

The Mosque in Albanian Folk Literature

MUHAMED ÇITAKU¹

ABSTRACT

The mosque had a significant role in all the Muslim community. This religious institution has played a key role in the Albanians since the 14th century when the people accepted Islam and up to the present day. The significant role of the mosque has been reflected through several folkloric works, which serve as a memory for the deeds, worries, and problems of the Albanian people throughout their history. The main goal of this paper is then to put to the fore the image of the mosque on the Albanian folklore at different stages and times. The mosque in Kosovo has been examined from different historical, religious, and geographical perspectives, including the architecture and ornaments – the image by which the mosque is presented on the Albanian folklore, fulfils the current landscape with new data and promotes a deeper understanding of the mosque on its own. In this paper, we understand the role of the mosque in establishing the Islamic identity of Albanians, organization of Albanian society, education, culture, the Albanian state building, protection from national assimilation, and its great resistance during invasion. The results shown have been obtained using a statistical and hermeneutic approach.

Keywords: Mosque, Albanian folk, intertextuality, Islam.

Religious facilities have been considered as paramount for the people's lives since the antiquity. As such, facilities have been determining for the peoples' lives from both material and spiritual perspective. The religious buildings have served as gathering points that united believers around a particular ideal, belief, or stance. The conversion of peoples' faith has also changed the religious buildings. Based on the buildings of cult, models with which people are identified were established. Among many catholic states of the Balkans, Albanians and Bosnians have often been identified with their mosques. The same religious buildings - mosques, however, do not share the same characteristics. As such, they did not have similar societal, political, and religious functions throughout the history. As a result, the mosques have been distinguished with particular features across peoples. The Kosovo Albanian people, in full compliance with its unique material, cultural, historic, and geographic nature, has given the Islamic cult buildings special characteristics along the history which are relevant for the present paper.

The majority of Kosovo Albanian people 97% are Muslim believers. The Islamic journey of Albanians began in the 14th century when the Ottoman Empire came in the Balkans and reached its peak in the 17th and 18th century (Pirraku 1995: 42). When the Albanian people accepted Islam, it began a new era – with new principles and rites. As the rules of Islamic religion began implementing by Albanians, many changes took place regarding the individual, his conviction, stance, the lifestyle of the family and the organization within the society.

The life in cities and towns changed towards a new Islamic-oriented architecture. Along different time intervals, new mosques were built throughout the Albanian Muslim settlements. Thus,

¹Muhamed Çitaku, Ph. D. Assistant. Prof. At the Department of Albanian Literature Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina 'Hasan Prishtina', St. George Bush. No. 31, 10 000, Prishtina, KOSOVO. Email: muhamed.citaku@uni-pr.edu

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as the number of the Muslim community increased via new conversions, so did the number of mosques. The mosques were used by the Albanians not only as the Islamic objects of cult, but also as objects for social purposes, such as places of debates among Muslim communities (Hecquard 2008: 300); the mosque was often used as the place where the organization of Albanian community fighting for the protection of the country, the protection of community members or protection of any particular social ideal occurred. The mosque was often the place of national debates where key decisions regarding the Albanian Muslim community were taken. The mosque was the place where the national, state, and cultural fortune was determined. The mosque had also a significant role for the unification of the Albanian Muslim community enabling them to establish clear and harmonized attitudes towards their enemies, and various political challenges that accompanied the Albanians throughout their history.

The mosque was also frequently used for the traditional Albanian culture. It was used in terms of ornaments and decorations of walls of Albanian houses so that an Islamic aura was reflected in buildings, bed linen, clothes of the Albanian people, and house doors (Statovci 1995: 199-200).

Thus, the mosque did not only have a religious role in the Albanian Muslims, but also a social, economic, and political role. As such, the mosque has been an inseparable part of the Muslim Albanians' lives in different fields. The different activities of the mosque were also reflected in the Albanian culture, literature, folklore, and tradition. The important events that accompanied the Albanian people affected the Albanian folklore. For the significant events, many folkloric works were created with the purpose of aiding the people of Kosovo to remember not only those events, but also their participants and heroism. The mosque being as part of those participants' lives, became part of those folkloric works portraying its image throughout different time periods in the Albanian people, depicting the important activities that took place along the history. As such, analysing the mosque through several folkloric Albanian songs made it possible to reveal the entire landscape of the important Islamic Cult Religion for the Albanians.

In our investigation, we analysed some folkloric works of the Albanian people, where the mosque helped us to uncover the image with which it appears in the Albanian folklore, the functions it performs, and its relevance for the History of Kosovo. More specifically, we have analysed 31 historic songs in the Kosovo Folklore where the mosque appears. For a more generalized image of the mosque, we have selected folkloric works created at different times and places. In all cases where the mosque was found, it was revealed that it played a significant role for the Albanian people, they respected the mosque, built it as a holy place, and it served as an interconnection with their God. Therefore, the Albanian people shared the important matters of their lives and discussed such things in the mosque. The present paper aims to investigate the image that the mosque had in the Albanian folklore, and its social relevance at different times, the impact of the mosque concerning the organization of the Albanian Society, the interrelation between the mosque and the history of the Albanian people, and whether the cultural development of the Albanian people had any impact on the change of the image of the mosque.

Mosques during the Ottoman rule

At the end of the 14th century, the Albanian society following a huge resistance became part of Ottoman Empire. The co-living with the Ottoman Empire lasted for about five centuries, until the beginning of the 20th century. The Islamic faith is thought to have been part of the Albanians even earlier coming to Albanians through 'different East traders' (Zejnnullahu 2011: 10). However, in a broader way, it began spreading after the Ottoman Empire was settled in the Albanian countries, marking thus an important turning point for the Albanian people.

