



National Identity in Kosovo: Albanian or Kosovan?

Kosova'da Milli Kimlik Tanımlama: Arnavut mu Kosovan mı?

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Abstract

In the study of nationalism, it is debated whether the nation builds the state or the state builds the nation. Two approaches are important in theory. The first is the French model (civic nation). According to this model, the state builds the nation. The other is the German model (ethnic nation). In this model, an ethnic structure with common values forms a nation, and this nation establishes a state. Kosovo is a country where ethnic Albanians live. It gained its independence after the war with the Serbs. NATO intervened and has been remaining the protective power of the country. Therefore, the state of Kosovo was both built on an ethnic structure and people within the borders of the established state were defined as a nation. This study discusses whether the people of Kosovo are Albanian or Kosovan. The study uses a qualitative research method. A conclusion has been drawn from the discussions in the literature.

Keywords: Kosovo, Kosovar, Albanian, Nationalism, Nation, Identity.

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Öz

Milliyetçilik çalışmalarında milletin mi devlet kurduğu yoksa devletin mi millet inşa ettiği tartışmalı bir konudur. Teoride iki yaklaşım önemlidir. Birincisi Fransız modelidir (Sivil millet). Bu modele göre devlet millet inşa eder. Diğeri ise Alman modelidir (Etnik millet). Bu modelde, ortak değerlere sahip bir etnik yapı milleti oluşturur ve bu millet devlet kurar. Kosova etnik olarak Arnavutların yaşadığı bir ülkedir. Sırplarla olan savaş sonrası bağımsızlığını kazandı. NATO müdahalesi oldu ve hala NATO ülkenin koruyucu gücüdür. Dolayısıyla Kosova devleti hem bir etnik yapı üzerine inşa edildi hem de kurulan bir devletin sınırları içinde kalan insanlar millet olarak tanımlandı. Bu çalışmada Kosova halkının Arnavut mu yoksa Kosovan mı olduğu tartışılmıştır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Literatürde yapılan tartışmalardan bir neticeye varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kosova, Kosovan, Arnavut, Milliyetçilik, Millet, Kimlik.

1.Introduction

On March 24, 1999, US President Bill Clinton appeared on screen and announced the beginning of the Kosovo operation with the following words (YouTube, 1999): "... in the last decade stripped Kosovo of the constitutional autonomy its people enjoyed thus denying them their right to speak their language, run their schools, shape their daily lives. For years, Kosovars struggled peacefully to get their rights back ..." In this speech, Clinton introduced a new concept in literature: "Kosovars." Until its independence in 2008, Kosovo used the same national symbols as Albania. Albanians and Kosovans, who shared the same national identity for a long time, used all national symbols, such as the flag, national anthem, football team, etc., together. After independence, Kosovo created its own national anthem and flag (Ibrahimi, 2021: 8). In other words, until Kosovo gained its independence, it was considered a country of Albanians by its own people. However, the demand to secede from former Yugoslavia and the war with the Serbs pushed them to struggle to establish their own state. As a result of this struggle, a country and its nation took their place in history. Clinton pre-emptively defined this nation as Kosovars. This study explains the building of national identity in Kosovo after independence. The explanation is based on nationalism as the

ideology that founded the state. The question of whether the ideology of nationalism in Kosovo emerged as Albanian or Kosovan is addressed.

2. Brief Information about Kosovo

Kosovo is a country in the Balkans that declared independence in 2008. The history of Kosovo has been shaped by ethnic conflicts and the influences of various empires. Since the 12th century, Kosovo was part of the Serbian Kingdom and later came under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. In the early 20th century, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Kosovo became part of Serbia and, after NATO intervention in 1999, came under United Nations administration. In 2008, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia, although Serbia and some other countries do not recognize its independence (Krasniqi, 2017: 23). The majority of the population in Kosovo is of Albanian descent, with a Sunni Muslim majority. Additionally, Orthodox Christians form a significant minority in Kosovo. Historically, religion has played an important role in Kosovo's social structure and is intertwined with ethnic identity. With the influence of the Ottoman Empire, Islam spread in Kosovo, and this influence continues today (Vickers, 2011: 3). Kosovo's culture is based on a rich historical heritage. The influence of the Ottoman Empire can be seen in its language, cuisine, and architecture. Kosovo is also known for its traditional music, dance, and crafts. Albanian folk music and dances reflect Kosovo's cultural identity. Additionally, Western cultural influence is strong in Kosovo due to its close proximity to the heart of Europe (Peci, 2020: 5). Kosovo's economy has rapidly developed since gaining independence. The country has seen growth in agriculture, mining, and the service sector. However, unemployment remains high, and infrastructure development is ongoing. Kosovo's most important natural resources are lignite and other minerals. Moreover, the country's economy is heavily supported by foreign aid and external investments. The process of European Union integration promotes economic growth (World Bank, 2020).

