

Miftar Kurti**Institute of History “Ali Hadri”, Prishtina (Kosovo)**

[miftarkurti@hotmail.com], ORCID: 0009-0005-0599-1944

Nuri Bexheti**University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” (Kosovo)**

[nuri.bexheti@uni-pr.edu], ORCID: 0009-0004-1235-3521

Ardita Hajdari**Institute of History “Ali Hadri”, Prishtina (Kosovo)**

[ardita.hajdari@hotmail.com], ORCID: 0009-0002-1910-040X

Primary Education in the Parallel System of Kosovo (1990–1999)

Abstract: Kosovo became part of the Socialist Republic of Serbia within the Yugoslav federation at the end of the Second World War in 1945. A unified curriculum was introduced across Yugoslavia by the Federal Law on Elementary and Secondary Education in 1958. The 1963 Constitution further devolved educational powers to the republics, and the 1974 Constitution elevated Kosovo to an autonomous province with its own education-making bodies. From the mid-1970s, Kosovo's provincial assembly regulated elementary and secondary schools under an eight-grade compulsory system, and the University of Pristina operated with growing autonomy.

In March 1989, Republic of Serbia, within Yugoslavia revoked Kosovo's autonomy and imposed Serbo-Croatian as the sole language of instruction, leading to the dismissal of Albanian-language teachers and the collapse of Albanian-medium classes. From 1990 to 1999, Kosovo Albanians established a parallel education network to preserve continuity and prevent the illiteracy intended by Serbian policies. This paper examines how primary education functioned under those extraordinary conditions: the parallel curricula and teaching materials used, the financing mechanisms, and the challenges encountered by students, teachers, parents, and school leaders during this period.

Keywords: Kosovo; Albanian education; albanian language; parallel system; Yugoslavia.

Introduction

The history of Albanian-language education in Kosovo is marked by repeated cycles of prohibition, resistance, and adaptation. From the

Ottoman period through the Yugoslav era, Albanian schools were systematically suppressed, yet communities consistently sought ways to preserve instruction in their own language. The culmination of these efforts was the creation of a parallel education system during the 1990s, organized outside the official Serbian state structures. This system, though operating under severe political repression and material scarcity, became a cornerstone of Albanian collective resistance and cultural survival. Within this historical continuum, the emergence of the parallel education system in the 1990s stands as a decisive moment in the struggle to preserve cultural identity under conditions of political repression. Despite formidable obstacles, including state bans, administrative decrees, and the confiscation of school facilities, this system functioned as an effective mechanism for safeguarding instruction in the Albanian language and transmitting national identity across generations.

This article seeks to demonstrate that the parallel education system was not merely a symbolic act of defiance but a practical and resilient structure that ensured continuity of learning. It asks how Albanian schools, organized outside official Serbian state frameworks, sustained their operation during the years 1990 – 1999 and what impact this had on literacy and educational attainment among Albanian children. By situating the parallel system within broader historical and political contexts, the study underscores its role as both an educational and a national project.

The working hypothesis advanced here is that, although informal and lacking state recognition, the parallel education system succeeded in maintaining high levels of literacy and primary education among Albanian children. Its endurance was made possible through the mobilization of community resources, the use of private homes and improvised facilities, and the cultivation of a collective ethos of resistance. In this way, education became both a pedagogical and a political act, reinforcing the cohesion of a society under siege.

To substantiate this hypothesis, the article will draw, where possible, on data from the post-war international administration in Kosovo, including Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) under the authority of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), OSCE, and UNICEF reports (Sommers & Buckland,

2004).¹ Statistics on literacy rates and school enrollment among children educated during the parallel system years provide empirical evidence that this improvised network not only functioned but achieved measurable outcomes. Such data will serve to highlight the paradox of an education system that, while denied official legitimacy, nonetheless succeeded in fulfilling its essential mission: the preservation of language, identity, and knowledge under conditions of systematic exclusion.

