

'Fierce Warriors' or 'Bloodthirsty Savages': Albanians in Serbian Textbooks (1882–1941)

Introduction

Only a handful of Serbian textbooks from the period 1882 to 1941 make any lengthy reference to Serbia's ethnic Albanian minority. Previous scholarship on Serbian textbooks from the period before and during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–41) concentrates for the most part on the educational role of Serbian nationalism, and later on Yugoslavism as an official educational policy, without any particular focus on the representation of minorities in textbooks.¹ In a recent study on interwar textbooks, Pieter Troch emphasizes the exclusiveness of the concept of Yugoslavism, which applied only to Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and failed to account for other ethnicities, most notably Albanians and Muslims in general:

Apart from the three accepted 'tribes', no significant attempts were made to include symbolic resources linked to other South Slav collective identities in Yugoslav national culture. Thus, we encounter very few elements that could mobilize Montenegrin, Macedonian or Bosnian Muslim collective identities as constituent parts of Yugoslav nationhood [...] Non-South Slav minorities, including Germans, Hungarians, Rumanians, and Albanians, were completely excluded from Yugoslav national identity in the curricula.²

Albanians were indeed marginalized or excluded entirely from these narratives, and they had little involvement in shaping Serbian and Yugoslav educational policy or curricula. As true as Troch's remarks about the general lack of material on Albanians in the textbooks of the time might be, the period from 1882 to 1941 still offers sufficient content for a more thorough and nuanced discussion of the perception of Albanians in Serbian education and textbooks. After providing

1 See: Charles Jelavich, 'Education, Textbooks and South Slav Nationalisms in the Interwar Era', in *Allgemeinbildung als Modernisierungsfaktor*, ed. by Reiter and Sundhaussen (1994), pp. 127–42.

2 Pieter Troch, *Nationalism and Yugoslavia* (2015), p. 133.

some context on Serbian and Yugoslav national educational policy, we will argue that Albanians were represented in textbooks with much the same ambivalences and contradictions that marked the official Serbian and Yugoslav policy towards them. Our sample in this chapter is limited to three revised editions of a history textbook by Mihailo Jović, published from 1882 onwards, and two reading books published by Miloš Matović and Milorad Vujanac in 1938. All these texts were written for use in the fourth grade of primary education, the final education level for the vast majority of pupils at the time.³ All textbooks used in Serbian schools from 1880 to 1918 were printed by the state, and only after being approved for use by the Main Education Council (*Glavni prosvetni savet*). Jović's textbook, of course, had this approval and was continuously used in school from 1882 to 1918, printed in fifty-six editions, and significantly revised three times. It can therefore be considered representative of the period under consideration here.

Education policy was more liberal in the interwar period than before; some privately published textbooks were approved for use in schools in addition to those published by the state. The Main Educational Council ceased its rigorous control of textbook content, which gave the authors more freedom in handling certain subjects, and in this respect the reading books by Matović and Vujanac constitute a representative sample.⁴

Nation, Education, and the Textbook

Education in the spirit of nationalism has a long history. By the nineteenth century, the idea of nationhood as fundamental to any form of community and as the highest achievement in the evolution of mankind, was firmly established. Scholars have long observed that education was at that time considered to play an active role in protecting, preserving, and improving a given society; as such, national coherence and organization were functions of proper education.⁵

The concept of nationhood was of concern to Serbians decades prior to the country's independence, having been introduced by the first generations of scholars educated abroad, and the works of Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864). However, it was not systematically incorporated into education policy until after full national independence was secured at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Integral to that process was the reform of the education system that followed in 1882, which

3 Aleksandra Ilić, 'Školski sistem, nastavnici i učenici u Srbiji (1804–2004)', in *Dva veka obrazovanja u Srbiji*, ed. by Avramović (2005), pp. 109–64.

4 Aleksandra Ilić Rajković, 'Albanci i srpsko-albanski odnosi u srpskim udžbenicima (1887–1987)' [Albanians and Serbian-Albanian Relations in Serbian Textbooks (1887–1987)], in *Figura neprijatelja*, ed. by Pavlović et al., (2015), pp. 177–95.

5 See: John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916).

saw the introduction of mandatory education. Contemporary Serbian pedagogues maintained that education in the Age of Nations should be national; similar views were emerging elsewhere in Europe at the time.⁶ Evidence that it was concepts like nationhood that inspired the reformers of the school system can be found in the words of Stojan Novaković, the leading figure in the reform and modernization of Serbian education. In line with views he later expressed during the debate over the high school curriculum in 1881, Novaković emphasized in his opening speech to the Main Education Council in 1880 that 'education is the crucial factor in the unification of Serbdom'.⁷ Reports from other discussions and debates regarding curricula and school programmes show that Serbian teachers and teachers' associations agreed.