The Islamic belief was first accepted from the Albanian people, whose places were not profoundly controlled by the Catholic Church Institutions (Pirraku 1995: 43). Soon after, the Albanian people who had suffered violence from the Orthodox Church Institution started the conversion into Islamic belief. This conversion seemed to have occurred as a reaction against the violence, corporal punishments, appropriation of properties on behalf of the church (Muharremi 2010: 39) exercised by the Orthodox Church against the local Albanians.

The acceptance of Islamic religion then became from the other part of the society distinguished as Christians of Byzantine Church, and Christians of Roman Church. The cities of Kosovo entered the Islamization process of people somewhat earlier (Duka 1995: 121) compared to the other Albanian cities from the Middle and South of Albania. At that time, many churches remained without any believers, because they converted into Muslims, while the locals chose either to demolish churches and erected mosques on the same grounds to serve their religious purposes (Uka 1995: 150), or churches were transformed into mosques, thus leading to the mosque image to be exhibited as a new image dominating among Albanians at the end of the 16th century (Pirraku 1995: 42).

Following the acceptance of Islam, Albanians began a new life in different respects. The country-built mosques and other Islamic buildings, such as 'maktabs, madrasas, and Islamic libraries' (Pirraku 1995: 45). The Albanian culture began to gradually be affected by the Islamic elements between the 14th and 17th centuries. The folkloric works began gaining the Islamic elements in different forms. As Kosovo was previously a country dominated by the catholic people, its folklore was full of catholic signs. However, such signs began to change into Islamic signs along with the change of the religion.

In folklore, the catholic characters were replaced with Muslim characters: the little Constantine transformed into Aga Ymeri, Vllastari into Alia, and Garentian into Fatimja. These characters that belonged to the Catholic religion, are seen now as Muslim characters celebrating Bajram, praying namaz, visiting the mosques, fasting the *Ramadan*, swearing to Allah, and starting their work with *bismillah* (Lambertz 1998: 5).

During that time, the Islam elements became part of the Albanian folkloric prose, for instance, characters of imams, angels, beautiful ladies (living in paradise), Zamzam well, prophets, halal and haram (Çetta, 1990, 91). These characters entered when Islam was accepted by the Albanian people, but they were not as people held a Catholic belief. Besides characters, these plays described stories based on the Islamic perspective, where haram is something harmful whereas halal despite its shape is beneficial (Çetta 1990: 91). At the same time, the prophet Musa was seen as shepherd, while prophet Sulayman could talk to animals (Zejnnullahu 2011: 13), whereby certain events portray ideas about God, prophets and goodness that Islam brings, while criticizing others that do not respect the religious rites through folkloric works of prose.

The Mosques had a significant role in the lives of Kosovo Albanians during that time. The Ottoman Empire did not engage directly in financing and maintenance (Shkodra 1995: 139) because the mosques were maintained by a part of Albanian population, who dealt with economy of citizens, production, and turnover of goods, called 'esnafët' (Shkodra 1995: 139). This category of Albanian society took care of mosques, dealing with issues such as "financing, building and spreading of mosques" (Shkodra 1995: 139). During that time, mosques in Kosovo served not only as sites for religious activities, but also as signs that distinguished the Albanian people from other people of Ottoman Empire, as it was composed of different people with different religion beliefs (Rizvanolli 1995: 127).

On the administrative-political agenda, this was the time of the settlement of Ottoman Empire administration in Kosovo, and its political, economic, and military establishment. The Ottoman Empire had many enemies. To be able to face with enemies, the empire relied on the support of local

people (Rizvanolli 1995: 127), among others, on the Kosovo Albanians. Albanians in Kosovo shared the emperor power with Turkish people in terms of political, military, government, diplomatic, and religious level (Pirraku 1995: 51), thus the Albanian people became part of the empire, even though they never abandoned their Albanian national identity (Pirraku 1995: 51). The incorporation of Albanians in the Ottoman Empire was observed in the folkloric works describing events and wars in which Albanians were along the Ottoman Empire against enemies, but always emphasizing their Albanian nationality and their pride.

In terms of Islamic perspective, new folkloric works were created during that time. Following the presence of Ottoman Empire, the first folkloric works were those that described its arrival in Kosovo. Kosovo along with the Balkans became part of the Ottoman Empire soon after the empire defeated the Balkanise coalition in the field of Kosovo in 1389. The initial folkloric works after the Islamization of Albanians are thought to have been the folkloric songs that described the war between the Balkans' Catholic coalition and Ottoman Empire, in which folkloric works dominated a highly Islamic approach to the war of the Ottoman Empire as a war that it waged for the spread of Islam (Lellio 2009: 85).

After them, other Albanian folkloric songs emerged containing the Islamic elements dealing with other wars of the empire, in particular when it was supported by the Albanian people in wars such as the Invasion of Budapest by Sultan Sulejman (known as the War of Budapest). For these events, some Albanian folkloric songs were created with strong Islamic signs, such as religious rituals, with characters dying as 'Shahids', and with the assistance granted by Allah to fighters (Berisha *et al.* 2007: 93). The song *From Prokupla to Nis* belongs to this period, in which the departure of Albanian Muslims along with Ottoman Empire towards the holy war carried at the borders of Austria-Hungary Empire is introduced. The song narrates the journey of Muslim Albanians as pilgrims: "*E prej Prekupe n'Kushumli, / Ani, na u mush fusha me haxhi!* [From Prokupla to Kushumli, / the field becomes full of pilgrims!]" (Berisha *et al.* 2007: 125), emphasizing their war under their Islamic religion via the epithet pilgrim, given to the Muslim Albanians participating in such wars. The war occurred at the border with Albanian countries, and the support given to the Ottoman Empire was simultaneously an effort for the protection of the Albanian lands. Therefore, their participation against a joint enemy of the Ottoman Empire and Albanians was immense and unsparing.

