

‘SHKOLLA SHQIPE’ AND NATIONHOOD
ALBANIANS IN PURSUIT OF EDUCATION IN THE NATIVE
LANGUAGE IN INTERWAR (1918–41) AND POST-
AUTONOMY (1989–98) KOSOVO

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The sense of nationhood of the Albanians in Kosovo was profoundly moulded by their quest for schools with Albanian as the language of instruction—*shkolla shqipe*—in the interwar period from 1918 to 1941 and in the post-autonomy period after 1989. The prohibition of Albanian secular schools in the interwar years and the curbing of self-rule of the Albanians in the sphere of education after the abolition of Kosovo’s autonomy were aimed at arresting the rise of Albanian national consciousness. However, Kosovo Albanians embraced alternative schooling strategies and so nourished their sense of national distinctness during both periods. This paper looks at the ways Albanians in Kosovo furthered their sense of nationhood, because of, and in spite of, Serb-imposed restrictions on education in Albanian. It also examines symbolic pillars around which their sense of nationhood was constructed in the interwar and in the post-autonomy period.

Interwar defiance: The ‘secret’ schools of nationhood

The closure of Albanian-language schools that Austria-Hungary had opened and assisted during its occupation of Kosovo in the First World War¹ marked the return of Kosovo to Serbian control in 1918. Throughout the interwar period, secular schools with Albanian as the language of instruction were banned in the Serb-dominated Kingdom

¹Cf. Jasar Redzepagic, *Razvoj prosvete i skolstva albanske narodnosti na teritoriji danasnje Jugoslavije*, Prishtina: Zajednica naucnih ustanova Kosova i Metohije 1968, pp. 299–315.

of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, reconstituted as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.² Instead, Serbian schools were set up in Kosovo and their doors opened to Albanians. However, even their geographic distribution had an ethnic bias. Schools were mainly opened in the areas populated by native Serbs of Kosovo and where Serbian settlers were moving in as part of Serbia's policy of boosting the Serb presence in the province.³

Education in the Serbian language was envisaged as a vehicle for the integration of Albanians into Serbia as loyal subjects. The curriculum, taught in the Serbian language was tailored to promote the common identity of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the new state.⁴ Yet, what for Serbs was a policy of integration, for Albanians was a policy of denationalisation.⁵ Albanian students attended a preparatory year in order to master Serbian, while religious instruction was provided separately for Serbian and Albanian students, taught by Orthodox priests and Muslim *mullahs* (teachers).⁶

The 1929 Law on People's Schools centralised and unified the state primary education system. It heralded greater state intervention in the now compulsory primary education and prescribed a uniform

²The benefits of the international legal obligations the Yugoslav state signed, like the Saint Germain Treaty on Protection of Minorities of 1919, or those of domestic legislation, like the Vidovdan Constitution of 1921 and the Law on People's Schools of 1929, all of which provided for primary education of minorities in their mother tongue, bypassed the Albanians, but not the Germans and Hungarians. See Svetozar Canovic, *Specificni problemi nastave u skolama Kosova i Metohije*, Belgrade: Zajednica naucnih ustanova Kosova i Metohije 1968, pp. 83–5; Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, London: Macmillan 1998, p. 267; Ljubodrag Dimi, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, vol. III, Belgrade: Stubovi kulture 1997, pp. 5–118.

³Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*, London 1998, p. 105; Jasar Redzepagic, *Skolstvo i prosveta u Kosovskoj Mitrovici i okolini od druge polovine XIX stoleca do 1975. godine*, Prishtina: Akademia e shkencave dhe e arteve e Kosovës 1980, p. 31; Abdulla R. Vokri, *Shkollat dhe arsimit në Kosovë ndërmjet dy Luftërave Botërore (1918–1941)*, Prishtina: Enti i Teksteve dhe i Mjeteve Mësimore i Kosovës 1990, pp. 27–8.

⁴On the cultural and educational policy in the interwar Yugoslavia centred on a common identity of the Kingdom's dominant Slav nations see: Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia*, Stanford University Press 1998, pp. 67–127.

⁵Vokri, *Shkollat dhe arsimit në Kosovë*, p. 22.

⁶Redzepagic, *Skolstvo i prosveta u Kosovskoj Mitrovici ...* 1980, p. 31; Vladeta Tesic et al., *Sto godina Prosvetnog saveta Srbije 1880–1980*, Belgrade: Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva 1980, pp. 111–35.

name for all schools: 'People's Schools.' However, Kosovo's schools were soon named after prominent Serbian figures.⁷ Albanian and Serbian students were to learn together in mixed classes, so that children:

... would see that they are no strangers to each other, so that religious tolerance is furthered and enforced and a gap which is separating their parents still today, is gradually reduced through children.⁸

Religious instruction continued separately for Serbs and Albanians. Teachers were instructed not to force Albanian and Turkish students to take off their traditional headgear—*kece* (in Albanian *plis*) and *fes*—so as not to vex their ethnic and religious feelings. Nonetheless, these youngsters were to be made into citizens who 'with the passage of time, would never know of any other homeland outside the present homeland'⁹.