3. Nationalism and National Identity

Nationalism is considered an important ideology in the state-building process in the modern world. This ideology is based on the idea that a nation can claim sovereignty by uniting around common elements such as identity, culture, language, history, and geography. Since the early 19th century, nationalism has been the main driving force behind the struggle for independence, especially in Europe. Understanding the role of nationalism in the state-building process requires examining the formation of modern nation-states and national identities. Nationalism is an ideology that promotes the idea of unity around a common

cultural identity and encourages the struggle for the sovereignty of a nation. Ernest Gellner (1983: 37) defines nationalism as "building modern societies," while Benedict Anderson (1983) highlights the concept of "imagined communities," emphasizing that nationalism creates a collective consciousness for a people to perceive themselves as a whole and build a nation-state. Nationalism plays a central role in ensuring national unity and sovereignty, and new states emerge as a result. The industrialization, spread of capitalism, and modernization movements in Europe in the 19th century prepared the ground for the rise of nationalism. With the French Revolution, nationalism was strengthened by the ideals of national independence and the sovereignty of the people. The French Revolution is recorded in history as a concrete example of creating a national identity and empowering the people (Hobsbawm, 1990: 24). While nationalism accelerates the state-building process, it also aims to create ethnic and cultural homogeneity by defining the borders of nation-states. In this context, nationalism can be a unifying force, but also a potential exclusionary factor. For example, during the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of new nation-states, nationalism brought about discrimination and conflicts among different ethnic groups. This situation shows that nationalism does not always have positive effects in the state-building process (Anderson, 1983: 28). The impact of nationalism as a state-building ideology was particularly evident in the new nation-states that emerged after World War I. The Treaty of Versailles, signed after the war, led to the dissolution of old empires and the establishment of independent nation-states. These states were shaped by nationalism and consolidated their sovereignty (Karakaya, 2007: 27). Today, nationalism also appears as a reaction to globalization and international integration. Modern nation-states often participate in the global economy and political structure while trying to preserve local and national identities. In this context, nationalism functions as a defence mechanism. In some European countries, nationalism manifests itself as a political movement associated with anti-immigrant sentiments and the defence of national identity (Smith, 2001: 7). Nationalism, as a critical ideology in the state-building process, constructs national identity. In the construction of national identity, two different state models are discussed. These are the French model (Civic Nation) and the German model (Ethnic Nation). According to the French model, the state builds the nation because the state is formed before the nation. On the other hand, in the German model, common values such as language, history, culture, and religion form the nation. In other words, people living in a specific territory do not constitute a nation (Boomans, 2008: 7-8). According to Benedict Anderson (1983), national identity emerged in

modern times and is a product of print capitalism. It is built on an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006: 36). Ernest Gellner (1983: 10-17) defines the nation as an invented concept. Education and industrialization have created the nation. Anthony D. Smith (1998) accepts that the nation was constructed in modern times but does not overlook the impact of pre-modern ties and lives. National identity is a social construct. It shows people's sense of belonging to a community. Individuals consider themselves part of a nation. The individuals connect with the society they consider themselves part of through language, ethnicity, history, geography, religion, and identity.

4.Kosovan and Albanian National Identity

The history of Albanian nationalism in Kosovo began in the 19th century against the Ottoman Empire. With Kosovo's separation from Yugoslavia, Albanian nationalism took on a different form (Ibrahimi, 2021: 11). Essentially, Albanians consider themselves the oldest and most ancient community in the Balkans. However, the awakening of national identity occurred later than in other Balkan countries. The fundamental definition of Albanian identity has been based on language and culture. For this reason, the slogan of the Albanian national movement has been "The religion of Albanians is Albanianism (Pashko Vasa)" (Sulstarova, 2006: 124). Albania declared its independence in 1912. Its independence was recognized at the London Conference in 1913. However, many ethnic Albanians were left outside the borders of this newly formed state (Haykır & Arslan, 2022: 818). One of the places where Albanians lived that remained within the borders of Montenegro, Serbia, and North Macedonia was Kosovo, which was within Serbia. Thus, Kosovo entered into a long struggle to unite with Albania (Kraja, 2019: 127). After World War II, Kosovo was left within the boundaries of Yugoslavia. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 sparked uprisings in socialist countries. Yugoslavia began to disintegrate. Like Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Slovenia, Kosovo also entered the process of independence. Eventually, after NATO intervention, it gained independence in 2008. Ethnically, ninety percent of Kosovans are Albanian. Before independence, they felt more Albanian than Kosovan. However, studies conducted after independence have shown that many people now identify themselves as Kosovan (Ibrahimi, 2021: 12). According to some writers, Albanians and Kosovans walked different paths. During the long communist period, people in the two different geographies could not communicate with each other. Therefore, people in the two different geographies developed two different national identities (Gashi, 2017: 3). However, according to Rexhep Qosja (2006), the Kosovan identity is a part of the Albanian identity. He believes the Kosovan

identity is a local identity, while the Albanian identity is a general identity that includes the Kosovan identity.