Thus in the period prior to the First World War, Serbian pupils were typically taught that language is the most fundamental and obvious evidence of a common origin and past, that nationhood is a natural way of grouping people, and that all those who speak the same language wish to and should live together in their national state. Accordingly, the primary task of Serbs should be to fulfil their centennial legacy of liberating and uniting all Serbdom. The development of the idea of united Serbian statehood can be observed chiefly in history textbooks, but pupils encountered events and figures from Serbian history in geography textbooks and reading books as well. In a nutshell, pupils were taught that Serbian nationhood was as old as the Serbian presence in the Balkans, truly understood at first only by a few, but later widely adopted and strengthened from the medieval Serbian expansion onwards.⁸

It is within such a context that one should frame Serbian and Yugoslav educational policy and policy in general towards the Albanians. The Congress of Berlin in 1878 provided international recognition of Serbian independence, but was nevertheless a traumatic event for contemporary Serbs, who were shocked by the Austrian takeover of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the Serbs perceived as their own land. Serbia was surrounded on three sides by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and thus turned its attention to the southern lands that still belonged to the Ottoman Empire: primarily present-day Kosovo and northern Albania. Once part of the medieval Serbian Empire, these lands had been inhabited in the meantime by a largely Albanian population. This lent the Albanians a new relevance in the eyes of Serbian textbook authors.

6 See: Roy Lowe, 'Education and National Identity', *History of Education*, 28(3) (1999), 231–3.

7 'Zapisnika sa sednice Glavnog prosvetnog saveta', *Prosvetni glasnik*, 1 (14) (1880), 533.

8 Aleksandra Ilić, *Udžbenici i nacionalno vaspitanje u Srbiji 1878–1918* [*Textbooks and National Education in Serbia 1878–1918*] (2010).

Albanians in the History Textbooks of Mihailo Jović (1882–1918)

The textbook most representative of the wider trends of the time, Mihailo Jović's *Srpska istorija* (Serbian History), illustrates this general framework in its depiction of national history as a perpetual struggle for national liberation and unification, and its emphasis on heroism and bravery. Thus as early as in the foreword, Jović advises the pupils to 'always be heroes like Obilić and the brigand Veljko'.⁹ This corresponds perfectly with the methodological instructions of the Ministry of Education, who expected Serbian history education to inspire 'love for our nation and feelings that would strengthen the will to carry out heroic moral actions'.¹⁰ Written in 1882 during the aforementioned education reform, Jović's textbook served as the dominant history textbook prior to the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes after the Great War, and appeared in dozens of editions. Throughout this period, the author repeatedly adjusted and revised *Serbian History* in accordance with official curricula. This makes it ideal for analysis, as it is highly representative of educational tendencies in Serbia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in general, as well as of the perceptions of Albanians in particular. We will focus on the negative evolution of perceptions of Albanians in the various editions of this textbook.

As one would expect, Albanians occupy a rather marginal role in Jović's textbook. They are mentioned only occasionally and in passing, in relation to two historical episodes: the reign of the Serbian Emperor Dušan (1331–55), who ruled Albania as well, and the Great Migration of the Serbs from 1690, which, according to Jović, triggered a major demographic shift in the territories of Kosovo and Sandžak. It is equally telling that there is no reference to the Albanians in the discussion of the Battle of Kosovo, even though it took place in a territory inhabited for centuries by both Serbs and Albanians. An Albanian named Konda is, however, regularly mentioned and credited for his help in the takeover of the Belgrade fortress by the Serbs during the First Serbian Uprising against the Ottoman Empire (1804–13). Yet no mention is made of any of the previous insurrections and insubordinations against the Ottomans that saw the Serbs, Montenegrins, and Albanians fight on the same side. This may indicate an implicit tendency to give preference to those episodes that present the Albanians as Serbian subjects or adversaries, rather than friends or allies.

The scarcity of references to Albanians should come as no surprise if one bears in mind that in the nineteenth century knowledge about southern lands still under Ottoman rule was limited even among educated people in Serbia. In

⁹ This term is a translation of *Hajduk*, which means brigand, highwayman, or outlaw, but is used to refer to South-Eastern European 'freedom fighters'. Jović, *Srpska istorija* (1882).

