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ALBANIA: A DENIAL OF THE OTTOMAN PAST (SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS AND POLITICS OF MEMORY)¹

Rezumat

Albania: negarea trecutului otoman (manualele școlare și politicile de conservare a memoriei)

În școlile din Albania postcomunistă, pe lângă manualele destinate pentru predarea istoriei, de asemenea, în calitate de material didactic suplimentar sunt utilizate și atlasele școlare. Faptele și relatările istorice ale trecutului otoman, menționate atât prin texte cât și prin hărți, sunt indiscret denaturate și marginalizate. Ca rezultat, în prezent, cetățeanul albanez este incapabil să explice de ce în Albania, unde predomină un sistem de guvernământ musulman, în același timp persistă un grad considerabil de toleranță poli-confesionalistă. Cu toate acestea, curricula școlară albaneză la disciplina „Istorie” continuă să propage în mod denaturat sentimentul antiotoman încapsulat de stereotipurile „jugul turcesc” sau „cinci secole de ocupație turcească”. Acest „antiosmanism” implantat în cultura și discursul public albanez a devenit un „corp străin” pentru statul albanez, care are un caracter musulman și policonfesional.

Cuvinte-cheie: Albania, „antiosmanism”, *dhimmi*, politici de conservare a memoriei, atlase școlare la disciplina „Istorie”, curricula școlară la disciplina „Istorie”, manuale școlare la disciplina „Istorie”.

Резюме

Албания: отрицание османского наследия (школьные учебники и политики сохранения памяти)

В школах посткоммунистической Албании, наряду с учебниками по истории, в качестве дополнительного дидактического материала также используются и школьные атласы. Изложение информации об исторических событиях османского прошлого, как упоминаемых в текстах, так и представленных в картах, явно искажено и маргинализировано. Как следствие, в настоящее время албанский гражданин не способен объяснить, почему в Албании, с преобладанием системы мусульманского правления, в то же время в значительной степени сохраняется толерантность к поликонфессиональности. Вместе с тем, албанский школьный curriculum по дисциплине «История», искажая реальность, продолжает пропагандировать антиосманские чувства, овеянные стереотипами «турецкое иго» или «пять веков турецкой оккупации». Такой «антиосманизм», внедренный в культуру и общественный дискурс Албании, стал «инородным телом» для албанского государства, носящего мусульманский и поликонфессиональный характер.

Ключевые слова: Албания, «антиосманизм», *dhimmi*, политики сохранения памяти, школьные атласы, школьный curriculum по дисциплине «История», школьные учебники по дисциплине «История».

Summary

Albania: A Denial of the Ottoman past (School textbooks and politics of memory)

In post-communist Albania's schools, alongside regular textbooks of history for teaching the subject, school atlases of history are also employed as a prescribed or adjunct textbook. In the stories and facts related through texts and maps, the Ottoman past is curiously warped and marginalized. As a result, the average Albanian is left incapable of explaining why Albania is a predominantly Muslim polity, but with a considerable degree of tolerant poly-confessionalism. Furthermore, school history education in Albania propagates the unreflective anti-Ottoman feeling encapsulated by the stereotypes of 'Turkish yoke' or 'the five centuries of Turkish occupation.' This simplistic anti-Ottomanism of Albanian culture and public discourse is strangely at variance with the Muslim and poly-confessional character of Albania.

Key words: Albania, anti-Ottomanism, *dhimmi*, politics of memory, school atlases of history, school history education, school history textbooks.

During my trips abroad, I developed a curious custom of purchasing history textbooks used in a given country's schools. I also checked on the existence of a history atlas as a genre of regular or adjunct textbook. Colleagues of mine were flabbergasted, because sojourns abroad should be more fun than going back to some fusty classroom, even notionally. However, taxi drivers, shop assistants, café owners, professors, and local travelers whom I meet in the country of my visit had to learn from exactly such textbooks and atlases of history. In the course of their compulsory education, a certain image of their own nation-state and of the outside world in relation to it was firmly placed in their heads. Now, for better or worse, as adults, they observe reality through the prism of these early school images (or rather, stereotypes) that are implanted in their minds, solidified, and came to constitute 'the truth', the national dogma, an ideological yardstick, against which events in their own nation-state and abroad must be assessed².

It is next to impossible to take off these nationally-tinted spectacles, because hardly anyone notices their existence in the first place. The 'textbook truth' about 'our nation' and the wider world becomes naturalized³. Rarely are we jostled out from this easy complacency, most often when we talk about exactly the same events from the past to people who received their education in another country. We are as much surprised about their 'incorrect' interpretation of these events as they about ours. We may take offense or decide to avoid the touchy subject for the sake of politeness. As a result, these invisible spectacles continue to sit on our nose and distort reality in the nationally-in-

flected manner, as intended by our country's ministry of education, in line with the national curriculum that *has* to be followed by *all* schools across our homeland.

