



## The Role and Importance of Translation for the Albanian Culture

### La función y la importancia de la traducción para la cultura albanesa

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ARBEN SHALA

Charles University, Faculty of Arts, nám. Jana Palacha 1/2, 116 38 Staré Město, Czechia.

Dirección de correo electrónico: [ben.shala@gmail.com](mailto:ben.shala@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0495-7884>

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**Abstract:** This paper outlines the importance of translation activity for the Albanian culture beginning from the earliest period, as a driving force and forerunner of the Albanian National Awakening and identity, to the latest developments related to the quantity of translations, as well as their quality, peacebuilding in Kosovo and the use of translation for subversive propaganda. Translation, along with religion and masterpieces of world literature, brought different alphabetic scripts, many foreign words and, despite the adversarial approach by the Church and ruling authorities, contributed to the codification efforts, language purification and the coining of new words. Common expressions and folklore were collected and found their way into translated texts, now serving as grounds to call for retranslation.

**Keywords:** Translation, national awareness, folklore, standardisation, tolerance.

**Resumen:** Este artículo trata de describir la importancia de la actividad de traducción para la cultura albanesa desde el primer período, como fuerza impulsora y precursora del despertar nacional y la identidad albanesa, hasta los últimos desarrollos relacionados con la calidad y cantidad de la traducción, la construcción de la paz en Kosovo y el uso de la traducción como propaganda subversiva. La traducción, junto con la religión y las obras maestras de la literatura mundial, aportó diferentes escrituras alfabéticas, muchas palabras extranjeras y, a pesar de la actitud adversaria de la Iglesia y las autoridades gobernantes, contribuyó en los esfuerzos de codificación, purificación del lenguaje y para acuñar nuevas palabras. Las expresiones comunes y el folclore se recopilaron y encontraron su camino en los textos traducidos, lo que ahora sirve como motivo para reclamar una nueva traducción.

**Palabras clave:** Traducción, conciencia nacional, folclore, estandarización, tolerancia.

**Summary:** 1. Introduction; 2. Early translations until 1912; 3. Kosovo during the years 1912-1945; 4. Translation in Albania during the years 1912 -1945; 5. Translation activity in post-World War II Albania; 6. Translation in post-WWII Kosovo until the abolition of autonomy in 1989; 7. Translation in Kosovo during the 1990s; 8. Translation in post-1999 Kosovo; 9. Current translation situation in Albania and Kosovo; 10. Conclusions; References.

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**Sumario:** 1. Introducción; 2. Traducciones tempranas hasta 1912; 3. Kosovo durante los años 1912-1945; 4. Traducción en Albania durante los años 1912-1945; 5. Actividad de traducción en Albania después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial; 6. Traducción en Kosovo posterior a la Segunda Guerra Mundial hasta la abolición de la autonomía en 1989; 7. Traducción en Kosovo durante los años noventa; 8. Traducción en Kosovo posterior a 1999; 9. Situación actual de la traducción en Albania y Kosovo; 10. Conclusiones; Referencias bibliográficas.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Translation in Albanian-speaking areas in the Balkans relates to the education system and the extent to which the Albanian language was recognised in education and administration.

This work is an attempt to bring a summary of key translation activity and the role it had for the Albanian-speaking population in the Balkans and their culture. It does not focus on present-day borders because it would be incomplete. This goes against the tendency the people in the Balkans have to explain the history from the modern-day perspective, forgetting that before the French Revolution of 1789, the nation-states as we know them today did not exist. Kingdoms and empires were political units made up of different ethnic groups that often changed their borders. Their territories were an indicator of physical power rather than linguistic and ethnic homogeneity (Hobsbawm, 1990: p. 80).

The methodology herein involves reviewing history books, books on Albanian literature, a memoir of Vedat Kokona (a literary translator and writer). Several journal articles published in Kosovo in *Gjurmime Albanologjike* (Recherchés albanologiques), other electronic and written resources, articles about translations by translators and publicists contained a wealth of information to conduct the analysis.

In the Albanian culture, like in many other national cultures and especially in the cultures of small nations that have not had a long tradition of writing, translations played an important role because they constitute the beginning of the national written literature. Translators, in fact, are regarded as the first authors of national Albanian literature. The first documents written in Albanian were translations followed by original works (Elsie, 2005: pp. 3-31). The translation activity, as in other cultures, appears to have been only an ancillary activity for it was “rarely considered a form of literary scholarship” (Venuti, 1998: pp. 32). Along

these lines, most Albanian writers conducted translation work at some stage in their creative work.

Lawrence Venuti (2005: p. 178) states that “national translation agendas have often been initiated by cultural elites who aim to impose their linguistic and literary values on an entire population”. The “agenda” of the time was the translation of religious texts, an agenda employed quite late in Albanian-speaking areas because historians and linguists claim that for a long time, religion was practised in Latin only, not in translation (Malcolm, 2011: p. 77).

After the Ottoman conquest, a form of self-governing policy was implemented, that of the *millet* (nationality) system, a system grounded in religious adherence rather than on ethnic grounds (Ceylan, 2002: pp. 250-252). In the *millet* system, Albanians, and their language were not recognised, and consequently, books and education in Albanian were forbidden. This was because people, especially in highlands, were Catholic, loyal to the Pope centred outside the Empire. They were seen as more suspicious than people belonging to *millets* such as Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Jewish, and Serbian who had ecclesiastical centres based within the Ottoman Empire. *Millets* were entitled to language, education and ecclesiastical justice (Malcolm, 2011: p. 182).

Pjetër Bogdani in his *Cuneus Prophetarum* (1685) referred to the people of Kosovo by their religion as Latins, Mohammedans or Schismatic (Rizaj, 1991: p. 85), while in southern Albania, Orthodox Albanian people were considered Greek (Jacques, 1995: p. 207). Regardless of this, in this period the foundations were laid for the translation and publication of religious literature in Albanian. To date, Albanians adhere to three different religious groups: Muslim (Sunni and Shia), Roman Catholic, and Orthodox.

