



Identity Perceptions of the Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia: How Identity Becomes a Shield when Denied

Dr. Ümit Öztürk*

* English Language Instructor at Dicle University, School of Foreign Languages & PhD holder in Sociology from Inonu University, umut051453@yahoo.com.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Submitted 18.01.2021
Accepted 10.06.2021
Published 01.07.2021

Volume No. 8

Issue No. I

ISSN (Online) 2414-8512

ISSN (Print) 2311-

293XDOI:

Keywords: Turks in Kosovo and North Macedonia, identity perceptions, national identity, assimilation, alienation from Turkish identity.

ABSTRACT

Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia have become members of a nation that has turned into a minority in terms of population and influence both after the dissolution of the Ottoman State and Yugoslavia. The aim of the study is to determine the identity perceptions of the Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia. Within the scope of the study, a number of questions were asked to the participants regarding their identity definitions and perceptions by means of semi-structured interview technique. Participants' responses were discussed with a phenomenological approach and qualitative analysis. Data were collected through snowball sampling since it provides in depth sets of data by references. It was observed from the findings that Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia experience nationalist feelings with a very high consciousness. They oppose to the understanding of Turkishness as an ethnic identity. According to the majority, Turkish identity should be understood as a national identity built on the basis of religion and culture. And it is far from seeking ethnic ties or genealogy. However, some of the participants dealing with questions such as "How can you call yourself a Turk? Is there any Turk left here after the Ottomans?" in daily life, state that they defend themselves by making reference to ethnic and ethnocentric implications. Because in such situations where identity is denied, identity turns into a shield. In addition, some participants stated that although they defined themselves with Turkish identity in the past, nowadays they define themselves as Albanian. This situation can be explained as an alienation from the Turkish identity arising from different reasons; such as assimilation and denial.



Introduction: Historical Background of the Turks in the Balkan Peninsula

Presence of Turks in the Balkan Peninsula dates back to the 6th century as a result of the settlements of Turkic tribes. These tribes accepted Christianity and melted away by mingling with the Slavic peoples; however, Muslim Turks from Anatolia managed to preserve both their religious and cultural characteristics. The existence of Anatolian Turks firstly started with about forty *obas* (nomadic Turkmen groups) who escaped from the Mongolian rule in 1261. They were settled in the region called Northern Dobruja within the approval of the Byzantine Emperor. The role of two leaders in the region, together with the Turks, was very important in this settlement. One of them was the Seljukian Sultan Izzettin Keykavus as a political leader and the other was Sarı Saltuk Baba as a religious-spiritual leader for the Turks. Ibn Batuta, who travelled the region in 1332, called the Baba Saltuk town "a city where Turks live" (İnalçık, 2005: 21).

The defeat of the Seljuk Turks by Mongols and the Crusader attacks targeting Egypt, Syria and Anatolia resulted in the strengthening of the gaza ideal (holy war) in Anatolia. Holy war, as an ideal became a life-and-death struggle for Turks in order to defend Islam and the Islamic world against non-Muslims. As a result of this development and organized Turkmen migrations to the Balkans, Ottomans became a great empire in the second half of the 14th century by passing to Rumelia besides seizing the Byzantine heritage in the Balkans (İnalçık, 2009: 8-9). In accordance with their beliefs, the Ottomans allowed minorities, from different religions and sects under their rule, to live their own beliefs within the "millet" system and govern themselves in their domestic

affairs (Kymlicka, 2003: 156). However, the order established by the Ottomans in the region began to deteriorate at the end of the 19th century. The Ottoman-Russian wars of 1877-1878 and the Balkan wars in 1912-1913 had severe consequences for the Muslims and Turks in the region. The incitement of the Orthodox and Slavic elements against the Ottoman State with the imperialist policies of Russia especially triggered the racist nationalisms and one million Turks-Muslims were massacred and more than two million were forced to migrate (Karpat, 2013: 18).

After the demobilization of the Ottoman State from the region, Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia were subjected to various assimilation processes presented by different regimes within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918-1929), the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929-1941), the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945-1963) and the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (1963-1992). During these regimes and after the balkanization of Yugoslavia, they could manage to preserve their existence until today.