A lot of disagreements and misunderstandings among people coming from different countries – be them personal or at the level of politics and scholarship – have their source in national-skewed school education [67]. In earlier ages, prior to the rise of the ideal of free and compulsory education for all, religions tended to put stereotypes in children's heads. Nowadays, when we are awash with veritable pet bytes of textual and audiovisual information available online, the 'correct and advisable' trajectory of national thinking about the past and the present is set out in the state's officially managed *Geschichtspolitik* (politics of history, politics of memory). With lavish governmental support, 'promising' research projects are pursued, 'appropriate' books are published in steep runs, films on 'glorious national stories' are produced, and 'nationally correct' content is copiously generated for websites. This swelling wave of 'correct thinking' about the past drowns out other views and interpretations, pushing them under rubrics marked as 'unreliable', 'eccentric', 'wrong', or outright 'lunatic' [84]. In this way, facts and events, which do not fit into the approved national master narrative, are brushed away from the public purview, downgraded to the status of 'information noise', which every 'appropriately' educated citizen is conditioned to reject on the first reading or watching, deeming them as 'incorrect' by default. The erstwhile discussion between different points of view is replaced by the brutal duel fought through the exponentially growing volume of 'appropriate information', ever faster and more broadly disseminated. It is eerily close to cyber war [26]. That national story wins what is repeated more frequently and imparted with the use of more ubiquitous and intrusive online and offline instruments. There is a popular (and as such un-attributable) 20th century saying 'a lie repeated a hundred times becomes the truth'. That is why, the average citizen has heard so much about the German, American (i.e. USA) or Russian history, but next to nothing about the Albanian, Burkina Faso or Laotian history, or let alone about the past of sub-states or cross-border regions and their populations. In this globalized world of nowadays, a couple of such most distinctly visible (read: overpowering) national master narratives are posed to constitute the skeleton of modernity (modern thinking) to which all other extant national histories must be fitted [34].

Albanian Textbooks of History

In late November 2015, my over two-decade-old dream came true and I visited Albania at the invitation of Bardhyl Selimi, a retired professor of mathematics and a leading Esperantist in this country. Prompted by my questions about school atlases of history, Bardhyl took me for a leisurely walk across the center of the capital city of Tirana to visit the National Library of Albania. A brief search in the library's e-catalog yielded few hits and merely those school atlases that had been published during the communist times. Bardhyl shrugged and could not help me more, because his two sons finished elementary education before the fall of communism. During some leisure time in be-

tween lectures and other official engagements, I persisted and enquired young kids about these school atlases. They confirmed my hunch that such atlases do exist. It appears that the National Library either does not collect them, or has a cataloging backlog in this field that goes back to the early 1990s. It may not be that surprising, when one bears in mind the fact that in 1997 all structures of the post-communist Albanian state collapsed, the economy suffered a complete meltdown and the civil war ensued [52].

Tirana's Mediterranean climate and the compact shape of its center makes the city friendly to flaneurs, despite the heavy traffic, the almost non-existence of pavements, uneven street surfaces and missing manhole covers. I developed a voracious taste for walks that brought me to all sorts of neighborhoods and half-concealed corners, including some local bookstores unknown to tourists. I also discovered that, like in Turkey, school textbooks can be more readily found in stationery shops than in regular bookstores. The persistence paid off. I managed to buy seven school atlases of history published in the 21st century.

Two of these atlases are adaptations and partial translations from the German and Italian originals [9]. All of them cover world history, with the exception of a single atlas solely devoted to the Albanian national master narrative [81]. One of the atlases was published in Macedonia and is also distributed in Albania and Kosovo [16], while another appeared in Tirana, but it is sold in Kosovo and Macedonia, as well [33]. Most of these atlases are earmarked for the subsequent school grades, namely, 4th, [60], 7th [54], and 8th [55; 81].

The Albanian-language general atlases of world history, with the predictable focus on Europe, features either special thematic sections or single maps devoted to Albanian history [9, p. 10, 16, 28, 31, 34-35, 41, 58-60, 70, 85; 33, p. 64-91; 54, p. 17-19; 55, p. 10-11; 60, p. 9, 23-25]. On top of that, in order to get a better insight into how the Albanian national master narrative is taught in Albanian schools, I also bought two alternative textbooks of history for the last (12th) grade of secondary school, since they are entirely devoted to Albanian history [82; 91]. To this lot, I added three school atlases of world geography [6; 7] and three more of Albanian geography [20], because they offer the geographical image of the 'Albanian world' that closely corresponds to the national master narrative propagated in history textbooks and school atlases of history. All the school atlases of geography are predictably devoted to 'ethnic Albania', understood as composed of Albania, Kosovo and the western part of Macedonia. Furthermore, the three atlases exclusively on Albanian geography, through maps on this subject, explicitly propose that the 'true ethnic Albania' consists of Albania proper, Kosovo, western Macedonia (including the Macedonian capital of Skopje), the sliver of northwestern Greece (Chameria, that is, *Çamëria* in Albanian and *Τσαμουριά* [*Tsamourιά*] in Greek), southernmost Montenegro (with the Montenegrin capital of Podgorica) and a piece of southernmost Serbia (that is, the Preshevo Valley in Albanian and *Прешево* [*Preševo*] Valley in Serbian)⁴. These six territories are typically depicted as 'islands' separated from one another by

broad notional white divides (which obviously do not exist in the terrain represented), suggesting that this separation is unjust and will be overcome in the future [20, p. 24]. Worryingly, this presentation of the ethnic (or rather ethno-linguistic) lands of the Albanians (that is, Albanian-speakers) implants in schoolchildren's minds an image that in the future may put them at loggerheads with their counterparts from Albania's and Kosovo's neighboring states. As it is well known, ethno-linguistic and historic claims of the territory, as proposed by political elites and nationally-minded scholars from the Balkan nation-states, would require a Balkan Peninsula several times bigger than it is now in order to be fully satisfied.