The Ottoman Empire had many states under its power. A large part of those countries was Catholic that rebelled whenever they felt stronger, made uprisings and expelled the Ottoman Empire from their countries. Whenever Catholic countries expelled the Ottoman Empire from their countries, they removed the Islamic signs and closed the mosques as well. Whenever the Ottoman Empire returned to those countries, it opened the mosques. As such, the war between the Islamic and Catholic countries was reflected on the opening and closure of mosques, depending on the domination between parties. Albanians often assisted the Ottoman Empire to return the countries that were out of its power. In such cases, Albanians created folkloric songs to save in their memories the deeds made during wars aimed to open the closed mosques, among others, they include songs such as *Brahim Pasha* and *Brahim Pasha mjekërrzi* ["Brahim Pasha" and "Brahim Pasha Black-Beard"]

In these two songs, the war that Albanians and Ottoman Empire did against Greeks who expelled the Ottoman administration and closed the mosques is saved. The Ottoman Military hugely supported by Albanians managed to retake under its control the Greek countries after 17 years. Once their power established, they activated the mosques and performed the *Azan* in them.

The folkloric songs describe with greatness the moment of entrance and activation of mosques after 17 years (Berisha *et al.* 2007: 164):

*"O, kur po hijkan, haj, shiptart e shkretë, [when ruined Albanians entered]
e qitshin roje, e p'e rujnë nibet, [they are setting up guards, setting up order]
o, thonë, Gjinolli t'madhe po bërtet: [then, Gjinolli yelled loudly]*

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- O, a ka djalë, more qi â kanë n'mejtep, [- Are there any boys gone to maktab]
 o, sod me hyp-o n'qat minare t'shkretë, [to climb that deserted minaret]
 o, me thirrë ezanin Muhamet, [to call ezan Muhamet]
 eh, more, s'â thirrë, vllazën qe shtatumdhetë vjet! [as no one did for seventeen years]"

The songs serve not only to express the remorse for the termination of mosque activities for 17 years in Greece, but also to express the pride of Albanians that managed to activate them and the Islam symbols again. In fact, songs represent special events of this war, important situations, and do not reflect the entire war. Among situations of high importance are those of opening the mosques. It seems that the troubadour has clearly understood the symbolic of mosque activation as a sign of Islamic arrival in Greece, because the issue of opening the mosque is as immensely emphasized as the war remains in the second place. Here, the mosque is completely the symbol of Islam, its closure reflects a non-Islamic administration of the country. While its activation, signals the Islamic administration of the same. In the Albanian folkloric songs of the time, the mosque as a sign of Islamic identity, is seen in other contexts as well. In the majority of cases when people respect it, they express their Muslim identity, however, when they show no respect, they do not express their non-Muslim belief.

The Albanian traditional song *Të shtatë kralat janë tubue* [Seven kings are gathered] (Fetiu *et al.* 2007, 161) talks about two situations through which the relationship between Albanian – Mosque passes during Ottoman Empire goes. When Kosovo was governed by Sultan, the enemies claimed that Albanians have abandoned the Islamic religion, arguing this through their claims to Sultan that Albanians have abandoned the mosque (Fetiu *et al.* 2007: 161):

*"Rumelia fenë e ka ndrrue, [Rumelia changed his religion]
 ramazanet s'i ka ninue, [and gave up fasting the Ramadans]
 n'për xhamia s'janë tue shkue [abandoned their mosques]"*

Sultan fell into this trap, as a result he withdrew his military from Albanians and did not protect them any longer from their enemies' danger. In the second line of the song, a new story is told: the Albanians delivered a letter to Sultan warning him that they did neither abandon the religion, nor the mosque (Fetiu *et al.* 2007: 162):

*"kirkush fenë s'e kemi nrrue, [no one changed our religion]
 ramazanet tanë i kemi ninue, [we fasted all ramadans]
 krejt n'xhamia jemi tue shkue; [and all of us are attending the mosque]"*

Both, in the first and second instance, the mosque reflects the symbol of Islamic religion, while in the first case it described people leave the mosque means leaving Islam, whereas in the second, their relationship with the mosque depicts their connection with the Islamic religion.

The Mosque During the War of Albanians for Independence

The Islamic religion continued its journey with the Albanian people, their history, their concerns, and national ups and downs. The crises of Albanians were also crises of the mosque, the concerns of Albanians were also concerns of the mosque, and great matters of Albanians were also great matters of the mosque. During the 19th century, the Albanian people attempted to establish its own independent state. While the Albanian causa during that time was a national causa, even the matter

of mosques in Kosovo was the national causa of Albanians, and their role in terms of national dimension was great and irreplaceable.

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century began the great fall and decay of Ottoman Empire which could no longer protect its territories, assign organizational combat structures, and collect the population. All these matters were discussed in the mosque by the Albanian society. In a word, they were discussed and determined in the mosque, and the mosque began to treat many of the important requests of the Albanian society, that the Ottoman Empire could deal with. This implies that the mosque addressed many issues that would have been addressed by the Ottoman Empire, which was ruined at the end of the 20th century due to the decay it had fallen.

