

## **RECONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY TO DRITERO AGOLLI'S LITERARY APPROACH**

Votim Hanoli PhD student at UET

\*Lecturer in Faculty of Social Science; Department of Communication

European University of Tirana

\*Lecturer in Faculty of Education ; Department of Literature

University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës.

e-mail: [votimhanoli@hotmail.com](mailto:votimhanoli@hotmail.com)

### **Abstract:**

At a time when celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the history that wrote our independence in the eyes of the others, the world and beyond, when due to political (electoral), national and patriotic reasons, the national, national identity and extreme nationalism are becoming a more flaring issue, we will try to bring an approach to this issue in the works of Dritero Agolli, one of the most devoted writers and one of the brightest pens of Albanian literature, "*the good man of the mother land and mud*". Through this study, we will try to depict how Agolli sees, through the primordial theory, the theme of national identity in all the literary genres including poetry, prose, stories, novels etc, in different times and stages, either arranged or not by the Socialist Realism or Communist ideology, and even how he sees it in some of its latest works written during the post-communist period, when this concept and theory almost take completely different notes.

**Key words:** National identity, primordial, Socialist Realism, mother land, blood and honor



*“No dictatorship can invent a weapon to kill true literature. The invented weapons can only slow down a little bit the journey, but literature continues to walk. The writer should not be afraid of neither great critics nor shortsighted literary critics, that`s the only thing that is needed” .(Agolli :2006c)*

## **Introduction**

For Albanians, the issue of the national identity, the discussion and the thesis about it, has existed since a long time ago and at times it has been seen as an attempt for existence, and at other times as an attempt for statehood. But it has also been seen as an opportunity to express yourself in comparison with other contemporary nations and cultures (at any period of time). Since the XVII century, the national consciousness in Europe originated from the identified culture or folklore, where it is

seen clearer than anywhere else that in sub consciousness exists the idea that each of us must be encouraged to protect this variety of ourselves and accept our different belongings. Based on this context we may conclude with the hypothesis that Albanians themselves have had many chances to identify and glorify their national morality. As Kadare said...*the problem of Albanian understanding or misunderstanding other continents, is in essence the existence of understanding or misunderstanding themselves...*(Kadare 2006c,p.49), and recently there have been many cases where Albanians lacked these elements.

We are going to treat the issue of “building the Albanian identity in Dritero Agolli`s works”, as an aspect that shows clearly the tremendous contribution of the writer in formulating the dimensions of “being Albanian” in different times, and these dimensions together with the social conflicts are considered as part of the Albanian national identity. *“In a world that moves so fast, the memories of a common origin are of great importance”*.(Altermat 2002c, p.07).

It has already become a tradition that any time we speak about Dritero Agolli it is unlikely not to link his work with our land, nation, work, mud, cart and plow, because Dritero Agolli is a simple man with dignity. We say this trying to unify in him all these features in a single one, which is the profound desire of the nation to make the latter an identity on its own.

Knowing that the great writer Dritero Agolli has been part of the Albanian literature since over 50 years ago, as a writer with lots of dimensions and views, all these facts made us believe strongly that it is worth treating a problem which has been absent in the approach to his literary creation, a problem which intentionally or unintentionally seeks to verify that *“nationalism is the only religion of current times”*. (Lukas 2002c, p. 23). The latter is a notion against which the time has fought and still continues to ignore, without being able to assimilate it, and bringing in our minds the theory of Urs Altermat which he calls a French concept of the resistance and reaction

against injustices: "The essence of the so called French concept is *"assimilation" as a criterion that the nation puts in front of "the others eyes"*. (Altermat 2002c)<sup>1</sup>.

This study aims to show sides and angles about discovering and showing the awareness of being Albanian, from the perspective to Dritero Agolli, starting from the moment when it originated and began to have a tendency to be like that, so an independent Albanian identity. It also tries to show what's the importance of treating such a theme in such a transitory and problematic period of time. Based on this context we share the same opinion with Amin Malouf when he says that: *"Every human being, with no exception, is composed of a mixed identity. To understand this they may just ask themselves some questions about showing forgotten pieces and undoubted branches, and they will find themselves complex, special and irreplaceable"*. (Malouf, 2006c, p. 25).