An Overview of the History of Albanian-language Education in Kosovo

Upon the Ottoman Empire's consolidation of control over all Albanian territories, concerted efforts were undertaken to safeguard the Albanian language and establish schools offering instruction in Albanian. Religious institutions, such as the College of Saint Luke in the village of Stubëll, Vitia, were established early in Kosovo's history, beginning in 1584. It was only during the period of the Albanian National Awakening within the Ottoman Empire that truly national Albanian schools were founded most notably the National Albanian School of Korçë (1887) and the Elbasan Normal School (1909). These institutions form the very foundation of the modern Albanian education system (Koliqi, 2004).

The use of several scripts including Arabic-Ottoman, Greek, Latin, or modified Italo-Latin variants created by Albanian authors was prevalent in Albanian-language schools until 1908. The Latin script was the only one adopted following the Congress of Manastir (1908). The Ottoman-Turkish system remained the primary school system in Kosovo until 1913, followed by the Albanian and Serbian systems (Pupovci, Hyseni, Salihaj, 2000; Hajdari, Bexheti, 2024). Following the establishment of the Albanian state on 28 November 1912 and the subsequent occupation of Kosovo by Serbia and Montenegro in 1913, Albanian-language schools and the use of the Albanian language in Kosovo were systematically banned through a comprehensive array of administrative measures (Koliqi, 2004, pp. 23–24). Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, education in Albanian was formally prohibited in Kosovo.

¹ Agency of State Archives of Kosovo. (n.d.). Fondi “Government of Kosovo – Commission for the Assessment of Damages,” File: Destruction of Archival Material 1989–1999, Pristina, 2003-2004.

During the First World War (1914–1918), Kosovo was divided into two administrative zones: an eastern zone administered by Bulgaria and a western zone administered by Austria-Hungary. Only during this period were Albanian-language schools allowed to be established in Kosovo. Under Austro-Hungarian military-civil administration, around 300 Albanian-language schools were founded, supported and encouraged through financial assistance (Koliqi, 2004). Kosovo was placed under strict police control from 1918 (Lory, 2005). With the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a systematic campaign against Albanian-language education in Kosovo was initiated. This policy led to the closure of 55 elementary schools, which had been serving approximately 4,000 pupils and staffed by around 100 teachers. The suppression of Albanian schooling during this period represented a deliberate attempt to curtail linguistic and cultural autonomy. It was only during the Second World War, under the conditions of foreign occupation, that Albanian-language elementary schools were permitted to reopen, marking a temporary reversal of the restrictive measures imposed in the interwar years. They operated in the Italian and German occupation zones, whereas in the Bulgarian-occupied area both schools and the Albanian language were banned. After the end of the war, Kosovo's education system went through several phases: the first phase (1945–1966), the second (1967–1980), the third (1981–1989), and the fourth (1990–1999), which closed out the twentieth century (Pupovci, Hyseni, & Salihaj, 2000). During the 1944/45 school year, Kosovo opened 278 four-grade elementary schools: 135 taught in Albanian (48.56%) and 143 in Serbian (51.44%). A total of 27,400 pupils were enrolled, 11,573 in Albanian and 15,827 in Serbian (Shatri, 2010). In the 1946/47 school year, the total number of Albanian-language elementary schools rose to 467, with 57,578 pupils enrolled (Karastojanov, 2007). By the 1949/50 school year, there were 472 Albanian-language schools with 747 teachers, and 320 Serbian-language schools with 539 teachers (Gjevori, 1998). From 1946 until the 1954/55 school year, pupils and elementary schools were segregated by national affiliation (Albanian and Serbian) and by language (Albanian and Serbian) (Shatri, 2010). In 1951/52, elementary schools teaching in Turkish also opened in Kosovo (Durmuşçelebi & Koro, 2012). Beginning in 1955/56, Kosovo established “territorial schools,” where instruction was organized in two teaching languages. In the 1959/60 school year, 502 elementary schools were operating in Kosovo, of which 159 were full eight-year institutions. By

