

Makale Gönderim Tarihi: 16/04/2019 - Makale Kabul Tarihi: 28/05/2019

## DISCUSSION ABOUT THE OTTOMAN IMAGE IN KOSOVO'S HISTORY WRITING: KOSOVO WAR AND SKANDERBEG\*

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### Abstract

*This work offers a study of the Ottoman/Turkish imagery in history textbooks in Kosovo. The unit of research is the compulsory textbooks prepared for the Albanian students in primary and middle schools in Kosovo in the year 2010-2011. Textbooks, which usually are the first meeting of the individual with history, are a main subject in educational sciences due to the fact that they are the compulsory study units which are designed by the states, reflections of the "official" national histories. However, little research has been carried on the history textbooks in Kosovo. This study, which aims to shed light on the negative imageries in these books is inspired by the speeches made by the former Turkish Education Minister Ömer Dinçer and former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and following reflections and discussion in Kosovo in the year 2011. In this study, 5th Grade history textbook prepared for Kosovo Turks was also taken into account for the comparison. History textbooks have been studied under the light of the aforementioned discussions. Positive and negative images of the Ottoman/Turkish image are addressed in this study. Negative descriptions of the Ottoman administrative system were one of the issues which required more attention. Such descriptive words as occupier, terror, captures children and despotic for the Ottoman rule were used.*

**Keywords:** Kosovo, Ottoman-Turkish Image, History Writing, Skanderbeg

## KOSOVA TARİH YAZIMINDA OSMANLI İMAJI ÜZERİNE TARTIŞMA: KOSOVA SAVAŞI VE İSKENDER BEY

### Öz

*Bu çalışmada Kosova güncel tarih ders kitaplarındaki Osmanlı/Türk imajı ile ilgilenilmektedir. İncelemede Kosova'da Arnavut öğrenciler için hazırlanmış olan ilk ve ortaöğretim kurumlarında 2010-2011 yılında zorunlu olarak okutulan güncel tarih ders kitapları incelenmiştir. Çalışmada ayrıca Kosova Türkleri için hazırlanmış olan 5. Sınıf tarih ders kitabından da karşılaştırma yapabilmek için yararlanılmıştır. Devlet kurumları tarafından yazdırıldıkları için ülkelerin "resmi" tarihlerini anlatan ve zorunlu eğitim süreçleri nedeni ile bireylerin kimi zaman baştan sona okudukları ilk, kimi zamansa yegane kitaplar olan tarih ders kitapları eğitim bilimleri kapsamında pek çok araştırmaya konu olmuştur. Ancak bağımsızlığını yeni kazanmış bir devlet olan Kosova'nın tarih ders kitapları üzerine imgelerin arkalarında yatan kapalı olguları gün yüzüne çıkarmayı ve olumsuz, kasıtlı kalıp yargılara karşı farkındalık yaratmayı amaçlayan araştırmalar çok fazla bulunmamaktadır. Özellikle, Türkiye Milli Eğitim Bakanı Ömer Dinçer ve Dışişleri Bakanı Ahmet Davutoğlu'nun 2011 yılında Kosova'da tarih eğitimi ve Osmanlı algısı üzerine yaptığı konuşmalar ve bunun Kosova'daki yansıması sonucu ortaya çıkan tartışmalar böyle bir çalışmanın gerekliliğini ispatlar niteliktedir. Kosova tarih ders kitapları da bütün bu tartışmalar ışığında, bu çalışma altında incelenmiş ve Osmanlı/Türk imgesi ile ilgili olumlu ve olumsuz imgeler ortaya konulmuştur. Çalışma boyunca dikkati çeken Osmanlı ve*

\*This study is based on the findings of the master thesis; on the subject of "Ottoman/Turkish image in history textbooks of Kosovo". This study was also one of the output of "The image of Ottomans/Turks in the Current History Textbooks in Balkan and Blacksea Countries" Project which is sponsored by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK), 1001 -Research Projects Funding Program.

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yönetim sistemi üzerine olan olumsuz nitelermelerdir. Osmanlı için “işgalci”, “terör uygulayan”, “çocukları rehin alan”, “despot”, “ortaçağ anlayışlı” gibi tanımlamalar kullanılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kosova, Osmanlı-Türk İmajı, Tarih Yazımı, Skanderbeg.

## Introduction

History and history writing is a controversial subject in different contexts. In this regard, Hobsbawm says<sup>1</sup>: "*Historians are the producers of the past. Unfortunately, the ideologues do not want the history that is written by the academic historians. In their point of view, history should be written in parallel to ideological needs and requires, and this is a mythology that is not true*". Words of Hobsbawm describe the purpose of this study. In the formation of the nation-states, history was used as a practical tool. States choose to construct and teach their ideology in history textbooks. In this respect, this study aims to examine the history textbooks of Kosovo in order to define the constructed images of Ottoman and Turkish identities.

## 1. HISTORY WRITING DEBATES IN KOSOVO

History writing in Kosovo is a controversial issue. Especially the speech of Ömer Dinçer, the former National Education Minister of Turkey during his visit of Kosovo in August 2011, History textbooks started a debate among historians in Kosovo. In this speech, Ömer Dinçer stated that some negative comments should be removed from history textbooks<sup>2</sup>.

