

Rejecting Imposition Through Self-Organisation in Education

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Abstract:

This paper aims to bring up and analyse the chronology of educational education life in Kosovo in 1989-1999, considering expulsion from school facilities and imposition of parallel school policies. In 1989, Serbia made changes to the Kosovo Constitution whereby Kosovo was stripped of its political, cultural, educational and legal autonomy that was enshrined in the Constitution of 1974. Constitutional changes of 1989 amounted to a direct attack against Kosovo's society and produced new social, political and cultural contexts in 1990-1999. It was those changes that brought about, not only formally, but substantially as well, a major dissatisfaction within the Kosovan society and made it find ways to self-organise and function on its own. Of course, survival was paramount to a society facing such a challenge, especially in a situation in which its education was the primary target. A directive stipulating that Serbia's laws and bylaws on education (school curricula and other documentation) must be implemented compulsorily in Kosovo schools as well, as of 1990/91 school year, made teachers, principals, students and parents reject implementing such a directive, which also resulted in the closure of Albanian schools and expulsion from school premises. Bearing witness thereof, the society organised itself and operated on its own, managing, thereby, to provide for the survival of education in Albanian. Hence, many houses turned into school premises, and many people of good will gave their all to make sure that education in Albanian survives and Albanian children have the opportunity to receive education basically and practically say "no" to submission in the face of such a pressure.

Key words: Rejection, imposition, constitutional changes, education in Albanian, survival

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is depicting the educational life over a decade, from 1989 to 1999, providing the context of expulsion from school facilities and imposition of parallel school policies. Exclusion necessarily led to rejection and self-organization. This is a decade full of challenges for Kosovar society, full of evidence of survival, self-organization and self-functioning in social and political trends, when everything was proving to crumble. Life was constantly being put at stake and threatened, while society itself sacrificed itself to sustain it. Social cohesion within Kosovar society, in the face of a pressure that was being exerted increasingly, was becoming stronger and stronger. All such resistance and consistency stemmed from a particular field of survival and resistance, such as education.

But, how did Kosovar society respond to imposing policies through rejection and self-organization in education?

This topic requires sociological and then political treatment, because it has both sides – that of political imposition, on the one hand, and rejection and political self-organization, on the other. The trend of rejection has come precisely from that of imposition or constitutional changes, but the power of dissent, opposition and self-organization has come as a response and as a sign of rejection.

At a time when constitutional and political downfall of this category of society reached a climax, rejection and dissent marked their first steps. Political changes themselves triggered a self-organization and survival reaction that aimed at preserving people's lives primarily, but educational, cultural and other identities as well.

Rejection and self-organization in education was replicated in other fields for which survival was very important. Consequently, self-organization in education proves to be fairest and most appropriate response under such circumstances. But it also proves to be the best response to maintain the continuity of the country's educational, cultural and political lives.

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In keeping with the topic itself, different methods have been used, such as inclusive and comparative ones, and data analysis was also of a particular importance. Relevant field literature reviews as well as specific research and factual evidence from previous publications have also been incorporated.

Rejection and self-organization

In March 1989, Serbia made changes to the Kosovo Constitution whereby Kosovo was stripped of its political, cultural, educational and legal autonomy that was enshrined in the Constitution of 1974. Such constitutional changes amounted to a direct attack against Kosovo's society and produced new social, political and cultural contexts in 1990-1999.

Consequently, "Serbism encompassed all areas of societal life: initially education, which was of national and political importance" (Schmitt, 2012, pp. 246-247), then "provincial media, television, radio, newspapers were also put under control, and Albanian journalists were expelled from their jobs. Serbian language became the prevailing language of broadcast and press media (Pristina Television reduced its schedule in Albanian to 45 minutes a day)" (Schmitt, 2012, pp. 246-247).

Of course, in addition to education and media, Serbisation extended its influence upon other aspects of life, such as in cultural and administrative ones, where dismissal of Albanian employees and their replacement by Serb employees became a 'normal' practice, to continue with changing the names of schools, hospitals and roads as a way to undo everything that belonged to Albanians and impart a Serbian spirit upon everything that was Albanian.

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"Cleansing also included the Pristina Theatre, whose Albanian employees were fired and the theatre was renamed as the "Serbian National Theatre". Street names and memorials were Serbised; books in Albanian were moved away from public libraries. Albanians were again called "šiptari", and the nationalist term "Kosmet" began to be used in administration. Indeed, Serbia waged a cultural war against some of its citizens. Expulsion from jobs included health sector and then industry, administration and trade" (Schmitt, 2012, pp. 246-247).