## 2. EARLY TRANSLATIONS UNTIL 1912

The earliest record of translation in Albanian, constituting thus the first written text in Albanian is a document containing a Baptismal Formula (1462) written by Archbishop Paul Angelus (Pal Engjëlli) in a circular letter in Latin. The Formula would serve the families to baptise their children at home in times when it was not possible in church or when a priest was missing because of the war against the Ottoman Empire (Bihiku, 1980: p. 11).

Although under Ottoman rule, the Reformation triggered the translation activity, *Meshari* (The Missal) by Gjon Buzuku was translated and printed in 1555. After this, there are no records of translation activity until 1592, when Lekë Matrënga translated *Dottrina Christiana* (Christian Doctrine) written by Diego de Ledesma. The works selected for translation were generally catechisms like *Dottrina Christiana* (Christian Doctrine)<sup>1</sup> by Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino (1618), and *Specchio di confessione* by Emerio de Bonis (1621), translated by Pjetër Budi as part of the Counter-Reformation. As a result, the Vatican allowed the use of Albanian instead of Latin in books and religious services in order to resist the spread of Islam in Eastern Europe. Although, little work has been done thus far with the transcriptions of Budi's translations, his translation and political activities were aimed at replacing the foreign clergy with Albanian (Ajëti, 2017 [1961]: p. 40; Elsie, 2005: pp. 9-27).

Translation activity increased more with Frang Bardhi who published a Latin-Albanian Dictionary (1635). It included more than 100 proverbs, some of them translated from Latin, Italian, and Turkish. In 1685, Pjetër Bogdani published his original work *Cuneus Prophetarum* (The Band of the Prophets) in Albanian with a parallel translation in Italian. Bogdani's work is considered "the most beautiful monument of prose written in the Gheg literary dialect of the time" (my translation). Then a catechism by Gjon Kazazi followed, translated as *Përmbledhje e shkurtë e doktrines së krishterë* (Rome, 1743) (Ajëti, 2017: p. 752).

In general, the earlier translated and original works have exceptional documentary value for the Albanian culture. However, they introduced many foreign words and structures according to religious or Italian models, often deforming syntactic structure of the Albanian language (Resmja-Molla, 2012: p. 12). Furthermore, as Berisha (1988: pp. 30-31) noted, they rely on borrowed themes, motifs, and models of narrative structure and more importantly they incorporate several expressions and constructions relating to oral prose and daily vocabulary, especially Bogdani's *Cuneus Prophetarum* (1685).

Translation and other literary activities of this period have elements of the Reformation, such as writing in a vernacular language and the use of translation into a common language to bring the Holy Scripture to

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<sup>1</sup> In this section unless specified otherwise all book / text titles are Elsie's translations (2010).

ordinary people. Translations also served the education of the clergy at a time when there were fewer and fewer Catholic priests due to conversion, repression, and incompetence. In order to reach a wider audience, the differences between the (sub)dialects were levelled out (Malcolm, 2011: p. 184; Ajeti, 2017 [1985]: p. 712).

The period under Ottoman rule is a time when, beside the Catholic clergy, many now-Muslim Albanian writers wrote directly in Turkish and Persian (Malcolm, 2011: p. 157) and did not translate. Yet at a later stage, some *aljamiado* literature appeared, known in Albanian as *bejtexhinj* writers. They used Turkish-Arab script in their texts related to Muslim religion and society. Initially, these texts were translations into Albanian and were imitations of Persian and Turkish literature. Characteristic of Ottoman trends in culture they introduced many Turkish, Persian and Arab words as well as related subjects and style which facilitated producing the meter and rhyme (Bihiku, 1980: p. 19). Kadare (2006: p. 27) considers this literature part of the fight of the Ottoman Empire against Albanian identity and overall immorality, both at the time and in the contemporary period.

Ecclesiastical literature continued to be the main selected work for translation in Albanian in the 18<sup>th</sup> century although to a lesser extent. The Roman Curia with foreign Italian translators was active in the translation of ecclesiastical texts. Several texts and grammar books were translated mainly into the vernacular of Shkodra, although the linguistic skills of the translators were questionable (Ajeti, 2017 (1961): p. 46).

Arbëreshë people (refugees who settled in Italy after the death of Scanderbeg in 1468) also translated into Albanian. Zef Serembe, Zef Skiroi, and other Arbëreshë writers wrote in Arbëresh dialect and translated their works and folk songs into Italian (Bala *et al.* 1989: p. 310). The most known among them in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Girolamo de Rada (Jeronim de Rada).

In his translated works de Rada tried to draw the world's attention to the Albanian national agenda by writing about the history of Albania. He worked to strengthen the national awareness among Arbëreshë people by reminding them about the country of their ancestors and to fight against foreign claims against Albanian lands (Mehmeti 1968: pp. 7-32). To promote this idea, he wrote both in Arbëresh dialect and in Italian, with some verses in German. In his works, he praised Scanderbeg, a celebrated hero who had fought and resisted Ottomans for twenty-five years. His works aimed to inform his readers about the antiquity of

Albania. In addition, de Rada collected Arbëresh folklore and published it along with his works in his newspaper *L'Albanese d'Italia* and later in his journal *Fiàmuri Arbërit-La bandiera dell'Albania* (The Albanian Flag) with parallel translation into Italian. In his publications, he laid the foundations of artistic literature in Albanian, although his language was heavily influenced by Italian vocabulary. Contemporary key personalities of European literature applauded his translated works (Bala *et al.* 1989: p. 251).