During this time, many *mualims* (religiously educated people) and imams (Myzyri 1995: 405) availed themselves to the nation transforming their mosques into important institutions for the national causa of the Albanian state with the purpose that the Albanian people be relieved from robbery and be able to protect the state from new invaders that endangered the Albanian state. During that time folkloric works were created for these *mualims* and imams. One of the songs as part of the folkloric works is the song *Kënga e Molla Sulës [The song of Imam Sula]* in which the actions of the imama who swore to fight against the invader are narrated: “*Për kto krime n’shiptari,/ooo, Molla Sula paska ni-e, / oho, Molla Sula trim si rrfe;/e muer Kur’anin e bani ne:-/Mas luftofsha sod për atdhë,/ooo, hiç mos paça din as fé* [For these crimes in Albania, / Imam Sula had heard, / Imam Sula the courageous man/ took the Qur’an and sworn on It/ if I don’t fight today for my homeland/ I’d better be without my belief and religion]” (Zejnnullahu 2011: 283).

At the end of the 19th century, the big powers began to break the Ottoman Empire which was a disaster for the Albanian lands. In 1878 in the Berlin Congress, a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina populated by Bosnian Muslims was assigned to Austro-Hungary, while some parts of Kosovo (around 545 villages) habituated by the Albanian Muslims were given to Serbia. The disaster for the Albanian Muslims violently displaced from their lands and spread as refugees across different countries had a great influence on the Albanian folklore. For this tragic occurrence, different folkloric works were created in which the severe tragedy of Albanians who were displaced from their lands during a freezing winter was mourned, where many dead children and aged people frozen by the winter were seen along the roads (Kostić 1907: 15).

The song says “*Ani, ka dhetë vetë ni vorr-o jen hi/o, s’na ka thirr kush tallkin përmbi!* [Ten people were buried in one grave/ nobody performed the burial rituals of praying]” (Pllana *et al.* 1978: 155), showing the grief of Albanians, as well as their concern for the missing of the religious rituals in their last moments of their lives, of *talqin* [reminding those close to death to remember their God in their words]. Thus shows a strong connection between these people and the Islamic faith and rituals. Their houses will disappear, the mosques, different tombs with which they were identified in religious respect (Zejnnullahu 2011: 28) and will be occupied by new Serbian population.

During that time, many folkloric songs were created and the mosque being their topic. The mosque in such songs is seen as a social life regulator of Albanians. The Albanian traditional songs narrated that the mosques for Kosovo Albanian Muslims were not only used for religious rituals, but also as a place where the people were gathered, discussed, and decided important topics relevant to their future. The mosque was an important place because people from all places of Kosovo gathered and made it possible that the taken decisions be spread throughout the whole country. Such traditional Albanian songs have been created to narrate a history of the Albanian life, often a history of conflict, where the decision taking process in the mosque was the epicentre of the Albanian society organization.

The song *N’Kamë na u çue Petri i Karadaku* [Petrit Karadaku stood up] tells the struggle of Albanians to protect their country from the invasion of Montenegro. The Albanian leaders gathered and decided to protect their country by fighting. As Kosovo during this time did not have its own

military, the protection had to be operationalized by volunteers gathered by the Albanian community. To organize the Albanian community, the leaders wrote letters and sent them to mosques in Kosovo, whereby the Albanian people were informed regarding the need for soldiers and protection of the country (Fetiu et al. 2007: 14-15):

*“Ali Pasha koka kanë gzue, [Ali Pasha had become happy]
Ka sjellë letra me ren tuj shkruë, [had written sequential letters]
Shkrujshin letra me ren aty, [letters had been written there one by one]
Po i çojnë n’Rekë, o, po i çojnë n’Malsi, [they had sent them to Rekë or to highlands]
O, po i shkepin nëpër xhami. [or had been delivering them throughout the mosques]
Po i çojnë n’Rekë e po i çojnë n’Malsi, [they had sent them to Rekë or to highlands]
Po i knojnë letrat nëpër xhami” [they had read the letters in the mosuqes]”*

In another song, *N’Carralevë domë me liftue* [We want to fight in Carraleva] a call for a meeting in the mosque as an effort to to organize the protection of Kosovo: *“Krejt bajrakin me ma trazue, / n’xhami t’Bajës m’u tubue!”* [The whole province be stirred, / and let us all gather in the mosque of Baja!] (Fetiu et al. 2007, 224). This role of the mosque is reflected in several folkloric Albanian songs, which implies that the use of mosques to warn important matters by Kosovo Albanian Muslims was quite common. The mosque during the big national Albanian crises, riots and wars reflected the image of a site where Albanian Muslims were informed over national matters, decisions, and sometimes about requests for soldiers, economic issues, gatherings, and organization.