While this discussion is keeping up to date, Ahmet Davutoğlu replied to a question on this subject during his visit in August 27, 2011 "Kosovo historians need to get rid of cold war historiography and writing ideological history", and brought a new dimension to the debate. Taking into consideration that Kosovo is a country that has just gained independence, “cold war historiography” and “ideological historiography” which was mentioned by Davutoğlu refers to Albania evidently. When the history textbooks in Albania are compared to the history textbooks in Kosovo, it is realized that the two countries have almost the same curriculum in the same way. In the book published by the Academy named "Historia e Popullit Shqiptar", the History of Albanian People, even if the process from the time of Enver Hoxha has changed substantially, especially some stereotypes and negative words regarding Ottomans are still used. For example, Erhan Türbedar, an important expert on Kosovo, says:

Since the historical publications of Albanian Academy of Sciences are narrating Ottomans as intolerant and fanatical. History writing in Albania affects the history writing in Kosovo directly; as a result, the same difficulties are experienced in Kosovo History textbooks.<sup>3</sup> Although the historians in Kosovo have different views on this issue, viewpoints of historians who write Kosovo history textbooks is quite remarkable. For example, on this subject, the viewpoints of Frasher Demaj, one of the writers of history textbooks in Kosovo

<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Etnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today”, *Antropology Today*, Vol. 8., March-April 1992, [http://faculty.washington.edu/charles/562\\_f2011/Week%209/Hobsbawm%201992.pdf](http://faculty.washington.edu/charles/562_f2011/Week%209/Hobsbawm%201992.pdf), [Accessed: 18.04.2012]

<sup>2</sup> “The reactions from Kosovo to the desire of Ömer Dinçer”, <http://www.karsihaber.com/omer-dincerin-istegine-kosovadan-tepkiler-151989h.htm> [Accessed: 12.11.2011]

<sup>3</sup> Türbedar E., “Balkanlarda Osmanlı İmgesi: Kosova Örneği”, <http://www.avim.org.tr/degerlendirmetekli.php?makaleid=4994> [Accessed: 21.03.2012].

for the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 13<sup>th</sup> grades, and the deputy of the Democratic Kosovo Union Party, are as follows:

The history of a nation cannot change for its current political interests. Ottoman Empire did not come to the Balkans for the purpose of holiday. They kept Balkans occupied for 523 years.<sup>4</sup> In the Top Channel interview, an Albania based channel, Fehmi Rexhepi, one of the writers of history textbooks for the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades, states that the books do not include anti-Turkish statements. He also stated that the claim of Minister Dinçer was meaningless in this regard, and nobody should escape from the historical facts<sup>5</sup>. As it is seen, the discussion here developed in the context of changing Kosovo's history by historians. However, the removal of open or closed stereotypes seems to be overlooked. For example, Fetnan Derviş whom I consulted to get his views in the scope of the project that we are working on "The Image of Turkish and Ottomans in Balkan and Russian history textbooks". Derviş is a history teacher and the author of Kosovo 5th grade history textbook written for Turks. During our interview, he stated that the debates in this regard have a negative impact in the view of the Turks, and the expressions already present in textbooks, give rise to bias in the relationships of Albanian, Serbian and Turkish students with each other<sup>6</sup>.

In addition to all of these discussions, Kosovo Ministry of Education declared that they formed a commission to investigate the issues that had caused a great controversy. Although this approach was considered as "the pressure of strong Turkey to the weaker Kosovo" by Rome Buja, the Kosovo Albanian nationalists, the Kosovo Minister of Education stated that the purpose of the commission did not change the history; it is to examine the reported adverse judgments. Besides, the Minister stated that this demand was not something imposed by the Turkish Government but it was also a request by the European Commission. According to the Minister, what happened in the past is past and the past cannot be changed but if there were defamatory and insulting expressions, they would be removed from the books<sup>7</sup>.

## **2. OTTOMANS THAT HAVE BEEN OTHERIZED FROM THE PAST TO TODAY**

All the discussions mentioned in the section above are actually current debate topics. As mentioned by Erhan Türbedar, to understand current debates, we need to go a little back in history which will take us to the formation of Albanian nationalism. Since Kosovo is a new state and the most important factor that affects Kosovo history writing is Albanian nationalism, there is a need to examine Albanian history to understand the process of history writing in Kosovo properly. For this purpose, this section will mostly be an observation of Albanian history.

The first thing that attracts attention in the investigation of nationalism is the attribute to the "oldest". However, history resembles to a stream and it is constantly updated and improved. For this reason, the "oldest" is continuously updated and re-interpreted. Today, in Albanian nationalism, the most binding element compared to the nationalism of other regions

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<sup>4</sup> "Bakan Dinçer ve Türkiye'ye Tepkiler Büyüyor", <http://kosovaport.com/21082011t11496/> [Accessed: 12.11.2011].

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> The meeting with Fetnan Derviş in Prizren in the scope of the project

<sup>7</sup> "Bakan Dinçer ve Türkiye'ye Tepkiler Büyüyor", *ibid.*

is "ethnic basis". Contrary to the interpretation of other nationalisms in the region about themselves based on religion and denomination against "the other", Albanian nationalism defends itself with its ethnical identity against "the other" by whom they think to be surrounded. Separations among the Albanians in terms of the religious and sectarian aspects undoubtedly has a great effect on this discourse. For example, Vasa Pasha (Vasa) narrates this situation in his poem "Oh Albania, Poor Albania" "(O Moj Shqypyni, E Mjera Shqypyni) which was later translated into language to language. Mjera Shqypyni is as follows:

....Some people say they have faith and some of them say they have religion  
Some of they say I'm Turk, and some say I'm Latin  
Some of them say I'm Greek and some say I'm Slav  
...come together my siblings, let's take an oath altogether  
Neither church nor mosque is the medicine of our nation  
It is Albania nationalism is the belief of Albanians<sup>8</sup>.