In Kosovo and especially western part of Macedonia, a period of interregnum started for the Turkish identity and culture after 1912. This period continued until 1951-1952. Approximately 40 years later, the conditions of the existence of Turkish identity and culture were restructured after regaining the Turkish education right. Despite some developments, the problems were not completely resolved. Implementations such as the expropriation of property, the ban on the veil and the ban on goat breeding, the pressures such as execution, exile and imprisonment on Muslim intellectuals targeted Turks directly; naturally, migration did not stop. Despite all those restrictions, Yugoslavia under Tito's leadership brought some relief for the Turks and other Muslims until his death and naturally dissolution of Yugoslavia. Although Turkish was an official language in the Yugoslavian Constitution of 1974, it was deregulated and made a regional language by restricting with a certain population quota in the new constitution prepared at the end of the war in Kosovo after the NATO intervention in 1999. Two years later the same regulation was implemented on Turkish language in Macedonia with the OH rid Framework Agreement signed in 2001 by Macedonian and Albanian representatives.

In views of the Turks, Turkish population has been manipulated during the censuses both at present and in the past. For instance, in the 1961 census in Kosovo, the population of the country was recorded as 1.082.000. The population of Turks was around 53.000. Later, both in 1971 census and in 1981 census, population of the Turks in Kosovo was recorded as 12.513. "*With a simple calculation that everyone can make, not a single Turk was born and not a single Turk died in 10 years*" (Jable, 2015: 5009-5010). Similar problems regarding the population records were also experienced in Macedonia. In the 1921 census in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, it was recorded that 150.000 Turks lived in Macedonia and 430.000 Turks within the Kingdom. In the 1948 census, the total population of the Turks of Macedonia was recorded as 95.940, however, in 1953 it was recorded as 203.938 and this population corresponded to 15.6% of the population of Macedonia at that time. Even though the forced immigration decreased the population of Turks, it was also decreased with the manipulations in the censuses. On the other hand, Turks recorded themselves as Muslim Albanians because they could not express their identity as Turk in the censuses due to the denial and assimilationist attitudes they were exposed to (Hamzaoglu, 2000: 42-47).

In summary, it is observed that official representation of Turks was interrupted between 1912 and 1951, especially in Kosovo and western part of Macedonia. Along with regaining the Turkish education right, which was recognized again in 1950-51, Turkish identity continues to exist in Kosovo and North Macedonia until today. As can be seen from the censuses in both countries in the historical processes, the expression of Turkish identity declined in periods when denial and assimilationist attitudes towards Turkish identity increased. However, expression of Turkish identity rose in the relaxation periods. Today, according to the census and official statistics, Turkish population is approximately recorded as 20,000 in Kosovo and 80,000 in North Macedonia. Turks often state that these rates do not reflect the reality, as well. They think that their population is higher than official records.

Identity and Theories of National Identity

Identity can be defined as the self-description and positioning of a person or a group among other persons or groups (Bilgin, 2007: 11). According to Güvenç, "Identity with the most common and useful definition is the response given by a conscious being to the question "Who are you, what are you?" (Güvenç, 1995: 24). The fact that the respondent is a "conscious being" makes one think that an individual thinks over who he/she is and what he/she is in contemplation beforehand and there is a process of consciousness experienced by the individual while defining or positioning himself / herself either as an individual or as the member of a group. Consciousness is experienced during the identity construction and social groups have also been influential within this process.

The influence of social groups on behaviors and attitudes of an individual is of great importance on one's sense of belonging because an individual's self is shaped depending on a group to which s/he belongs. Most of the responses to the question "Who am I?" refer to social groups. For instance, a person who says "I am a woman", "I am a Turk", "I am a Muslim" emphasizes that s/he belongs to certain groups as well as expressing himself / herself as an individual (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2004: 278).

It is difficult to talk about a natural identity that inevitably imposes itself on individuals. Identities are culturally, politically or ideologically subjected to a series of historical construction processes. Due to their dynamic nature, identities have the potential to be reconstructed and reconsidered at any time. In the formation of identity, the youth period of an individual is a stage where socialization accelerates and has a special importance. However, due to its dynamic nature, identity formation continues throughout life. This means that the individual can develop, change or reconstruct her/his identity if s/he experiences an important event that may affect her/him in the following years of her/his life. In this respect, it is not possible to treat identity as a fixed and unchangeable pattern in the past, in the future or now. Although possible changes occur periodically, some of them may also occur depending on age. However, a consistent identity will support the individual and provide her/him to have a healthy stance in life (Tatar, 2008: 192).

