

## Albanian Multipart Singing: Fragile Voices between Everyday Practice, Ideologies and UNESCO Heritage Politics

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**Abstract:** This article presents an overview of research on multipart singing in Albania within a larger context of drone-based multipart traditions in Southeast Europe and the Mediterranean. Emphasis is put on the transformative and dynamic dimension of this tradition during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in relation to processes such as urbanization, politics of staging, homogenization and folklorization during the communist rule of Enver Hoxha, and the re-valuation of this tradition in the post-communist era marked by mass migration and cultural impoverishment. The article also highlights the ambiguous role of UNESCO as a major transnational actor with the 2008 inclusion of the multipart practice in Albania in the register of intangible heritage of humanity. The main argument is that processes of the “reinvention of tradition”, of its medialization, and its homogenization extended well beyond the socialist period and began well before WWII during the reign of King Zog I. Despite these constant transformations often related to sonic politics, as evidenced through the author’s own ongoing fieldwork in South Albania, multipart singing has remained vital as a mirror of key aspects of social life, including rites of passage and village feasts. Singing also serves as an important cultural catalyst for affective states related to changing life circumstances, political instability and everyday lives. The article argues that the constitution of “sonic communities” (often symbolically formed by local male groups performing vocal competitive sessions sitting around a table) significantly strengthens the resilience of individuals and communities to cope with the challenges of a long-lasting transformation.

**Keywords:** *Balkans, multipart singing, transformation, ideologies, communism, heritage*

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