In the face of all this cultural, educational, health and psychological pressure, which gradually became physical, a certain category of society had to find alternative ways and life in Kosovo began to turn into *defiance and opposition, rejection and parallelism*, which Gene Sharp would call "massive political defiance" (Sharp, 2012, p. 15).

Although this was only the starting point of the great changes that took place within the society, there was always a growing tendency of submission and escape, as part of realization of a bigger plan. Besides such changes, a different pressure was being tested, starting from specific areas such as education and health, to continue in others. That even went beyond pressure, and excess was direct in disruptive measures against Albanian education, so as to extend the pressure further on all other domains, from expulsion from premises to the absence of the basic conditions and suspension of salaries.

"The curbing of Kosovo's autonomous powers in 1989 ended any form of Serbian-Albanian cooperation in the field of education in Kosovo. It marked the emergence of two parallel sets of laws on which two, legally and spatially separate, national education system in Kosovo would be based" (Kostovicova, p. 75).

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"1990-1991 will be remembered for the devastating measures the Serbian government took against Kosovo's educational institutions. Extraordinary measures were imposed upon 110 primary schools, with over 8,000 students remaining out of school desks. Serbia plundered the personal incomes of 3,486 primary school and 4,300 high school teachers. The personal incomes of Albanian teachers of Podujevo and Istog/k was given a 'gift' to Serbs and Montenegrins. The "Provincial Fund" for primary education, headed by M. Novakovic, by Decision No. 400-193/71 dated 30.V.1991, forbade funding for all the Albanian primary schools in Kosovo 'temporarily'" (Osmani, 2009, p. 60).

Thus and here began the exclusion of a category of society from the system, proving the great change and, at the same time, the great effort for submission, which was particularly evident in the educational system, leaving pupils out of school desks, interrupting their funding and conditioning it with compliance with plans and programs that were coming ready-made from Serbia.

Besides a growing pressure that was being exerted upon elementary and secondary education in Albanian, pressure was also being exerted upon the University "and, consequently, 'anti-Albanian inquisition', as Ali Hadri had termed it, through ideopolitical differentiation of Albanian teachers and students, began to burst through their expulsion from jobs and their imprisonment and various threats and blackmails against them. In addition, demands for the closure of our university and its branches and high schools, drastic reduction in the number of Albanian students and the abnormal growth of Serbian-Montenegrin students in the university were intensified (Koliqi, 2010, p. 31)." Naturally, such continuous pressures made normal life impossible within the very abnormality that was already increasing day by day, because this pressure was expanding and increasing far and wide, but it was felt more in some areas than in the others, especially in education. By degrading education, there was an attempt to increase the number of illiterates and denigrate the society as a whole. The pressure exerted on education had multiple consequences, starting from financial and psychological to physical pressure.

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Within a short period of time “over 5,000 high school teachers, in fact, all of them were fired and over 850 university professors were dismissed and expelled from school premises so as to make more than 20,000 universities and around 60,000 high school students unable to continue their education. At the same time, all Albanian primary school teachers, a total of about 18,000 of them, were laid off without pay for six whole years” (Agani, 2002, p. 26).

In addition to consecutive expulsions and dismissals from an institution to another, the pressure was also being exerted in other forms, everywhere. “Finally, by the beginning of 1991-92 school year, the authorities went further expelling Albanians from all the schools in Kosovo. All over Kosovo, there were similar scenes: children, teachers and parents arriving at schools on September 2 to find armed police blocking their entry” (Clark, 2000, pp. 96-97).

This tendency and pressure, except at elementary level, reached a point when attempts were made to reach such an end through student enrolment announcements, equalling hence the number of Albanian and non-Albanian students, to continue further with other differences in the working conditions, which differed greatly between the conditions under which Albanian and non-Albanian students were studying. “The ruthless war against Albanian education, which had begun and not concealed its intentions ever since the violent abolition of Kosovo's autonomy in March 1989, would be made known with the announcement for the enrolment of the new students in the 1991-1992 university year in June 1991, when the University of Pristina, having put under oppressive measures a year before, would announce only two thousand places for students from Kosovo and as many places for students from other areas of Serbia, who would, for the first time, be offered special working and studying conditions in Kosovo, among the best in the country. Also, the announcement would omit learning in Albanian for the first time” (Buxhovi, 2012, p. 516).