Approaches to understand the national identity and the formation of nations are generally examined under three headings. These are grouped as primordialists, modernists and ethno-symbolists. The common feature that is thought to unite modernists is that they see nationalism as a gift of modernization processes occurred in recent history. The feature that unites ethno-symbolists is the emphasis they give to the ethnic origins of the nations and what unites the primordialists is that they regard nations as natural structures. Theorists who defend the "primordialist" approach argue that nations existed before nationalism as given, natural and organic phenomenon, contrary to what modernists claim. These three groups can be summarized under those headings as "Nations Before Nationalism: Primordialist Approach", "Nationalism Before Nations: Modernists" and "Ethno-Symbolic Contributions to the Nationalism Debate" (Özkırmılı, 2016).

The view that sees nations as heirs of ethnic cores is ethno-symbolism that claims to go beyond the modernists and primordialists. The pioneer of this theory is British sociologist Anthony Smith. According to Smith, the nation is a historically established phenomenon. The nation is the modern heir and transformed version of the ethnos which is much more common and older than itself. In this respect, the nation collects all the symbols and myths of pre-modern ethnicity within itself. The nation is present in older ethnic structures. The power of nations is directly proportional to the popular and political connections they establish with ethnic communities and identities that are older. The relationship of identity established with an ethnic past with epic myths, legends, symbols and values is vital in the construction of national identity (Smith, 2012: 79-80). Smith alleges that there is a much stronger link between nationalism and pre-modern ethnicity than other theorists think. Even though he admits that nations could not be seen as natural as the primordialists did, he insists on claiming that their origins were based on a relatively ancient history and a continuing ethnic consciousness. Although he agrees with the idea that nationalism as an ideology and political movement dates back to the late 18th century, he claims that the date of its existence and the date on which it is based is much older than it is claimed (Calhoun, 2012: 76).

Hutchinson, following Smith's footsteps, states that he agrees with the modernists that nations were generally formed in the 18th century as units based on popular sovereignty and common citizenship within an integrated country and economy. However, he emphasizes his support for the ethno-symbolist perspective by supporting the thesis that nations that have existed for centuries are sentimental communities based on ethnic cores and ethnic cultures that existed long before the modern period (Hutchinson, 2008: 78).

Modernist approaches that explain the formation of nations with terms like social engineering, invention and imagination are very popular. Especially theorists such as Hobsbawm, Gellner and Anderson have led to the birth of an important critical writing with their works. From the perspective of Gellner, it is nationalism that creates nation. Nationalism invents nations. Nationalism is not a product of nations, on the contrary, it is the nationalism that creates nations (Gellner, 1991). Hobsbawm, following Gellner in his footsteps, also emphasizes the elements of "artificiality, invention and social engineering" in the process of nation-building, that is, nations are formed from above (Hobsbawm, 1995: 24-25).

The thesis that nations are the product of imagination is based on the supposition of "imagined communities" by Benedict Anderson. He describes nation as a community imagined in both sovereignty and limitation. It has been imagined because members of even the smallest nation will not be able to meet other

members, and most will not hear anything about them. Despite this, the imagination of the whole members continues to live in each of their minds. The role of the media, printed books and rise of the printing technology in building the nation is so significant that it can explain how the emergence of the first European nation-states was shaped around the national printing languages (Anderson, 2006).

Because of his perspective regarding the importance of history in the formation of nations, French philosopher Renan's views are also important. According to him, unities such as language, race or religion cannot guarantee to be a nation. History is very important in the formation of the national identity. Common sacrifices and sufferings are more affecting in the formation of the national spirit than common joy. Just like man that is not something created in a single moment with his flesh, bone and soul, the nation, just like the individual, is also a product of a past full of struggles, endeavors and sacrifices. A nation is a great interdependence created by the feeling of sacrifices endured together (Renan, 1882: 120-123).

While emerging, nations were subjected to different geographical, political, cultural and sociological determinations in historical processes, therefore it can be said that none of the theories is lonely sufficient to understand the construction the national identities. In this respect, the inclusiveness of the Turkishness as a national identity has constituted a sociological fact that is rarely experienced in terms of the Turkification of different ethnic elements in the Balkans. Culture and religion, as two crucial elements are prominent in the formation of this identity. As stated by Ortaylı, even "speaking Turkish" and "being a Muslim" enabled the citizens of the Ottoman Empire to be identified as a Turk in a certain period, and the Turkish identity gained a very broad and inclusive nature. There was no disease of genealogy search at the root of this identity formation. *"Language and religion weave the Turkish national identity; but if there is one more important element than these two, it is the common historical destiny; it is a great history lived with its suffering, joy and pride"* (Ortaylı, 1998: 8).