A network of Serbian state schools in Kosovo remained underdeveloped in this period. Compared to Serbia (including Vojvodina but without Kosovo) with 8.96 classrooms per each 1,000 school-age children, in Kosovo there were 5.26. Only 30.2 per cent of school-age children of all nationalities in Kosovo went to school in 1939–40. In the Yugoslavia of that period, just Bosnia-Herzegovina had a worse record with 21 per cent.¹⁰ Of those attending school in Kosovo, Serbs largely outnumbered Albanians. Some eleven thousand Albanians comprised about 30 per cent of all primary school children, while their number as compared to Serbs in secondary schools was negligible between 1940 and 41.¹¹

While repressing Albanian secular schools, Serbian authorities condoned the work of private religious Muslim schools. This policy was driven by the same rationale as that of prohibiting secular schooling in Albanian—to undermine the feeling of Albanian national identity by stimulating the supremacy of collective identification based on religion. Albanians were to remain 'unenlightened and uncultured

⁷Vokri, *Shkollat dhe arsimit në Kosovë ...*, pp. 12–13.

⁸Dimic, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, vol. II, 1997, pp. 109–10 quoting A.J. (O.N.), f-87–91; A.J. CPB (38), f-63–69; A.J. 66 (pov), f-22 and 62.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁰Canovic, *Specificni problemi nastave u skolama Kosova i Metohije*, pp. 78–80; Dusan Kosanovic, 'Problem savremenog pedagoskog obrazovanja i permanentnog usavršavanja nastavnog kadra i srednjih skola s posebnim osvrtom na specificne uslove u SAP Kosovu' (unpublished PhD manuscript), Prishtina: Univerzitet u Pristini 1980, p. 171.

¹¹Canovic, *Specificni problemi nastave u skolama Kosova i Metohije*, p. 85.

for a long time to come.¹² Ignorant of their national culture, it was reasoned, Albanians would be left without the symbolic 'arsenal' they needed to mount a nationalist challenge to the Yugoslav state. However, it was precisely these schools that contributed to the rise of Albanian national identity in the interwar period.

It was only well after the turn of the century that the conservative Muslim clergy in Kosovo, hitherto inimical to the national cultural movement, took up the cause of Albanian 'national' education.¹³ The Turks' unrelenting opposition to education in Albanian, coupled with grass-roots efforts of Albanian nationalists to promote the national cultural revival, made a number of *mullahs*, (Muslim teachers) *hodjas* and *imams* (priests) in Kosovo embrace the cause of education in Albanian. Some got involved by coordinating the work of cultural clubs and appealing to patriots to take up teaching in Albanian, others by introducing Albanian instruction into religious schools.¹⁴

A *hodja* from the Lap region in the north of Kosovo described the relationship between national schooling and religion in the following terms:

In the field of schooling, we find ourselves on the war front. In the conditions of war even the Koran permits eating not only of pork, but even of pig's ears and trotters, only the battlefield must not be abandoned!¹⁵

Continued prohibition of Albanian secular schools in interwar Yugoslavia made the Muslim clergy in Kosovo follow up the trend of

¹²Muhamet Pirraku, 'Kulturno-prosvetni pokret Albanaca u Jugoslaviji (1919–1941)', *Jugoslovenski istorijski casopis* 1/4, 1978, pp. 356–70, here footnote 10, p. 358; Cf. Dimic, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, vol. III, p. 123; Marco Dogo, 'National Truths and Disinformation in Albanian-Kosovar Historiography' in Ger Duijzings, Dusan Janjic and Shkelzën Maliqi (eds), *Kosovo-Kosova: Confrontation or Coexistence*, Peace Research Centre, University of Nijmegen, 1996, pp. 34–45, here pp. 38–9.

¹³On the opposition of conservative Muslim clergy from Kosovo to the adoption of the Latin alphabet for the Albanian language which Albanian national leaders advocated as a means of furthering Albanian national consciousness and unity and, instead, their insistence to hold on to the Arabic script of the Koran see: Stavro Skendi, 'The History of the Albanian Alphabet: A Case of Complex Cultural and Political Development', *Südost Forschungen XIX*, 1960, pp. 263–84, here p. 278

¹⁴Abdulla R. Vokrri, *Shkollat dhe arsimit në anën e Llapit brenda viteve 1878–1944*, Prishtina: Enti i Teksteve dhe i Mjeteve Mësimore i Kosovës 1995, pp. 11–14; Hysni Myzyri, *Arsimi kombëtar shqiptar (1908–1912)*, Prishtina: Enti i Teksteve dhe i Mjeteve Mësimore i Kosovës 1996, p. 201.