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All these forms of discrimination, expulsion or differentiation were aimed at persuading this category of society to agree to such a situation and accept the demands coming from Serbia. This was, of course, opposed strongly, because it was in contradiction with the basic demands of the majority population, which was made of Albanians in this case.

In all these efforts for imposition and submission, one thing was being proved continuously – that Rejection was imposed above all. The Rejection stemmed exactly from where the attack began, from a target group against which the implementation of an oppressive and exclusionary policy was being attempted.

It all started when the first step of disobedience and defiance came precisely from the rejection of the curricula, because their acceptance implied, among other things, acceptance of and agreement with a policy that aimed at imposing the content of a material to be developed during the teaching process. "Serbian education authorities, since the end of June 1990, distributed among the Kosovo schools' education laws, curricula and school documentation (diaries, student records) and other laws and bylaws issued by the Serbian authorities, which were preceded by a directive reading that as of 1990-91 school year the Unified Serbia's laws and bylaws (curricula, school documentation and others) would also be implemented in Kosovo schools compulsorily. Teachers, school principals, students, and parents declined to apply Serbian laws and bylaws in Albanian schools and were determined to work with Kosovo laws and bylaws (teaching curricula), in the face of permanent violence of the Serbian government" (Intervistë-Gashi, 2019).

The imposition was first attempted through programs, in order to test other party's potential reaction or non-reaction and to see the result produced by such a circumstance. "They have already closed 4 high schools in Podujevo, Lipjan, Obiliq etc. All other schools run the danger of being closed, because Serbia is trying to impose curricula revised in Belgrade.

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These curricula are discriminatory. They aimed at cultural and ethnic assimilation. Police intervene in all schools. The same police beats and maltreats students and teachers and confiscates all administrative and pedagogical documents” (Osmani, 2009, p. 49).

However, the Assembly of Kosovo, on July 2, 1990, issued the Constitutional Declaration and, consequently, the decisions of the Assembly of Serbia on the abolition of Kosovo bodies were not recognized.

Also, according to that declaration, until the promulgation of new laws and bylaws, the laws that were promulgated in support of the 1974 Kosovo Constitution would apply, “Therefore, teachers, students and parents did not succumb to Serbian legislation, but organized according the education according to the Law on Secondary Oriented Education (“Official Gazette of the SAPK No. 3/80, 7/86 and 23/87), whereas as of 1994, in accordance with the Decree Law on Temporary Management of Educational Activity in the Republic of Kosovo (Decree No. 7 of 30 August 1994 issued by the Government of the Republic of Kosovo), teaching was organized according to the curricula issued by the Presidency of Education, respectively the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kosovo” (Gashi, 1997, p. 9)

In line with the opposition of or disagreement with the imposition, it became necessary to act through *parallelism* or creation of parallel structures.

Opposition to or disagreement with the measures envisaged came precisely from education, by opposing the curricula and displaying hence openly a lack of readiness to cooperate, despite the pressure that was being exerted. “Thus, the resistance of education activists and teachers of Albanian schools against the application of Serbian decisions and legal acts in Albanian education in Kosovo started openly with the refusal of cooperate with the Serbian educational authorities, which, through their obedient servants, since 20 August 1990, organized 'official' visits to schools, asking Albanian principals and assistant principals to accept cooperation with the oppressive Serbian authorities in Kosovo and school work under Serbian legislation” (Gashi Z. , 2014, pp. 61-62).

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The refusal or rejection of such curricula, in a way, revealed not only the disagreement but also the opposition to such a destructive and discriminatory policy against a given ethnicity alone. Such an opposition began with self-organization, especially in education, and in other domains later on. In the face of all this rejection, opposition and self-organization, Kosovar society was gradually assuming the epithet of parallel society; "Kosovo Albanians build a system that Western observers have called 'parallel society' (Schmitt, 2012, p. 248).

Despite constant pressure, self-organization and functioning of Albanian education outside school premises managed to preserve, in essence, the content of the curricula in important subjects and education in Albanian and, of course, this was acknowledged as parallel education. "The relocation of the Albanian education system into the private space ensured the continuity of Albanian education in Kosovo on Albanian's own terms. The re-created Albanian education in houses, workshops and cellars came to be known in Albanian as *arsimi paralel*, or parallel education" (Kostovicova, p. 97).

In such a situation created in this society and impossibilities imposed upon a category thereof, self-organization and self-functioning result naturally from its imposition or exclusion.