Since there is no search of race and genealogy in the construction of this identity, the basic determining factors have concentrated on the basis of religion and culture. Therefore, as it was repeated by some participants, massacre of Muslim Bosniaks and Albanians during the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo, was regarded as the eradication of Turkishness from the Balkans since they adopted the Turkish-Islamic culture, united around the same ideal with Turks even though some of them could not speak Turkish. In brief, Muslim Bosniaks and Albanians have paid for adopting the Turkish-Islamic culture.

In this respect, Gökalp's views about the nation is important to understand the formation of the Turkish identity in the Balkans even though it sounds a bit romanticized. As he stated, nation is neither a category of race or tribe nor a geographic or political group in the Turkish thought. The nation is common in terms of language, religion, morality and sense of beauty. It is a community of individuals having the same education of manners and decency. Every individual belongs to a certain nation through her/his feelings. This nation consists of the society in which the individual lives and s/he is educated. In this context, Gökalp included peoples such as ethnically Arabs and Albanians into the Turkish national identity, since they were educated with Turkish manners and served for the Turkish ideal not only in good times, but also in hard times, as the citizens of the State. He drew attention to the importance of the search of race in animals such as horses but not in humans, because virtues of the animals are based on their instincts. Briefly, according to Gökalp, national identity is a state of participation and strength that occurs sociologically in the context of emotion, decency and culture by exceeding the categories like race and tribe or geographic and political groups (Gökalp, 1999: 20-23).

Depending on the relevant literature, it is possible to express the problem sentence as follows: *"How do the Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia define and perceive their identity in the context of religious, national and ethnic identities?"*

Methodology

This study utilizes the phenomenological design which is one of the qualitative research approaches. The purpose of the phenomenological design is to search for the truth about the phenomena and to produce in-depth inferences based on the experiences and feelings expressed in the narratives of the individuals. Phenomenological design is an effort to understand and interpret how meanings related to phenomena are constructed and produced in the consciousness of individuals and in their worlds of meaning (Yüksel&Yıldırım, 2015).

Snowball sampling method was chosen as one of the purposeful sampling methods in the research. The

basic logic of the snowball sampling is to identify individuals and situations that can be a rich source of information regarding the research problem. The first interviewees are asked questions like "Who are the people who know best about the research subject?" and "Who should I interview with?" to reach further participants. They recommend other experts on the subject; then both the number of participants and the amount of information gathered rounded up as expressed by the snowball metaphor. The researcher continuing to gather information will soon witness that some certain names are brought to the fore among the potential participants nominated (Patton, 2002: 237-38).

During the research, just as the names of the participants who were recommended for their knowledge and expertise of the research subject were repeated, the data collected started to repeat after a while and reached a certain saturation point. After this stage, data collection was continued for some while and then concluded due to the repetition of the same information. The collected data were carefully analyzed under headings according to the emerging themes. The data were grouped into themes according to the repetitions of the participants' narratives in the Findings section. They were analyzed frequently referring to the direct opinions of the participants in accordance with the nature of the descriptive analysis.

Population and Sample

The population of the research was determined as Turks living in Kosovo and North Macedonia. For snowball sampling from the population, participants were selected in Kosovo from Pristina, Prizren and a Turkish village, Mamuşa. In North Macedonia participants were selected from Skopje, Gostivar and three Turkish villages, AşağıBanisa, Yukarı Banisa and Vrapçište. Those geographical locations are places where Turkish population and influence is intensely experienced and observed.

Interviews lasted for a 2-month period in the summer of 2017. In addition, the researcher made a preliminary visit to the region in 2015 and visited some participants again in the summer of 2018, at the final stage of the research. For sampling, participants, who were enthusiastic and expert about the research subject, were selected thanks to the contacts made during the preliminary visit and also some of them were selected at the recommendation of some authorities from the Confederation of Balkan Rumelia Turks. A total of 75 participants were interviewed. 65 of them defined themselves as Turk, respectively 7 as Albanian, 1 as Bosniak and 1 as Macedonian. In addition, 1 participant working in a Turkish institution was included in the participants list. The selection of the participants was made on a voluntary basis. Preliminary information was given about the research, and instead of stating the names only, the gender, age and residence for the participants were coded. With the participants' preferences and invitations, the interviews were mostly held in places such as their homes, offices, associations or cafes where they felt themselves comfortable.