Vasa Pasha who has an important role in the formation of "Re-Awakening" of Albanians and who was born as a Catholic from Iskodra expresses a similar definition of "Albanian nationalism". His ideas provided national unity as well as they were effective in creating an atheist state of Communist Albania<sup>9</sup>. This search during the establishment of national identity is seen in Şemsettin Sami, ie. Sami Frasheri. Frasheri refers to this subject in his work named as "Shqipëria, ç'ka çene, ç'eshte e ç'do te behete?" (What was Albania and what is it going to be now?) According to the author, the religion is more important than the ethnic identity in their native geography. Besides, he supports his expression by saying if the ones are Catholic, they are Frankish and if they are Muslim, they are Turkish<sup>10</sup>. Since the vast majority of the Albanian population is Muslim, and perhaps because Ottoman Empire ruled the country for centuries, the biggest other of popular nationalism of today has become Ottoman Empire. This situation has shown itself in both political and cultural aspects from post-Ottoman period so far. Olsi Jazexhi who has some studies on Albanian nationalism describes this situation as follows:

"The current tripartite structure is struggling to transform the "nation" of Ottomans to a modern nation. They need to change Albanian nationalism into the province religion. Some politicians such as Ahmed Bey Zogu who ruled the country from 1920 to 1939 took after westernization, secular reforms and legalization their own management on behalf of westernization. However, the opposition labeled eastern satrap as the sultan and Turkish by

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, (Scarecrowpress, Plymouth, 2010), p.467.

<sup>9</sup> Uğur Bahadır Bayraktar, , " Mythifying te Albanians: A Historical Discussion on Vasa Efendi's "Albania and the Albanians ", *Balkanologie*, vol.XIII, no:1-2, December 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Sami Frasheri, *Shqipëria, ç'ka çene, ç'ka eshte e ç'do te behete?*, Dituria, Bucharest, 1899, (Prishtine, 1999), s.67.

comparing it with Zogu and his regime.<sup>11</sup> On the political approach mentioned in the relevant quotation above, it is seen that the opposition accuses government of acting like a Turk. Unfortunately, this approach of 1920s has remained so far in Albanian political life. Especially, the last history writing debates in Kosovo show that this approach has not disappeared at all. For example, this approach reveals itself during the time of Enver Hoxha when Turkish words were removed from Albanian language<sup>12</sup>. So even if the ideologies change, the unique thing that does not change in Albanian nationalism is the otherization of "Turkishness" and "Ottoman History". In both history writing and political discourse, Ottoman history reminds the dark era. For example, Fatos Nano, Prime Minister in Albania in 1997, expressed in a speech about ending the 555 years of Ottoman backwardness<sup>13</sup>. As mentioned earlier, just as the political opposition came to power, they stated that they took over the "debris" in the territory of Albania as anywhere". In the Albanian discourse, one of the creators of this debris in Albania is the Ottoman Empire.

The otherization of the Ottoman Empire in culture and literature is frequently observed. Enis Sulstarova interprets this situation as "a desire to escape from the East"<sup>14</sup>. For example, the biggest reflection of this approach shows itself in the description that Ismail Kadare makes in his novels. This situation can also be seen in award-winning novel of Kadare named "The Siege"<sup>15</sup>. Again, the display of the film "Adverse Year" that was based on a novel of Kadare named "Shooting Star Time" caused a big reaction among Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia Muslims<sup>16</sup>. Islamist media in Turkey took over this issue and participated the discussion. In the film, the Ottomans and the Muslims are described as the biggest obstacle in establishing an independent Albania and emphasizes that the Ottoman Empire spoiled the essence of Albania. Kadare has already been known as anti-Ottoman with his personal discourse. Jazexhi states that such a film is seen very often especially in the communist era and the basic thesis Communist history writing and art is based on the notes that Ottoman occupation and its sovereignty in Albania cut the natural development of the country in Europe and buried the country into the five centuries of darkness<sup>17</sup>.

In the light of all of these examples, going back to Kosovo and history writing in Kosovo does not seem so easy. It is also not easy to answer the question whether the anti-Ottoman discourse has been continuing for almost a century can be replaced by a "brotherhood". Especially "Ottoman narrative" topic in history textbooks discussion was initiated by Davutoğlu, Turkish Foreign Minister. In addition, Ömer Dinçer, Minister of National Education undoubtedly brought about many reactions. We have mentioned many of these reactions in the previous section. However, before the examination of findings in history textbooks, on behalf of seeing the effect of a century-long discourse, we need to have a look

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<sup>11</sup> Olsi Jazexhi, "Düşmani Tasvir: Arnavutluk Lise Ders Kitaplarındaki Türk ve Osmanlı İmajı", *Balkan Araştırmaları Dergisi*, sayı:2, 2011, p.43.

<sup>12</sup> James Mayfield, "Enver Hoxha's Project for a post modern Communist Albania: Libertaion, Proletarian Rule, Atheism, and Extreme Isolationism", <http://euroheritage.net/hoxhaimperialism.shtml>, [Accessed: 10.07.2012].

<sup>13</sup> Olsi Jazexhi, "Komünizm sonrası Arnavutlukta İslamofobinin Politik İstismarı", *International Islamophobia Conference*, İstanbul, December, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Enis Sulstrova, "Orientalizmi Shqiptar", *Perpjekja* 20/2005, p.42-60.

<sup>15</sup> İsmail Kadare, *Kuşatma*, (Profil Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2011)

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.islamidusunce.net/forum/index.php?topic=1106.0;wap2>, [Accessed: 13.07.2012].

<sup>17</sup> Jazexhi, *Düşmani...*, *ibid.* p.44.

at a section written by Ndue Ukaj, a young journalist of young Kosovo, on these discussions will be useful:

With the ones whom we fought for five hundred years and who debased the nation, abused its shape, and who have pushed us to the pit of ignorance and backwardness ... is it possible to have fraternal relations today when we have turned our faces to the civilized world?<sup>18</sup>

## 2.1. Results

In this part of the study, with the quotations from Kosovo history textbooks, Ottoman and Turkish image will be examined and interpreted. The Ottoman domination in Kosovo will be discussed by considering the most important and controversial events in Kosovo history in view of abbreviating the subject. The investigations of the other issues have been made but because of the limitation of the study, these have been discussed in the conclusion. As we mentioned in the previous sections, if we make a historical listing, the issues to be mainly addressed in this chapter are following:

- Kosovo War and the Albanians
- Skanderbeg: Father of Albanians

To examine the post-Ottoman period, the viewpoint about Turkish Republic and the reforms of Atatürk established after the Ottoman Empire in the history textbooks of Kosovo will be discussed and the differences between two-state image will be interpreted.

