišti sestrica Jelica:
Mili Bože, čuda velikoga!
Što sam vrlo braći zgriješila,
Te me braća pohoditi ne će?“
Nju mi kore mloge jetrvice:
Kučko jedna, naša jetrvice!
Ti si vrlo braći omrznula,
Te te braća pohoditi ne će.“
Ljuto pišti sestrica Jelica,
Ljuto pišti jutrom i večerom.
Al' se milu Bogu ražalilo,
Pa on posla dva svoja anđela:
Id'te dolje, dva moja anđela,
Do bijela groba Jovanova,
Jovanova, brata najmlađega,
Vašijem ga duhom zadanite,
Od groba mu konja načinite,
Od zemljice mijes'te kolače,
Od pokrova režite darove;
Spremite ga sestri u pohode.
Hitro idu dva Božja anđela
Do bijela groba Jovanova,
Od groba mu konja načiniše,
Njinijem ga duhom zadanuše,
Od zemljice mijese kolače,
Od pokrova rezaše darove;
Spremiše ga sestri u pohode.
Hitro ide nejačak Jovane;
Kad je bio dvoru na pomolu,
Daleko ga seja ugledala,
Malo bliže pred njeg' išetala,
Od žalosti vrlo zaplakala,
Ruke šire, u lice se ljube;
Pa je seja bratu besjedila:
Jeste l' mi se, brate, zatjecali,
„Kad ste mene mladu udavali,
Da ćete me često pohoditi:
U godini svakoga mjeseca,
U mjesecu svake neđeljice?
„Evo danas tri godine dana
Nijeste me jošte pohodili!“
Još je njemu seja besjedila:
Što si tako, brate, potavnjeo
Baš kan' da si pod zemljicom bio?“
Besjedi joj nejačak Jovane:
Šuti, sejo, ako Boga znadeš!
Mene jeste golema nevolja:
Dok sam osam brata oženio,
I dvorio osam milih snaha;
A kako se braća iženiše,

Devet b'jelih kuća načinismo;
Za to sam ti pocrnjeo, sejo.“
I on bio tri bijela dana.
Oprema se sestrice Jelica,
I oprema gospodske darove,
Da daruje braću i snašice:
Braći reže svilene košulje,
A snahama burme i prstenje.
Al' je Jovo vrlo ustavljaše:
Ti ne idi, moja mila sejo,
Dok još braće u pohode dođe.“
Al' Jelica ostanuti ne će;
Ona spremi gospodske darove;
Otale se Jovo podigao
I sa šnjime sestrice Jelica.
A kad blizu dvora dolaziše,
Kod dvora je prebijela crkva.
Pa besjedi nejačak Jovane:
Ti počekaj, moja mila sejo,
Dok ja odem za bijelu crkvu:
Kad smo srednjeg brata oženili,
Ja sam zlatan prsten izgubio,
Da potražim, moja mila sejo.“
Ode u grob nejačak Jovane,
A ostade sestrice Jelica
Čekajući nejačka Jovana.
Čekala ga, pa ga potražila,
Al' kod crkve mlogo novo groblje:
Tu se odmah jadu osjetila,
De j' umr'o nejačak Jovane.
Hitro ide dvoru bijelome;
Kad je blizu dvora dolazila,
Al' u dvoru kuka kukavica;
To ne bila sinja kukavica,
Veće njina ostarila majka.
A Jelica na vrata dolazi,
Ona viče iz grla bijela:
Jadna majko, otvori mi vrata.“
Stara majka iz dvora besjedi:
Id' odatle, od Boga morijo,
Devet si mi sina umorila,
I men' hoćeš ostarilu majku?
A Jelica bila besjedila:
Jadna majko, otvori mi vrata,
Ovo nije od Boga morija,
„Već Jelica tvoja mila šćerca.“
Pa joj majka otvorila vrata,
Zakukaše, kano kukavice,
Rukama se b'jelim zagrliše,
Obje mrtve na zemlju padoše.¹²

¹² „Braća i sestra” folkore songs, https://www.prelepapoezija.com/braca-i-sestra/?fbclid=IwZXhobgNhZW0CMTAAARiPgNfv90pUeWY-hAovRypfsx6x8rtE6_Izn5yEs_7xkdfE38ngwGl6BgM_aem_ASbFdSsWDDohl1_009smeQ4Uy_x1MAN_R6DoGkbnjr2CY_g7jgR86k1X-oCijFYyKbsEEVvmzqxL7N-tFgsF6_5PvG