Findings

What does it mean to be a Turk in the Balkans?

When Turkishness as an identity reached to Balkans in its unique historical course, it transcended the distinctions of language and race and formed an interesting understanding of the nation experienced and lived-in culture with the combination of religious and national identity. This understanding peculiar to the Balkans found its expression as "Alhamdulillah I am Turk" (Thanks God, I am a Turk) among some Muslim ethnic groups. As stated by a participant (Male, Prizren, 67) it is possible to express this perception in this way: "*The one who thinks in Turkish is a Turk*" even if he/she cannot speak Turkish. The intention of saying *thinking in Turkish* means being a Muslim and living the Turkish culture and also regarding Turkey as homeland can be included in this perception.

The same participant (Male, Prizren, 67) expressed that understanding of the Turkish national identity formed in the Balkans cannot be grasped in some academic schools in Turkey since the Ottomans is regarded as only ummah, the whole community of Muslims. In fact, the Ottoman State was a great union that directed the formation of a nation in a broad sense. It is the only union that has been a nation since Mehmet the Conqueror. However, the problem is that even in the last periods of the Ottomans, the concepts of "*nationalité*" and "*millet*" [nation] were seen as equivalent in the period after the French Revolution. For this reason, the nation has been defeated. Because "*nationalité*" is not a substitute for the "*millet*". The difference of the "*millet*" from "*nationalité*" is that "*millet*" expresses a wider unity. For this reason, "*Not only the one who speaks Turkish but also the one who thinks in Turkish is Turk*". The participant stated that academia and political authorities in Turkey ought to understand this mentality as follows:

“We explained so much in symposia, they don't understand us. They think it is the same as French nationalism. They say that “there were no Turks, Albanians or Bosniaks in 1600s-1700s. They were known as Muslim”. Turkish identity includes Muslim. " [Mentality of] Alhamdulillah I am Turk" stems from here. Why did they [Albanians, Bosniaks and other ethnic Muslims] migrate to Turkey after 1912? Because they regard Turkey as homeland. That's why we said that the one who thinks in Turkish is a Turk. Until thirty years ago, as a tradition they used to say Alhamdulillah I am Turk. In all the Balkans, they would not say I am a Muslim. It would be emphasized in a stronger way... After the prayer of meal as a tradition, Albanians used to say Alhamdulillah, I am Turk. The peoples who did not speak Turkish used to do this. That's why we said the one who thinks in Turkish is a Turk."

As stated by Oran in a study (1994) on the Balkans, national identity was expressed as Turk among some Muslim communities called as Torbesh, Pomaks and Romani (Gypsies) living in Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Kosovo. In the study, it was stated that Muslims defining themselves as Turk took it as an insult when they were called with definitions such as Torbesh and Roma (Gypsy) in some regions. Also, when taking an oath, the expression "I swear by the faith of my Turkish religion" was still used among some Albanians. In Macedonia, when Oran asked "why they cannot speak Turkish, if they are Turks?" to some members of the Torbesh community who defined themselves as Turk and alleged that their ancestors had come from Konya before the Ottoman period, they replied:

“Our schools were closed down with the Ottomans withdrew, and 600 of us who resisted this policy were killed. Therefore, we began to speak Macedonian to avoid oppression and to find employment."

This answer explains the assimilationist policies in the historical process, however to be a Muslim and to be a Turk were considered identical for Muslims in the Ottoman times even if they could not speak Turkish. As it was explained before, since the Turkish identity was perceived as a national identity on the basis of religion and culture (including language, but not necessarily), it was often stated by the participants that Albanian Muslims who adopted the dominant and attractive Turkish culture, described themselves as “Alhamdulillah I am Turk”. Despite this, it is observed that the Turkish identity, which has turned into a minority today, has lost its attractive characteristics. The oldest participant of the study (Male, 87, Skopje) expresses this situation as follows:

“Once upon a time, when an Albanian girl came to a Turkish family as a bride, she would be Turkified. On the contrary, when a Turkish girl went to an Albanian family, she used to Turkify the family. Today it's the opposite because Albanians are majority. We are minority against Albanians. When asked “What are you?”, they used to say “Alhamdulillah, Turk” until the middle of the 20th century. For Albanians, it was an attractive culture and identity. Turkish identity is now reversing. Once mixed marriages were in our favor, now they are against us”.