¹⁰ Ministry of Education, *Prosvetni zbornik zakona i naredaba* (1895), p. 808.

the opening section of his textbook, Jović himself admits with regret that 'pupils were unfamiliar with and vague on Kosovo and other places'.¹¹ This utter lack of knowledge about the Albanians can be illustrated, for instance, by Jović's discussion of Emperor Dušan:

Dušan took the title of Emperor of the Serbs, Bulgarians (for they submitted to him), Greeks (for he had taken much of the Greek lands), and Albanians. Albania lies to the south of us and is inhabited by the Arnauts¹²; [he called himself the] Albanian Emperor because the Albanians always obeyed him and assisted him with their armies [...] There were Serbs as well as Greeks and Bulgarians. Fierce Arnauts were also in his army.¹³

Jović readily lists all the nations that Dušan ruled over, but feels the need to provide basic information only about the Albanians, implying that his readers are familiar with the Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks, but not with the Albanians.

As early as in Jović's 1886 revision of his textbook one finds claims that stand in stark contrast with those quoted above. Examples include those about Albanian violence against the Serbs who remained in Kosovo after the Great Migrations to the north that took place from 1690 to the first decades of the eighteenth century: 'These migrations were bad for the Serbs, for the Serbs were spread across faraway lands, and the Turks settled the Arnauts, who committed even more terrible crimes against the Serbs than the Turks themselves, on their territory'.¹⁴ What exactly these more terrible crimes might have included is difficult to deduce given that Jović previously described Ottoman rule as slavery for the Serbs:

The Turks molested the Serbs as Christians and called them *rayah* [slaves¹⁵] [...] Every fifth year the Turks would come to the Serbian lands to take the healthiest and most beautiful boys for their army of Janissaries [...] The Janissaries were the greatest evildoers. When a Serb could not pay the tribute, they would pass him over a fire, whip him, or pull him by horses' tails.

Thus, the phrase 'worse than the Turks' effectively indicates a metaphor for ultimate oppression.

11 Jović, *Srpska istorija* (1882), pp. v–vi.

12 *Arnaut* is an archaic ethnonym for Albanians commonly used in Serbia, preceded by the more international ethnonym 'Albanians' in socialist Yugoslavia.

13 Jović, *Srpska istorija* (1882), pp. 108–9.

14 Jović, *Srpska istorija* (1886), p. 91.

15 It is worth clarifying that the actual meaning of the term *rayah* is not 'slaves' but 'flock'. It designated the tax-paying lower class of subjects within the Ottoman Empire. While in fact some Muslims were also categorized as *rayah*, and Orthodox priests were exempt from taxation and thus excluded from this category, in the popular belief expressed by Jović *rayah* is used to denote the 'slavery' that Serbs, as Christians, suffered at the hands of the Ottomans. See for instance: Stanford Shaw, 'The Ottoman View of the Balkans', in *The Balkans in Transition*, ed. by Jelavich and Jelavich (1963), pp. 56–78 (esp. pp. 58–60).

However, this new, drastically negative perception of the Albanians in the 1886 edition remained somewhat opposed to their depiction in other parts of *Serbian History*. Thus, for instance, in the section about Emperor Dušan, the author retains the first edition's positive evaluation of the Albanians as brave warriors:

The land between the river Drim and the Adriatic Sea is called *Albania*. It is inhabited by the Arnauts. The *Arnauts* are good heroes [...] Dušan penetrated with his Serbs and, little by little, conquered all of Albania and took the title of King of Albania.¹⁶

Since this evaluation obviously contradicts the statements about Albanian barbarism, it thus comes as no surprise that the next revision, in 1894, provides an interpretation more in line with the negative trend in the rest of the portrayal:

Two years after this war, Albanian leaders clashed and fought against each other. While they were fighting among themselves, Dušan gathered an army and struck the Albanians, defeating some and attracting others to his side with promises and gifts, thus spreading his rule over all of Albania.¹⁷

In the third revision of this textbook the explanation of who the Albanians are is excluded; it appears that the rising interest in the Albanians and their lands made such elementary information obsolete. Jović also left out his previous statement about Albanian heroism, as it contradicted the picture of Albanians as torturers of the Kosovo Serbs. Instead the author discusses the relationship between Dušan and the Albanians in further detail. Thus, while his 1882 textbook implies that the reason for the success of Dušan's campaign among the Albanians was their good relations ('because the Albanians always obeyed him and assisted him with their armies'), the 1894 edition places an emphasis on Albanian discord, greed, and corruption as the reasons for the establishment of Dušan's rule over the Albanians. It is this third revised edition from 1894, which continued to be reprinted without changes in 1900 and thereafter, that appears to be more in line with the official Serbian policy that increasingly relied on force and hostility towards Albanians.