Interpretation of the meaning of the Croation balad "Sister with nine brothers", in English language:

A mother feeds her nine dear sons and her tenth child, a little maiden. She raises them until they are ready for marriage, with the sons to marry and the daughter to be wed. Many suitors come for her, one from Ban, another from General, and another from a neighboring village. The mother chooses the suitor from the neighboring village, while the brothers give her to the suitor from across the sea. The brothers advise her: "Go, our dear sister, with the suitor from across the sea. We will visit you often: every month of the year, every week of the month." The sister listens to her brothers and goes with the suitor from across the sea. But behold a great wonder! God sends a plague that kills nine of the dear brothers, leaving the mother alone and bereft. Three years pass. The sister Jelica cries out in grief: "Dear God, what a great wonder! Have I done so wrong to my brothers that they will not visit me?" The mother-in-law reproaches her: "You wicked one, our sister-in-law! You have become so hated by your brothers that they will not visit you." Sister Jelica cries bitterly, both morning and evening. But God, moved by pity, sends two of His angels: "Go down, my two angels, to the white grave of John, the youngest brother. Prepare a horse from the grave, make cakes from the earth, and cut gifts from the cover. Prepare him to visit his sister." The two angels hurry to the white grave of John, make a horse from the grave, prepare cakes from the earth, and cut gifts from the cover. They get him ready to visit his sister. John's youth hurries along. When he is nearing the palace, his sister sees him from afar, comes closer to him, and cries greatly from sorrow. She opens her arms and kisses his face. Then she speaks to her brother: "Did you not say when you were marrying me that you would visit me often: every month of the year, every week of the month? Today marks three years and you have not yet visited me!" She also asks him: "Why have you delayed, brother? Were you really under the earth?" John replies: "Be quiet, sister, if you know God! I have had great troubles: I married off eight brothers and courted eight dear sisters-in-law. After my brothers married, we built nine white houses. That is why I have become dark, sister." He remains for three days. Sister Jelica prepares gifts for the brothers and sisters-in-law: silk shirts for the brothers and rings and bracelets for the sisters-in-law. But John holds her back: "Do not go, my dear sister, until my brothers come to visit." But Jelica would not stay; she prepares the gifts and leaves with John. As they approach the palace, they see a white church. John says: "Wait, my dear sister, until I go to the white church. When we married the middle brother, I lost a golden ring. I need to find it." He goes to the grave, and Jelica stays waiting for him. She waits, looks for him, but finds a new graveyard by the church. There she feels sorrow where John has died. She hurries to the white palace; when she comes close to it, she hears a cuckoo's cry, but it is not a young cuckoo, but their aged mother. Jelica comes to the door and calls out: "Poor mother, open the door for me. The suffering mother from within says: Leave from here, you bring God's plague. You have killed nine of my sons and now you want to trouble me, the old mother?" Jelica replies: The suffering mother, open the door for me. This is not God's plague but Jelica, your dear daughter. The mother opens the door. They cry out and embrace each other, and both fall to the ground.

7. Common and Differences Elements in the Ballad of Two Nations: Albanian and Croatian

The basic theme and keeping the promise. Both ballads emphasize the strong emotional bond between a sister and her brothers, highlighting the pain of separation due to marriage. Promises and their fulfillment are related to the central theme. In the Albanian ballad, Yusufi promises to visit his sister and fulfill his mother's wishes, while in the second ballad the brothers promise to visit their sister regularly. The supernatural elements identified in the two ballads are: Joseph rises from the grave to keep his promise in the Albanian ballad, while in the second ballad, God sends angels to prepare John to visit his sister from the grave. Family tragedy in two ballads. Both stories involve the tragic loss of brothers. In the Albanian ballad, the brothers die one by one, just like in the second ballad. Mother's pain is portrayed in both ballads. In the Albanian ballad, the mother cries and lights