¹⁵Vokrri, *Shkollat dhe arsimit në anën e Llapit ...*, footnote 56, p. 29.

introducing the Albanian language in the religious schools that had been inaugurated in the last years of the Turkish rule. They began to abandon Turkish and Arabic language and script, partly or entirely, and to spread the knowledge of Albanian in their sermons and writings. They also began to give lessons in the Albanian language or distribute Albanian books, alongside religious instruction in *mektebs* (Muslim primary schools) and *medreses* (Muslim seminaries).¹⁶

The new national 'mission' of religious schools made Serbian educational authorities qualify *mektebs* as 'nationally harmful to the state'.¹⁷ Similarly, *medreses* were portrayed 'as not serving our state in the least'.¹⁸ Therefore, Serbo-Croat speaking Muslims from Bosnia, who spoke no Albanian, replaced Albanian *myftis* (senior Muslim clerics) and *imams*, who hardly spoke any Serbian. The policy was aimed at forestalling Albanian nationalist activity in religious institutions. However, Albanians gave precedence to their national language over common religious identification. Bosnian Muslim teachers faced fierce opposition and boycott by their Albanian co-religionists in Kosovo.¹⁹

The legalisation of religious schools in the 1930s entailed enhanced control of their curricula and a required fulfilment of often impossible conditions. Many *mektebs* and *medreses* were closed, but their spread was not hindered. By 1938–9 there were 296 *mejtepes* (i.e. *mektebs*) with 11,362 students, whilst nearly each town in Kosovo had a *medrese*. Ultimately, religious schools emerged as the biggest beneficiaries of the 1936 Law on the Islamic Community. It sanctioned the ultimate authority of *ullema-medzlis* in Skopje over the social and cultural life of Muslims. Albanians *de facto* obtained full religious-educational autonomy from the state.²⁰

Clandestine efforts aimed at promoting the Albanian sense of nationhood in religious schools were paralleled by the institutional struggle for *shkolla shqipe*. Albanian members of the *Xhemijet*, the party representing Muslims in Sandjak, Kosovo and Macedonia demanded

¹⁶Vokrri, *Shkollat dhe arsimit në Kosovë*, pp. 303–14; Pirraku, 'Kulturno-prosvetni pokret Albanaca u Jugoslaviji ...', pp. 360–1.

¹⁷Dimic, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, vol. III, p. 130, quoting A.J., 66 (pov), f-22/a.j. 51; A.J., (pov), f-22/a.j. 55.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 131 quoting A.J., 38 (CPB), f-64/169; A.J., 63, f-151/xv; AJJ, 63 (Versko odeljenje—Muslimanski odsek), f-137/x.

¹⁹Vokrri, *Shkollat dhe arsimit në anën e Llapit*, p. 78. Pirraku, 'Kulturno-prosvetni pokret Albanaca u Jugoslaviji', p. 361.

²⁰Dimic, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji*, vol. III, pp. 131–2; Vokrri, *Shkollat dhe arsimit në Kosovë*, pp. 293–8.

Albanian-language schooling in the Parliament. However, they also developed an 'underground' activity and helped to revive Albanian secret schools,²¹ of which there was already a tradition dating back to the time of the Ottoman prohibition of Albanian schools. While secular and religious teaching content was combined in religious schools, secret schools were entirely secular.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, secret schools sprang up in Albanian-populated areas in the Balkans, spreading from the south of Albania northwards to Kosovo, as a strategy to disseminate 'the knowledge of nationhood.' Secret classes that taught *shkrim/lexim*, reading and writing of Albanian, were set up in grocery stores and private houses, country inns and out in the open. Students of Albanian embraced Albanian primers, textbooks, newspapers and other patriotic publications that were smuggled into the Ottoman-controlled Albanian lands.²²

Following the *Xhemijet's* demise, the clandestine spread of Albanian lessons in interwar Kosovo continued, along with a secret distribution of Albanian books. Albanian nationalists from Kosovo staunchly opposed the education of Albanians in Serbian schools, for, as Hasan Prishtina said, 'they teach something else from what we wish our lads to learn.'²³ Hence, it was only the 'underground'—a secular or religious setting—that was conducive to furthering Albanian nationhood.

The educational policy of forcing Albanians into Serbian secular schools or leaving them to Muslim religious schools in interwar Kosovo failed. The education of Albanians in Serbian state schools came to be seen as 'training' Albanians for their national resistance to the Serbs,²⁴ as secular knowledge, albeit imparted in Serbian, stimulated the desire of Albanians for national self-awareness. At the same time, many Albanian *mullahs* began to stealthily teach 'national awakening' during religious classes, while Albanian students secretly circulated Albanian books in Serbian schools.²⁵

²¹Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 1984, pp. 377–8; Pirraku, 'Kulturno-prosvetni pokret Albanaca u Jugoslaviji', p. 363–4; Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, pp. 269–72; Vokri, *Shkollat dhe arsimi në Kosovë ...*, pp. 318–9.