Shifts in the portrayal of issues around Serbian land and migration, and how they might relate to the Albanians, can be observed in the following three quotes from the 1882, 1886, and 1894 editions respectively:

[Serbian Patriarch] Arsenije Čarnojević did wrong by the Serbs by leading this migration. The Serbs that he took with him suffered greatly at the hands of the Austrians and still do, because the Austrian Emperor rules over them. Yet it was even worse for those who stayed here in Serbia. The Turks settled the Arnauts on the empty estates, and

16 Jović, *Srpska istorija* (1886), p. 53.

17 Jović, *Srpska istorija* (1894), p. 46.

so nowadays only a few Serbs remain in Serbia south of us (around Prizren and Peć); all people there are Albanians, even though they were not there before.¹⁸

A mass migration of Serbs took place in 1690. Arsenije Čarnojević, a Serbian patriarch, summoned the Serbs from Old Serbia and fled with them to Banat and Bačka. These migrations were bad for the Serbs, who became spread throughout faraway lands, and the Turks settled the Arnauts, who committed even greater crimes against the Serbs than the Turks themselves, on their territory.¹⁹

Arsenije did wrong by the Serbs, for those that he took with him obey the Hungarians and Germans nowadays, while those that remained are scattered, abandoned and weakened; thus neither we nor those in Bačka and Banat can become strong, because we are small in number.²⁰

The Ambivalence of the Interwar Years (1918–41)

The following is an analysis of two literary short stories portraying radically different depictions of the Albanians, included in two Serbian fourth grade reading books from the interwar period. These stories had both been published previously. While 'Lazar the Brigand and his Mother', published in Miloš Matović's reading book from 1938, provides a picture of the Albanians as Serb-hating and treacherous, 'The Albanian Woman', included in Vujanac's 1938 reading book, praises them as heroic and brave. They testify both to attempts at a more inclusive approach regarding the Albanians, and to the ambivalences towards them in the interwar period.

These inconclusive depictions are illustrative of the general ambivalences and contradictions of official policy towards the Albanians after the First World War in the newly formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. On the one hand, one can certainly give good reasons for considering Yugoslav policy towards Albanians and Muslims as the continuation of earlier (post-1878) Serbian attempts to encourage their migration.²¹ Albanians were presented in several textbooks as puppets of the Great Powers, and the independence of Albania as a regretful outcome.²² On the other hand, a cornerstone of the official Yugoslav education policy was its emphasis on the liberation of brotherly nations from the imperial yoke of both the Austro-Hungarians and the Ottomans. Serbian and/or Yugoslav rule over a significant

18 Jović, *Srpska istorija* (1882), p. 187.

19 Jović, *Srpska istorija* (1886), p. 91.

20 Jović, *Srpska istorija* (1894), p. 74.

21 See: Vladan Jovanović, *Slike jedne neuspele integracije* (2014).

22 See: Ilić Rajković, 'Albanci i srpsko-albanski odnosi', in *Figura neprijatelja*, ed. by Pavlović et al. (2015), pp. 177–95.

Albanian population could be seen as liberation. An interesting example of this latter approach can be taken from the depiction of the 1912 First Balkan War in Miloš Matović's elementary school history textbook, entitled *Osvećenje Kosova* [Revenge for Kosovo].²³ After informing the pupils of the significance of Kosovo for the Serbs, the author offers an explanation of its relevance to Albanians. Of the Serbian army's entry into Prizren (the former capital of the Serbian Empire), the author writes: 'King Petar first went to the Church of the Holy Salvation built in Emperor Dušan's time'. The very next day he attended a service in an Albanian Catholic church, 'in order to assure the Albanians that his army was not coming to conquer another people, but to introduce freedom, justice, and order'. While textbook readers might wonder about the feelings of the Albanian Muslims and Turks who made up the vast majority of the population in Prizren, it seems that both King Petar and the textbook author decided to disregard them. Even after huge territorial enlargements in the course of the Balkan Wars and the First World War, along with the subsequent formation of Yugoslavia, King Petar's kingdom remained somewhat torn between these contradictory policies of integrating the Albanians and compelling their emigration.

The depictions of Albanians in the two stories selected by Matović and Vujanac in 1938 could hardly be more different. Vujanac published the short story 'Arnautka' (Albanian women)²⁴, which tells of a young sixteen-year-old boy returning home as the only survivor of the clash between the Shala Albanians and the Turks from Shkodra to find his tribe and his mother mourning his death. Instead of rejoicing over her son's survival, the mother brands him a coward for not dying alongside his company, telling him to go back and die at the spot where the others did if he wishes to be called her son. The story ends with the Ottoman vizier pardoning him and sending him home to his mother a hero.