1966/67, primary education in Kosovo included 204,702 pupils distributed across 6,546 classes. Of these, 133,907 pupils received instruction in Albanian, and 67,742 in Serbo-Croatian. In 1973/74, compared with 1966/67, the total number of pupils had increased by 63,430 (Shatri, 2010). The 1974 constitution greatly reduced the statutory differences between the autonomous provinces (Kosovo and Vojvodina) and the republics (Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina). For Kosovo Albanians, this was a major change (Lory, 2005), because under that constitution Kosovo gained the right to regulate its own educational and cultural affairs (A.S.A., 1999). The 1975/76 school year was the first to apply the new education laws based on the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution, granting Kosovo's education system full autonomy. According to Article 182, Chapter III of the 1974 Constitution of Kosovo, primary education was made compulsory and was to last at least eight years.² In this school year, a total of 879 primary schools were in operation. Of these, 422 were full eight-year schools, and the remainder were incomplete schools. A total of 285,969 pupils were enrolled: 225,590 in Albanian-language classes and 58,796 in Serbo-Croatian.

The period 1975/76 – 1980/81 is regarded as the brightest era for education development in general and for Albanian-language education in Kosovo in particular. Net enrollment for the generation aged 7–14 rose above 93.4 percent. First grade achieved full participation of seven-year-olds, while in eighth grade participation was around 85 percent.

In the 1980/81 school year, 895 primary schools operated: 463 fully independent eight-year schools, 30 six-grade schools, 41 five-grade schools, and 361 four-grade schools. This network enabled 321,547 pupils to attend primary education. The national composition of those pupils was: 268,548 Albanians (83.52 %), 34,827 Serbs (10.83 %), 3,462 Montenegrins (1.08 %), 1,466 Turks (0.46 %), 7,127 Bosniaks (2.22 %), 3,880 Roma (1.21 %), and 2,237 others (0.70 %). Enrollment for the 7–14 age group that year reached 94.10 percent. In 1983/84, Kosovo had 928 primary schools serving 1,435 settlements, of which only 489 were eight-grade schools. By the 1988/89 school year, instruction took place in 964 primary schools: 360 four-grade, 14 five-grade, 35 six-grade, and 555 eight-grade schools. That year, 349,114 pupils were enrolled – 304,836 in Albanian, 42,388 in Serbo-

² Constitution of the Socialist Autonomous Province of Kosovo of February 27, 1974, Chapter III, Article 182, p.115.

Croatian, and 1,890 in Turkish (Shatri, 2010). After the death of the Yugoslav leader Tito (4 May 1980), two major changes took place in Yugoslavia: ethnic tensions rekindled with great force, resembling an unforgivable hatred, and dictatorial methods became part of the governing style (Duroselle & Kaspi, 2011).

The Serbian authorities began to express their policies openly and blatantly intensify grievances toward Albanians, withholding support for their culture, education, and language. These injustices culminated in the demonstrations of March and April 1981. After this demonstrations, Serbian and Yugoslav authorities launched a campaign of segregation against Albanians. They organized a broad offensive, aiming specifically at Albanian education and schools in Kosovo. Education itself was labeled a source of irredentism and separatism. The situation worsened further in March 1989, when Serbia abolished Kosovo's autonomy and installed an apartheid system against Albanians (Schmitt, 2008).

From July 1989 to March 1991, Serbia enacted several laws (Marko, 2023), including the “Law on the Functioning of Republican Bodies in Extraordinary Circumstances”, as if in wartime (Avdić, 2013). In addition to passing laws, Serbia issued around 500 decrees that affected every sphere of Kosovar society and the entire education system, from preschool institutions and elementary schools up to the university level. These legal and administrative measures resulted in the total removal of Kosovo's autonomy (Marko, 2023).