## 3. KOSOVO WAR AND THE ALBANIANS

The War of Kosovo is first taught in 5<sup>th</sup> grade history textbook. In the book, what draws our attention is the unit and the title of the subject<sup>19</sup>. The subject is taught under the unit "The Attack of the Ottomans to the Land of Arber-Kosovo War" in 5<sup>th</sup> grade History textbook. The title of the subject that covers Kosovo War is "The Kosovo War: The War of the people from Balkan against the Ottoman Empire". Kosovo War is discussed in 7<sup>th</sup> grade history textbook again. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade history textbook, the subject is taught within the 4<sup>th</sup> Unit that is "Arberia between XI-XV Centuries". The subject is narrated under the stress of "The common resistance of the people from Balkan against Ottomans", the Albanians involvement in the war emphasized and some historical distortion about the murder of Sultan Murat perhaps because of the embracement and sacralization by Serbs one-sidedly. The text that discusses the subject is as follows<sup>20</sup>:

At the time of the Kosovo War, with the Battle of Maritsa in 1371, the gate of the Balkans were opened to the Ottomans. They occupied Sofia and Nis in a short time. Their aim was to enter Arberia, Serbia, Bosnia and other Balkan lands. They were making co-operation with the other Christian rulers in the infiltration attempts to Balkans. However, when the infiltration of the Ottoman Empire increased, those in Balkans realized that the other side is

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<sup>18</sup> "Turqia Poshteron Turpshem Shqiptaret", <http://ina-online.net/opinione/8063.html>, [Accessed: 16.07.2012].

<sup>19</sup> F. Rexhepi and F. Demaj, *Historia 5: Botim e Trete*, (Shepia Botuese Libri Shkollor, Prishtine, 2009), p.33.

<sup>20</sup> I. Bicaj and A. Salihu, *Historia 7: Botim i Peste*, (Shepia Botuese Libri Shkollor, Prishtine, 2009), p.55-56.

strong. This resulted in the unity of these countries against the common enemy by leaving aside their quarrels among themselves. Therefore, Serbs, Albanians, Bosnians, Bulgarians and Hungarians formed a coalition against the Ottomans. Some Albanians such as Gjergji II. Balsha, Theodor II. Muzaka and Gjon Kastrioti took part in this coalition. The General Commander was Serbian Prince Lazar Hereblonoviq. After gathering his own army, Sultan Murat I arrived in Kosovo in 1389. The mutual war began near Pristine in June 28, 1389. However, the location is not exactly known. The war was so fierce and the continuation of the war was too dramatic. On both sides, the losses were terrible. Both Sultan I. Murat and Lazarus died in the battle. According to the rumors, Sultan Murat I was killed by Milosh Kopiliq. Historical resources fail to provide a clear information about this topic and the ethnic origin of Milosh Kopiliq. Arber Prince Theodor II Muzaka died in the battlefield. The only clear reality about this war is that the Ottomans won.

The above text proposes that Kosovo War was important for the Albanians as much as the Serbs. The emphasize is placed on the Albanian princes' endeavor and loss against the Ottomans in the Battle of Kosovo. Another remarkable point is the murder of Sultan Murat. Ethnic origin of Milosh Kopiliq is not clearly stated in the resources. Anyway, he is commemorated by the Serbs at the anniversary of the Kosovo War every year. There is a subtle element of criticism on this, in the context of the fact that the only valid information about this war is Ottoman victory. If it is, why did The Milosevic's 1989 meeting be organized at the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kosovo War. This meeting ignited the fuse of Yugoslavia War. These links and relations prevail their significance on several levels of history construction.

**Figure 1:** 'Vrasja e Sulltan Muratit I (Murder of Sultan Murat I)



Vrasja e Sulltan Muratit I



**Figure 2:** ‘Milosh Obilic



In addition, while describing Kosovo War in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade history textbooks, the imagery in the textbooks (Figure 3.1) is also noteworthy. In the above image, it is written “Murder of Sultan Murat I” in the comment under the picture<sup>21</sup>. The striking issue in the picture is the depiction of Ottoman soldiers and the Sultan their own ethnic and cultural clothing. However, in the depiction of Milosh any detail demonstrating which ethnic group he belongs to is not available: only a man dressed in more western style against the Ottoman Empire is depicted. However, when the name of the mentioned hero was investigated, it can be found that a portrait of Milosh differs from those illustrated in textbooks (Figure 3.2<sup>22</sup>). Thus, the ethnic identity of Milosh seems to be left in obscurity. Again another striking point is altered names of Milosh Obilic in Serbian and Western sources into Milosh Kopiliq in Kosovo history textbooks. The same figure is called as Milosh Obilic in 5th grade history textbook prepared for the Turks in Kosovo<sup>23</sup>. Altering the Serbian ethnic identity of a historical figure can pave the way to various debates.

### **3.1. Skanderbeg: The Ancestor of Albanians**

As it is known, Skanderbeg is the most important national figure in Albania. Skanderbeg’s statues are built in the squares of the cities occupied by Albanians. The city of Kruja, where Skanderbeg revolted against the Ottomans, hosts the Skanderbeg Museum. In this museum, some pictures, documents and items that narrate the events of the period of

<sup>21</sup> *Historia 7*, *ibid.*, p.56.

<sup>22</sup> <http://savelic.webs.com/apps/photos/photo?photoid=85679900>, [Accessed: 30.03.2012].

<sup>23</sup> Fetnan Derviş, *Tarih 5*, (Shtëpia Botuese Libri Shkollor, Prishtine, 2010), p.71.