²²Hysni Myzyri, *Shkollat e para kombëtare shqipe (1887–korrik 1908)*, Tirana: 8 Nëntori 1978, pp. 131–46; Edwin E. Jacques, *The Albanians. An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, Jefferson: McFarland 1995, pp. 307–8.

²³Vokri, *Shkollat dhe arsimi në Kosovë*, p. 359.

²⁴Pirraku, 'Kulturno-prosvetni pokret Albanaca u Jugoslaviji', p. 365; Vokri, *Shkollat dhe arsimi në anën e Llapit*, pp. 58–9.

²⁵Vokri, *Shkollat dhe arsimi në Kosovë ...*, pp. 189–98.

Poignantly, it is the ban on secular education in Albanian, that turned Islamic institutions, *mektebs* and *medreses* of Kosovo's Sunni Muslim community but also *tekkes* (lodges) of its Sufi Orders, the ardent pioneers of the national cultural movement from the time of the Ottomans, into the hub of Albanian 'national' education in interwar Kosovo. As Pirraku argues, it is very difficult to accurately ascertain the impact of efforts aimed at enlightening the Kosovo Albanian youth in the national spirit due to their clandestine quality. He, however, adds that these efforts ought to be acknowledged for securing a continuity in a development of Albanian national culture,²⁶ and, hence, a sense of Albanian nationhood in Kosovo. Indeed, it was the battle for the opening of *shkolla shqipe*, rather than their existence that fed the Albanians' sense of nationhood in interwar Yugoslavia.

Post-autonomy 'shkolla shqipe': lessons in national freedom and martyrdom

The Serbian drive to revoke Kosovo's autonomy in the late 1980s stirred Albanian fears that with it, all their cultural rights would be revoked as well. Yet, Slobodan Milosevic, the then head of Serbia's Communist Party, assured them:

Albanians indeed will not lose the right to their language, nor to their schools, nor to their cultural development. Nor will their work and creation and their entire life be threatened in any way because they are Albanians.²⁷

However, a nationalist stigma had already been attached to education in the Albanian language in Kosovo.

Ever since the 1981 Albanian demonstrations in Kosovo, in the context of a dominant demand for the elevation of Kosovo's autonomous status in communist Yugoslavia to the status of a republic, the Albanian-language education system, and Prishtina University in particular, were identified as a 'hotbed of Albanian nationalism and separatism.' Despite purges of the educational content, the ban on imported textbooks from Albania, the expulsion of politically 'incorrect' educators and students, even their prosecution and imprisonment, and a ban on educational co-operation with Albania,²⁸ the Serbian

²⁶Pirraku, 'Kulturno-prosvetni pokret Albanaca u Jugoslaviji', p. 369.

²⁷NIN, 6 March 1989.

²⁸Musa Limain et al., *Studim. Gjendja dhe pozita e arsimit shqip në Kosovë në periudhën 1990–95 dhe mundësit e zhvillimit të mëtejshëm*, Prishtina: Instituti Ekonomik

verdict on Albanian education in Kosovo remained unchanged. Therefore, the constitutional changes were to give Serbia jurisdiction over Kosovo's education, which would allow it: 'to decisively influence ... the educational content with the aim of developing the feeling of permanent membership in the SRS [Socialist Republic of Serbia] and the SFRY [Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia]'.²⁹

In spring 1990, the SRS Presidency announced the unification of Serbia's education,³⁰ ending Kosovo's self-rule in the area of education. Albanians lost the right to adopt a Kosovo curricula in line with the agreed ideological guidelines, which was the procedure applied since 1974.

The issue of primary and secondary curricula brought the Serbian-Albanian confrontation over education in Kosovo to a head. Albanians refused to accept the curricula compiled for them in Belgrade. Instead, they fully endorsed a decision to apply the curricula adopted by the Albanian members of the Education Council of Kosovo in August 1990.³¹ In effect it marked the point of emergence of *shkolla shqipe* that would allow unconstrained expression to Albanian nationhood in Kosovo.

The demand for and opposition to Kosovo's constitutional reintegration into Serbia had made the nationalist mobilisation of Serbs and Albanians respectively a fact by the 1990s. In such an atmosphere, the issue of curricula lent itself to exclusive nationalist interpretation.³² Albanians rejected the Serbian curricula for Kosovo not only

January 1996, pp. 17–23; Xhafer Xhaferi, 'Represioni serb ndaj Universitetit të Prishtinës', *Kosova: Revistë historike politike*, no. 5, 1997, pp. 23–7; p. 24.

²⁹Danilo Z. Markovic, *Obrazovanje za buducnost*, Belgrade: Prosveta 1989, p. 128.