National Identity: Religion and Language

The Albanians are rightly proud of the fact that they built a poly-confessional nation-state where religious or ethno-religious strife and conflict are conspicuously absent. According to the 2011 census, nearly 60 per cent of the country's inhabitants profess Islam (including Bektashism), 10 per cent Roman Catholicism, and almost 7 per cent Orthodox Christianity, while the remaining 23 per cent either did not declare their religion in the latest census or are atheists [76, p. 3]. The story is starkly different in today's Kosovo, where almost 96 per cent of the population are Muslims. The rest are Christians (Catholics and Orthodox) and non-believers. In Kosovo the confessional divide tends to coincide quite tightly with the ethnic cleavage⁵. Albanians (94.5 per cent), Bosniaks (1.7 per cent) and Turks (1.1 per cent) tend to profess Islam, while Serbs (4 per cent) Orthodox Christianity. Kosovo follows the ideological pattern of other Balkan nation-states, where the nation is defined both in ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious terms. Hence, a 'true Kosovar' (or Kosovan Albanian) must be an Albanian-speaking Muslim, a 'true Greek' must be a Greek-speaking Orthodox Christian, a 'true Bulgarian' must be a Bulgarian-speaking Orthodox Christian, a 'true Serb' must be a Serbian-speaking Orthodox Christian, a 'true Bosniak' must be a Bosnian-speaking Muslim, a 'true Montenegrin' must be a Montenegrin-speaking Orthodox Christian, a 'true Macedonian' must be a Macedonian-speaking Orthodox Christian, a 'true Turk' must be a Turkish-speaking Muslim, a 'true Croatian' must be a Croatian-speaking Catholic, or a 'true Romanian' must be a Romanian-speaking Orthodox Christian.

On the contrary, for a 'true Albanian' from Albania it is sufficient to speak Albanian alone, and there are no religious features as a defining one in that Albanian-ness, which is practiced within the borders of the Albanian nation-state. However, this situation causes a paradoxical rift within the broader definition of that also encompasses the Albanian ethnic areas located outside Albania. Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia are almost exclusively Muslims. Hence, a 'true Albanian' in these two states must be an Albanian-speaking Muslim. This conflation of language and religion, typical for the rest of the Balkans, stands in stark opposition to the purely ethno-linguistic definition of in Albania. Only Montenegro's Albanians, who are either Muslims or Catholics, in their poly-confessionalism are similar to Albania's Albanians.

Many Albanians educated in school to wish for a 'bigger Albania' that would encompass all Albanian-speakers in a single polity, in the course of their lives, may find out to their surprise, that Kosovo/Macedonian Albanians are quite different from Albanian (and Montenegrin) Albanians. The former tend to be suspicious of the latter's easy going and unideologized poly-confessionality, while the latter are distrustful of the former's ideological fixation on religion that uncomfortably stands too close to what is stereotypically perceived as 'Islamism' (all too often and rather incorrectly equated with Islamic fundamentalism). This inner-Albanian ideological division may yet turn out to be the most effective barrier that will keep Kosovo from entering a state union with Albania. From the vantage of religion and language, the two Albanian polities of Albania and Kosovo are eerily similar to Germany and Austria. Both latter states share the same standard German language, but Austria is confessionally homogenous (Catholic), like Kosovo, while Germany is heterogeneous in this respect (Protestant and Catholic), like Albania itself. In addition, the standard German language being based on the (East) Middle German dialects of today's central Germany differs from the Upper German (Alemannic) dialects of southern Germany (Bavaria) and Austria (cf. Ammon 1995). Similarly, the standard Albanian language steeped into the Tosk dialect of southern Albania and is close in meaning to the Gheg dialect of Kosovo and northern Albania.

The Millet System

The creation of Christian nation-states in the Balkans in areas seized from the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century was followed by the founding of Albania in 1912 and the destruction of this empire in the wake of World War I. The secular (but culturally Islamic) Turkish nation-state replaced the Ottoman Empire in Anatolia and the south-easternmost corner of the Balkan Peninsula. In the Ottoman Empire the 'people(s) of the Book' (بائتکفلا ل ما) [*Ahl al-Kitāb* in Arabic, *Ehl-i kitab* in Osmanlıca), that is monotheists (meaning Muslims, Jews and Christians of various creeds), were considered to be *Ehl-i Zimmi* (Osmanlıca for 'protected people[s]'), and as such tolerated and incorporated into the polity's structure through the means of the religion/church-based non-territorial (personal) autonomy [32, p. 158; 79, p. 254]. The autonomy for the faithful of a given kind of monotheism, together with this autonomy's ecclesiastical structures, became known as *millet* (from Arabic *مِلَّة* *millah* for 'religious community'). The Rum (literally, 'Roman'⁶) millet was for the empire's Orthodox Christians headed by the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople. Judaists or Yahudiler in Osmanlıca (Jews) were grouped in their own Jewish millet. The faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church constituted the Armenian millet. Muslims were not organized in a separate Muslim millet, but their privileged position in the empire ensured that this population and their institutions for all practical reasons functioned as a millet of such a kind. Furthermore, when Ottoman sultans wanted to refer to the totality of Muslims living in their empire, they invariably spoke of them as 'the Millet of Islam' [36, p. 212].