The notification was frequently done at *Jammats* or *Juma’ah* (Friday prayings) where the number of people was bigger than usual, as observed in the folkloric song *Lufta e Beranes* [The war of Berane] when the *Juma’ah* attendees were notified for the mobilization required to protect Berane, a border place of Kosovo threatened by Mountenegro (Fetiu et al. 2007: 57-58):

*“edhe djemt tu xhamija kanë shkua. [Even men went to the Mosque]
E kishin kjenë Rugova xhumanë tu falë, [Rugova guys had been praying Juma]
atëherë djemt tu dera kanë pritë, [then, they had waited at the doors]
deri teqmil xhuman’ e kanë falë [until they had performed Juma’s prayers]
[...]
e kanë nxjerrë letrën e jau kanë dhanë. [informing letters were given to them]”*

The inhabitants of Berane seek 500 soldiers from mosque participants to support their efforts to save Berane from the siege of enemy. Normally, the *jama’ah* (participants) helped them, as 500 soldiered were quickly gathered and departed to save the country. Additionally, in this song Albanians commenced the war as the *Ezan* or *Adhzan* for the morning prayers was performed, reflecting the mosque as the coordinator of the Albanian Fight (Fetiu et al. 2007: 61):

*“Kur u knua ezani i sabahit, (when the morning ezan was performed)
atëherë luftës Avdija ja ka nisë [Avdija began the fight]”.*

The mosque is represented as a life regulator at tough situations because the reliability on its holiness was extraordinary. There was no other cult place regarded more important and more suitable for Albanian Muslims than the mosque to organize their last moments of lives with praying rituals of namaz. The significant spiritual interrelationship with the mosque, in the last moments of life of Albanians, is also observed in the song *Kanga e bejta Sylës* [The Song of Bejt Sylë], where the last wish of the captured character before execution was to pass by the mosque: *“- Huqymet, kofsht*

bekue! / Një rigja ju me ma ngue, / Kah xhamia me na çue [I blessly ask you capturing authority / to fulfil me a wish / to lead me by the mosque]" (Berisha et al. 2007: 213).

There are also cases when the captured person asked to be allowed for praying. This is manifested by the folkloric song *Duel po vet Dergut Pasha* [Went out and ask Dergut Pasha] when Shaban Binaku was captured. The song hero, Shaban Binaku asked to be allowed to pray before his execution: "*du m'u ungjë avdes me marrë, / pesë reqate namaz m'i falë* [I want to sit for ablution and pray for namaz]" (Pllana et al. 1978: 283). The hero character of the song, in his last moments of life wants to go to God bent over and wants to spend his last moments praying.

During the late 19th century, Kosovo was constantly attacked by enemy forces on the border. The bravery of the Albanians in these battles is great. Even in these cases they do not forget the religion. That is to die as determined by religion by standing stoically against the enemy with great faith in God. Folk songs highlight these attitudes of heroes, Osman Kuka being one of them (with nickname Oso Kuka), who in his fight against the enemies decided to fight for *Dinë* [belief] until the end of his life and not to withdraw from the fight because his withdrawal would be a great sin. This character in his last moments of life asked a rhetorical question to his soldiers: "*A ma mirë me dekë për Dinë, / a me rrnue me faqe të zezë?* [Is it better to die for *Din*, / or to live suffering?]" (Taipi 1933: 84). These verses strongly express his Islamic religious preoccupation to die in accordance with the stoic attitudes of Islamic religion requiring a man to hand over his soul unwaveringly to his lofty ideal. We have the same behaviour from Osman Kuka's new comrade, called Sal Behri, who in the last moments of his life also made a religious gesture, performed the *ezan*: "*Sal Behri nji grimë femi / hypë nelt e thërret ezanin* [Sal Behri a small child, / goes upstairs and performed the *ezan*]" (Taipi 1933: 83). The call to prayer was a motivation given to the Albanian Muslims in the moments of fierce fighting they were experiencing at that time. It was a reminder of God, of His Mercy, of the other world because all the warriors had decided to die in fight and not retreat.

In Albanian folk songs, the mosque has a key role in reconciling the enmities of Albanians, especially during wartime. Albanians in cases of national crises when their existence was endangered by the enemy, their existence, family, district, state, put aside their hostilities, animosities, and enmities. To solve these problems among themselves, they chose their holy place, the mosque. In such cases, the Albanians gathered in the mosque, reconciled with each other, removed their enmities and divisions, so that the war is more organized: "*n'xhami t'Bajës kur janë shkue, / gjaqe, varrë, o, na i kanë pajtue* [When they went to the mosque of Baja, / they reconciled and solved their disputes with one another]" (Fetiu et al. 2007: 223). In fact, the reconciliation of families who have suffered from enmities, murders, and revenges continues to the present day to be in the mosque, making an earlier tradition of the people highlighted in the Albanian folklore continue. Even during the wars, the mosque was not forgotten, in particular when things went wrong, as human or natural problems emerged. In those instances, the Albanians tried to remove their obstacles by going to the mosque and praying. The song "*P'e therret pasha Abdullah Begin* [The pasha is calling Abdullah Begu]" represents the Albanians in one of their fights against Montenegro in which a huge fog is raised and they went to the mosque to pray for their fight to be eased (Fetiu et al. 2007: 29):

*"na u nisë lufta mu në Shekullare, [the war commenced exactly in Shekullare]
ranë do mjeglla, ani, kurgja s'u pa! [the fogs covered the space, and nothing was seen!]
Thirrne ezanin, ju, more, hoxhollarë, [call the ezan you imams]
t'shkojmë n'xhami na t'ja bajmë duanë, [let's go to the mosque and pray]
o, ishalla Allahi-o ne na jep t'maren, ani hej! [may the Allah help us all!]"*

One of the features of the invader's aggression against the Albanian Muslim population was that it committed violence on the days and nights of the greatest Islamic religious holidays (Zejnnullahu 2011: 31). As during the days of Eid and Friday prayers, the mosques were full of

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Albanian Muslims, therefore the enemies wanted to turn the days of Islamic holidays of the Albanian population into a disaster. Numerous songs with such a theme are preserved in the Albanian folklore when the mosque was misused to cause the deepest possible misfortune to the Muslim Albanians of Kosovo. The folkloric song *Demë Ahmeti rrin n'Mavriq* [Deme Ahmeti stays in Mavriq] presents the tragedy of Demë Ahmeti's family who was killed by a Serbian gang while Demë Ahmeti was in the mosque, praying the Eid prayer: "*Natë Bajrami koka kon qillue, / Demë Ahmeti heret m'ish çue, / Nat Zhiti n'xhami u shkue* [That was a night of Eid, / Deme Ahmeti got up early, / and went to the mosque in Zhiti]" (Berisha et al. 2007: 126).