³⁰*Jedinstvo*, 24 April 1990.

³¹*Shkëndija*, August 1990.

³²The comparative analysis of the Kosovo and Serbian curricula for the so-called national subjects (Literature, History, Geography, Music ...) in primary and secondary schools carried out by the Serbian educational advisors and the response of the Albanian education officials indicate that the Serbian curricula planned the inclusion of the educational content that would allow the expression of Albanian national identity in Kosovo but reduced its volume. Therefore, the major difference between the Kosovo and Serbian curricula was in the inclusion into the Kosovo curricula of the content that was reduced in the Serbian ones envisaged for the use in Kosovo. Changes for the subject of Music in primary schools seem to be most radical to the extent that no or very few Albanian songs were encompassed in the Serbian curricula. The analysis and response are included in: Zecir Demi, 'Predmet: Pismena odbrana u svojstvu optuzenog za krivicno delo iz Clana 216 KZ Srbije', *Opstinski sud u Pristini*, Prishtina, 28 May 1998 (documents used in the trial).

as 'an attempt at a reduction of the Albanians' national identity',³³ but also as '*shkombëtarizmi* (denationalisation)' and 'an insult to Albanian national dignity'.³⁴ By contrast, Serbs assessed the Kosovo curricula as illegal and as a source of 'separatist indoctrination of pupils'.³⁵ Ironically, less than three years later a group of Yugoslav/Serbian experts under the auspices of then Prime Minister of the Federal Yugoslavia Milan Panic conducting negotiations with the Albanian delegation from Kosovo on education within the framework of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia in Geneva in 1992–3, assessed that 'there were no essential differences in the contents' of the 'disputed' curricula adopted by the Kosovo Education Council in August 1990 and those adopted by Serbia to be used in Kosovo.³⁶

However, Serbia's educational unification also entailed Belgrade's control of student enrolment in Kosovo's schools and the university. Once the enrolment plans were drafted in Belgrade, thousands of Albanian youngsters were left without the possibility of continuing their education in Kosovo. Unlike non-transparent curricula, numbers clearly spoke for themselves.

Some 9,100 places for Albanian- and some 5,535 for Serbo-Croat-speaking students were envisaged in secondary schools for the 1991–2 school year, for some 32,000 pupils finishing primary schools in Albanian and about 4,000 pupils finishing school in Serbo-Croat in Kosovo. In other words, while 21,185 Albanian primary school graduates would remain without an opportunity to continue their education in Albanian, some 1,500 extra places were planned for the Serbo-Croat speakers in secondary schools.³⁷ At the same time, an equal number of places—1,580 for Serbo-Croat and 1,580 Albanian-speaking students—was planned at the Prishtina University for the 1991/1992 academic year, for about 14,000 students graduating from secondary schools in the Albanian language and some 3,000 in Serbo-Croat in Kosovo.³⁸

³³*Bujku*, 12 Sept. 1991.

³⁴*KOHA*, 13 Sept. 1995.

³⁵*Bujku*, 4 June 1991.

³⁶'Kriticke primedbe vladine strane na skolske programe za osnovnu skolu', *Radna grupa za probleme obrazovanja na Kosmetu pri Zenevskoj konferenciji o bivsoj Jugoslaviji*, Belgrade, 8 Feb. 1993, p. 4 (official report compiled by the Yugoslav government working group); on the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, see, Stefan Troebst, 'Conflict in Kosovo: Failure of Prevention? An Analytical Documentation, 1992–1998', ECMI Working Paper, no. 1, May 1998, pp. 37–8.

³⁷*Bujku*, 4 June 1991.

³⁸*Zëri*, 15 June 1991; *Bujku*, 7 June 1991.

Serbian education policy in Kosovo was a nationalist remedy to the perceived 'Albanianisation', i.e. Albanian cultural and numerical dominance, of the educational system in the province. At a symbolic level, Belgrade now took control over how much 'national affirmation' it would allow Albanians in Kosovo. Also, equality, hitherto conceived as providing an opportunity to all to study in their native tongue, was now interpreted as a 1:1 ethnic parity in the overwhelmingly Albanian province.

The conflict over education culminated at the start of the new 1991–2 school year. On 1 September Serbian educators aided by Serbian police barred entrance to schools to all Albanian teachers and pupils who refused to submit to Serbia's control over the Albanian-language education.³⁹ Meanwhile, hundreds of Albanian university lecturers were dismissed by newly appointed Serbian faculty deans and education in the Albanian language at Prishtina University practically ceased.⁴⁰

Serbian authorities remained intransigent towards the Albanians' demands to continue exercising their educational autonomy and return to their own educational facilities, for which they demonstrated in the autumn of 1991. The Kosovo Co-ordination Council for Education, the Albanian umbrella organisation of political parties and teachers' organisations, declared it was 'impossible' to start the new school year for all levels of education in the Albanian language.⁴¹ For Albanians resistance to the imposition of Serbian educational policies was paramount to 'the defence ... of national identity.'⁴²

Paradoxically, the unrestrained assertion of Albanian nationhood became feasible only after the creation of the so-called *arsimi paralel*—parallel education—the Albanian educational system in Kosovo mostly in private houses at the beginning of 1992. For the first time since Kosovo's inclusion into the Yugoslav state, Albanians administered Albanian-language education without any accountability to the Serbs.