The Serbian nation-state was established in the 1810s

for the Slavophone Orthodox Christians of the Patriarchate of Peć (abolished in 1766). The Greek nation-state founded during the following decade of the 19th century aspired for overhauling the entire Orthodox (Rum) millet into a Greek nation. But the Ottomans' successful curb on these ethno-religious aspirations of Greeks, combined with the rise of ethno-linguistically underpinned nationalisms of Orthodox Slavs, increasingly limited the Rum millet to Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians, alongside a handful of speakers of other languages as long as they conceded to use Greek in education and for written communication [5, p. 25-26, 28, 71].

Faced with the military domination of the West and Russia intervening in the Ottoman lands, the sultan approved the new lines of division coalescing within the Orthodox (Rum) millet for preserving the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire [36, p. 216-217, 223]. For instance, in 1870 the Sultan agreed with the founding of the Bulgarian Exarchate, which encompassed the territories of today's Bulgaria, Macedonia and northern Greece. In this way, the unity of the Orthodox (Rum) millet was finally shattered, and the empire's Slavophone Orthodox Christians were organized as a brand-new 'Bulgar millet.' This development ideologically and politically blocked the northward expansion of Greece until the Balkan Wars and the Great War in the 1910s [50, p. 78-79]. The creation and expansion of nation-states increasingly territorialized the previously non-territorial millets [85, p. 242-243]. The 'proper' post-Ottoman nation-state was designed for a single millet, largely irrespective of any difference in actual vernaculars. In this way, Serbia emerged as a nation-state for the Slavic-speaking faithful of the autocephalous fragment of the Rum (Orthodox) millet centered on the erstwhile Patriarchate of İpek (Peć) [47, p. 49]. Greece was built as a nation-state for the Rum (Orthodox) millet's faithful who employed the Greek-language original of the Gospels in liturgy. Bulgaria was constructed as a Slavophone nation-state for the Bulgar millet (that is, the Bulgarian Exarchate), while Turkey and Israel as nation-states gathered within their borders the members of the Muslim and Jewish millets, respectively [88, p. 10-12, 170]. Obviously, as it is well-known the Turkish nation-state limited itself to the Muslims in Anatolia, speaking Turkish, Kurdish, Laz (Georgian), Circassian, Albanian, Tatar or Gagauz, among others [12, p. 40-41].

The Albanian Dilemma

After 1878 the predominantly Albanian-speaking *vilayets* (Ottoman administrative regions) of İškodra (Shkodra), Yanya (Ioannina), Kosova (Kosovo) and Manastır (Bitola) became a semi-isolated promontory of the Ottoman Empire encircled by the Adriatic and Ionian seas in the west, while in the north and south by the Christian nation-states and powers of Montenegro, Austria-Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece. The fear was that if the carving of the Ottoman Balkans continue in accordance with the principle of one millet for one nation-state, this would mean the apportioning of Orthodox Albanian-speakers to Greece, Catholic Albanian-speakers to Montenegro and Austria-Hungary (or possibly to Italy), while Muslim Albanian-speakers would be expelled as 'Turks' to

'go home' to the would-be Turkish nation-state in Anatolia [39, p. 46; 57].

A frightening premonition of such a scenario led to the rise of the Albanian grass-roots opposition in the form of the League of Prizren in 1878-1881 and to the subsequent emergence of the purely ethno-linguistic concept of the *non-millet*-based (*non-religious*) nation of Albanian-speakers. The leaders of the movement were torn between their Ottomanism and the Albanian political program ideally to be carried out in an autonomous manner within the Ottoman Empire [86, p. 435]. A solution would have been an autonomy for some Unified Albanian Vilayet ('region') composed of the Ottoman *vilayets* of İškodra (Shkodra), Kosova, Manastır (Bitola) and Yanya (Ioannina) [78; 87, p. 34]. But unlike in the case of Christians, the Sultan was not ready to consider such a solution for part of the Muslim millet. From his perspective, it would have constituted a serious weakening of the unity of the empire's demographically Muslim foundation, or the Millet of Islam. On the other hand, the coalescing Albanian elite and the average Albanian-speaker saw the Sultan's decision as endangering their own safety in this far-flung corner of the empire almost entirely at the mercy of Christian powers and neighbors, who would not consider any concessions for Albanian-speakers [72; 78].

When the First Balkan War commenced, the Albanians had no choice but to take matters into their hands, and thus proclaimed their own nation-state in 1912. Luckily for them, none of the European great powers wanted to fortify an already existing Balkan nation-state with a grant of ethnically Albanian lands because it could have given an undue advantage to another great power's client state in this region. The story is well known and recently was celebrated in numerous publications brought out for the celebrations of the centenary of the Albanian nation-state in 2012 [53, p. 24-124]. Not surprisingly, this is also the main story narrated in the aforementioned school textbooks of history [82, p. 85-109; 91, p. 84-105], in the school atlas of Albanian history [81, p. 22-39] and in general school atlases of history [33, p. 76-85; 54, p. 17-19].