Also, in this study we will try to reconsider a theory which in the period of the Socialist Realism created in the Albanians' mind the so called revolutionary spirit, which protects the existence of their national identity through false values (we dare to call them like this), those values which that system and doctrine imposed blindfold. The Socialist Realism has had an impact on theoretical studies rather than literary practices, but we can't say that it hasn't influenced it at all. As a result of Socialist Realism, in many literary works has bloomed schematization which has been the biggest wound of our literature, especially in the treatment of themes like work in factories, plants and cooperatives which were treated schematically. In these schematic works, novels, drama and movies, man was not portrayed in his complexity but its taste in the language of agitation and didactics which made literature sterile.

Agolli does this, in a period of dictatorship, through literary and communicative word and discourse, knowing the great risk and being conscious that *"No dictatorship can invent a weapon to kill true literature. The invented weapons can only slow down a little bit the journey, but literature continues to walk. The writer should not be*

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<sup>1</sup> To read more on this reasoning that makes Urs Altermat theory in his book "Ethno nationalism in Europe" in 2002, Phoenix.

*afraid of neither great critics nor shortsighted literary critics, that's the only thing that is needed". (Agolli, 2006c).*

These dimensions, in his literary works are unfolded in the three literary genres, often in an original form which goes beyond the time when they were written, which was a time restricted by ideology and sociology. If in its beginnings the issue of identity was considered more like an ideological theory, with his works Agolli continues the projection of Albania becoming "*a poet of 28000 km<sup>2</sup>*", but with the difference that he accepts the contradiction and the fact that the concept has begun to change. He, diplomatically, draws himself back from ideology and in his literature will be noticed a new tradition which tries to release the "soulless" Albanian poetry, from a doctrine of false monumentalism.

Based on this fact we may say that Agolli transformed the image of the "*great theme*" and wandered to look for poetical cadence, not just from the war depicting the outside heroism but even through the experiences of a person with a profound love for his nation, where it is portrayed clearly the reformation of a new social and national consciousness.

Despite these important literary communicative signs that are focused on the issue of "*being Albanian*" as a contemporary and historical identity, in the works of Dritero Agolli we have noticed even writings concerning Albanian literature of the past as the presence of signs of our identity in the Albanian language and culture. Agolli may have done this because of his duty as chair of the League of Writers.

To answer all the questions and hypothesis mentioned above, knowing that this theme is more a theoretical issue, it is believed that all this job is done considering the problem as a Case study and using approaches such as biographies and monitoring of the data about this theme such as book reviews, analysis etc, without forgetting even the historical data which are brought through the cultural-historical and interpretative data method adapting them to the needs of this study.

***Albanian identity means the need to understand the existence of being Albanian more than the need for conservation of the social values of a nation. The***

*question of greatest importance we have tried to answer is: how is treated the great issue of Albanian national identity in Dritero Agolli's literary creation?*

Concerning the need of the continuance to know and discover the Albanian national identity, in Dritero Agolli's work problem is revealed with other helpful questions which complete our central question.

1- How is this issue treated and what is its importance in approach with other

2- Is this issue "incited" by the communist ideology or is it camouflaged by /because of it?

**Dritero Agolli's literary approach and his art of writing, as a means to built the national identity and to verify the hypothesis regarding the issue of what the national identity should and must do to maintain the social values of a nation.**

In his writings, the presence of the Albanian soul as an existence that is noticed in modern times, is brought to us carved in some aspects, all of which are nothing else but an expression of a material and spiritual thesis which melt together, condense in eternal steams and finally precipitate in the infinite Agollian *homeland* in a substrate which possesses the roots of this identity and feeds them with Albanianism.

**\*Dritero Agolli's poetry as a testimony of Albanian national identity, divided in some sub-issues**, where we would like to depict his special art in sketching the national identity and compare him with Naim Frasheri, Ismail Kadare etc.

***The Albanian national identity in poetical speaking shows:***

-The representation of the emblem of the Albanian identity from the historical perspective as a great sacrifice from contemporary perspective as a testimony of eastern and western tendency of the Albanians' survival, where on the top of the iceberg stands the lyrical-epical poem: "*Nene Shqiperi*" (Mother Albania". "*In this poem dominate the glorification for homeland (not just socialist), the myth of origin and the absorption of national pride*". (Sinani, 2012c, p. 20).