Schmitt (2012: p. 114) concludes that around the 1800s, regional leaders, often of Albanian origin, ruled large parts of the south-eastern Ottoman Empire. They belonged to different religions, were educated and held high offices in the Ottoman Empire, yet they showed their national identity awareness by supporting the Albanian National Awakening. Their administration centres became places where Albanian intellectuals settled and found more freedom for their patriotic initiatives. Examples of this are Moldavia and Wallachia (Romania) ruled by the Ghica (Gjika) family and Egypt ruled by Mehmed Ali Pasha. These and many other similar centres became rallying points where several Albanian associations, clubs, and literary societies were established. Their members, key personalities during the independence and edification processes, prepared and printed books and other materials in Albanian and secretly dispatched them to Albania. In response to neighbouring claims, they wrote treatises in foreign languages and translated them into many other languages. The focus of such works was to promote their national identity, the right to education in the native language and autonomy within the Empire (Elsie, 2010: pp. 61, 125).

As a result, *The truth on Albania and the Albanians: Historical and Critical Study* was published in London in 1879 by Pashko Vasa (Governor of Lebanon). It unfolded the causes for the uprising and demands of the Albanian League of Prizren (Kosovo) in 1878. Originally written in French, it was translated into Albanian, German, Turkish and later on into Arabic and Italian (Elsie, 2010: p. 165). Another influential work *Albania-What it was, what it is, and what will become of it? Reflections on saving the Motherland from perils which beset it* (1899), written by Sami Frashëri, known in Turkey as Şemseddin Sami, was translated into several languages: Turkish, Greek, French, Italian, and German. He was a great contributor to Turkish literature and grammar as he was a linguist, lexicographer, novelist and playwright (Elsie, 2010: p. 152).

The beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time when modern nation-states, as Hobsbawm (1990: p. 19) states, “linked nation to territory” and were working for their independence. During this period, religion turned out to be important, especially for mixed families. As Edith Durham (1909: p. 6) observed for families with mixed blood, the religion they followed played a crucial part, as it was their identity, which in due course turned out to become their nationality.

Consequently, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the process of nationalisation of identities in the Balkans, religion served as a tool of differentiation from “the other”. Even those who shared the same culture and language made no exception. Religion became interchangeable with ethnicity and further, it turned into interethnic conflict. Unlike other Balkan nations, which used religion as a constitutive element of national identity, divided into three religions, Albanians used only language as the main constituent to forge their national identity (Hobsbawm, 1990: pp. 53, 70). These factors kept them at a disadvantage in education and consequently in interpreting the past (Schmidt, 2012: p. 23).

Under those circumstances, Serbs were at a sociocultural advantage in producing interpretations on the past and on the “Old Serbia” as a tool to incite nationalistic feelings. A number of works attempting to draw its past borders (Rizvanolli, 1993: pp. 128), and to explain that northern Albanians were Albanised Serbs were produced. Serb academia sponsored the translation of one of those works into German in 1889, for a wider audience (Malcolm, 2011: p. 266).

In the Orthodox area, in southern present-day Albania, the Greek clergy considered the use of Albanian in Church services heresy. The territorial claims based on religion disfavoured the use of the Albanian language as a distinctive detail between the Greeks and the Albanians. The translation of religious books and the use of Albanian in Orthodox Church services appeared and remained a critical enterprise until the Albanian Orthodox Church declared their independence from the Greek Church in 1908. In fact, it is an issue that comes up now and then (Jacques, 1995: pp. 207).

Kostandin Kristoforidhi (a translator and scholar), in response to these claims, prepared primer books in both Albanian dialects (Gheg and Tosk), and used translation as a tool against the propaganda of the Greek Church. The Ottoman Empire supported the Church, which in turn opposed people who held masses in Albanian and translated

ecclesiastical texts. Many writers and translators were anathematised or even killed (Jacques, 1995: pp. 207; Lloshi, 2008: pp.181).

The most famous translations of the time were conducted by Vangjel Meksi in 1824, and Kostandin Kristoforidhi in 1866. They translated separately the New Testament into Albanian. Meksi translated it only into the Tosk dialect using Greek script, supposedly into the vernacular of Janina (Ioannina), the centre of Ali Pasha Pashalik (Clayer, 2012: p. 163). Kristoforidhi, on the other hand, translated it into the Gheg (in Latin letters) and Tosk (in Greek letters) dialect.

Lloshi (2008: p. 15) attributes the adoption of two alphabetic scripts to Alexander Thomson, representative of the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) in Turkey, as being drafted upon his request because of the absence of a standardised alphabet. According to Elsie (2017: p. 5), people writing in Albanian used ten alphabetic scripts between the years 1750-1850. The British and Foreign Bible Society of London sponsored the translation and printed both versions of the New Testament translated by Kristoforidhi (Jacques, 1995: p. 286). Additionally, Kristoforidhi translated other ecclesiastical books in both dialects (Gheg and Tosk). He was from the area where the two dialects blend (Elbasan area) and used translation as a tool to establish a standard dialect / language (Ajeti, 2017: p. 32). Many diplomats and other people interested in learning Albanian used his translation of the New Testament and other ecclesiastical translated texts as textbooks (Lloshi, 2008: p. 202).

At that time, the only way Albanians could get education was in the languages recognized by the system. Many leading Albanian writers, translators and political personalities received their education in Greek, Latin, Italian and French at the Zosimaia School in Ioannina (Hoxha, 2018). Zosimaia graduates like Kostandin Kristoforidhi, Naum Veqilharqi, Naim Frashëri, Sami Frashëri, Jani Vreto, Faik Konica and other well-known personalities of the time, in addition to nationalist concerns, recognized and addressed several problems concerning the Albanian language. The lack of a common alphabetic script, (the north used Latin while the south used Greek script), language purification and levelling of differences between dialects and other vernaculars were the priority issues to be tackled (Ajeti, 2017 [1998]: pp. 784-792).

Another area, where Kristoforidhi and other authors increased their interest, was collecting folklore, words, and expressions from the common people. This process led to the coining of new words, and translations served as a corpus for later authors and translators and helped



turn Albanian into a cultivated, enriched and purified language. In their works, they introduced patriotic topics to strengthen national awareness over the religions (Bala *et al.*, 1989: p. 143). Through translations, they intended to mitigate the political influence of clergy who seemed to be uninterested in the Albanian language and alphabet and were pursuing their Hellenization. Many other authors, such as Gjergj Qiriazi (George Kyrias) and his brother Gjerasim (Gerasim Kyrias) continued with translations of the ecclesiastical texts (Lloshi, 2008: p. 180).