Albanians' new *shtëpi shkolla*—house schools—became a symbolic embodiment of Albanian nationhood. Kosovo's education authorities approved a list of recommended school names for primary and secondary schools. They included prominent Albanian figures in

³⁹Zëri, 7 Sept. 1991.

⁴⁰Bujku, 1 Nov. 1991; Xhaferi, 'Represioni serb ndaj Universitetit të Prishtinës', pp. 25–7; Hajrullah Koliqi, *The Survival of the University of Prishtina, 1991–1996*, University of Prishtina 1997, pp. 38–9.

⁴¹Bujku, 20 Oct. 1991.

⁴²Zëri, 31 Aug. 1991.

history, education, science and culture, many of whom were banned in Kosovo during Communism; geographical names such as *Drenica*, an area of Kosovo symbolic of Albanian resistance, and *Iliria*, territory inhabited by the ancient Illyrians; and historical events and dates such as the 'Prizren League' and '2nd July' (the day of Kosovo's independence⁴³), as well as letters and nouns with a symbolic meaning: 'A' as the first letter of the alphabet, *Bashkimi* (unification), *Liria* (freedom), *Kombi* (nation), and *Martiri* (martyr).⁴⁴

Alongside school names, changes in the curricula for primary and secondary schools, mainly in the so-called national courses—literature and language, history and geography⁴⁵—gave meaning to Albanian nationhood. These curricula were initially 'deideologised.' The demise of Communism had resulted in the removal of 'ideological' subjects like Marxism.⁴⁶ Yet their 'deideologisation' also implied the assertion of the self-centred vision of Albanian nationhood.⁴⁷ The teaching of Serbo-Croat in Albanian schools was removed from the new Kosovo curricula.⁴⁸ At the same time, for example, the geography of former Yugoslavia was replaced by the geography of Kosovo in primary schools, and by the geography of Albanian lands in secondary schools.⁴⁹

⁴³On 2 July 1990, the Kosovo Assembly declared 'the constitutional declaration on Kosovo as an independent and equal constituent unit within the framework of the Federation (Confederation) of Yugoslavia'. See Assembly of Kosovo, Constitutional Declaration, 2 July 1990 in Marc Weller (ed.), *The Crisis in Kosovo 1989–1999: From the Dissolution of Yugoslavia to Rambouillet and the Outbreak of Hostilities*, vol. I, Cambridge: Documents and Analysis Publishing 1999, pp. 64–5; this document served as a basis for the declaration of Kosovo's independence. See Resolution of the Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo on Independence, 22 September 1991, *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴⁴Lista orientuese për emërtimin e enteve parashkolllore, të shkollave fillore dhe të shkollave të mesme', *Pleqësia e Arsimit e Republikës së Kosovës*, Prishtina December 1991 (official document of the Kosovo Albanian education authority).

⁴⁵KOHA, 1 June 1994.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Cf. *Shkëndija*, March 1998.

⁴⁸Compulsory learning of the language of the other ethnic group was part of the educational policy during Communism in Kosovo of fostering interethnic tolerance between Serbs and Albanians. See Jasar Redzepagic, 'Ostvarivanje jezicke ravnopravnosti u oblasti obrazovanja u prošlosti i danas', *Buletin, Shkolla e lartë pedagogjike 'Skënderbeu' Gjilan*, no. 1, 1987, pp. 7–21. The refusal of Serbo-Croat-speaking students in Kosovo in 1988–9 to learn Albanian was one of the harbingers of the conflict over the curricula.

⁴⁹Zeqir Demi, *Roli i Pleqësisë së Arsimit të Republikës së Kosovës në pavarësimin e shkollës shqipe—Kushtet dhe rrethanat e jashtëzakonshme*, Prishtina: Pleqësia e Arsimit të Republikës së Kosovës 1995, p. 48.