The Neglected Ottoman Legacy

What schoolchildren and other readers cannot learn from the textbooks and atlases of history is how the Albanians living in today's Albania became poly-confessional and why this religious diversity does not cause any considerable political and identification tensions, which is (or was) the norm in other post-Ottoman nation-states in the Balkans and Anatolia [31; 63]. Early modern Albanian history is construed as the period extending between the Middle Ages and the founding of the Albanian nation-state [91, p. 68-93]. In turn, the beginning of the early modern times is defined as the establishment of Ottoman domination in the ethno-linguistically Albanian lands between the 1380s and 1410s [82, p. 70].

But in the sections devoted to this early modern or Ottoman period, the textbooks and atlases proudly place, on the one hand, the aforementioned 'struggle for Albanian national statehood', while on the other the Ottoman vassal-turned-Catholic warlord, Skanderbeg (Gjergj Kas-

trioti, 1405–1468), who first, upon conversion from Orthodox Christianity to Islam adopted the name *İskender*⁷ and became an Ottoman bey. In turn, his full title *İskender Bey* yielded the Latinized form *Skanderbeg* (cf. *Francus* 1544). In 1443 he deserted the Ottomans, and after converting to Catholicism carved out for himself a Christian polity in today's northern Albania. Under *Skanderbeg's* leadership, the Christian population composed of Albanian-, Slavic-, Greek- and Vlach (Aromanian)-speakers successfully repelled Ottoman attacks in the mountainous terrain until a decade after the ruler's death, when the polity eventually fell to the Ottomans in 1478. The two textbooks of history under review devote to *Skanderbeg*, respectively, nine and 10 pages [82, p. 68-77], while 25 and 22 pages to the rise of the Albanian national movement [82, p. 85-109; 91, p. 84-105]. As a result, in these two textbooks, five and six pages, respectively, remain for covering the entire Ottoman period of more than half a millennium [82, p. 79-84; 91, p. 78-83]. The irony is that half of the space is taken by an overview of the semi-polities won by the two Ottoman governors of Albanian origin who went rogue, namely, *Kara Mahmud Pasha* (1749–1796) of the *Sanjak of İşkodra* (*Shkodra*) and *Ali Pasha Tepelena* (1740–1822) of *Yannina* (*Ioannina*). The latter warlord controlled most of what today is northern Greece and southern Albania [82, p. 82-84; 91, p. 81-83]. Hence, effectively the Ottoman period is discussed most sketchily on a mere *three* pages in both the textbooks [82, p. 79-81; 91, 78-80].

By comparison, these two textbooks devote, respectively, 25 and 21 pages to the ancient Illyrians and their state(s) seen as the ethnic (or rather mythic) origin of the Albanians [82, p. 18-42; 91, p. 23-43]. Not surprisingly, any Albanian, whom I met, was ready to tell me something about the glory of the ancient '*Albanian*' Illyria [51], while my friend *Bardhyl Selimi* was even named after an Illyrian monarch. The name *Bardhyl* is an Albanized rendering of the name of the monarch *Bardylis* (*Βάρδουλις*) who ruled the Kingdom of *Dardania* (largely coterminous with today's Kosovo) during the first half of the Fourth century BCE [16]. The myth of '*Albanian Illyria*' is cultivated for national ends to this day, first, for 'proving' the autochthony of the Albanians to the western Balkans where they live at present, and second, to underscore the idea of a '*Greater Albania*' [28, p. 10]. Namely, in antiquity all hypothetical '*Illyrians-Albanians*' lived in a single kingdom, so nowadays a single polity should be achieved for all the Albanians, too [24, p. 247]. The irony is that during the 1830s and 1840s early Croatian / South Slav (Yugoslav) and Panslav activists and nationalists used the term '*Illyrian*' for denoting their own language and national movement [19].

In the two atlases of history under discussion, two and four pages, respectively, are given to the story of *Skanderbeg* [33, p. 71, 73; 81, p. 13-16], one and two, respectively, to the exploits of *Kara Mahmud Pasha* and *Ali Pasha Tepelena*⁸ [33, p. 74; 81, p. 19-20], 10 and 18, respectively, to the growth of the Albanian national movement [33, p. 76-85; 81, p. 22-39], while as few as *two* pages only in both atlases are devoted to the coverage of the Ottoman times [33, p. 72, 75; 81, p. 17, 21]. And again, these two atlases

discuss the Illyrians on three and six pages, respectively [33, p. 64-66; 81, p. 4-9].

The Ottoman Past Rejected

The world-renowned Albanian author, *Ismail Kadare* (born in 1936), is also rightly feted at home as Albania's most important living writer. But a streak of unrepentant anti-Ottomanism weaves through his hypnotically crystalline prose. Some Ottoman institutions – looking strange to the modern Western eye – *Kadare* employed in his books and stories as metaphors for depicting the abuse of power in the authoritarian state, for instance, the practice of storing written records of dreams in an archive [41], using or imposing blindness for administrative purposes [45]⁹, or maintaining the post of *curser* [43]. This veiled criticism of the stark realities in communist Albania with the employment of Ottoman-inflected metaphors unfortunately reinforces the average Albanian's already steadily negative image of the Ottoman past as imparted at school both during the communist times and nowadays [80].