Thus, a Serbian team assumed control of all political, economic, and cultural decision-making mechanisms, inevitably fostering the creation of a deeply antagonistic parallel Albanian society (Lory, 2005). As a 1990 Human Rights Watch report documents, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo were arrested en masse, beaten and tortured in prisons, and dismissed from their jobs solely because of their ethnicity (Human Rights Watch Staff, 1990). Serbian police units repeatedly used excessive force against ethnic Albanian demonstrators (H.R.W.S., 1990).

Therefore, the Serbian and Yugoslav authorities' intervention in Kosovo was not intended to protect the Serb minority, as officially claimed, but to reassert control over Kosovo (Human Rights Watch Staff, 1990) and to ban Albanian-language education (Hajrizi, 2011).

After these harsh policies by the Serbo-Yugoslav authorities, Albanian parties and cadres in Kosovo strove to seize the initiative. On 2 July 1990, the Albanian delegates of the provincial Parliament gathered, despite being barred by police from entering the building, they read the

Declaration of Independence and on 7 September 1990 they proclaimed the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, which would be independent of Serbia but not of Yugoslavia. After Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence, the Albanians took a further step. On 10 October 1991, they organized a referendum in which they declared Kosovo's independence from Yugoslavia. Only Albania recognized this decision; Serbia declared it illegal and immediately began implementing a comprehensive policy of Serbianization. Education, vital in national and political terms, was the first target, followed by television, radio, and newspapers, all brought under state control. Albanian journalists were dismissed; Albanian curricula were removed; books in Albanian were withdrawn from public libraries; street names and monuments were Serbianized. Albanians were again addressed with the slur "shiptari" and in administration the nationalist label "Kosmet" (Kosovo and Metohija) came into use. In March 1990, some 7,000 pupils across 13 Kosovar municipalities and schools showed symptoms of poisoning, a deliberate action, Albanians believed, by Serbian authorities (Schmitt, 2008).

Serbian authorities confiscated school seals, thereby preventing official school documents (registers and diplomas) from being validated. Pupils were barred from attending through repressive measures, and schools were even surrounded by blinded military vehicles to block Albanian students and teachers from entering. Serbian authorities conditioned the entry of Albanian teachers into school buildings on signing a declaration pledging "to accept Serbia as their state and to organize educational work in harmony with the laws and by-laws of the Republic of Serbia" (Sommers & Buckland, 2004). Albanians refused to comply, and they also rejected Serbian curricula and teaching programs because they contained derogatory references to Albanians; every subject had been radically rewritten; Albanian history and culture were demeaned in all subjects, and Kosovo was omitted entirely. In Albanian language courses, celebrated writers such as Ismail Kadare, Dritëro Agolli, and Mark Krasniqi were removed from syllabi, while in Serbo-Croatian language and literature for elementary schools' authors like Rexhep Hoxha, Agim Deva, Migjeni, Naim Frashëri, Esad Mekuli, and Rifat Kukaj were expunged. Albanian writers of the National Renaissance and contemporary literature were replaced by Serbian and Yugoslav authors (Gjoshi, 2016). By the 1990s, this policy culminated in the closure of schools attended by Albanians and the replacement of Albanian teachers with Serbian teachers (Nizich & Laber, 1992).

How and Why the Parallel Education System in Kosovo Was Established and How it Functioned

Since most of the social life had been “Serbianized” (Schmitt, 2008), and the Serbian authorities completely banned instruction in Albanian on 1 September 1991 (Hyseni, 1996), Albanian teachers saw the need for a strategic shift. Through their unions – and with support from dismissed educational administrators and local parent groups – they took the initiative to create an alternative system of schooling (Clark, 2013, pp. 284-286).

To organize this parallel education, a ministerial council of the Government of Kosovo was formed in Pristina, comprising:

A representative of the “Naim Frashëri” Albanian Teachers’ Union;

A delegate from the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute;

A member of the Pristina Inter-municipal Pedagogical Entit;

A delegate from the Kosovo Education Unions;

A representative of the former Kosovo Education Community.