Such a major and sweeping expulsion turned into an internal power of self-organization, especially in the field of education, which made someone call it "parallel society" and others "a state in a state". "The Serbian government, through the police and violent measures, from the administration to the economy, ran the state apparatus, but not the internal organization of Albanians too, which had begun to show clear signs of 'parallel life', which would soon turn to parallel authority and state or even, as it will be called, "a state in a state" the moment the Government of the Republic of Kosovo would be elected by the end of 1991" (Buxhovi, 2012, p. 498).

In such a situation, when schools were closing from a municipality to another on daily basis, when pressure was also being exerted on the University, there was of course no other way but parallelism. "When they closed schools and expelled university people, we decided to continue working in parallel" (Rugova, 2005, p. 141). So, parallelism came as a response to that kind of

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pressure, though under such circumstances it was of course difficult to imagine or even put something like that in practice.

Besides, in this great effort to build this parallelism, Kosovar society has, among others, demonstrated extraordinary solidarity by providing homes for schools but also contributing in other ways, up to financial ones “At that time there was great solidarity. All of Kosovo was doing some work in parallel society, volunteering. The Serbs are trying to kill our society, but we woke up instead” (Clark, 2000, p. 95).

Determination for parallelism was already being shown publicly, and this was best reflected in education. One of the protagonists of the national education strategy under the circumstances of Serbian occupation, Fehmi Agani, being in charge of education affairs, at one of his meetings with US representatives, stated that “there will be no compromise with Serbs on national education, even if we are forced to keep the schools in the fields and mountains and snow and rain...” (Buxhovi, 2012, p. 514).

This was a clear sign of the extent to which the pressure exerted on this category of society could be borne and, at the same time, of its resolve to self-organize in this regard, in order to prevent the rise of illiteracy.

Despite such exclusionary and denigrating circumstances, we see how dedication was to essentially preserve the teaching and learning process, thus rendering parallelism already accomplished and irreversible. Students and teachers, in their efforts to salvage Albanian education, faced completely unpredictable circumstances amounting to limited freedom of movement and life danger.

All this constant pressure exerted upon Albanian education was intended to “keep all educational activity in a state of tension and internal fear and distraction, so that education would fail from within and lose every meaning for both students and parents, whereby, from the very outset, the main component of the parallel state – which, in this segment, determined to act in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo approved in the Assembly of Kacanik, began to

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turn the creation the state of Kosovo into reality in the most important and yet sensitive sector – would be compromised. Because of that determination, which was more than historic, Albanian education in Kosovo assumed the duty, the burden and the responsibility to become among the first to serve the sacred cause of the state of Kosovo and its creation” (Buxhovi, 2012, p. 520).

While self-organization in education was already becoming a reality and giving signs of a well-organized society on the one hand, it was also showing signs or foundations of the state of Kosovo on the other.

In all these efforts for survival and self-organization of education system as one of the most important and basic areas for the very existence of the Albanian people, it was the citizens themselves who spared nothing to preserve and organize educational life.

This was becoming more and more evident, especially in circumstances when organization was evolving and increasingly taking on the spirit of all-round solidarity within the society.

As a token of solidarity with one another and the situation which Kosovar society and education in particular were going through and in the course of self-organization as a necessity and inevitability, many citizens lent their houses to be used as schools.

Of course, “the working conditions in these houses were not favourable, for there was no necessary inventory, there were no banks and chairs, but considerable renovations and adaptations were also made in school-houses over time. It is worth noting that, during these years, a large number of existing schools were repaired, repaired, but also some of them in all municipalities of Kosovo, somewhere more and elsewhere less, new school buildings were built with the own contribution of the community and with the assistance of the fund of the Kosovo Central Funding Council. More than 3,200 heads of families have lent their homes over these 8 years of working out of school facilities” (Shatri, 2010, pp. 15-16)

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In addition to many heads of families who lent their houses for schools, a valuable contribution to the survival of Albanian education was also provided by teachers themselves, who, despite economic pressure and suspension of their salaries and psychological and physical pressure that was exerted upon them, managed to stay up to their duty and preserve and foster the spirit of self-organization in the society. "A special contribution in this regard was provided by all education employees of all levels, from primary and pre-school education to high and higher education, with about 22,000 of them, about 400,000 pupils and students and about 3,000 heads of families, who lent their houses to this army of pupils and students. What would have happened had education not acted and had pupils and students not been educated in Albanian, how would the state of Kosovo have acted?" (Shatri, 2010, p. 9).