The changes in the curricula were carried out in accordance with the 'national goal'.⁵⁰ The principle of nationhood expressed at a political level in the form of Kosovo's independence was built into the curricula. It replaced 'symbolic engineering' of Albanian national identity along ideological lines characteristic of the Communist period when the curricula were aimed to foster Kosovo Albanians' sense of belonging to the Yugoslav political community while de-emphasising their sense of commonality and fraternity with Albanians in Albania proper. *Shkolla shqipe* nourished a Kosovo-centred sense of nationhood in the post-autonomy Kosovo. However, it also furthered a symbolic national unification of Albanians, which a former Kosovo Albanian official identified as an important role of an Albanian school.⁵¹

Following the agreement reached by the Education Ministry of Kosovo and the Education Ministry of Albania in August 1992, the first joint curricula for the subjects of Albanian Language and Literature, History, Geography, Music, Visual Arts and English in primary and secondary schools were compiled in 1994. The unification of curricula was the 'fulfilment of an old dream of the Albanian people of Kosovo for a spiritual and cultural integration with Albania'.⁵² The publishing of joint school textbooks to be used in Kosovo and Albania followed it.⁵³ At the same time, as prescribed by Kosovo's education authorities, the portrait of Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg, was hung in Albanian classrooms.⁵⁴ The choice of the great 15th century Albanian national hero evoked the sense of all-Albanian national unity.

Albanian 'parallel education' in the post-autonomy Kosovo was of particular importance as Albanians identified it as an 'attribute of (Kosovo's) statehood'.⁵⁵ The education system and education authorities were the only segment of Kosovo's autonomy that continued to function in the post-autonomy period in Kosovo.⁵⁶ In addition, they

⁵⁰'Raporti i punës së Pleqësisë së arsimit të Kosovës për vitin 1991', Pleqësia e Arsimit e Republikës së Kosovës, Prishtina January 1992 (official report of the Kosovo Albanian education authority).

⁵¹Pajazit Nushi, 'Drejtimet strategjike të arsimit kombëtar dhe të shkollës shqipe' in N. Prifti (ed.), *Shekulli 21*, New York: Gjonlekaj Publishing Company 1996, pp. 9–15, here p. 10.

⁵²Shqipe Gashi, *Shkollat e mesme të Prishtinës 1990/91–1996/97*, Prishtina: n.p. 1997, pp. 114–15.

⁵³KOHA, 22 Nov. 1995.

⁵⁴Demi, *Roli i Pleqësisë së Arsimit*, p. 45.

⁵⁵KOHA (Shtojca), 7 June 1995.

⁵⁶Demi, *Roli i Pleqësisë së Arsimit*, p. 5.

now exercised complete independence from Serbia. The idea of sovereign statehood was graphically imprinted on all school certificates and diplomas that bore the inscription of the 'Republic of Kosovo'.⁵⁷ As a 'functionalisation of the statehood of the Republic of Kosovo', the survival of the 'parallel' Albanian educational system merited special effort, attention and sacrifice.⁵⁸

Serbia's efforts aimed at imposing its vision on Albanian nationhood in the late 1980s produced the opposite result. Re-established mainly in private homes throughout Kosovo, the Albanian education system provided a hitherto unprecedented opportunity to symbolically tailor the Albanians' sense of national identity. Unlike the interwar period, the post-autonomy conception of Albanian nationhood was fully secular. The 'parallel system' in private schools was actually a secular state educational system in Albanian, whose qualitative and quantitative development in the post-Second World War Kosovo was remarkable.⁵⁹ Arguably, it was the very sense of Albanian nationhood that was elevated to the level of being sacred.

Post-autonomy graduates in Kosovo were the 'generations of the (Kosovo) Republic'.⁶⁰ They no longer studied the people's heroes who had fought for the 'brotherhood and unity' of Yugoslav nations and nationalities. Instead, they learnt about the declaration of Kosovo's independence, while prominent Albanian national figures were listed in their history textbooks, not as heroes, but with the word 'martyr, referring to people who fought for freedom and national independence ...'.⁶¹

⁵⁷See the official certificates and documents reproduced in Gashi, *Shkollat e mesme të Prishtinës ...*, pp. 211–50.

⁵⁸*Shkëndija*, April 1996.

⁵⁹Cf. Dennison I. Rusinow, 'The Other Albania: Kosovo 1979' part I: *Problems and Prospects*, American Universities Field Staff Reports, Europe, no. 5, 1980, pp. 1–17. For example, in the 1945/6 school year there were some 23,500 Albanian primary school and about 1,000 Albanian secondary school students in Kosovo. See Kusanovic, *Problem savremenog pedagoskog obrazovanja ...*, p. 183; Vojislav Okiljevic and Fazli Sulja, *Socijalisticki samoupravni preobrazaj obrazovanja i vaspitanja u SAP Kosovo*, Prishtina: Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva Socijalisticke Autonomne Pokrajine Kosova 1978, p. 16. In the 1989/90 school year, there were 304,836 Albanian primary and 66,361 Albanian secondary school pupils in Kosovo, see Limani, *Studim: Gjendja dhe pozita e arsimit shqip ...*, pp. 38 and 66. In 1988–89, there were 25,949 Albanians being educated at Prishtina University, established in 1970. See Destan Halimi (ed.), *Universiteti i Prishtinës 1970–1990*, Prishtina: Universiteti i Prishtinës 1990, p. 56.