This appears to be a case of adopting wholesale Orientalization [74], or the Western (European) skewed and stereotypical perception of the Balkans [37; 83] for thinking about the Ottoman past of Albania. Many of such stereotypes, as those of 'five hundred years of Turkish [Ottoman] occupation', 'Turkish [Ottoman] yoke', or 'Turkish [Ottoman] atrocities' used to be the staple of the specifically *Christian* propaganda directed against the *Muslim* Ottoman Empire. With the rise of the Christian nation-states in the Balkans these stereotypes were made into the cornerstone of their national master narratives [38; 61]. The Ottoman Empire was and still is blamed for nearly all today's ills observed in these polities, especially for their economic backwardness (as measured against the yardstick of [West] Germany, where hundreds of thousands of migrants from the post-Ottoman states have found gainful employment since the 1950s [29]. Turkish secular and nationalist historians, politicians and intellectuals also adopted some of these anti-Ottoman stereotypes, but obviously not those that could be interpreted as anti-Turkish. What is more, they replied to the stereotype of 'Turkish atrocities' with their own of 'Christian atrocities' that were equally (or even more) numerous and lasted considerably longer, that is, from the 18th through the 20th century [57]. In addition, they developed a specifically Turkish stereotype of 'perfidious treachery' on the part of the post-Ottoman Balkan nations in return for 'benevolent Ottoman rule'. Last but not least, since 2003, when Turkey has found itself under the rule of the secularist but firmly pro-Islamic Justice and Development Party led by *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan*, the Ottoman past of this country has been increasingly rehabilitated and incorporated into the Turkish national master narrative [71].

Kadare's anti-Ottomanism, shared with the average Albanian, seems to be a by-product of the modernizing propaganda and effort in communist Albania, which found its historical Other in the 'bourgeois, oppressive, backward and essentially medieval in its demeanor' Ottoman Empire. This image of the Muslim world was widespread in the Soviet Union, where *Kadare* studied [46], and was also

well entrenched in other Soviet bloc countries where many Albanians received university education prior to Tirana's rift with Moscow at the turn of the 1960s. These students brought this negative image back home to Albania, thus reinforcing the local anti-Ottoman sentiment. (Such collocations as *pesëqind vjet pushtimit turk / osman / otoman* [five hundred years of Turkish / Ottoman occupation], *zgjedha osmane / ottoman / turk* [Turkish / Ottoman yoke] turn up time and again in official Albanian-language publications and academic monographs published in Albania and Kosovo [11, p. 16-17; 14, p. 134, 489; 22, p. 68; 62, p. 19, 25, 28; 70, p. 101; 73, p. 38, 39, 57; 80, p. 52, 60, 125, 217; 89, p. 6, 76, 168; 90, p. 199]. To my knowledge, none of those, who joined the ranks of the 'chattering classes', took care to point out that these anti-Ottoman stereotypes are self-defeating, being directed against Albania's own past and the predominantly Muslim character of its population. It is the case of a not fully-realized self-hatred that constantly produces new generations of 'Muslim-hating Muslims'. What is more, this persisting negative attitude toward the Ottoman past, that actually made Albania what it is, feeds back into the anti-Ottomanism of the ideologically Christian Balkan nation-states, proving in their eyes that this sentiment 'must be right', when even Muslim Albanians concur on the issue. Neither does Kadare appear to notice the irony of this paradox (also encapsulated in his very own Islamic name 'Ismail'; similarly, most Albanians brandish Islamic names or surnames, too), which could lend itself to a great novel of ideas that would transcend the received national preconceptions and opinions. Beyond the aforementioned metaphors directed against authoritarianism, metaphors that build on anti-Ottoman stereotypes, Kadare presents the introduction of Islam to Albania as an authoritarian-like imposition [40], which ominously diverted Albania from the 'correct' (read: Christian and Western European) path of development [42]. Predictably the author eulogizes (though in typically his own oblique manner) Skanderbeg's persistent but eventually doomed military resistance against the Ottomans [44]. In one short novel, the writer also focuses on the historical event of the 1830s massacre of about 500 southern (Tosk-speaking and Muslim) Albanian beys (that is, chiefs, warlords, village leaders) in Manastir (Bitola), as a clear example of 'Ottoman perfidy' [4, p. 79-80; 45]. Obviously, the massacre could be equally interpreted as a long-awaited reintroduction of law and order, which since the turn of the late 18th century had been time and again breached in this area by such rogue governors of Albanian ethnic background as Kara Mahmud Pasha or Ali Pasha Tepelena, of course, with complicity of the local beys.