Undoubtedly, beyond the signs that signalled the beginning of something different, the building of a parallel educational life was slowly taking shape, not on the foundations of school premises, but on the foundations of school-houses; not in the frame of an institutional set-up, but of an individual and collective self-organisation, and "it must be admitted that education that acted in those years was the first institutional resistance. Education employees, in particular parents and people in general, disregarded Serbia's laws, disregarded discriminatory plans and programs for Albanians, ignored threats and beatings against them and sacrificed themselves and their families, even without personal income, for the sake of a high national and state ideal. It was education that laid the foundation of Kosovo's statehood" (Shatri, 2010, p. 9).

Another form of pressure exerted upon Albanian education was precisely the prohibition of funding. "Apart from basically technical dilemmas that related to the provision of premises for hundreds of thousands of students, there was also other issued related by nature: desks, chairs, and above all, the question of financing a system of more than twenty-two thousand employees?" (Buxhovi, 2012, p. 514).

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Subordination of teachers and society itself was being intended through this form of pressure. This was simply one of the ways to leave teachers without personal income, to exert social and economic pressure on them and their families and to leave students without teachers consequently. “From January 1991, funding for teachers teaching in Albanian in the first and fifth grades of primary school was ceased. There are 21,214 teachers working in Kosovo's primary schools. 3,486 of them of them working in the above-mentioned grades were not paid. 10,718 Albanian teachers were paid the average salary in December 1990 (3.224), while 7,010 employees were paid the average salary of the Republic of Serbia (4.532). Of these, 2,306 were Serbian and Montenegrin teachers, while the rest were administration and other school support staff. According to the said decision of 30 May 1991, by the order of the Minister of the Republic of Serbia, in support of the decision of the Serbian Government dated 20 February 1991, the Presidency of the Fund (illegitimate), in which there was no Albanian, issued a decision on temporary suspension of funding for elementary schools, implementing the educational curricula adopted by Serbia’s Education Presidency” (Osmani, 2009, pp. 56-57).

Despite the challenges that the Kosovar society faced and despite all that social, economic, political and physical pressure, the society managed to keep life and other processes of particular importance to it alive.

All this was achieved owing to self-organization, primarily in the field of education. According to Agani, Serbia had not calculated well the “organization of education, even outside school premises!”. It is precisely this organization or, better yet, self-organization of Albanian schools, this amazing organization, that preserved the entire school structure, without losing any school, faculty or branch, section or department, which saved teaching in Albanian language” (Agani, 2002, p. 28).

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Thus and here began the first response to a system of denial and exclusion, to continue later in other fields of life in general. Thus and here began the first response for the survival and self-organization of Kosovar society, “the Kosovo civil movement conquered a public space denied by Belgrade. Good or bad, education is working (classes are being held in private homes), just like publishing, health (a network of private "clinics") and a form of social solidarity that makes sure that nobody will starve; sourced from the "reconciliation councils" that in 1989-1991 made it possible to quell blood feuds across the country, there will also be some kind of justice..." (Rugova, 2005, p. 37).

Owing to this self-organization and self-functioning it was essentially possible to preserve people's lives and even the survival of Albanian education and culture in general. Undoubtedly, attempts at subjugation in a situation of attempts to deny everything else than what was being imposed were many and continuous, but yielded no results. “The launch and survival of the parallel education system in Kosovo has surpassed its strictly educational value. It was hailed in the Albanian community as proof of Albanian fledgling statehood in Kosovo and a vanguard of peaceful resistance to Serbian rule. For the Albanians, the resurrection of the Albanian education system made the Republic of Kosovo (whose independence was declared in 1990) more real. Importantly, the parallel education system was the only truly functioning segment of the Albanians' self-declared independent state in Kosovo. Education officials described its existence as a 'handicap' to Serbia's sovereignty in Kosovo” (Kostovicova, p. 120).

Through this form of self-organization, Kosovar society became an example of survival and preservation of people's lives and built a sustainable system on which it continued to produce new circumstances on the way.

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Except for survival, this self-organization enabled the realization of the state of Kosovo. The endeavour to defend human rights and freedoms was the best answer that could be given to an attempt to destroy everything. In the realization of the state of Kosovo, in formerly divided school premises, today learn all the communities living in the Kosovar society, and all human rights and freedoms, regardless of ethnicity, religion and race, are respected in the new state of Kosovo. Undoubtedly the case of Kosovo, parallelism and self-organization up to declaration of independence is the most successful story of a society that managed to survive and function under extraordinary circumstances.

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