candles on the sons' graves, while in the second ballad, the mother is left alone after losing her sons. The return of a dead brother is the main motif in the two ballads. Joseph rises to take his sister to their mother in the Albanian ballad, and John is sent by angels to visit his sister in the second ballad. The differences are in the number of brothers: The Albanian ballad contains seven brothers, while the second ballad includes nine brothers. The initiator of the marriage also stands out, since in the Albanian ballad, a rich gentleman, Brahim Beg, proposes marriage. In the second ballad, the mother and brothers choose a suitor for their sister. Promises and promise keepers. In the Albanian ballad, Yusufi makes and tries to keep his promise. In the second ballad, all the brothers together promise to visit their sister, but only John fulfills the promise after death. The ending also differs, as the Albanian ballad ends with the mother turning into a bird out of her grief. The second ballad ends with Jelica and her mother reunited and embracing, both falling to the ground in sorrow. Here we also see special cultural elements, such as: the Albanian ballad includes special cultural elements such as the concept of "Besa", an oath celebrated in Albanian folklore. The second ballad, although rich in cultural context, focuses more on the interaction between the sister and her deceased brother without a specific cultural term such as "Besa".

8. Conclusion

In our attempt to discover the cultural similarities and differences of Balkan folklore (especially in the countries presented in this article) and by categorizing common elements such as motifs, themes and narrative structures, we estimate that the attribution of ownership of epic songs, legends and ballads that we have analyzed is challenging because of the considerable overlap in these common elements. This similarity happened with the heroes who fight dragons: in Albanian folklore, Gjergj Elez Alia, in Bosnian folklore Alije Đerzeleza and in Macedonian Bolani Dojčin. All three show common motives, the protection of morals and the care of a sister towards a brother and vice versa. Similar are the motifs of the sister ballad with seven brothers, in the Albanian version and in the Croatian version with one sister and nine brothers, or the courage of the heroes of the Albanian and Bosnian epic song.

In summary, the comparison of Balkan epics, legends and ballads helps us learn more about the culture, history, stories and identity of the Western Balkan region, where it is very challenging to determine the origin of the oral folklore heritage.

References

- Adela Peeva, *Whose Is This Song?* https://www.imdb.com/video/vi430752281/?playlistId=tto387926&ref_tt_ov_vi
- Bernardin Palaj dhe Donat Kurti, *Visaret e Kombit*, vol. II, Tiranë, 1937.
- Binney, S.H., 2018. "How 'the Old Stories Persist': Folklore in Literature after Postmodernism." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings*, 6(2): 5, pp. 1-20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/c21.69>.
- Daniel G. Hoffman, Richard M. Dorson, Carvel Collins and John W. Ashton, *Folklore in Literature: A Symposium*, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Jan. - Mar., 1957, Vol. 70, No. 275 (Jan. - Mar., 1957), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/536498>.
- Gilles De Rapper, Pierre Sintès. *Të emërtosh dhe të klasifikosh në Ballkan*. Gilles de Rapper; Pierre Sintès. France. Fjala Publishing, 2015. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01451160/document>
- Gjergj Shuka, *Tridhjetë legjenda dhe këngë ballkanike - Studime mbi origjinën historike*, Naimi, Tiranë, 2015.
- Gjergj Zheji, *Folklori shqiptar*, Argeta-LMG, Tiranë, 1998.
- D. A. Widdowson, *Folklore Studies in English Higher Education: Lost Cause or New Opportunity?*, *Folklore* 121 (August 2010): 125-142. ISSN 0015-587X print; 1469-8315 online/10/020125-18; Routledge Journals; Taylor & Francis 2010. The Folklore Society DOI: 10.1080/0015587X.2010.481145, <https://doi-org.sheffield.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/0015587X.2010.481145>
- Senad Mičijević, *Zajednički Elementi Bošnjačko-Albanske Epike*, *Science Of Literature - Discussions And Articles*, Vol. 2 No. 2, Univerzitet 'Džemal Bijedić' Fakultet humanističkih nauka, Mostar, 2007.
- Mirsad Kunić, *Usmeno Pamćenje i Zaborav Krajiška epika i njeni junaci*, Centar za kulturu i obrazovanje, Tešanj, 2012.
- Momčilo Zlatanović, *Epske narodne pesme jugoistočne Srbije*, Vranje, 1987.
- Richard James Calhoun, *Existentialism, Phenomenology, and Literary Theory*, Published by: South Atlantic

Modern Language Association Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3196789>.

Румяна Станчева, Сравнително литературознание и балканистика, София, 2009, 5.

Zala Volcic, "Connecting the Disconnected: Balkan Culture Studies", *Journal of Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, Volume 10, 2013 – Issue 2-3.

Zymer Ujkan Neziri, *Epika legjendare e Rugovës*, Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës, Prishtinë, 1997.