Skanderbeg are displayed. Consequently, the comment used in the title "Skanderbeg: The Ancestor of Albanians" is not quite unfair. Narration of Skanderbeg has a significant place in Kosovo history education curriculum. Skanderbeg's importance reflects the significance and effectiveness of the Ottoman rule in Albania. The narrative of Skanderbeg is a good example to study the constructed Ottoman image in Albania. The topic of Skanderbeg is covered in 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade history textbooks. However, since 11<sup>th</sup> Grade history textbook addresses the post-Skanderbeg period extensively, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade history textbooks offer a constructed narrative and story of Skanderbeg.

The history of Skanderbeg period is narrated within a continuum. Kastrioti family that Skanderbeg belongs is mentioned in Battle of Kosovo first, and took part in the Balkan Coalition against the Ottoman Empire<sup>24</sup>. 5<sup>th</sup> Grade history textbook discusses Skanderbeg in a detailed way. The most outstanding titles in this book are as follows:

- The Heroic Commander Skanderbeg<sup>25</sup>
- Skanderbeg's Model Love of Freedom<sup>26</sup>
- Skanderbeg: Warmhearted Humanist<sup>27</sup>

The Ottoman devshirme system is discussed within the context of Skanderbeg's story. For example, in 7<sup>th</sup> grade history book, this issue is discussed under the heading "The Ottoman Military Arrangement: Hostages in the Military" as follows:

The strong military character of the Ottoman Empire resulted from giving great importance to the military. In the most important positions of the Ottoman army, the selected soldiers (janissaries) were located. These elite divisions had a close relationship with the Sultan. They were pedestrian soldiers. These soldiers were the best (the most handsome, the most intelligent) ones. They were selected according to the system of Pencik and devshirme. One of the five young people who were taken as hostages were integrated into this structure on the basis of Pencik. This system began at the time of Sultan Murat I. Afterwards when the number of hostages decreased; the devshirmeh system became more effective. This method was activated at the time of Sultan Murat II (1438). This barbaric system includes Europe's Christian children. The name of this was blood tribute. Considering the other taxes, this was the most difficult tax. These children and young people were sent to the Sultan's palace. They were being trained there and then they could advance to the highest rank of the state. The religion of these children and young people was converted. They became Muslim and their names were changed. These young people who lost their ethnic identity and national consciousness became the most trusted people of the Sultan. This system included all of the occupied territories. From this system, the most affected place was Arberia<sup>28</sup>. In the text above, pre-Skanderbeg Ottoman devshirme system is explained. The most important assessments on the system of devshirme here are "barbaric recruiting" and "blood tribute" interpretations. The term "barbarian" that is used here probably appears to be passed down

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<sup>24</sup> *Historia* 5, *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p.45

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p.46

<sup>28</sup> *Historia* 7. p.58-59.

from the Western sources to the Albanian history writing. We will discuss that the western and Albanian coalition against the Ottoman Empire in the textbooks may have been constructed upon with this "Barbarian Ottoman" fictitiously. Beside this barbarism discourse in history textbooks; it was also emphasized that the children who were taken as devshirme could advance to the highest positions of the state and become the most trusted people by the Sultan.

Skanderbeg's recruitment to the devshirme system is described in the relevant section of this book as follows:

The Ottoman Army entered the lands of Albania. They looted and vandalized many villages, and seized several boys and beautiful girls. Skanderbeg was one of them. His father was John Kastrioti. He had to send Skanderbeg and the other two sons to the palace of the Sultan. Although his name and religion were changed, Skanderbeg never forgot where he had come from. He returned to his country and fought against those who had taken him hostage.<sup>29</sup>

The images related to the Ottomans in the text above are as following: "predatory" and "the one that retains Albanian children forcibly". Again in the same way, the narration of Skanderbeg returning to his country and fighting against those who had taken him hostage may cause an implicit pattern interpretation because the Kosovo Albanians mainly belong to the religion of Islam. As a Catholic hero, endeavors of Skanderbeg against the Ottomans may be interpreted as a subtle critic to the Albanians who were Islamized. Issue of the Albanians who chose Islam is discussed in different chapters of the textbooks. Thus, it might be proposed that the textbooks attempt to awake a sense of trivialization of the religions of Islam and Orthodox Christianity in the face of Catholic Christianity.

**Figure 3.** 'Marrja peng e Gjergj Kastriotit (Being Captured of Gjergj Kastriotit)'



Marrja peng e Gjergj Kastriotit.

<sup>29</sup> *Historia 7*, p.59-60.

Figure 4: 'Kruja Museum'