This council decided that all teaching would take place in private homes (Shatri, 2010).

To coordinate these efforts and develop solutions, a further Coordinating Council was established under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Fehmi Agani, who was later executed by Serbian police-military forces in May 1999.³ That Coordinating Council, which also included teams of educational experts, drafted an action plan with three variants: A (A-1, A-2), B (B-1) and C (C-1).

Under Variant A, all Albanian pupils who had not been forcibly expelled from their primary school buildings would attend. Variant B was intended for schools operating in two or three shifts, and in some cases even three to four shifts. Variant C was designed for those schools that had to vacate their premises and were forced to carry out teaching in private homes. The duration of lessons was to be flexible, depending on which variant was in use. According to Variant A (A-1 and A-2), each lesson would last 45 minutes. However, if a school ran three or four shifts, lessons under this variant could be shortened to 30 minutes. This reduction applied only during the winter term; in spring and summer, lessons would return to 45 minutes (Shatri, 2010). Following this

³ Bird, B., Watt, N. (1999, May 10) Kosovan leader's death condemned, *The Guardian*; Husarska, A. (1999, May 25) Death of a Peacemaker, *The Washington Post*.

model, the first “house-school” opened on 6 January 1992. By 15 February 1992, all primary and secondary schools in Kosovo had begun operating in private homes – also referred to as house-schools – according to the planned variants (A, B and C) (Pupovci, Hyseni, Salihaj, 2000). Albanian-language education in Kosovo during the period 1991–1999 is known by the name “parallel educational system”. Leading this initiative were 14,000 primary school teachers, around 4,000 secondary school teachers, and 862 university lecturers, most of whom had previously been dismissed from their positions by the Serbian administration.

At the time, the educational system in Kosovo included 452 full primary schools, 67 secondary schools, and one university comprising 14 faculties and 7 higher education institutions, with approximately 400,000 pupils and students (Koliqi, 2004).

Primary education was divided into two cycles: The **Lower Grade Cycle** and the **Upper Grade Cycle**.

The lower cycle consisted of four grades (I, II, III, and IV). It was also known as “*class-based teaching*”, attended by children aged 7 to 11. It was referred to as *class-based teaching* because the entire teaching process was conducted by a single person, known as the *classroom teacher* (for grades I–IV).

The upper cycle, on the other hand, was referred to as “*subject-based teaching*” and included grades V, VI, VII, and VIII of primary school. After completing grade VIII, students were issued a **certificate of achievement**, which reflected the academic performance of the student from grade one through grade eight. The certificate also included a grade for the student’s behavior (Pupovci, Hyseni, Salihaj, 2000).

Certificates for primary education, secondary school diplomas, and university degrees carried the seal of the “Republic of Kosovo”.

Based on the strategy developed for students excluded from school facilities, teaching was organized into five categories:

First category: schools that operated in facilities with physically separated classes, i.e., in legally recognized school buildings.

Second category: primary schools, mainly with physically separated classes, which, for various reasons, had been completely shut down and, from 1990 to 1999, did not appear on official records as schools.

Third category: schools that conducted lessons both in school facilities and in private homes.

Fourth category: primary schools whose students continuously received instruction in *home-schools*.

Fifth category: primary schools that were burned down by Serbian forces during the War (1998 and 1999), forcing students to relocate to other school facilities in Kosovo or to private homes (Shatri, 2010) and in some cases, even to Albania and Montenegro.