5.Dimensions of Kosovan National Identity Building

The process of the Kosovan identity becoming distinct from the Albanian identity is not complete. However, as a state, Kosovo is trying to provide its people with a national identity. According to the French model, this identity has begun to diverge from the Albanian identity. Although Kosovans identify themselves as Albanians, the fact that they are two different states undergoing different processes demonstrates this distinction. The separation of the Kosovan identity from the Albanian identity can be attributed to two factors: the communist period independence process and international institutions (Ibrahimi, 2021: 14).

5.1.National Movement of Kosovo During the Yugoslav Era

After the London Conference, the state of Albania was established, but many Albanian regions, including Kosovo, remained outside the borders of this state. During World War I, Kosovo was divided between Austria and Bulgaria. Bulgaria banned the Albanian language, flag, and national symbols. On the other hand, Austria granted autonomy to Kosovars and allowed them to be educated in Albanian (Kostovicova, 2005: 30-40).

After the war, Kosovo came under Serbian rule, where the Albanian language and other national symbols were banned. Albanian books could not be published. The society was demilitarized. However, these measures did not prevent Kosovars from striving for independence. Later, Kosovo came under the rule of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, established in 1918. After World War II, this kingdom was renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Kosovo became part of this republic. This federal republic was composed of six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia. Along with these republics, two provinces were defined: Kosovo and Vojvodina. The republics were able to preserve their national identities, but Kosovo, which had the third-largest population in Yugoslavia and was Albanian, did not use its national rights (Ibrahimi, 2021: 14).

Many political movements aimed at uniting with Albania, such as the National Defence Committee, emerged. In 1919, Serbia carried out a land reform and relocated 70,000 Serbs to Kosovo, while around 250,000 Kosovars migrated to Albania and Turkey. By the 1940s, the

Albanian population in Kosovo had decreased from 90% to 70% (Kraja, 2019: 77). Although an agreement was reached between Yugoslavia and Turkey in 1937 for the asylum of 4,000 Muslim Albanians from Kosovo to Turkey, this agreement was not implemented due to World War II. During World War II, Kosovo was divided among Italy, Germany, and Bulgaria. Italy pursued a policy of uniting Kosovo with Albania during this period. At the end of the war, Kosovo was reoccupied by the Serbs (Kodra, 1996: 105-108).

Yugoslavia did not create issues regarding religion. However, after 1947, the Albanian language was banned. On February 28, 1974, the Kosovo Socialist Autonomous Constitution came into effect. Kosovo became an autonomy attached to Serbia. According to this new constitution, which replaced the 1963 constitution, Albanians could use their own flag. The autonomy was granted extensive powers, and universities were established. Despite all these advancements, the underdevelopment of human rights led to protests. During the protests that began in 1981, the demand for a republic was voiced. Later, the demands continued for the union of Kosovo with Albania. With the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980 and the rise of Slobodan Milošević, things became more difficult. In response to the demands, Milošević threatened to abolish the autonomy (Klan, 1999: 105-115). A state of emergency was declared. The government entered Kosovo with 15,000 Serbian police forces and convened the Kosovo Assembly. The assembly was surrounded by soldiers. Under threat, the Kosovo constitution was abolished, and a decision was made declaring Kosovo as part of Serbia (Kipred, 2005: 8).

After the abolition of autonomy in Kosovo, all Kosovars working in public service were dismissed. Kosovars in the military were declared suspicious and were expelled from the army. Consequently, many young people migrated to other countries. In response, Ibrahim Rugova founded a party in 1989 called the Democratic League of Kosovo. Subsequently, the Kosovo Assembly declared the Republic of Kosovo with equal rights within Yugoslavia. In a referendum held a year later, 99.87% of Kosovars voted in favour of independence. Following this, Kosovars rejected Serbian institutions and established parallels for each institution. In 1992, parliamentary elections were held, and Ibrahim Rugova was elected president. At the Dayton Conference, Kosovo was seen as an issue of Serbia. In 1997, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA or UÇK) was established (Borger, 2015: 9).

On March 5, 1998, the house and village of a KLA commander, Adam Jashari (Adem Yaşari), who is subject of the slogan "Bac, y Kry!" meaning "Uncle, We Won!", were attacked by

Serbian soldiers and police. Along with Jashari, 57 people, including family members, were killed by the Serbs. This incident sparked further conflicts. The events continued until NATO's intervention. On March 24, 1999, NATO launched a 78-day air operation. On June 12, 1999, the Serbian army conditionally surrendered. Serbian soldiers left Kosovo, and NATO forces took their place. Later, the United Nations Security Council, with resolution 1244, established the KFOR force, consisting of 37,200 soldiers from 36 countries. In the conflicts, 13,500 people were killed (Koha, 2019: 1). At the end of the non-conflict process, Kosovo declared independence in 2008.