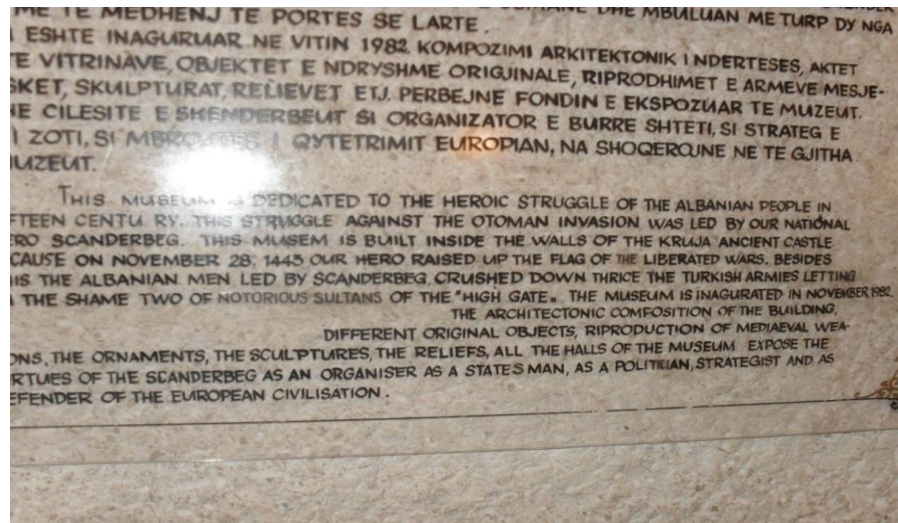


Figure 3 is an image used in 5<sup>th</sup> grade history textbook<sup>30</sup>. The sorrow of Skanderbeg and his brothers was described in this picture. Considering visual image used in the Battle of Kosovo, in this picture their clothes understand the nationalities of the heroes that were portrayed against the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, while the sorrow of Albanian children in their local costumes was reflected in the picture, Ottoman soldiers created neither bad, nor good impression. In this case, Ottomans pictured as "soulless" and "reckless" comes to mind. Perhaps those who are reflected as "reckless and soulless" are not the Ottomans. Because considering that the Janissaries were devshirmes perhaps, with this picture it is aimed to depict that these soldiers that converted by the Ottoman Empire forgot their families and their histories and transformed into "soulless and reckless" personalities. Another outstanding definition of Skanderbeg is the "Guard of the European civilization". For example, this is thought in 7<sup>th</sup> grade history book under the heading " Skanderbeg: The Guard of European Civilization". The text is as follows:

"Strong resistance of Arbers led by Skanderbeg was a strong wall for Western Europe. For 25 years, Ottoman armies were unable to go further. Some European countries were aware of the importance and role of Arbers. Their relationship with Skanderbeg clearly shows this. Skanderbeg had quite good relations with several European countries. Among them, the most important ones are: the Pope's Country Vatican City, the Kingdom of Naples, Republic of Venice, Dubrovnik et al<sup>31</sup>." As it is understood from the text above, Skanderbeg fought not only for his own nation, but also for Western values as well. The emphasize is that Skanderbeg protected Christian (Catholic) Europe against the Muslim Ottomans. The same message is also delivered on the information note which hung at the entrance of the museum in Kruja. The note also emphasizes that Skanderbeg protected Western Europe against the Ottoman invasion.

<sup>30</sup> Historia 5. p.38.

<sup>31</sup> Historia 7. p.67.

The aforementioned Catholicism emphasis in the textbooks is outstanding in the narrative on the relationship of Skanderbeg with the Pope. The relation of Skanderbeg to the Pope is explained as follows:

Skanderbeg was in a good relationship with the country of the Pope. The Arbers and Skanderbeg was seen as the protectors of Christianity in Balkans. Therefore, holy branch was supporting the fight of Skanderbeg against the Ottomans. The leaders of Rome also were giving moral and material support for the country of Skanderbeg. The Papacy aimed at the establishment of an anti-Ottoman coalition. Skanderbeg was also thought to be the head of this coalition. Skanderbeg received great respect. For this reason, the rank of "General Commander of Holy Branch" was given to him.<sup>32</sup> The figure of Skanderbeg is not just the "Albanian Freedom Fighter" who fought against the Ottoman Empire. As mentioned many times before, in the processes of describing Ottoman Empire and the Islamization in history textbooks, an emphasis on Catholicism is also present.

Skanderbeg is the most important national hero of all the Albanians today. In fact, the statues of Skanderbeg could be seen in many regions inhabited by Albanians. The national struggle of Skanderbeg against the Ottomans for the Albanian nation, and trying to give the implicit image of "Crusader war of Catholics against the Ottomans" in the textbooks and to emphasize Skanderbeg as "General Commander of Holy Branch" meanly as "Guard of the Vatican" are also remarkable. Considering the fact that Kosovo is a country which gained its independence as a result of a bloody civil war, using such interpretations in Kosovo history textbooks is undoubtedly striking. The narrative of Skanderbeg in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade history textbook prepared for Turks seems to be rather superficial. In example, some definitions such as "Guard of the European civilization" for Skanderbeg are not used and the emphasis "Christian Skanderbeg" that we see in the books prepared for the Albanians is almost never used. These book states that the long lasting resistance of Skanderberg is connected to the struggle between the Hungarians and the Ottoman Empire<sup>33</sup>. So Skanderbeg who is enshrined in Albanian books is discusses rather briefly and superficially in Turkish history books.

#### **4. TURKISH REPUBLIC AND THE REFORMS OF ATATURK**

When the books are examined, it becomes apparent that the images of Turkey and Atatürk are quite different from the image of Ottomans. Jazexhi who carried out a research on the subject interprets this distinction as "good Turks and bad Turks"<sup>34</sup>. In fact, the same case is evident in the Turkish history textbooks as well. While narrating the last time of Ottomans in history textbooks, a very positive portrait is not presented and the necessity of the Republic is explained. Kosovo history textbooks describe Mustafa Kemal as the "good" who took the place of the one that is a kind of "bad". The textbooks also include Mustafa Kemal's revolutions. Looking through the aspect of Turkey, this is a positive narrative. For example, in 9th grade history textbook, it is stated that following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the

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<sup>32</sup> *Historia* 7. p.68.

<sup>33</sup> Derviş, *ibid.*, p.43-44.

<sup>34</sup> Jazexhi, *ibid.*

First World War, nationalist movements had begun in the country and the leader of this movement was Mustafa Kemal<sup>35</sup>. In the textbook Mustafa Kemal is mentioned as follows:

Mustafa Kemal fought to establish a strong and modern Turkey. He was a patriotic, good and capable soldier, and a democratic and anti-monarchist person.<sup>36</sup> (F.Rexhepi, *Historia* 9, 2010, p.36). Between the years 1923-1938, reforms were made under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. For the modernization, development and the economic growth of the country, some new laws and reforms were made in the fields of education, language, and clothing. At the time of Atatürk, Turkey established relationships with abroad and had incredible progress.<sup>37</sup> The same interpretations are found in 12<sup>th</sup> grade history textbooks, and it is emphasized that Atatürk fought against both the enemy and the Sultan<sup>38</sup>. The same textbook emphasizes that Mustafa Kemal fought for the independence of the country. These studies lead us into a simple conclusion. In the narrative of Ottomans in Kosovo history textbooks the biggest "devil" is the Sultan. Mustafa Kemal was fighting for the independence of his country against both the powerful countries and the Sultan and he respects other nations. When we examined periodically, both in the process leading to independence and in the case that came out after the First World War, we find two factors that hinder the integration of Albanians. These are the Sultan and powerful countries. Atatürk also fought against these two actors. In this respect Albanians are expected to affirm reforms of Mustafa Kemal. In addition, it can be seen that the about of Atatürk and Turkish Republic go parallel with the current policy considering the fact that Kosovo is a newly established independent country and Turkish Republic was the first to recognize and support Kosovo.