Here its is seen clearer than anywhere else a futuristic spirit of Naimi romantism, which Agolli wants to use as a source of inspiration in the creation of an Albania apparently happy through two forms:

**-first:** through the impact of the past myth and nostalgia for great times and

**-secondly:** through idealism and arousal into a cult of a typical utopian place. Referring to primordial theory through a literary and discursive approach and trying to built bridges of belief among the nationalism and identity, Agolli treats a very big and early problem of Albanians, which is related with the maintenance of spiritual and national values beyond territorial frontiers, not as a form of material demand but as an alienation of the moral and spiritual feelings, and showing that the basis of our identity is the *common origin* or ethnicity and identity represent something more natural and biological.

*“In the end of XXth century the emigration policy focuses on emotionalizes and mobilizes popular masses in all the european nations more than in other problems. This can be explained less with actual material profits than with the symbolic value of an issue that relates with the national identity. (Altermatt, 2002c, p.17).*

- Presence of the ideology of communist regime where the Albanian identity is restricted in the ideological circumstances which are depicted in the poem “*Devoll, Devoll*” etc. It’s time when the theory of Socialist Realism, no matter how grotesque and absurd, tries to built a man moulded with the idea of importance and nationalism by identifying with parts of its foundation such as Devoll, a river in his birthplace. Personifying and making it part of his national consciousness, Agolli sees it a creature which breathes and walks accros footpaths and carries a part from the national history and culture, without which he (Agolli) can not live.

*“Yeah, I am such a Devoll  
I’ve taken your mud from valleys  
Put it in a woolen bag  
... hey Devoll how many weapons did i shot  
for this beloved communism  
remained in your mountains sleepless  
and killed betrayal with nervousity” (Agolli,1979c)*

-Albanian identity released from the ideological circumstances in his volume “*Mesdite (Midday)*”, where the identity is portrayed within a frame which identifies him with soil, as an essential primordial element.



*“I lived and was brought up these gorges  
Where the sun arises from mountains and falls in the sea  
the moon sprinkles oisiers  
Where birds sleep crumbed in the leaves  
... I got tired in the field every day  
And did not leave a single piece of land without planting braird  
... Did you my homeland see who I used to be? ... i have placed my head in your  
lap!” (Agolli, 1969c, p. 80).*

It can also be seen in his poem *“Toka ime, kenga ime (My land, my song)”*, where he masterfully interwove two very important elements of identity such as *land* and *word*, with which he sings and glorifies it to prove that it is crucial to be unique in the process of forming our national consciousness.

*“Me beloved land.....since i took my first steps  
... I felt this from your warm fervor, from your odor.  
I felt them while I filled my hands with corn,  
...I was chosen by lot to be farmer,  
I was chosen by lot to be poet”.* (Agolli 1969c).

It is only with the usage eight times of the stylistic figure of the metaphorical epithet *toke e dashur* that the language comes as an inside powerful call to continue that lyric connotation of an epic narration that originates from our national Renaissance, and to walk in the footsteps of Naimi, whom Agolli himself transformed into a myth of the Albanian word and literature, because he saw in him the personification of a man with clear national ideals inside whom sleeps a completed national identity.

*“You as a good farmer, dug the land of words,  
the land of my great parents` words that had remained barren  
covered with bad bushes in the mountains  
you dug it so that it never remains barren...”* (Agolli 1969c).

-The approach concerning self consciousness about the Albanian national identity which we can see in the volume *“Pelegrini i vonuar (The late pilgrim)”*, where we



find a Dritero who is aware of the *vonese* in time along his metaphorical journey, conditioned this by the lack of real time and by disappointment beyond an ideal which he could not transmit fully to the next generations because for Agolli being or feeling an Albanian is an obligation

*"I am a pilgrim since a long time ago.*

*A nomad of the lost caravan*

*An carry on my shoulder a promise*

*Made in the ashes of the defeated grandparents"*

*(Agolli, 1993c, p.5).*

because *"Before you become newcomer you should be an escaper, before you arrive in a place you should leave another place and the feelings a man has for the land he left never are simple"*. (Malouf, 2006c, p. 42). The hero of poetry, as an idealistic identity symbolizes the great disappointment, the overturn of spiritual and psychological understanding to all the idealists after the fall of communism and recreation within them of a new consciousness.

**\*The author who testifies with his novels (prose) the shapes of identity and treats the concept of Albanianism in some of his best, most debated and most criticized novels, because the Albanian identity is present even in his novels, where we see aspects such as:**

- The identity of Albanians as pat of war against conquerors, where we see the resistance (*qendresa*) of Albanians beyond ideology.