The negative character Novica, with his gang during the absence of Demë Ahmeti, attacked his home, entered, and destroyed his house and property, killed some members of his family, and enslaved some others. The Mosque, in such cases, is transformed into an institution of national value, the attendees who were in the mosque following the understanding of this event gathered and quickly followed the Slavic gang: "*Hallakamë u çue xhemati, N'fun e n'krye a hallakat Llapi / Kualt n'udhë i cofen Gollaki, Përmas Dems kokan kanë shkue* [the Jammats was rebelled throughout Llap/ many horses died following Demë] (Berisha et al. 2007: 126). The *Jammats* managed to catch the gang and saved those family members of Demë Ahmeti's family who were still alive.

But it happened that the enemies used the mosque to kill as many Albanian Muslims as possible. The enemies knew that the mosque was used by Albanian Muslims to perform religious rituals and prayers. In the Albanian folklore, there are many stories of murders in the mosque. One of them is the Albanian folkloric work 'The song of the Mosque' where the murder of Albanians is explicitly told: "*-Ngoni ju, të gjithë zapti! -/ po ju thotë Jogoshi i Zi: / -N'katër anë me ndu dervi, / kur t'vinë shiptart n'jaci, / hudhni bumba në xhami!* [Listen you all capturers! / The black Jogosh is asking you/ to watch over four gates/ when Albanians come to pray for Jaci/ through bombs into the mosque!]" (Zejnnullahu 2011: 378).

Similarly, the folkloric song entitled "*Kanga e mulla Ganit* [The song of Imam Gani]" prescribes the assassination of the village's imam: "*-Se n'Tropjë, ish kanë imamë. / Vra e kanë, namaz tuj ba, / Shpejt namazin e ka marue, / shahadetin ja ka fillue, / krisi pushka, jetë ka ndrrue!* [He was imam in Tropoja/ they killed him while praying namaz/ he rapidly finished his namaz/ and began pronouncing the shehadeh/the rifle was fired and he got assassinated]." (Zejnnullahu 2011: 398)

As previously claimed, being highly engaged in the Albanian national matters, imams were frequently the main target of the enemy and were the first under search for murder. Their assassination was mainly carried out with the purpose of leaving the Albanian people without their spiritual leaders, so that their organization becomes harder, while their land easily invaded.

The Mosque During Slavery – Violent Conversion of Muslims

After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Albanian countries were attacked by neighbouring countries. Many areas populated by Albanians broke away from Albania and were occupied by invaders. Neighbouring countries were not friendly with the local Albanians, as they used violence against them and made attempts of ethnic cleansing, reflected in many folk works that appeared during that time. Only during 1912-1927, 844 thousand refugees were forcibly displaced from the Balkans to Turkey (McCarthy 2017: 63), most of them Albanians whose lands remained outside Albania. The image of the mosque during this history was the image of Muslim Albanians, a reflection of suffering and survival effort that the Albanian Muslim population experienced during that time. Albania declared its independence in November 1912, while 2/3 of the Albanian settlements remained outside the country as part of neighbouring countries, one part under Serbia, while the other parts under Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece. Kosovo was previously separated from Serbia and

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remained under its sovereignty for the next 100 years. For Kosovo Albanians the invasion by Serbia brought a new period filled with violence, murders, displacement, and violent conversions executed by the state administration of Serbia over Kosovo Albanians. The confiscation of the property of Kosovo Albanians, their lands, lands of mosques (Verli 1995: 467), the forceful expulsion and their murder, were the events that characterized the time in Kosovo.

Through these forms of violence, the Serbian state tried to force the Albanian population to move from Kosovo in order to remove every trace of Albanians in this country. In the deserted places, the mosques of the Muslim Albanians, their cemeteries, houses with oriental architecture (Osmani 1995: 484) were demolished and Serbian immigrants were brought in. They filled the land with places of worship and houses to make Kosovo look like an early Slavic settlement. The folk song describes the destruction of Kosovo by the Serbian power: "*S'lan mektep pa prish, s'lan xhami*" [They demolished all *maktabs* and mosques] (Fetiu et al. 2007: 355).

The mosque played a major role during that time in organizing Kosovo Albanians to face with the aggression of the Serbian state. Numerous volunteers were organized in the mosque to protect their places endangered by violence, deportation, murder (Dobra, 1995, 491). The mosque was the place of resistance against the Serbian policies of ethnic cleansing: at times of violence over Kosovo Albanians as a way of forcing them to leave their lands, the mosque was the place where Albanians were called not to leave their homeland (Dobra 1995: 490). During that time the 'element of Islamic religious affiliation was mostly attacked' (Verli 1995: 467) and the Muslim population of Kosovo in particular. The mosque during that time in Kosovo had an educational role. In the invaded Albanian countries, the Serbian state closed the Albanian schools, *madrasas* and *maktabs*. To replace their closure, the mosque was transformed into an educational institution to educate the younger generations. Along with religious subjects, scientific subjects were taught in the mosque to replace the curriculum of closed schools. Some of the imams, in order to escape persecution from the Serbian state, taught the students in their private houses (Dobra 1995: 492). Kosovo mosques at that time also served as libraries of thousands of books, thousands of documents, and old manuscripts (Morina 1995: 523). Moreover, schooling in mosques was obtained in the Albanian language, which greatly influenced the raising of the Albanian national consciousness of students and contributed to their protection from assimilation.