### **Conclusion**

The Republic of Kosovo, a young state that declared independence on 17 February 2008, is located in the "heart" of Southeast European geography, the Balkans. History writing in Kosovo led to great debates especially in the recent period. In this regard, the need for research is revealed. Focusing these debates especially on the "Ottoman image" in history textbooks brings about striking awareness and several questions to be answered. In the context of all these discussions, this study aims to investigate and interpret "Ottoman image" in Kosovo history textbooks prepared for the Albanians. It is remarkable that such a small and young country that has 10 887 km<sup>2</sup> area is at the center of all these discussions. Yugoslavian War turned the attention of the entire world to this region and Kosovo found itself at the last row in the process of disintegration. Kosovo's process has not fallen off the hot agenda since UNSC's decision No. 1244 in June 10, 1999. Kosovo's ethnically sensitive nature, the urgency to create an influence in the region, and Kosovo's remaining claim on Serbia bring up the question why Kosovo remains as one of the underdeveloped countries. Undoubtedly, one of the answers to this question is "history" and "historical myths". On the basis of this discussion lies the five centuries of Ottoman rule. Ottoman Empire with both its government

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<sup>35</sup> F. Rexhepi, *Historia 9: Botim i Katert*, (Shepia Botuese Libri Shkollor, Prishtine, 2009), p.36-37.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p.36.

<sup>37</sup> *Historia 9*, p.37

<sup>38</sup> I Bicaç. and I Ahmeti, *Historia 12::Gjimnazi Shoqeror Botim e Dyte*, (Shepia Botuese Libri Shkollor, Prishtine, 2006), p.44.

structure and the nation system managed to rule the region in a complex structure during the five centuries until the Balkan Wars. However, the region had to struggle with rapidly changing political systems, problems of its demographic structure and geographical borders along with the establishment process of nation-states, during First and Second World Wars as well as Yugoslavia Civil War and the Cold War. All of these developments following the period of Ottomans have been attempted to be explained by referring to the “Ottomans” continuously by the studies on the region. At this point, the “past” narrative which stands continually in the subjects of both Balkans and Kosovo shaped the writing history in the region to a large extent is a different reality. Especially, the investigation of “Ottoman image” in the history writing of a country that is tried to be embraced by showing historical references is quite important from this aspect. Taking into account all of these discussions, an investigation on "Ottoman / Turkish image" in Kosovo history textbooks was made in this study, and it is tried to be discovered and interpreted of the explicit and implicit stereotypes in history textbooks. Although Kosovo Albanian history textbooks formed the main source of the study, Kosovo history textbooks in Turkish and Albanian versions were examined in this context. The conclusion is based on this comparison of narratives of the same subject in various history textbooks.

Undoubtedly, the stereotypes in Kosovo history textbooks are produced by the ideologues of Kosovo. However, during this study I found the opportunity to study Albanian History textbooks. Albanian history writing shows that the history writing of the two states advanced based on nearly the same systematic. For example, the book named "Historia e Popullit Shqiptar" that was prepared by the Albanian Academy of Sciences in Albania and that is accepted as one of the most fundamental works about Albanian history draws the attention to the fact that the only image that does not change in narration and content is “Ottomans”, although it is changed in narration and content after the Socialist period. So, the Western Europe that was defined as "enemy" in history writing of socialist period is defined as, a "friend" in contemporary discourses. While the "Ottoman" that was described as “occupant” and “wild” in the previous period is still described in the same way in contemporary Albanian history writing. Islamo-phobia and Ottoman phobia/Turkophobia in the Communist-era can be accepted to some extent as a state propaganda against the religion and the past system. However, one of the largest and the most important ally of both Kosovo and Albania in the region is Turkey. The old imagery and interpretations find a place in the history textbooks and history writing is undoubtedly about the depiction of the Ottoman Empire as the "biggest other" during the formation of Albanian Nationalism. In the aftermath of Communism, the positive image of Turkey in the history textbooks shows that in this regard there was "Ottoman-Turkey" decomposition in Albanian history textbooks. However, in the scope of all this information, the answer of the question that we asked at the beginning of the study "Is there any government intervention in history textbooks ?" is yes, as we mentioned in the relevant section of the study. In Kosovo as in many other countries, the history curriculum and the history textbooks are prepared under the control of the ministry. The most important question that we look for an answer throughout the study is undoubtedly what kind of images the Ottoman/Turk narrative in the textbooks contain. As we mentioned in

the relevant sections, Ottoman Empire and the Ottomans are portrayed in textbooks as one of the biggest other for Albanian nation. One of the most frequently used, almost the first, image that comes to mind about Ottomans is the "occupant". This "occupant" definition is used so much that phrases such as "occupation period" for Ottoman period and "occupant" for the Ottomans are used almost as the synonyms. However, the Ottoman is not restricted to the definition of "occupation", in some texts we encounter the terms such as "the ones who terrorize", "medieval darkness", "feudal", "bully", "intolerant", "unreliable", "oppressive", "barbaric", "dull", "the ones who forced people to change their religion", "who captive the children" and "assimilating". History textbooks include criticism of Islam especially over the Ottoman oppositions, and by mentioning Catholic Albanians very often, it is stressed that Albanians were generally Catholic before embracing Islam and thus Catholicism propaganda is made implicitly. Especially, the complimentary narrative of the relationship of Skanderbeg with the Papacy even though Papacy never verified this claim. In addition, in the narrative of the Ottoman period in the history textbooks describes constantly that Ottomans left the Albanians in turmoil and cheated them. Especially in the text about the separation period from the Ottoman Empire, it is stressed that the Sultan, and the Young Turks, the Committee of Union and Progress and the Union dissident groups cheated Albanians and left them in turmoil. In this way, the connection between the Ottomans and the Albanians is separated and all of the Ottomans, either bad or good, are otherized. In general, this negative narrative is repeated in the unit questions and discussion part at the end of the relevant units. It is clear that the main aim is to imprint this notion on the students' consciousness.