In addition, in historical phases the sacrifice of the national consciousness has been witnessed from time to time as a result of the solidarity, which emerged with the strengthening of the ummah consciousness. A participant in Kosovo (Male, Prizren, 70) stated that among some Turks in a certain period between 1951 and 1953 there was a consciousness mentioned like “*if we are all recorded as Albanian in the census, we will establish the Republic of Kosovo more comfortably*”. The motto of this consciousness was voiced like “*My heart is Turk, yet I am recorded Albanian against Serbs*”.

Alienation from Turkish Identity

Instead of the information conveyed by the participants who define themselves as Turk, I observed in the field research that some people who used to define themselves as Turk began to move away from Turkishness for many reasons within the historical phases. This process can be conceptualized as an alienation from Turkish identity stemming from denial and assimilationist attitudes. When a participant in Skopje was asked ‘how do you define your identity?’ he confirmed this finding with the following words:

“I define my identity as a Muslim Albanian. While we were going to Madrasah we were not used to be asked "What are the pillars of Islam?" but "What are the pillars of Turkishness?" we were asked. In the past, when I was asked “What are you?”, I used to say “Turk” but now I say “Muslim Albanian.” (Male, Skopje, 47)

Asking the Pillars of Turkishness instead of the Pillars of Islam in a Madrasah when our participant was 17 years old is a very interesting example confirming the fact that how being a Turk and a Muslim were perceived as identical even about 30 years ago in Macedonia. However, when he was asked the reason “why he defines

himself as a Muslim Albanian at present?" he replies *"When some people coming from Turkey ask me "how do you define your identity?" their attitudes seem chauvinistic so I don't define myself as a Turk anymore."*

By mentioning his religious identity first with a strong consciousness of ummah, the participant distinguishes himself from the Christian Albanians with the definition of "Muslim Albanian". When it comes to participant's reason why he doesn't explain himself as a Turk anymore, the chauvinistic attitude of the visitors from Turkey in his answer is actually veiling the rise of assimilationist pressure of the nationalism rather than explaining the truth. Because such changes in the definition of identity over the years is directly related to social and historical realities.

Another participant (Male, 51) in Skopje answered more clearly on this issue: *"I used to define myself as a Turk in the past; but now they immediately ask about my village and start to scrutinize. Now I say Albanian so that no problem occurs."* This answer clearly unveils the rise of assimilationist pressure of the nationalism within the historical processes.

Again, when I was advised to interview a person (Male, 46, Prizren,) since he is known as a Turk and expert about the research subject, also had his university education in Turkey, the respondent said that *"it is not true if I say I am Turk, I speak Turkish but I am Albanian."* He also added about his love to Turkey and Turks.

When I asked the reason of this to the person (Male, 67, Prizren) who advised me to interview him, he was surprised and made the following comment: *"He takes places in all Turkish national-religious celebrations, activities and organizations with us like a Turk, it means that he benefits from Turkish identity in a pragmatist way for his relations with important people."*

Another participant in Prizren (Male, 17) defined his identity from a religious perspective instead of a national identity and replied: *"If I say I am Turk, they get angry. If I say I am Albanian, they get angry. So, I stay away from these conversations. I say I am a Muslim."* When I asked a participant, defining his identity as Turk and knowing this student well, why he introduced himself as a Muslim instead of a national identity? He said, *"He is a Turk but he is not interested in these kinds of issues. He refrains from involving in political issues."* When I met with the same student one year later, I learnt that he dropped out of his school (a madrasah in a different city where education is given in Albanian language). He stated that he could not continue because he did not know the Albanian language well. When I said *"What is the need for this Turkish language, be an Albanian, then you will have a more comfortable life"* he replied: *"No, I cannot be."* This example is very important to see how much influential is the integration within the language domain on identity construction or identity crisis especially among teenagers.

What is more interesting is that both acceptance and denial of the Turks' presence in the region work together. Although a young participant (Male, 24, Prizren) who introduced his identity as an Albanian and mentioned some people as Turks during the conversations, when I asked him about the Albanian language skills of Turks, he said *"Actually, there is no Turk here. We are all Muslim Albanians, however some of them are defining themselves as Turks for their interests."* Even though the participant introduced some people as Turks during the interview, the contradictory answer "Actually, there is no Turk here" is a problem that the Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia frequently face with in their daily lives.