On the other hand, Venice, Austria, Italy, and France took up the Albanian Catholic community at different times. International agreements signed with the Ottoman Empire granted them the right of *Kulturprotektorat* (Cultural Protectorate) for Catholic populations within the Ottoman borders (Jacques, 1995: p. 208). Although *Kulturprotektorat* was imposed on the Ottoman Empire in the early seventeenth century by Austria, the main effects would be seen in the mid-nineteenth century when schools were opened, teachers were trained and logistic support was provided. Therefore, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century under the agreed terms, Austro-Hungary aided the reconstruction of churches and confessional schools in Kosovo where the priests were teachers, supposedly loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy contributed significantly to the opening of schools in Kosovo, supported the Albanian schools in Shkodra and focused solely on the Catholic community. They neglected, however, requests by Catholic leaders for an inter-confessional education in Albanian. This was partly because of their silent friction with the French Consulate in Skopje and partly with local Albanian clubs, each trying to control education in Albanian (Rizvanolli, 1993: pp. 125-138).

The Young Turk revolution (1908), and the contribution of the Albanian forces to the revolution benefited the Albanian National Movement or National Awakening and their efforts for education in Albanian because the ruling authorities tolerated them. At that time, Albanian was introduced in some of the Turkish and Greek schools in the region (Vishko, 1988: p. 165). This emphasized the need for a common alphabet. For this purpose, the representatives of Albanian associations, clubs and publishers held the Congress of Monastir (Bitola) or otherwise known as the Congress of Alphabet in 1908. The principle agreed upon was that of a Latin alphabetic script. The final version was a blend of the three main scripts, each apparently representing a literary tradition: Gheg, Tosk and Arbëresh (Rrota, 1968 [1936]: pp. 89-91). This event was a

milestone, which resulted in key decisions such as the selection of Latin script, and took the first steps to discuss dialect differences towards a standard language. The decision to establish a printing press and a Normal School proved to be of crucial importance, facilitating thus the translation process and contributing towards national consolidation (Vishko, 1988: pp. 155-177).

Once the alphabet was agreed upon, a standard orthography was required for official purposes and for education. Under Austro-Hungarian auspices, the Komisija Letrare Shqype (Albanian Literary Commission) convened in Shkodra. After several consecutive meetings, the Commission agreed to use the central dialect of Elbasan as a standard language and published an orthography. The education system was under the supervision of the Albanologist Maximilian Lambertz and, as a member of the Albanian Literary Commission, he supported the publication of textbooks in Albanian (Elsie, 2010: p. 260).

Many foreign linguists, anthropologists, publicists, scholars and diplomats who came into contact with the Albanian language and culture found it attractive and it became one of their main interests. Johann Georg von Hahn, Gustav Meyer, Norbert Jokl, Jan Jarnik, Franz Nopcsa von Felső-Szilvás, Milan von Šufflay, Auguste Dozon, Edith Durham, Leo Alexander Freundlich, Marie Amelie von Godin, and Margaret Hasluck (Elsie, 2010), among many others, collected folklore and translated it into their languages. Many of them were founders of Albanology departments in their countries. It appears that the Serbs were also interested in Albanian folklore. Vuk Karadžić, a Serbian philologist and linguist, collected twelve epic songs in Kosovo, transcribed them into the Cyrillic alphabet and translated them into Serbian, but never published them. Jokl published them later (Shala, 1988: p. 45).

Another notable development, which ironically turned out to be important for Kosovo Albanians, was the foundation of the Albanian Department at the University of Belgrade. In 1925, the Croatian Henrik Barić opened the Seminar on the Albanian Philology to continue with the journal *Archives for Albanian Antiquity, Language and Ethnology*. The focus of their studies was the Albanian language, grammar, ethnography and, of course, folklore (Kelmendi, 1963: p. 220). After World War II, the Kosovo Albanians who studied there were the main professors to establish the Faculty of Philosophy in Prishtina and carry out translation work into Albanian, although Albanian remained marginally used until the 1970s (Mala, 2014; Hyseni *et al.*, 2000: p. 61).

In 1912, Albania proclaimed its independence while Serb forces occupied Kosovo.

### 3. KOSOVO DURING THE YEARS 1912 -1945

After the Serbian occupation, Kosovo had no right to an education in Albanian and, consequently, no translation activities took place, except during World War I (1914-1918), when Kosovo was administered by Austro-Hungary and Bulgaria. In the part occupied by Austro-Hungary, unlike the areas under the control of Bulgaria, education and translation of books and other school textbooks took place (Hyseni *et al.*, 2000: p. 55). The infrastructure improved and the Albanians dedicated themselves to local governing. In their area of control, Bulgarians continued previous policies and also banned Serbian education (Malcolm, 2011: p. 338; Schmitt, 2012: p. 143).

Once World War I ended, Albanian schools were closed and the Serb authorities enforced their education system and language. Between the two World Wars, no education was given in Albanian and, consequently, there was no translation. Education in primary schools was conducted in Serbian, the only language of instruction, although religious instruction was permitted for Muslims and Catholics for some time (Çetta, 1974: p. 14). The Serbs supported Muslim religious schools in an effort to strengthen a Muslim identity over an ethnic identity among Albanians and by targeting not only the educated and rich Albanian people. Anyone who promoted Albanian culture and education would be killed. Franciscan priest Shtjefën Gjeçovi, writer, translator and collector of customary law, and the Croatian Albanologist Milan von Šufflay, the founder of Albanology in Croatia, were assassinated (Malcolm, 2011: p. 351; Schmitt, 2012: p. 163).