Again, based in primordial theory which considers blood as a fundamental element of existence and resemblance of the national identity as a nationalistic subject, in his book *"Njeriu me top"* Agolli depicts a hero who fights with blood for blood. Mato Gruda, camouflaged by communist ideology is placed in a situation between the dilemma to continue the tradition of family as a victim of bloodshed and the thought that the homeland and nation stand above these personal interests.

Blood is an element from which Agolli barely will separate himself, emphasizing that it is the basis, the fondament through which national identities are created, but which unfortunately he relates with blood feud because of land frontiers

*Three burning bullets in your chest hit*

*Kamber, son of mother, son as a white pigeon*

*Your mum is holding the candle, your sisters are crying*

*Your gun didn't fire, that's why you didn't pay back*

*With a red handkerchief mother your blood collects*

*(Agolli, 1975c, p.39)*

In “*Komisari Memo*”, the notes of identity idealism can be seen in the way how Memo Kovaci builds the stereotype of partisan hero with great national consciousness divided between the war in the mountains against the conqueror and the ideological educative and political war against rural population. But on the other side Commander Rrapo, whose surname is “Tabani” leads us to tradition, something that can be considered typical, giving the character a very important national and primordial identity. Influenced by the Socialist Realism and anti-fascist war, the communist ideology plays his role and the hero finds it difficult to escape this fighting duality.

-It may also be seen as an ironic approach towards the fact of being an Albanian in the pages of his novel. “*Shkelqimi dhe renia e shokut Zylo*” (*The Glow and Fall of my comrade Zylo*). Through a donkishotic discourse, which at first sight may look simple but in fact is ironic, Agolli succeeds in creating a character whose identity is as clear in his portrayal as complex in description, where the psychological element is fundamental and results as a structure which precipitates from an unusual situation, and is accompanied with various aspects which even he himself can not explain. Here, the identity is identified with the typical communist word, *comrade*, so as to reinforce the irony of a moral and political understanding which is always positive. This is the paradox which accompanies the hero in the process of his identity creation. It's not purposeless that his work is paralleled with creations of Defoe, Gogol, Kafka or Kundera, to irony the acceptance of the fact of being a master towards the fact of being an Albanian.

In this case, comrade Zylo and others similar to him, do nothing else but destroy heroic identities superficially and internally, and create false and funny identities, something which Agolli does not want and sees as a destruction of the national

values. *“Through the character of Demka, the author warns that an ordinary man may leave the guilt to someone else and may find an alibi, but the one who belongs to the world of political mediums has no alibi. The individual gains as much freedom as he deserves. The best for the obeyed slave is slavery. (Sinani, 2012c, p. 88).*

- As a destruction of the individual and property in *“Deshtaku (The loser)”*, a novel based on another primordial element such as the land, through which passes a heroic and tragic identity, who is always preset in Agolli`s work, and who even here can not escape the communist ideology.

In his being existed the ghosts and voices of the predecessors and the howls of the war. *“In these moments he was not Xhelo Mara of fields with muds but Xhelo Mara of the war routes, (...) who led the people in battles where you could smell the blood and death”.* (Agolli,1991c, p. 29).

In this novel, the hero, camouflated by the communist ideology, tries with a great devotion to work for his people, but despite his good will, he could not succeed up to the end because the subversive force is bigger than his, searching deep in the roots of what we want to call national, Agolli admits that homeland is the one from which no one who calls himself a nationalist and patriot can escape. For him, homeland is created and is present in every part and detail of the structure. *“Homeland Xhelo is this garden, that strip of land, those two cows that mow: can you hear how they mow? (.....).Homeland is that plep tree, that fence and that chimney over there! (.....). If they disappear, our homeland becomes weaker”.* (Agolli, 1991c, p. 119).

The same line can be found even in the novel *“Trendafili ne gote, (The rose in a glass)”*, where the hero, lot in his artistic world (he is a writer), gets lost and is identified as an Anthe with the mud, land and everything that is national.

*No, you are wrong. The heavy rains get on my nerves. I think about the fields and woods where people work, and when they fall stumbled over I fall too. The writer can not work if the others don`t work. The writer is such a strange creature that you can not imagine. He is so strange that it isn`t worth explaining. The lines that fill in a paper page for such a human being are footpaths and streets full of people”.* (Agolli 1999:20). It precisely for this reasons that this novel wasn`t accepted by the critics of

the time, pretending that in this book Agolli hadn't treated the great "theme of the time" but had killed "the hundred-year old eagle, the symbol of Albanianism", and had brought a lyrical novel where he had treated the theme of love.