5.2.The Influence of International Organizations in Kosovo

After NATO's intervention in Kosovo, the country was placed under international protection, creating a de facto state separate from Serbia. Four institutions contributed to the achievement of independence and the formation of the Kosovan identity. These are the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the European Union (EU) (Kraja, 2019: 300-240).

The international organizations mentioned above did not bring significant changes to the country. However, they played a role in the formation of national identity. Maintaining peace in the Balkans after the war was very important. International structures were effective in maintaining this peace process. International organizations rejected the union of Kosovo with Albania. Various international institutions spent their budgets on multi-ethnic programs (Egleder, 2013: 273-275).

The Ahtisaari Plan, implemented between 2005 and 2007, is very important in the establishment of the Republic of Kosovo and the formation of the Kosovan identity. Former President of Finland Martti Ahtisaari's unofficial meetings to determine Kosovo's status are known as the Ahtisaari Plan. The plan was made under the supervision of the United Nations. According to this plan, Albanian and Serbian were defined as official languages. Extensive local administration rights were granted to eight Serbian settlements. Additionally, the Serbian population was provided with connections to the Serbian Orthodox Church. Privileges such as property acquisition, tax exemptions, and customs exemptions were granted to Serbian churches in Kosovo. The plan defined the conflict in Kosovo as an ethnic conflict and, therefore, Kosovo was designed as a multi-ethnic structure. Using of the red, black, and

eagle emblem on the flag was banned. These colours and emblems are symbols of Albania. It was suggested that Kosovo have its own national anthem. Along with these measures, Kosovo was prohibited from merging with another country (Ahtisaari, 2007).

The main goal of the Ahtisaari Plan is to build a Kosovan national identity. This identity needs to be separated from the Albanian identity. Additionally, this identity should be one that all ethnic groups, especially the Serbs, can adopt. Therefore, the Ahtisaari Plan aimed to create a Kosovan identity.

With the acceptance of the Ahtisaari Plan, Kosovo declared independence on February 17, 2008. Twenty-three EU member states accepted the declaration of independence. In the United Nations, 116 countries recognized Kosovo. This entire process eliminated the possibility of Kosovo being a part of Albania. Thus, the Kosovan identity was defined by international organizations as a mandatory identity.

The new flag of the state of Kosovo is blue, white, and yellow. The flag features six stars, each representing an ethnic group living in Kosovo. The national anthem is melodic and has no words. All these symbols indicate Kosovo's separation from Albania.

6. Conclusion

Nationalism, defined as the ideology that establishes a state, is built on a national identity. It is debated in the literature whether the nation creates the state or the state builds the nation. This debate mainly revolves around the notion that nationalism is a modern concept. However, there are writers who claim that nationalism and the nation existed in prehistory. Almost all state elites define the existence of the nation today by referring to history.

The construction process between state and nation is explained through two different perspectives. The first is the French model, where the state creates the nation. The other is the German model, where the nation creates the state. In the first model, also known as the civic nation, a state that achieves political unity brings its citizens together under the same ideals. To do this, it uses structures such as education and broadcasting to build a nation. However, according to the German model, also known as the ethnic nation, people who share the same ethnicity, language, history, and culture form a nation, and this nation establishes the state.

Kosovo is predominantly an ethnically Albanian state. Although they are ethnically Albanian, they have had different historical experiences compared to Albania. Therefore, Kosovars are

in the process of becoming a nation after the state, in accordance with the definition of a civic nation.

Kosovo, which gained its independence in 2008, can be explained as emerging as a civic nation named Kosovan for the following reasons: history, international organizations, and an independent state. Historically, Kosovars have had different experiences from Albanians. Particularly, being part of Yugoslavia and being separated from the Albanian geography and culture for a long time has differentiated Kosovars. The independence movements, during and after the Yugoslav period, gave Kosovars an opportunity to establish their own state. Thus, Kosovars differentiated from Albanians and formed the Kosovan national identity. Secondly, international organizations recognized Kosovo as an independent country, but with the condition of being fundamentally distinct from Albania. Kosovo's conflict past with the Serbs, with Serbs living in part of Kosovo, kept Kosovo away from the Albanian state and identity. Finally, having their own independent state made Kosovars identify as Kosovan.

Today, the national identity debate continues in Kosovo. The vast majority of people living in Kosovo identify themselves as Albanian. The Kosovan identity has emerged on the historical stage, but it is too early to predict whether it will be adopted. Kosovo has a long way to go in building its national identity.

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Makale tek yazarlıdır.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı

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