Albanians during that time were victims of an unprecedented violence in the Balkans: following the invasion of Kosovo, the Serbian state tried to remove Kosovo Albanians from mosques and to forcibly convert them from Muslims into Orthodox Christians (Durham 2006: 263). According to the Serbian state, Albanians "Muslims either had to be baptized or to face death" (Nasi 1995: 474). The violent conversion of Albanians reached its peak during 1915-1917. Despite a small part of the Albanian population that accepted the conversion, most of the people rejected the Serbian state request either individually or collectively. Death awaited those who did not accept the conversion. Obviously, this was a serious event with a great impact on the Albanian folklore. Many Albanian folkloric works were born to save the memory of the tragic situations through which the Albanian people went during the violent conversions, the sacrifice of life and the violent rejection of a different religion (Fetiu et al. 2007: 313):

*"katër kralat janë ra n'Shygni, [four Kings came to Albania]
po prej në robë, po prej në sabi [to slaughter men hostages and children]
tanë po i presin djemt e ri; [all young children are being slaughtered]
lag me ujë, po i qesin në ngri, [watering them to get freezed]
kush po pshton pa u mërdhi, [anyone who escaped freezing]
tanë po i therrin me singi! [was stabbed with a knife]
Po i çojnë n'kishë, s'po i lanë n'xhami [and were sent to the church not to the mosque]"*

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These folkloric songs are full of gruesome scenes, beatings, murders, and macabre violence. But within them we also find a pride of the Albanian environment not surrendering against violence: the songs praise the high morale of those people facing death, the courage with which they defend their Albanian Muslim identity until the end of their lives. The folkloric song *Avro Cemi* initially represents the request of the invader for conversion: “*Ju muslimanë fenë me ndrrue, /se zakonin qashtu e kanë çue!* [You Muslims should change your religion/ because of the law that requires so]” (Fetiu *et al.* 2007, 56). At the same time, it represents the Albanians’ negative answer to the posed question implying no change of religion regardless of the price to be paid: “*Fenë tanë na s’mujmë me ndrrue, /se jem’ msu’ xhami me shkue, /e tybe n’Zotin, n’kishë n’kem shkue!* [We can’t change our religion/ because we have been used to go to the mosque/ and will never go to the church!]” (Syla *et al.* 2007, 56). The violent conversions did not target only one place, they were spread all over Kosovo. Such are the following folkloric songs, representing the resistance of characters throughout different parts of Kosovo. The folkloric song “*Hajmedet për Lug t’Baranit* [The poor valley of Baran]” represents the Albanians from the Valley of Baran in Kosovo who accepted to be killed and be buried on the graves they opened themselves and at the expense of not changing their religion (Syla *et al.* 2007: 38):

*“Ku ke nie shqiptartë fenë m’e ndrrue! [where did you hear that Albanians change their religion!]
Ramazana tanë i kemi ngjinue. [and we fasted every ramadans]
për Bajram n’xhami jemi shkue [for Eid in the mosque we went]
pa na gri-e, pa na coptue, [until you slaughter us either in part or in whole]
tybe, n’munesh fenë me na ndrrue. [you will never make us change our religion]”.*

A lot more magnificent is the answer of Kosovo Albanians to Montenegro’s proposal for conversion into Orthodox Christians or face death as Muslims (Syla *et al.* 2007: 29):

*Pa na gri, more Savë, s’shtatë e n’shtatëdhjetë, [until you Savë slaughter us either in part or in whole]
s’un na shtjen, ti Savo, kryqin me prekë! [you will never make us touch the cross]”.*

As the enemy decided to shoot these characters, they broke the debate and turned to their faith and advised one another to pronounce the Shehadeh and Salavat: “*Hazir Aga fort qi po bërtet-e:-/Salavat, more vllazën, shahadet-e, /ka ni gisht ju çone përpjjet-e* [Hazir Aga is asking loudly /us as his brothers to pronounce the shehadeh / and raise towards the sky the point finger]” (Syla *et al.* 2007: 48). The Serbian Orthodox Church was identified with the Serbian state, in this way the conversion aimed at the assimilation of Albanians, because every convert was forced to change his national affiliation, to become a Serb. Therefore, the resistance of the Albanians in these situations was a resistance both to the violent conversion to Orthodoxy and to the national assimilation into Serbs. During that time, the mosque had become prominent as a centre of resistance against Orthodox conversions, which led the Serbian invader to close many mosques, turning some into stables, prisons, and some into military depots (Osmani 1995: 481). The imams of those mosques did not escape the violence of the Serbian state: many of them were killed (Bajrami 1981: 143), many others were threatened and a lot more were beaten and abused.