Italy invaded Albania in the spring of 1939 and established the Albanian Kingdom, a satellite kingdom under the rule of Italy. On 12 August 1941, the largest part of Kosovo joined the Albanian Kingdom, while the rest remained under German control (the north), and Bulgaria (the eastern part). On the Bulgarian occupied part, the Serbian language in administration and education was replaced with Bulgarian (Kostovicova, 2005: p. 38). Italians and Germans established an Albanian administration in Kosovo. Albanian schools were opened in Kosovo and the 1916 orthography was used, and it remained in use after World War II until late 1960s (Ajeti, 2017: p. 754).

#### 4. TRANSLATION IN ALBANIA DURING THE YEARS 1912 -1945

Translation began flourishing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Translation included not only ecclesiastical literature but also translations of Muslim literature and other kinds of translated literature such as drama, philosophic works, and manuals (Kokona, 2003: p. 11), reaching a zenith in the 1930s and 1940s. In addition to literary texts, one important step was the recording of legal proceedings in Albanian (1913) (Elsie, 2010: pp. 141, 275). Many periodicals were published which, in addition to original literary works, included translations on linguistics, philosophy and economy (BKSh, 2016). Nevertheless, during the 1920s and 1930s, Albanian continued to be written in different dialects and vernaculars (Ajeti, 2017: p. 802).

One of the most prominent translators in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Fan Noli. He was a poet, publicist, orator, translator, musician and historian. Like many of his contemporaries, for the major part of his life, he lived and made his contribution from abroad.

In the early period of his translation activity, Noli used translation in his efforts to establish the independence of the Albanian Orthodox Church from Greek influence. He translated catechisms and other religious texts in times when the use of Albanian was still considered heresy. He paved the way towards successful endeavours for an Autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church holding the first liturgy in Albanian in 1908, in Boston, USA (Jacques, 1995: p. 311).

At a later stage, Noli particularly excelled in his literary translations. He translated from English, French, Russian, Greek, German, Turkish, Persian, and Spanish and brought Albanian readers into contact with masterpieces of world literature. Noli was very acquainted with both Albanian and other world cultures from which he translated. The works he selected had sharp social content representing a social criticism regarding matters relevant for the circumstances Albania was in at the time (Çetta, 1974: p. 18).

He has been criticised for using many foreign words. In fact, he lived briefly in Albania. However, Dhimitër Pasko, known as Mitrush Kuteli (as quoted in Agani 1966: p. 92), states that although the subject matter is borrowed, the translator has poured into it his genial touch giving us an Albanian equivalent of an absolute value. His translations enriched the Albanian vocabulary by neologisms and borrowing, but under Albanian

morphology rules. Moreover, he wrote introductions and prefaces to his translations, providing valuable literary criticism and thus becoming the first Albanian aesthete (Agani, 1966: p. 93).

Recently, there have been some interesting discussions about whether the classic literature translated by Noli and his contemporaries should be retranslated. This theory is usually justified by the losses because of the domestication (*shqipërimi* lit. albanianisation) approach, due to unfaithful translation and the use of folklore. Translators such as Agron Tufa (2011), Edmond Tupja (2015), and several other supporters of retranslation of classics claim that such an approach affected the content and message of the written works and the writer's style. Nevertheless, Norbert Jokl applauded Noli's translation of *Rubaiyat* by Omar Khayyam as second only to Fitzgerald's translation, and as good as German or Spanish translations (Bala *et al.* 1989: p. 514).

During World War II, under the Italian occupation, books in Albanian and in French, German and English were seized to give way to Italian books; however, by the end of World War II, there was a "frenzy of translations", and an overproduction of low-quality yellow-backs in Albanian. Anyone who knew a foreign language could translate and publish (Pipa, 2013 [1944]).

## 5. TRANSLATION ACTIVITY IN POST-WORLD WAR II ALBANIA

After World War II, translation in Albania focused in two directions and was conducted by two publishing houses. The first one was *Naim Frashëri* where literary translations took place and the other was *8 Nëntori*, established in 1974, formerly known as *Instituti i Shkencave*, established in 1946. Books on Marxism and Leninism and other non-literary works were translated there. Most of the translators who worked there were anonymous, formerly convicts who had "stains" on their biographies (Ndoja, 2013).

Many intellectuals who worked on translations left Albania after the communist takeover and fled abroad. The survivors of "witch hunts", as Elsie (2010: p. 186) referred to actions against them carried out by Koçi Xoxe (the Minister of Internal Affairs of Albania), in the years 1946-1947, had to lie low while they worked on translations. The hunt resulted in the imprisonment, torturing and execution of many writers, albanologists, and translators who had studied abroad and knew several languages, including Ottoman Turkish and Persian languages, and

translated world masterpieces into Albanian. Others were interned, imprisoned, tortured and sentenced to twenty years or more of hard labour, spending the rest of their lives in misery, away from academic activity, thus exhausting the Albanian national culture (Topalli, 2010).

A decree promulgated on 14.12.1953 intending to “activate the prisoners for work”, as part of their “re-education”, included translation among many other professions. Prisoner translators were forced to work and had to meet quotas in exchange for reduced sentences. If quotas were not met, terms would be extended accordingly. They produced thousands of translated pages comprising many technical books, literary and historical works (Sufaj, 2012: p. 89).

Pjetër Arbñori (2018 [2004]) a political prisoner who suffered a 28-year imprisonment during the communist regime, recalled being paid ten Albanian Lekë per day, “benefits” that equalled two kilos of sugar. Other benefits of prison translation included a better food, a 2.7-day sentence deduction per month, and a monthly 20-minute meeting with family. The literature selected for translation was politically and ideologically motivated. Depending on political trends, there were periods of increased translation from and to Russian, which, after the war, was the most translated language and was considered the main language in translation (Arbñori, 2018 [2004]).