When we examine the image of Turkey in the textbooks, we encounter a very different scene. The image of Turkey is much more positive comparing to the other countries in Kosovo history textbooks. Turkey is not defined as the consequent of Ottoman Empire or the heir of the Ottomans. Turkey's establishment process is praised as a struggle against imperialism and invaders. Especially in text that narrates Atatürk's reforms and revolutions, this narrative is strikingly full of praise and it is also stressed that Atatürk fought against the Sultan at the same time. Therefore, according to history textbooks, Turkey and the Ottoman are different from each other, and certainly separated. The reasons for this approach seem to be understood if the history textbooks of Kosovo are examined in terms of the periods other than Ottoman period, the sense that the country images in the textbooks are shaped by the current political situation comes out. Turkey's support to both Kosovo and Albania is effective in creating a positive image of Turkey. However, at this time the question that "Why do the Albanians with whom we have good relationship differentiate the Ottoman from Turkey?" comes out. The answer to this question will not be too difficult. Because the side of Turkish has avoided to praise the Ottoman History so far as possible in his own history writing, and always by packing the awl to the Ottoman Empire it has an understanding of praising and glorifying own state system. Besides, having a good relationship with the countries in the region occurred only after the cold-war. However, the change in both domestic and foreign policy in recent years brought about a new Ottoman discourse pragmatically and tried to eliminate these differences. This understanding is available in the recent discourses. By stressing that the history of Ottoman Empire is not limited to 90 years



and it is the continuance of the Ottomans that is a great empire and it should be act under this responsibility.

In this study, another question that we tried to answer is "To what extent is the Ottoman image in the textbooks imposed on the students?". After the examination of the text, a survey was conducted to the Albanian students from Kosovo. This survey revealed that the Albanian students from Kosovo are largely affected by this history writing and directed against the Ottomans. The students from Kosovo depicted Ottoman Empire as "the worst" in their mind and when they hear the word "Ottoman", the terms "occupant" and "enemy" come to their mind. In addition, this propaganda is made not only by history textbooks. Especially with the fact that the side of Turkey expressed their objections on this issue in the last period and the discussion about it arouse great interest in Kosovo media, the students got a negative attitude towards Turkey that they see as a "friend" and "ally" when the issue is the Ottomans was brought forth. Meanly in the formation and the maintenance of the images, media tools have a big impact as well as history textbooks. Although this study examines generally the Ottoman/Turkish image, the question that we look for an answer is whether these images create bias on the society. The observations in Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania, the investigations I made on the textbooks, the survey I conducted to the students and the discussion on the subject in the media has shown that the images in textbooks certainly create a prejudice on the society. This will have an effect on the integration of the region both in the axis of EU and with the international organizations such as NATO. This situation is not only associated with the image of Ottoman Empire. "The other" in Kosovo history textbooks is the Ottoman Empire from 1389 to 1912; it is Serbs, Montenegrins, Bulgarians and Greeks in the First World War; Germans and Italians in the Second World War, the West during the Cold War and Serbs and Macedonians during the disintegration of Yugoslavia. This alienation in history textbooks, unfortunately, affects the behavior of the society negatively and causes to look at the other societies through a negative point of view. Especially in the countries that host many different ethnic elements and still have the same ethnic debates like Kosovo, history writing should certainly be reviewed. Of course, this study will take time, and it will lead a strong reaction by some groups. However, the Albanian students in Kosovo share the same land with "Killer Serb" and "intolerant Turk" that are settled in their mind in history textbooks is a fact. The environment the State of Kosovo that is still engaged in healing the wounds of war and solving the problems remained from the war will leave to future generations in its own hands. Civil wars and divisions in the past resulted in otherization, perhaps they will not be repeated or deepened by means of the disposal of alienations in the writing of history in the future. Although purifying the history textbooks from those arguments and re-creating them as a peaceful historiography may seem very difficult yet it is never impossible. In order to achieve this, the international organizations such as EU and UN are carrying out many studies. Perhaps setting up history commissions can be proposed. These commissions should be formed by the historians from different countries which share the same historical experience. While separate history books are printed for Albanians and Turks in Kosovo, Serbs use the books printed by Belgrade since they do not regard the institutions of Kosovo. This situation causes Serbian, Albanian, and Turkish students who live in the

same society and same cities to have bias against each other with their own historical myths. This situation should be corrected as soon as possible. While doing this, it is required to put the nationalist rhetoric of other countries and communities aside and provide an agreement on the common text. The studies of CDSEE (Center for Democracy in South East Europe) and the history books will perhaps be the best example in this regard<sup>39</sup>. The terms as "Balkan" and "Balkanization" are unfortunately reminiscent of the phrases like "pain" and "war" and reversing such a situation is in the hands of the people of the region. By putting aside the ideological history writing of the countries and shifting to peaceful history writing could remove controversial issues and prevent future conflicts. Peaceful history writing in the Balkans is for the interest of the region as well as for the interest of all mankind.

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<sup>39</sup> For investigating the studies carried out by the center, see: <http://www.cdsee.org/>

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