Both rogue governors are lauded in the aforementioned Albanian history textbooks and school atlases of history, almost as early Albanian national leaders, despite the fact that they 'ruled' over multiethnic and poly-confessional populaces, which was the norm across the Ottoman Empire. Curiously, the most successful of all these Albanian Ottoman-officials-turned-rogues, Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt (Mehmet Ali Pasha in Albanian, Kavalali Mehmet Ali Paşa in Turkish, 1769-1849) does not earn

a mention in the textbooks under review. In the wake of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798-1801), as an Ottoman commander, between 1801 and 1805, Muhammad Ali gradually seized power in this rich and extensive Ottoman province with the world's oldest university of Al-Azhar (founded in 972) to boot. He deftly used the opportunity afforded by the internecine struggle for domination over this province between Egypt's old (pre-Ottoman) Mameluke elite and the Ottomans. In 1805 the Sultan recognized Muhammad Ali as Governor (*Wali*) of Egypt, but Muhammad Ali preferred to style himself as Viceroy (*Khedive*) [27]. In 1811 Muhammad Ali sealed his seizure of power in Egypt by massacring the Mameluke elite (around 500 officials and landlords) during a banquet [58, p. 59], like the Ottomans would do with the Albanian beys in Manastir 19 years later. Hence, it could be argued that the Ottomans learned this cruel ploy from Albanians.

The Mameluke warrior elite, which had governed Egypt for almost six centuries since 1250, was replaced by Muhammad Ali and his Albanian soldiers overnight. The new ethnically Albanian elite, under the Muhammad Ali (formally known as Alawiyya) dynasty, ruled and modernized Egypt, turning it into a regional empire that at times extended from the Peloponnesus, Crete, Cyprus and Syria in the north to Sudan, Eritrea and parts of today's Somalia in the south, and to what at present is Saudi Arabia in the east [1; 21]. This Albanian dynasty and elite's rule lasted until 1953 when an Arab national republic was proclaimed in Egypt, the monarchy abolished, and 4,000 Albanian families (that is, around 20,000 people) were summarily expelled from the country [23, p. 126]. To my knowledge there is not a single monograph or novel devoted to this amazing century-and-a-half-long Albanian adventure in Egypt. The topic is waiting for 'its Kadare', who would do justice to it.

Obviously(?), these events are not mentioned in the Albanian history textbooks or school atlases of history under review. This story goes too much against the grain of the national curriculum's anti-Ottoman sentiment and the required focus on the lands compactly inhabited by Albanian-speakers. That Albanians could prosper under Ottoman rule and lead at the empire's forefront of modernization, even without going rogue. The typical path of highly successful career within the fold of the Ottoman officialdom is offered by the example of the Albanian Köprülü (Qyprilliu or Kypriljoti in Albanian) family from the town of Köprü(lü) (or Veles in today's Macedonia), whose seven members served as the Ottoman sultans' grand viziers (akin to 'prime ministers') between 1656 and 1711 [2, p. 313-319]. Thousands upon thousands of other Albanians entered the Ottoman bureaucracy and army if they were Muslims, or engaged in trade and commerce when of different religions. They availed themselves of the large and stable Ottoman sphere of borderless travel, employment and of the free circulation of goods and ideas that used to extend from today's Algeria in the west to present-day Turkey in the east, from what nowadays is southern Ukraine or Hungary in the north to today's Egypt, Yemen and Oman in the south.

On 28 November 2015 I had the privilege to participate in the international conference 'Transition in retrospect: 25 Years After the Fall of Communism', organized in Tirana by the University of New York Tirana (UNYT). In the panel on 'Historical and Comparative Analysis of Transition', I happened to attend the lecture of Professor Fatos Tarifa (Rector of the UNYT) on 'Communist and Post-Communist Disparities and Universals'. In the course of this talk and during the follow-up discussion, I was surprised to hear that the 'Ottoman occupation' was held responsible for present-day Albania's relative economic and technological backwardness (obviously as measured against Germany or the Czech Republic, *not* against the benchmark of Moldova or Belarus). I proposed that the communist system and the self-imposed isolation of communist Albania might be better candidates for culprits in this regard. However, in response, I heard the usual litany of anti-Ottoman stereotypes that did not constitute any coherent argument, which would unequivocally connect Ottoman rule to the perceived Albanian backwardness. In turn, I alluded to some developments under Ottoman rule that in the Western theory of development are viewed in positive light. Namely, political, economic, social and cultural life of the Ottoman Empire overwhelmingly unfolded in cities and towns, however small. The urbanization of space and society, which followed the Ottoman takeover of the Balkans and the establishment of lasting and stable peace (*Pax Ottomanica*), was quite unprecedented in the Balkans and stood in stark contrast to the village-centered, rural character of economy in the Christian areas surrounding the Ottoman possessions in southeastern Europe [17; 48, p. 75, 90]. This Ottoman urbanization brought about monetary economy to the newly conquered areas, where non-monetary barter had been typical for the pre-Ottoman period. Importantly, the system of serfdom that during the Christian period had tied peasants to land and forced them to render free agricultural labor to noble land owners was terminated in the Balkans under Ottoman rule [30, p. 24-25; 35, p. 1-18]. Serfdom, which perpetuated the rural (and thus premodern) character of society and economy, persisted from Prussia in the north to the Austrian Empire in the south (that is, to today's Austria, Western Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia and westernmost Croatia) until the middle of the 19th century [66]. It can be argued that the Ottoman rule, instead of keeping the Balkans backward, actually gave the region a head start in this regard by emancipating peasantry. Unfortunately, this precious advantage was squandered during the numerous wars in the 19th and 20th centuries (in quest for the ethnically and historically 'correct' national territory) followed by multilateral expulsions, and under the pressure of the Great European powers that imposed on the Balkan nation-states disadvantageous economic and political terms [8]. What is more, the dismantling of the serfdom system in the Russian Empire (that is, from present-day Lithuania, Belarus and eastern Poland in the north to Ukraine and Moldova in the south) commenced as late as the early 1860s and continued until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 [49; 64].