In private homes, from the 1991/92 school year until March 1999, students from over 70 primary schools (grades I–VIII), with separate classes (grades I–IV), were accommodated. In some schools (private homes), instruction was organized only for core subjects, while skill-based subjects (Physical Education, Music, Visual Arts, etc.) were not held at all. In the lower primary cycle, organizing lessons was somewhat easier, as each class was accommodated in one room (within a private house), whereas in the upper primary cycle, one class would be organized within an entire house. There were cases where some lower primary teachers conducted their lessons with their own students in their own homes – such as in Gurakoc of Istog, in Obiliq, in Pozheran of Viti, and elsewhere. Another form of organization was the block-scheduling model. A teacher assigned to a specific class would deliver the entire weekly subject load in one day. For example, the full weekly mathematics curriculum would be taught in one day, while on another day, instruction would focus solely on the Albanian language. In some schools, the learning process took place in rotating locations. On one day, classes would be held in certain homes, usually those of the students' parents, and the next day in another home (in Peja, Prizren, Viti, etc.). There were cases when locations changed daily or weekly. This method of organizing instruction served as a preventive and safety measure, as the police did not know where lessons for each school were being held. This was critical, as students, teachers, parents, and the homeowners of these “schoolhouses” were often mistreated. Instruction also took place in **odas** (traditional guest rooms reserved for men). In such cases, one room was used per class, meaning there were as many “classrooms” as there were classes. Lessons typically began at 8 or 9 in the morning. According to variant C, class periods were reduced to 30 minutes. This shortened duration applied only to core subjects, while other subjects, such as visual culture and music, could be shortened even further, sometimes to under 30 minutes, and were treated as consultative sessions. Oversight by the school administration and other responsible bodies was impossible under such conditions. This form of educational organization also faced other unexpected obstacles. There

were cases when homeowners requested the house to be vacated due to a family death, as the mourning period (*e pamja*, or condolence visits) had to be observed. In other cases, during religious holidays, families would ask that no lessons be held on those specific days (Shatri, 2010).

The Working Conditions in Private Homes and with a Parallel System were Unfavorable for many Reasons

Police violence continued, teachers were paid poorly and with significant delays, there was a lack of material resources, textbooks were missing, and even lesson plans and curricula for some subjects were absent (Pupovci, Hyseni, Salihaj, 2000; Hajrizi, 2011; Clark, 2013, pp. 284-286). The classrooms were far from meeting pedagogical standards; they were overcrowded. The rooms in private homes were not equipped with necessary furnishings, and there were neither chairs nor desks. Students were forced to sit on the floor. Notes were taken in notebooks placed on the floor or on the shoulders of classmates. Later, in many schools, desks and chairs were improvised.

The heating of the rooms was inadequate. The cleanliness of such spaces was difficult to maintain. In urban areas, lessons were often conducted in rooms that one had to pass through the kitchen to reach. The smell of food was always present. In rural areas, many of the rooms used for lessons lacked sufficient clean water, and in some cases, sanitary facilities were not installed. Students and teachers had to walk on foot from one village to another, and in these areas, transportation was lacking because the Serbian authorities, aiming to hinder free movement, intentionally disrupted land communication in Albanian-populated areas.

The power supply was also unreliable, particularly in Albanian-majority villages. In the 1998/99 school year, the organization of the learning process became even more difficult due to the onset of the war in Kosovo. What stands out during the parallel system is that the families, who owned the homes converted into schools, did their best within their means to create the best possible conditions. They took care of the cleanliness of the premises, ensured their heating, and maintained discipline both inside and outside the school. They even defended the students and teachers if they were attacked by the police, regardless of the consequences (Shatri, 2010). There were cases where parents were killed for not allowing their children to be mistreated by the Serbian police (Pupovci, Hyseni, Salihaj, 2000). During the years of the parallel

system, “there was practically no teacher training”; the teaching methods were traditional and outdated. Low-quality education was also a weakness of the parallel system because maintaining quality was impossible. The goal was to prevent the increase of illiteracy despite the difficult conditions. Ultimately, the parallel system was not only about education but also about politics (Sommers, Buckland, 2004). As Howard Clark rightly observes, the movement of parallel structures had four objectives: the survival of the Albanian society in Kosovo, contesting the legitimacy of Serbian state institutions and opposing the imposition of legitimacy by Albanian institutions, committing to civil resistance by refusing to provoke acts of violence, and finally, mobilizing international support (Clark, 2013; Ağır, 2012, p. 115).