Vedat Kokona (2005), a writer and translator, recalls in his memoirs that while working at “Naim Frashëri”. He along with other translators whom he refers to as scribes, translated many communist related documents. According to Kokona, forcing a writer to work on translation activity was seen as a form of punishment or demotion. In his case, he was demoted from a writer to a translator once the Party members did not deem his drama *Hijet e natës* (Night Shadows) ideologically correct because of a “lack of ideological axis”. For this reason, he was appointed a literary translator to the publishing house Naim Frashëri for about fourteen years, from 1951 to 1965.

At Naim Frashëri, they worked in difficult conditions. For some time, they worked from home and were poorly rewarded for the hard work they did. With the salary he received, Kokona could not support his family and the family of his brother in prison. Therefore, he had to translate an additional 300 verses per week about the war in Korea. He translated them mainly from Soviet newspapers expressing his regret that a verse of that “crap” was paid five times more than a verse of Hugo or Shakespeare (Kokona, 2005: p. 220). Despite all that, he concludes that

the time spent and efforts devoted to the translation of literature proved as rewarding as “thousands of pages, most of which now are in the golden canon of the Albanian literature”. These efforts included also “many idiotic poems, both national and international” (Kokona, 2005: pp. 145, 208).

After World War II, the Tosk dialect became the standard language used in administration and education. A commission was set up to develop an orthography in Albanian, and respective orthography projects appeared in 1948, 1951, 1956, and 1967. The Orthography Congress was held in 1972, with delegates representing the Albanian population of the former Yugoslavia and the diaspora (Bajçinca, 2016 [2006]: pp. 31-33). Since then many types of dictionaries (bilingual, etymological, single field and of rare and uncommon words) were compiled and published. The *Dictionary of the Contemporary Albanian Language* published in 1980, served as a reference for “phraseology, orthography and pronunciation” (Murati, 1982: pp. 140-143), and remains to date as such.

In the 1950s, there were efforts to translate and publish Albanian writers into foreign languages, usually French, English, Italian, Arabic, and other languages of socialist states in order to promote Albanian literature abroad. For this purpose, a journal called *Les lettres Albanaises* published Albanian literature in French. Nevertheless, Albanian literature in translation is generally identified with Kadare and a good part of his success is attributed to quality translation conducted by the prisoner translator Jusuf Vrioni. However, quality translation on its own did not suffice as it took twenty years after the first publication of his novel, *The General of the Dead Army*, for it to be duly appraised. Therefore, translating and publishing in foreign languages proved ineffective in Albania, partly because of the country they were published in and partly because of the names of publishing companies. Kadare enjoyed success and became famous once his translated books were published by well-known French publishing companies and were given a positive criticism and reviews (Jaka, 1987: pp. 411-423).

In this way, we can conclude that the translation situation in Albania in the aftermath of World War II is partly contradictory to Venuti’s statement that translation is considered an act of violence against a nation based on the biological grounding in ethnicity or race (Venuti, 2005: p. 177). It is a matter of fact that translation was considered an act of violence because it was strictly dictated and the works for translation were carefully selected. However, this threat was not based on biological

grounding in ethnicity or race; rather it was ideologically oriented, because the translations had to be in service of the “ideological superiority” of communism (Kokona, 2005: pp. 227).

After the fall of communism, the market was liberalised and was marked with poor translations that failed to convey the author’s message and style, and there was a lack of proper editing and cultural background knowledge (Tupja, 2015). In addition, indirect translations were made on several occasions (Lanksch, 2013).

## **6. TRANSLATION IN POST-WORLD WAR II KOSOVO UNTIL THE ABOLITION OF AUTONOMY IN 1989**

After World War II, as a result of previous linguistic policies, there was a high percentage of illiteracy. According to the 1948 census, 74% of the population of Kosovo were illiterate, and the language used in administration and official communication was Serbian (Hyseni *et al.* 2000: pp. 26, 61).

Initially, Yugoslav relations with Albania were good, and several books in Albanian were dispatched to Kosovo along with teachers. The Albanian teachers educated in literary Gheg at the Normal School were helping with the *Rilindja* newspaper and educational institutions. They used the 1916 orthography. The policies of both states had their education oriented towards teaching socialist realism. However, after the breakdown of relations between Albania and Yugoslavia, 714 teachers were expelled, textbooks from Albania were removed and Serbian textbooks had to be translated into Albanian (Kostovicova, 2005: p. 40). Subsequently, the orthography and language deteriorated. The language used in translation was modelled according to the Serbian language. The translators did not know the language into which they were translating well. This period will have a long-term impact on the syntax of the Albanian language and the use of standard Albanian in Kosovo (Bajçinca 2016 [2006]: p. 34). The differences in orthography and language quality are evident between translations published in the 1950s and 1960s in Kosovo, and those translated at the same time in Albania and reprinted in Kosovo.

The army and police under the command of Ranković (Yugoslav Minister of Internal Affairs) took over the government in Kosovo. Under his authority, repression on the civilian Albanian population increased. Everybody, including the members of the Communist Party, became



suspect. Repression strengthened more Albanian identity awareness and feelings. The same policies continued after Kosovo was granted the status of an Autonomous Province in 1963. The status defined the present-day borders of Kosovo, and many Albanian inhabited villages and towns remained out of the borders, such as in Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro (Malcolm, 2011: p. 412; Schmitt, 2012: p. 177).

In addition to political and physical repression, translation was used to promote Serb history and culture through translated textbooks used in the education system. Moreover, translation activity aimed at promoting a new identity, mainly of Kosovo Albanians in the former Yugoslavia. These attempts consisted of promoting the vernacular language to be used in translated books and other publications in order to increase the linguistic difference with Albania, which would eventually lead to the creation of a separate identity. Part of that involved referring to Kosovo Albanians as *Šiptari* and not *Albanci* as other Albanians living in Albania were recognised. In fact, Serbo-Croatian remained the only official language while Albanian enjoyed the same status in theory. The earlier practice of serbianisation, such as adding *ić* to Albanian surnames and even translating them into Serbian, stopped (Clark, 2000: p. 11; Schmitt, 2012: pp. 177, 281).