Conclusion: Albania as an Unaware Preserver of Ottoman Values?

The pronounced rejection of the Ottoman past as the direct and most important source of today's Albania, alongside its society and culture, creates an intellectual and ideological paradox that sits ill at ease (almost schizophrenically so) in the midst of what currently Albanian-ness is about. The Albanians themselves, together with Albanian politicians and intellectuals, are right to be proud of the peaceful and easygoing poly-confessional character of their nation-state [25; 69, p. 24]. But it is regrettable that the vast majority of them are patently unable to see that this advantageous sociopolitical reality of Albania is an Ottoman legacy. When the Ottoman Empire was divided among successor nation-states, the previously non-territorial millets were territorialized and each enclosed within the boundaries of its own nation-state. Religious in their character millets were transformed into ethno-religious nations that, in turn typically were required to become ethno-linguistically homogenous [75, p. 96-98].

As a result, in today's Balkans nation-states are separated from one another by the dual barrier of language and religion (or ecclesiastical autocephaly in the case of the Slavophone Orthodox polities). Only Albania avoided following this highly divisive path of national statehood building, legitimation and maintenance. In a way (if the clearly national in its character insistence on ethno-linguistic homogeneity is overlooked for a moment), Albania can be seen as the very last remaining part of the Ottoman Empire, true to the sociopolitical organization of this erstwhile realm. Namely, as many as three millets brush shoulders freely in the Albanian nation-state, that is, Muslims¹¹, Catholics and Orthodox Christians. I should also mention the fourth – Jewish (Judaist) – millet¹². During World War II Albania was the sole country in the Europe occupied by Germany and Italy, where not only practically all the local Jews were saved, but their number actually grew steeply (eleven-fold, from about 24 to circa 300 [23, p. 218-219]), since many Jews from outside this country found safe haven in wartime Albania under Italian, and then German, occupation [3; 77]. The uplifting story deserves to be better known across the world, and should be made into a shining multicultural pillar of present-day Albania's national master narrative befitting this new post-communist epoch of European integration and globalization.

Apart from Jews, Albanians also saved around 25,000 Italian soldiers, who were mercilessly hunted down and killed by German (and Austrian) troops after Italy's 1943 change of sides in the Second World War [13, p. 501; 19, p. 185]. Many of them joined the Albanian resistance [65, p. 120]. Typically, (predominantly Muslim) Albanians' welcoming behavior extended equally toward former Italian occupiers (read: enemies and 'infidels') and persecuted Jews is explained by referral to the Albanian tradition of *besa*, or the obligation to protect guests in one's own house at whatever a cost [10; 24]. Well, it might be true, but another, equally plausible explication is offered by the Ottoman (or more broadly, Islamic) institution of *Dhimmi* (Arabic ذمّي for 'protected persons', rendered as *Zimmi* in

Osmanlica) extended to non-Muslim monotheists of all creeds across the Ottoman Empire. This institution constituted the legal cornerstone of the empire's millet system [36, p. 213, 216]. And nowadays, in a curiously unrealized (almost unconscious) way, nameless and unnoticed, this Ottoman millet system for all the Dhimmis (now, Muslims included in their number) of various confessions continues to underpin society and politics in today's Albania. Perhaps, it would make more sense for the European future of Albania in the globalized world to consciously embrace the country's Ottoman past, obviously without glossing over Ottoman rule's dark corners, but equally with doing justice to its valuable achievements. This, among others, would entail covering the Ottoman past of Albania in school textbooks and school atlases of history¹³ in more depth and in a fairer and more objective manner. More space should be given to the Ottoman Empire and the role of Albanians in the poly-confessional realm's transcontinental and interethnic networks [59] than to the mythic Illyrian origin of the Albanian nation. Skanderbeg already functioning as Albania's main state-approved national hero for over a century must be retained for the sake of national feeling and cohesion that his image generates. The warlord's coat-of-arms of the double-headed (Byzantine and Orthodox Christian) eagle on the red background serves as Albania's national flag. But the school textbook coverage of Skanderbeg's struggle against the Ottomans might be rationalized and pared down so that it could be seen for what it was, that is, the rather brief transition period from Christian rule to the half-a-millennium-long *Pax Ottomanica* in the Albanian lands. Making good use of this lengthy, and relatively stable and prosperous period, Albanian-speakers created their modern culture and nation, even if at times in opposition to the Ottoman government's wishes. Significantly – unlike the Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs or Montenegrins – the Albanians *never* waged full-fledged war on the Ottoman Empire. Had they done so, for sure, Albanian soldiers, in equal measure, would have fought on both sides of such a hypothetical Albanian-Ottoman (Turkish) front, thus most probably, precluding the possibility of creating a tolerant poly-confessional Albanian nation-state, which Albania is nowadays. This valuable social and political capital is the Ottoman Empire's lasting bequest to Albania and its future.

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