Curriculas, Subjects, School Textbooks, and Funding

Up to the 1989/90 school year, when Kosovo still had an independent, autonomous education system, teaching was delivered in three instructional languages (Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish) under unified curricula and syllabi. After two parallel systems emerged, Albanian and Serbian, driven by differing community goals and visions, the gaps between them only widened. The Serbian-managed system moved toward alignment with the Soviet model (introducing Russian as a compulsory subject from grade III) and wove these objectives into its literature, history, music, and art programs. In contrast, the Albanian-language system sought to reweave the domestic ties severed after Serbia and Montenegro’s 1913 occupation of Kosovo: in collaboration with Albanian authorities, it harmonized curricula and syllabi, especially for national-orientation subjects.

In 1993, the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute launched curricular-reform activities. Thus, beginning in the 1994/95 school year, Kosovo introduced these key changes:

- The social-studies subject was added progressively in grades I–IV as “Social Education,” and in grades V–VIII as “Civic Education.”
- The subjects “Nature and Society” (grades I–III) and “Social Knowledge” (grade IV) were removed.
- In grade III, “Natural Science” replaced “Nature and Society.”
- In grade IV, “History” replaced “Social Knowledge.” No substantive curricular revisions were made for mathematics, physics, or related subjects, whose syllabi remained virtually unchanged since 1988/89.

After the 1999 war, and in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244, teaching in Albanian, Turkish, and Bosnian took place within a single system, even as it accommodated actual ethnic diversity and upheld equality (Pupovci, Hyseni, Salihaj, 2000). Following Kosovo's declaration of independence on 17 February 2008, the entire education system was overhauled to operate under the new Constitution and the Law on Pre-University Education.

In July 1991, Serbian authorities imposed violent measures against the Kosovo Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Aids, immediately initiating the exclusion of its Albanian staff. Despite immense challenges, from 1992 to 1999 the Institute published a total of 276 titles for primary and preschool-level students and teachers. Publication details by year:

1992: 8 titles (225,000 copies)
1993: 11 titles (197,319 copies)
1994: 24 titles (453,217 copies)
1995: 26 titles (519,846 copies)
1996: 46 titles (908,907 copies) the highest output to date and the year school-reading texts reappeared after many years of hiatus
1997: 43 titles (748,500 copies)
1998: 43 titles (527,770 copies) including pedagogical and school documentation (class diaries, student record books, and primary-education certificates)
1999: 77 titles (2,352,000 copies) the largest single-year print run in the 30-year history of the Institute of Textbooks and Teaching Aids (Pupovci, Hyseni, Salihaj, 2000).

After 1990, funding for Albanian-language education was completely cut off, making it necessary to create special structures to collect contributions and donations for Kosovo's parallel education system. To establish the minimal conditions for successful operation, Kosovo's educational bodies, both governmental and non-governmental (the Pedagogical Institute, the "Naim Frashëri" Albanian Teachers' Union, the Independent Union of Education, Science and Culture, and the Ministry of Education of Kosovo), took the initiative to finance Albanian schools institutionally. On 28 June 1991, the Central Financing Council was founded, composed of cadres delegated by these associations and institutions. In March 1992, municipal sub-councils were also formed to decentralize collection efforts (Hajrizi, 2011).

By Government Decision 01 No. 7/91, dated 15 December 1991, the rules for gathering financial resources were formalized: obligors and

types of contributions, contribution bases and rates, methods for distributing collected funds, and the financial control of expenditures (Gojani, 2009). Three main funding sources were established for the parallel system: remittances from abroad, community-raised funds, and other donations (Sommers & Buckland, 2004). These measures enabled Albanian teachers to begin receiving salaries in 1992, though pay was initially very low. In April 1992 the flat salary was just 20 DM; in April 1993 it rose to 80 DM; in 1994 to 120 DM; and by 1997 it reached 160 DM (Hajrizi, 2011). In 1993 alone, the system funded the salaries of some 20,000 teachers (Schmitt, 2008). Despite an atmosphere of intensified repression and conflict, and just before NATO's air campaign began in 1999 about 267,000 Kosovo Albanian pupils were still attending schools within the parallel education system. That continued operation under such conditions has been regarded as an impressive achievement (Sommers & Buckland, 2004).