This period was also marked with several periodicals in Albanian where translations and literary works written by Kosovo Albanians in Kosovo were published. They included different translations beginning from Greek and Roman authors to modern ones, from all over the world. This brought local authors into contact with contemporary literary movements and different ideas of the time (Qosja, 1973: p. 262). The most important was the literary magazine *Jeta e re*. In the first issue (1949), the authors discuss their concerns related to Albanian creative literature in Kosovo, translation activity, and the need for a standard language and orthography. There was an appeal to publish translations in addition to the original literary works, as they would serve as a model for the new generations to create contemporary literature (Mekuli, 1949: p. 9). Throughout this period until 1990, works analysing the translated literature and the mastery of different translators were published in magazines and periodicals of the time. In the early 1980s, discussions also covered the translation studies as a separate science (Karjagdiu, 1984: pp. 565-580).

Translation activity was used to promote the literature of other Yugoslav republics in Albanian and vice versa. Therefore, in the late

1960s, Kosovo-Albanian authors of different genres were translated, mainly into Serbian and sometimes into Slovene and Macedonian. There were also translations into English, French, German, Italian, Turkish and Arabic languages. However, authors from Albania were not translated into Serbo-Croatian (Jaka, 1987: pp. 418-420).

Translations from languages spoken in Yugoslavia other than Serbo-Croatian into Albanian were usually conducted from Serbo-Croatian. Native Albanians, post-World War II graduates of the Albanology Department of the Belgrade University, with few exceptions, generally conducted translations from Albanian into Serbo-Croatian and vice versa. Modern Arab poetry and other European literary works have also been translated from the Serbo-Croatian language (Mala, 2014; Mehdiu, 1997: pp. 93-106; Jaka, 1990: pp. 33-36).

In 1962, a section of the Bureau of Education Textbooks and Learning Materials opened in Prishtina, a change that facilitated the translation of textbooks from Serbian into Albanian. Until 1962, out of 364 school textbooks, only the primer and the textbook on Albanian language were originally in Albanian; all the rest was translated from Serbian. This was true throughout the 1970s. It was only during the 1980s that original textbooks would supersede translated books (Hyseni *et al.*, 2000: pp. 170).

The activities for a standard orthography in Kosovo took place separately from those in Albania. A series of *Konsulta Gjuhësore* (Language Consultations) took place in 1952, 1957, and 1963. The latter was concluded with the publication of an orthography (1964). During this period, different divergent and convergent approaches to the standard orthography used in Albania were observed. In 1968, the Language Consultation concluded with an agreement to adopt the standard Albanian used in Albania for official use by the Albanian speakers in the former Yugoslavia, despite the fact that 80 percent of it belonged to the Tosk dialect (Ajeti, 2017: pp. 767-769; Elsie, 2010: p. 266). Ajeti (2017: p. 756) underlines, however, that the rate of dialect features is 13 to 8 in favour of the Tosk dialect. The standard language came into use in education, the media, and the press. Nonetheless, the linguistic inferiority of Gheg speakers continues to date.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the relations between Albania and Yugoslavia improved again. Albanians in Kosovo benefitted from the agreements and protocols of cooperation signed between the University of Prishtina and the University of Tirana, which concluded with a legal

agreement between Arteksport and Rilindja publishing houses. Among thousands of books and teaching items, books of foreign literature translated into Albanian were supplied (Syla, 2011: p. 150). This continued until 1981 when the situation worsened following the student protests demanding social equality and political rights. After that, the relations with Albania severed again. Standard Albanian, among others, was attacked and was publicly criticised by some Serbian newspapers and local politicians as something imposed and unnatural (Ajeti, 2017 [1989]: p. 793).

Rexhep Qosja (2013: pp. 18-19) states that compared to Albania where the literature to be translated was selected based on serious criteria following the ideology of socialist realism, in Kosovo that was not the case. In Albania, the major translated works were of classic literature, while translators in Kosovo had the liberty to translate the books banned in Albania. Still, politics determined the direction of translation preferences, that is, publishing as much as possible the literature originating from the former Yugoslav republics. Nevertheless, Qosja states that all the literature translated in Albania and some other banned translations were printed in Kosovo.

Mehmet Kraja (2011: pp. 18-19), on the other hand, notes that translation in Kosovo differed from that of Albania. It lagged behind and never managed to have a significant place in the Albanian literary canon, partly because of language quality, and partly because of translation from Serbo-Croatian. In addition, authors such as Kafka, Wilde, Joyce, Camus and Saussure, and many others who had been banned in Albania, were translated in Prishtina.

## **7. TRANSLATION IN KOSOVO DURING THE 1990S**

The 1990s were a time of political turmoil, civil disobedience, state arbitrary power, and emigration *en masse* of Kosovo Albanians to the rest of Europe. A parallel education and healthcare system in Albanian were set up in an effort to withstand Serbian nationalist policies (see Clark, 2000: pp. 113-139). Translation was used by the then peaceful movement as a defence mechanism to promote the national agenda of the majority of people in Kosovo for liberation and democratisation towards independence.

In such a time of information darkness, the Kosovo Information Centre (QIK/KIC) was established. Many times, their work was the only

reliable source of information to other international media about what was happening in Kosovo, especially during the years 1998-1999. The Centre challenged the Serb politics of controlling all aspects of life including the media, society, and culture by setting a functional network of collecting information all over Kosovo. It published an evening daily newspaper called *Informatori* with editions in Albanian and respective translations in English, French and German. The English section, in addition to translating the daily news and dealing with political and sociological topics, translated books on Kosovo and other documents related to the overall situation of Albanians in Kosovo (Zejnnullahu, 2017: pp. 33-40).

When the war broke out in 1998, many aid agencies, a short-lived OSCE mission, the Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), and news agencies relied on translation and interpreting. Interpreters working for the KVM went out on patrols along with the international verifiers. While working for the mission, the military and police forces often intimidated and threatened both local and international staff and there were even instances of assault against the international verifiers. After their withdrawal, interpreters, translators and other local workers were hunted down and many were killed (OSCE / ODIHR, 1999: pp. 157, 333).