Mosque During the Communist System

After the World War Second, The European states were divided into the Eastern and Western Bloc. The Eastern Bloc states were led by the communist system. Kosovo after World War Second remained part of the Eastern Bloc states led by the communist one-party totalitarian system. As the

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communist system propagated atheistic ideas, it attacked religion along all Eastern Bloc states. While in some parts, the target of this system was the Catholic religion, in some others was the Islamic religion. Given that Kosovo had a population of 97% Muslims, the Islamic religion was attacked employing various means and forms during the communist system in Kosovo. From the beginning, the communism divided the state from religion. This made that all the social functions that the mosque had performed thus far in the Albanian people, such as national, educational, political, cultural functions, be removed from the mosque, reducing its function to only Islamic religious services, which were highly controlled by the system (Sadikaj 1995: 501). During that time the religion was attacked economically, taking away a high proportion of land and many objects. It was also attacked by the media, employing bans on publishing books, providing religious education, and closing several *madrassas*. Muslims were banned to establish religious organizations of any kind, in a word, a 'versatile campaign' was organized against the mosque and religion (Sadikaj 1995: 502). The religion in Kosovo was not banned, as it was the case in some other communist countries, but it was seen as primitive, non-scientific, and outdated. These views that the communist system held towards the Islamic religion directly affected the new folklore impression to the mosque. Thus, during the analysis of the Albanian folklore, we have seen that in the folklore collected immediately after the Second World War, the mosque is more widely expressed. This is because of the initial phase in which communism was in Kosovo after the Second World War, as its influence had not been fully extended yet. It is because of this reason that the Islamic signs are more present on the Islamic folklore including the mosque. Things change a bit later, communism during 1980-1990 reached its peak, gaining a huge support of the people, thus influencing the folklore creations which massively avoided both the mosque and the other Islamic signs. The mosque was either completely missing or was encountered very rarely in the folklore collected during that time. Out of 31 folk songs with mosque-focused topic we have studied, 27 were collected until the 1970s, while only 4 were collected during 1980-1990. This evidence shows the decline of the use of Islam and its signs in folklore along the phase that communism reached its peak during 1980-1990. Thus, showing a decline of the role of the mosque during the communist era in Kosovo, being marginalized, and having a less important role as used to have initially. The cultural trajectory through which the Albanian people went during the last two centuries, is reflected in the change of the image of the mosque, moving from one stage, where the role of the mosque and the Islamic religion was great between the 18th and 20th centuries, to the next stage when a part of the people embraced an atheistic ideology, such as Communism, minimized the place of religion in society, along with the place of the mosque. Therefore, the above statistics are significant and completely in line with the path that the Albanian people walked culturally, reflecting the change of the image of the mosque: the mosque as an object had an important religious, social, cultural, and political image in the Albanian folklore until the arrival of Communism in Kosovo. The mosque was the place where the fate of Kosovo was decided, but after the arrival of Communism the image of the mosque began to deteriorate when the Communism in Kosovo reached its peak during 1980-1990. The mosque was then avoided, marginalized, and its role was substituted by the communist institutions, such as corporates, communist parties, organizations and the like. In a word, the older the Albanian folklore, the wider the presence of Islam. The mosque has a significant role in the Kosovo Albanians, while the newer the folklore, the smaller the Islam, the mosque and the Islamic signs far rarer.

To conclude, as of the moment Albanians accepted the Islamic religion, the Islamic religion became part of their being, their identity, history, culture, economy and politics. The Islamic religion accompanied the Albanian people from the past to the present, through ups and downs, problems and joys, triumphs, and losses. The mosque as an object of Islamic cult became the centre of many activities of the Albanian people, everything that preoccupied them, and their history became part of activities of the mosque. These activities were preserved in several Albanian folklore creations that

illustrated particular events of the Albanian people throughout its history, yet as a whole they reflected the full image of the mosque in Albanian folkloric culture.

The mosque in the first centuries of the acceptance of Islam by Albanians, is seen as a reflection of the great cultural change that occurred following the conversion of Albanians from the Catholic to the Islamic belief: the folklore adjusting to the new way of life that the Albanian people had begun, changed the Catholic signs that were previously found in the folklore with the Muslim ones. We have seen a new image that the mosque had during the struggle of Albanians for their country's independence. It was the epicentre of many organizational activities while many wars aimed the protection of the country. During the great national upheavals, the frequent wars that took place in the country, different policies for the state, community, religion, nation, were enabled due to the frequent and quick meetings in the mosque, which played a significant role regarding the organization and gathering of Muslim Albanians dealing with such activities.

Following the invasion of Kosovo, the mosque became one of the institutions that opposed the invader, the Serbian state hindering its organization, education, and violent conversions. Despite the Serbian state excessive violence, destroying the mosque and killing the imams, the mosque did not stop its holy mission related to the nation and religion of the Albanian Muslims. And finally, we noticed that after the Second World War, the mosque faced with the atheistic ideology of the Communist system with an unequal war, where the Communism had appropriated the power and had turned almost everything belonging to the state into its own benefits and counter the Islamic religion and the mosque. The fact of overcoming the communist venture, strongly refreshed the religion after the 1990s in Kosovo. Today the religion is facing with the modern problems of globalization. In the folkloric works it is seen that the mosque has performed various functions in the Albanian society. It is revealed that the changes in the function of the mosque in the Albanian folklore emerged due to the cultural changes of the Albanian people throughout the history, and because of different concepts that a new era brought to the state, nation, and people. Each folkloric creation hides a special message for the mosque, depending on the culture through which the Albanian people was going be it social or state problems, or conflicts with others. As such from one folkloric creation to another, the mosaic of the mosque becomes clearer, more accurate and more complete.

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