**\*Dritero Agolli's drama, as a sign of exploring Albanianism, comes through various characters, who are at the same time realistic, ideologic, and at some degree political, with the purpose of completing the framework of a literary genre beyond classical structure building national identity in these characters.**

The presence of the Albanian identity is seen even in his drama. It would be more than enough to mention here "Balade per nje grua" (Ballad for a woman), to understand literary creations of greatest importance concerning the theme of the existence Albanianism. The ideologist man creates for himself an identity he does not possess, a national identity but which has nothing to do with his nation. "You think that I expressed my thoughts about you to satisfy some sentimental feelings of myself. I revealed them to fulfill some interests which are higher and more important than you might think...Your mistakes towards me are very big even though they are secondary. As a communist woman I judged you right, even as a woman I should be in that height... Go Arsen, go because you are late".

These are the words of the main female character, Fatbardha, to that the hero now is only an ideological identity. It is doubtless that this reveals even the other side of this identity, Arseni, who in fact has done nothing to be discredited in this way. The only thing he did is his desire to bring with his science a new ideology. He was a good scientist but a failed family member.

On the other side, there is Fatbardha, a character who shows a stoic and manly identity and who manages to get out of her life her lost husband but does not allow the party to exclude her from its nets. Both of them are characters of a grey area.

**\*Violence, as a tool with which is associated the reconstruction of national identity in Dritero Agolli's characters.**

Referring to our national history, we can't see our nations' war and attempts without being under the dictatorship of violence. Through violence we have seen so

many attempts for assimilation, which even though may have been very taught and strict they have never managed to stop the attempt for becoming ware of the fact that the national spirit and the attempts to create this identity have been more powerful than anything else and have created in every person`s consciousness some kind of national ego.

*“The feeling of national identity may not only be a source of pride and joy, but it may also be force and self-confidence. It is not surprising the fact that the notion of identity is object of such a widespread admiration that may inspire us with the idea that we must love our neighbor and with he big theories of social capitalism and community self-determination”*(Sen, 2011c, p. 17).

Even the heroes of Dritero Agolli, in some way, each of them through his own world, try to find and create their true identity, proving this way what Amartia Sen said: *“Violence comes or originated from those single and hostile identities, where it can be easily forced, with the support of brave masters of terror”*.(Sen 2011c, p. 18)

Said in other words, for Albanians, the national identity may be called a forced identity imposed through violence. Even Agolli`s characters themselves during their creation and almost during all their literary life haven`t escaped force and the pressure of violence i different periods and systems: for example Memo *“Komisari Memo”*, (*Commander Memo*) during war, as victim of violence by the conqueror etc, Minai *“Trendafili ne gote”*- (*The rose in a glass*) as a victim of violence with the purpose of creating a part of himself in the eyes of the others, *“Comrade Zylo”* (*The Glory and fall of comrade Zylo*) as to show one side of his personality in front of the others, and for whom we definitely feel sorry.

All in all we find almost all the characters of Dritero Agolli restricted, compared this to the way they create and determine their identity. This happens because these restrictions may have a great influence in their ability to persuade other people, especially to make them understand that they are different from what they may imagine and they succeed in achieving this.

## Conclusions

*“In a world of international economy and massive communication, the ethnic conflict and nationalism are two important political forces of the recent years. Will global culture go beyond nationalism? In fact, the evolution of modernity has brought to life memories and ethnical gatherings, because in the era of unbelievable changes people seek stability and understanding, and as a result they return to their ethnical inheritance.” (Smith 2008c).*

Based on Smith`s consideration we may say that that the part of social, cultural and spiritual consciousness, that which makes each person determine his existence is national identity , prescribed in every cell of this consciousness. If for anyone this sounds too exaggerated, to Agolli this is just one small part of what he calls being brought up from your routes and identification in the eyes of the foreigners.

His heroes, in every single step they take, have the tendency to go towards the creation of some self-awareness principal ego. They are always facing conflict with anything, proving this way what the author himself has said about his characters: *“crazy people”*, in search of everything authentic, primordial and national building this way a small part that sleeps deep in their sub-consciousness, and which is their national identity, their love for what belongs to them, their ancestors and to other generations.

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