## **8. TRANSLATION IN POST-1999 KOSOVO**

Following the deployment of an international presence in Kosovo, that is, the Kosovo Force (KFOR), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in 1999, and at a later stage the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) in 2008, language staff became an integral part of the mission. They usually were young people who had the linguistic knowledge, yet no satisfactory sociolinguistic awareness (Kajtazi, 2017: p. 58).

Translation and interpreting became important for implementing the mandate of the mentioned missions covering all aspects of administrative, judicial, executive and cultural work, and other matters of importance in which Kosovo was lagging behind because of the decade of boycott and peaceful resistance. Translation was in service of promoting UNMIK policies, especially focusing on reconciliation amongst the hostile parties, good governance, human rights, democratisation, economic development, and ensuring a peaceful and

normal life for all people of all ethnic groups living in Kosovo (UNSC Report S/1999/779). In order to promote interethnic tolerance and cooperation, international presence used the media and translation to promote a political (activist) habitus (see Wolf, 2014: p. 15). This was conducted by establishing and supporting local radio and TV programs that would be impartial and would help narrowing the gap in trust between the major ethnic groups. Many brochures were produced and television campaigns addressing immediate problems such as landmines, illegal weapons, reckless driving, happy shootings, and other issues were broadcasted on daily basis since the end of the war. At the same time, they promoted and provided stories of interethnic tolerance and cooperation. Many times, they pictured Kosovo Police in acts of good faith, and also their and KFOR's intervention readiness and capabilities. These translated versions of audio and video footages, involving interactions between the two ethnic groups and languages were broadcasted in Albanian and Serbian (see Wentz, 2002: p. 512).

The international presence, however, introduced and patronised a new Kosovar identity initially as a territorial identity. This new identity, Albanians, Serbs, and all other minor ethnic groups living in Kosovo would find it equally representative in terms of national identity in the future. Kraja (2019) finds this approach subversive and disintegrating.

According to the Kosovo Constitution (2008, Article 5), the official languages in the Republic of Kosovo are Albanian and Serbian, while Turkish, Bosnian and Roma languages have the status of official languages at the municipal level as provided by law. This means that there is a high demand for translation and interpreting (for laws, different documents, reports and communication) needed for official purposes.

Besides, the deployment of international organisations as part of the signed agreement in 1999, there was a flow of non-governmental organizations with various agendas. They used translation to promote their extremist agendas. In addition to economic assistance given to various vulnerable social groups, they funded and supported subversive elements related to religion, against standard language and national personalities, religious tolerance, and gender equality (Qarri, 2017). Translations of radical literature were in service to influence the youth who eventually joined the terrorists in the Middle East (Tërnavë, 2017). Internet and social media provided an easy forum to use various interpretations of translations according to extremist Middle East countries models (Xh. Hamiti, as quoted in Gashi, 2017).

## 9. CURRENT TRANSLATION SITUATION IN ALBANIA AND KOSOVO

Translation activity and the selection of works for translation purposes depend on market demand. There is a dissatisfaction, in relation to the quality of translations in Albania. There is an overproduction of translated works, on the one hand, while the low volume sales, lack of interest and low prices, in turn, determine the quality of translations. Either way, this affects the motivation of translators because of the lack of financial remuneration for their work (Kasapolli-Selani, 2014; Zeqo, 2011).

Another problem that concerns translation activities is piracy. Publicists Ymeri (2007: pp. 18-19) and Kraja (2013) have expressed their concern that books translated in Kosovo in the 1970s and 1980s may have been alienated and published in Albania with minor editing after the fall of communism. According to Kraja (2013), in the past twenty years, literary translation has almost ceased in Kosovo.

There is a prevalent problem with translations from Albanian to other languages. Native Albanians continue to conduct translation from Albanian into other languages, because only a few foreign translators know Albanian sufficiently to produce high quality translations. This problem has accompanied translation activity for a long time (Elsie, 2016). The loss of specialists in Albanian culture and literary translators such as Robert Elsie (passed away in 2017) and Hans Joachim Lanksch (passed away in 2019) has impoverished the translation and presentation of Albanian literature and culture to English- and German-speaking audiences.

A yearly book fair brings together Albanian publishing companies in Prishtina (Kosovo), Tirana (Albania) and Tetovo (North Macedonia), where many translated books, usually translated in Albania, are displayed for sale. Books translated in Kosovo are often read as sources of errors and not as new literature, a Kosovo publisher and literary translator claims (F. Berisha, personal communication Sep 3, 2019). At present, according to the Albanian Ministry of Culture, 79% of books in the Albanian market belong to foreign authors, mainly from the West, and 10% to the literature of the South-Eastern Europe (Muçi, 2016).

## 10. CONCLUSIONS

Translation has played a crucial role for the Albanian culture in several important areas. To begin with, the first texts written in Albanian were produced through translation. This activity brought the ideas of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and Albanian culture benefited from the respective translations. Among other things, translation laid the foundations for an artistic literature in Albanian and also addressed several topics such as alphabetic script, language purification, collection of folklore and words, and encouraged education in Albanian. Translation was also a means to raise national awareness and to promote the national agenda.

Translation as a means of propagating different ideologies, strictly controlled by the authorities in Albania, served to support communist policies, but also, to some extent, to make Albanian literary works available abroad. In Kosovo, under Yugoslav rule, it contributed to the production of a contemporary literature and provided access to works banned in translation in Albania. Translation, also served to support the failing efforts to create a new identity for the Albanians in the former Yugoslavia. These attempts continued and were implicitly supported by the peacekeeping and peacebuilding forces after the war ended in 1999.

At present, as regards to literary translation, there is an overproduction in Albania, yet quality is not as good. In Kosovo, it has almost come to an end. Non-literary translation, however, has thrived thanks to the presence of the peacekeeping and peacebuilding forces, and of many non-governmental organisations.

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