⁶⁰*Zëri*, 23 Sept. 1995.

⁶¹*Zëri*, 15 April 1995.

The fact that Albanian students collected their school and university diplomas after years of studying in adapted rooms, shops, cellars, garages and attics was the most poignant lesson they learned about Serbs in the parallel schools of Kosovo. *Shkolla shqipe* in the post-autonomy Kosovo became the 'schools of resistance'⁶² teaching the 'religion' of Kosovo's freedom.

A Serb-dictated educational policy, based on the principles of ethnic exclusion and control in the interwar and post-autonomy period in Kosovo directly fuelled the prospects of interethnic confrontation, rather than those of interethnic accommodation. The battle for an Albanian national school—*shkolla shqipe*—in Kosovo in both periods fuelled the Albanian national political movement. Alternative strategies that the Albanians were compelled to pursue to express and guard their sense of national identity seemed to vindicate the belief that a genuinely free *shkolla shqipe* could become a reality only once the national sovereignty in Kosovo had been achieved.

Contrary to intentions, the Serbian policy of prohibition and restriction on education in Albanian gave impetus to the sustained effort on the part of the Albanians to nourish their sense of nationhood. As a result, the Albanian national identity in Kosovo was clearly delineated in opposition to the Serbs as the ethnic 'Other.' Such a

⁶²Shkëlzen Maliqi, *Kosova: Separate Worlds—Reflections and Analyses 1989–1998*, Peja: Dukagjini 1998, pp. 113–17. Notably, it was not only the education content that captures a dimension of resistance innate to *shkolla shqipe* in post-autonomy Kosovo. By and large, the Serbs turned a blind eye to the Albanians' flourishing parallel education system in Kosovo. However, acts of random violence exercised against Albanian pupils (like the breaking-up of classes or mistreatment of students and teachers, especially when caught with the diplomas with a 'Kosovo Republic' stamp) turned the schools into a genuine 'battlefield'. See 'The Frozen Smiles: Violence against Albanian Children in Kosova', Democratic League of Kosova—Commission for Children's Rights of Women's Forum 1992 (Human Rights Report); 'Violations of Human Rights in Kosova 1995', Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms, paper written for the Commission on Human Rights, 52nd session, Geneva 1996; 'Kosovski Albanci II: Policijska represija', Izvestaj br. 16, February 1995, in *Pod lupom: Kršenje ljudskih prava na teritoriji bivše Jugoslavije 1991–95, Fond za humanitarno pravo*, 1997, pp. 173–224 (Human Rights Report). Sacrifice for Albanian-language education was acknowledged in obituaries with the following words: 'We are proud to have had such a parent who did not even spare his life in the defence of *shkolla shqipe*' or 'With will and pride you gave [your life] for high Albanian national ideals, for sacredness of language, students and *shkolla shqipe*'. See Drita Halimi-Statovci, *Etimologjia Flet*, Prishtina: Instituti Albanologjik i Prishtinës 1998, p. 287.

symbolic mapping out of Albanian nationhood in Kosovo in terms of opposition, however, overshadowed important questions concerning the development of Albanian nationhood in Kosovo quite apart from the Serbs.

In the interwar period, the nascent sense of Albanian nationhood rested both on religious and secular foundations. The Muslim clergy embraced and furthered education in Albanian and so heralded ultimate superiority of national rather than religious identity in the Albanian community in Kosovo. But, their engagement, effectively, implied an interposition on nationhood of a strong sense of religious identity, rather than the demise of the latter. Such conceptualisation of nationhood around religion, starkly contrasted with efforts on the part of nationalists to construct the Albanians' sense of national identity in purely secular terms, creating possible tension between secular and religious visions of nationhood.

In the post-autonomy period, the secular vision of nationhood prevailed. However it also included a duality. A Kosovo-focused vision of nationhood with a political goal of Kosovo's independence as its political corollary, contrasted starkly with steps undertaken in the field of education to bring about the symbolic unification of all Albanians. Unification was not articulated as a political goal of an overwhelming majority of Albanians in Kosovo in the post-autonomy period but the symbolic unification of education could, arguably, spawn an analogous political demand for the political-cum-territorial unification of Kosovo and Albania.

Were this request to be articulated, the feeling of 'Albanianness'—Kosovo Albanians' sense of membership in a large Albanian community—would, inevitably be challenged by 'Kosovarness'—the Albanians' strong sense of Kosovar identity. It is the relationship between 'Kosovar' and 'all-Albanian' that the *shkolla shqipe* in Kosovo will have to resolve. Otherwise, it risks turning from a school that promoted the sense of Albanian national identity, despite the symbolic and institutional hurdles the Serbs had raised, into a school inconspicuously nourishing potential intra-Albanian tensions.