This story of the resolute and Spartan logic of heroism was previously published in the famous 1901 collection of heroic tales *Primjeri čojstva i junaštva* (Examples of Manliness and Heroism) by Marko Miljanov. Miljanov was a famous Montenegrin warrior born around 1830 in the Montenegrin-Albanian border zone. He was considered the greatest hero of his time by both Serbo-Montenegrins and Albanians. In his old age, Miljanov became literate in order to be able to record the courageous deeds of his contemporaries. In two of his books published around 1900, Miljanov praises the Albanians as great heroes and honest people. One third of his seventy greatest *Examples* of heroism, courage, and chivalrous deeds were carried out by Albanians, whom he especially praises for their heroism and hospitality.

In contrast to Vujanac's selection, Matović's reading book presents a single,

23 Miloš Matović, *Istorija Jugoslovena* (1939), p. 63.

24 Milorad Vujanac, *Čitanka za četvrti razred osnovni škole* (1938), pp. 61–2.

drastically negative representation of Albanians. Matović includes the last part of a story originally published in the collection *Stories from Old Serbia*, written by the Kosovo Serb and patriotic zealot Zarija R. Popović in 1922. The story is entitled 'Lazar the Brigand and his Mother'.²⁵ Matović explains the setting of the story, which evokes Ottoman violence against the Serbs in Kosovo in the early years of the twentieth century. It tells of a band of Kosovo Serb brigands who ask a local Albanian to safeguard them in the village of Velika Hohxa, where they went to deal with the Turkish evildoer who oppressed the local *raya* (flock), and their subsequent killing by the Albanians.

The treacherous nature of the Albanians who break traditional Balkan patriarchal codes of honour and hospitality is carefully depicted. The company leader, the teacher Lazar from Prizren, asks an Albanian twice for his *besa*, and each time the latter confirms it. *Besa* is an Albanian term meaning a promise or a word of honour, but it also denotes faith and fidelity, and is usually regarded as sacred by Albanians, signalling an obligation to always keep their word at all costs. Breaking *besa* is therefore sacrilege and a grave sin. Moreover, in the story of Lazar, the Albanian invited the brigands into his home, welcoming them with bread and salt, which traditionally evokes another institution of hospitality that ensures care and protection for a guest. There is an abundance of evidence for the almost sacred respect for the guest among the highlanders of the Central Balkans. The aforementioned Marko Miljanov's *Examples* offers many episodes in which hosts are killed while steadfastly protecting their guests even from the host's fellow tribesmen or authorities. Edith Durham and Rebecca West offer lively depictions of their experiences of this unusual Albanian hospitality in their early twentieth century travelogues. The Albanian, therefore, by betraying Lazar and his company after giving the *besa* and receiving them into his house, violates the sacred duty of hosts to protect their guests. In short, it is precisely in the treatment of traditional customs and patriarchal values that the two stories differ the most; the excerpt published by Matović denies the Albanians those values of honour and hospitality most commonly associated with them, and for which Marko Miljanov commends them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the presentation of Albanians in Serbian textbooks throughout this period, while undoubtedly biased and prejudiced, is anything but simple and straightforward. It contains ambivalences that speak to the shifting status of

25 Miloš Matović, *Čitanka za četvrti razred narodnih škola u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji* (1938), p. 210.

and attitudes between the two nations. In distinction to earlier Serbian perceptions of Albanians as ‘fierce warriors’ and occasional allies against the Ottomans, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century textbooks are marked by an evident hostility towards Albanians. This enmity arises for the most part out of contemporary disputes over the territory of present-day Kosovo, northern Albania, and northern Macedonia inhabited mostly by Muslim Albanians, but historically part of the Serbian medieval state.

The story included in Vujanac’s reading book exemplifies the attempts of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to develop a more inclusive policy towards the Albanians; as such, its author chooses a short story that presents Albanians in line with values that are shared by Serbian narratives, in what the authors would consider a highly positive manner. Matović, by contrast, selects for his reading book a story that presents the Albanians as Serb-hating and treacherous, thus retaining the negative stereotypes towards Albanians typical of earlier historical periods.

While Albanians are largely ignored in the historical material of the textbooks, it is in these literary depictions, and in precisely this rupture between literary and historical textbook content, that one finds a more rounded and nuanced illustration of Serbian and Yugoslav attitudes towards them. These attitudes oscillate between overtly positive praise and the complete denial of Albanians’ traditional customs and moral values. As such, they offer a chance to either escape the vicious cycle of negative perceptions in current textbooks and in society at large whose values they represent, or they may propel us further along that path.

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