The Impact of Repression on Albanian Education in Kosovo (1998-1999)

The Albanian-language curricula, subjects, textbooks, school literature, pedagogical organization of schools, and the close collaboration between Kosovo's educational and scientific institutions and those of Albania (in the 1970s) were perceived by Serbian authorities as primary sources of "counter-revolution" and "Albanian irredentist and separatist indoctrination". One of the earliest forms of state violence was the expulsion of Albanian students from primary schools. In Pristina, for example, a child was expelled after the 1981 demonstrations merely for writing "K.R." (Kosova Republikë) on the blackboard. At the Gurakoc (Istog) primary school, top-performing students were expelled solely because their parents had been imprisoned or politically persecuted. In 1986 alone, authorities imposed ideological-political sanctions on 73 education workers, disciplinary measures on 40, and administrative actions on 24 teachers for alleged "hostile activities." Seven school directors were dismissed, with punitive actions taken against nineteen others. Hundreds of Albanian students, teachers, and education workers suffered convictions or various forms of punishment (Shatri, 2010). During the Kosovo War of 1998-1999, a total of 132 school buildings in several municipalities were destroyed and burned (Frederiksen, Bakken, 2000). Additionally, 689 primary school buildings were damaged. According to the Summary Report from the International Damage and Destruction Assessment Group, the estimated

cost of the damage amounted to €29,105,000 (Osmani, 2010). UNICEF also reported that, along with the destruction of the 132 schools, many school libraries were also obliterated (Frederiksen, Bakken, 2000). Based on several reports, documents such as teaching diaries, student records, protocol books, lesson plans, employee files, financial documentation, and other school records were either taken, damaged, burned, or destroyed between 1989 and 1999. In the Municipality of Mitrovica alone, archival materials from the period 1945-1999 were destroyed or damaged in 27 primary schools. Similar destruction occurred in 10 primary schools in Podujevë, 9 in Klina, 8 in Kaçanik, and other areas.⁴

Conclusion

The case of Kosovo's parallel education system in the 1990s represents not only a unique phenomenon in European history but also a powerful example of how education can serve as a form of collective resistance. What began as an improvised response to repression evolved into a structured network that safeguarded literacy, language, and identity for an entire generation. In this sense, the system was more than a pedagogical arrangement; it was a social contract between teachers, parents, and pupils, grounded in the determination to resist assimilation and cultural erasure. At the same time, the experience highlights the paradox of resilience under duress. While the system succeeded in preventing illiteracy and preserving Albanian-language instruction, the conditions of clandestine schooling inevitably affected the quality of education. This tension between survival and standards underscores the broader costs of political repression on human capital and cultural development. The long-term legacy of the parallel education system is visible today in the many graduates who have become influential figures in politics, culture, and academia. Their trajectories testify to the enduring impact of education, even when conducted under extraordinary circumstances. The system thus stands as both a historical lesson and a reminder of the centrality of education in nation-building and cultural preservation.

Finally, future research could benefit from integrating post-war data collected by international organizations (UNMIK, OSCE,

⁴ Agency of State Archives of Kosovo. (n.d.). Fondi "Government of Kosovo – Commission for the Assessment of Damages," File: Destruction of Archival Material 1989–1999, Pristina 2003-2004.

UNICEF) on literacy rates and educational attainment among those educated in the parallel system. Such evidence would allow scholars to measure more precisely the outcomes of this unique experiment and to situate Kosovo's experience within comparative studies of education under repression. In doing so, the case of Kosovo may contribute to a broader understanding of how marginalized communities mobilize education as a tool of survival, identity, and resistance.

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