One participant (Female, 63, Prizren) explained with her own experience how much destructive the identity can become as a result of the denial and oppression that comes with chauvinism, turning into a systematic and conscious oppression within the family. The participant summarized the nationalist feelings of her husband, which turned into a chauvinistic state despite he loved and married her as a Turk, in the historical process as follows:

"After 1981, Albanian identity spread at homes. Missionaries came after the 1980s. Catholics wanted to transform them both in terms of religion and national identity. They imposed Skanderbeg and Mother Teresa as national heroes with Catholic identity. I personally saw pressure from my husband. I was not allowed to speak Turkish; I was not allowed to sing the lullaby in Turkish. I was not allowed to call my daughter "kızım" [daughter in Turkish]. That's why we broke up. The people around me said "Give up, define your identity with your husband's"; but I did not give up. After 1977 he started to act like a chauvinist Albanian. In 1978 the language at home changed. My children still call me "mami" [mother in Albanian]. He was nervous when not only Turkish but also Serbian was spoken. The children were trembling at home, they were full of joys when the father was absent. One day, he removed the evil eye bead, novels, the Koran translation and calendars [in Turkish language] and threw into the hall. We put them in a sheet and left the hall; but I saved my children. Both of them

became Turkish nationalists. Because they saw the pressure. He regards you as an enemy. Albanian religion was something like Albanian nationalism. Moreover, his father was also Turk. His mother was Albanian. "

When I said, "I wish you had given up and accepted your husband's identity" instead of getting divorced, she replied with the following words:

"I said "How can I be?" Then, it is not me. If I don't accept my identity, if I change it, it's a characterlessness. If a person denies her identity today, she deceives you tomorrow, too. The one who deceives herself will deceive you tomorrow, too. I was supposed to be appreciated, but he condemned me. He was very regretful; but it was too late".

Discourse of Cultural Construction versus Discourse of Ethnic Identity

Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia do not regard Turkishness as an ethnic identity, however they regard it as a national identity lived in culture mostly within the body of religion and language. Therefore, Turkishness is perceived as a culturally constructed national identity and consciousness of a national affiliation. Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia clearly define themselves as "Turk". In addition, sometimes it is possible to hear initials such as Muslim Turk, Rumelia Turk, Macedonian Turk, Kosovar Turk and grandchildren of the Ottomans with the definition of Turk. Such definitions serve as a reinforcement rather than a direct identity definition.

Turks of Kosovo and Macedonian persistently emphasize that Turkishness is a national identity and they oppose it to be associated with ethnic affiliation. A participant (Male, 55, Vrapçište) who directly defines himself as "Turk" stated that even some scientists deliberately name Turkishness as an ethnic affiliation and explained the reason why they do it:

"Instead of nation, they say ethnic community in Macedonia. They do this on purpose to break us from Turkey and the Turkic world. We are Turks and we are an indivisible part of the Turkish nation. They do this to break us up. Everything we have is same. Tradition, custom, culture".

Again, in Macedonia a participant (Male, 37, Skopje) emphasized the cultural construction of Turkishness with these words: *"The identity of Turks here is not an ethnic one, but a cultural identity. My grandfather had three wives: Turk, Albanian and Bosniak. My wife is Albanian."* And he added from a psychoanalytic perspective *"I consider myself belonging to Turkish heritage because I dream in Turkish"*. Also, from a culturalist perspective, in addition to her mother tongue and family pattern in her identity construction, a participant in Macedonia (Female, 74, Skopje) drew attention to the decency and manners emphasized by Gökalp (1999) as components of Turkish national identity.

And a participant (Female, 69, Skopje) who introduced herself as a "Bosniak of Sanjak" in Macedonia stated that her mother could speak Turkish and her surname was the same as with a surname in Turkey, naturally she was a Turk. While expressing her identity *"I feel Turkish, too. I am recorded as Turk in the census so that the population of Turks will be higher. My husband is Turk. My children are much more Turkish nationalist"* she added.

A participant in Kosovo (Female, 46, Prizren), whose mother is Turk and father is Gorani, drew attention to the "hybridity" phenomenon arising from mixed marriages and stated that Turkishness is more dominant in her identity and explained the reasons as follows:

"I express my identity as Turk. This identity of me outweighs. My father is Goran, my mother is Turk, my husband is Albanian. I am hybrid; but I am Turk. This outweighs. It depends on how history teachers injected us the history; we got the education in Turkish; but Turkishness was not injected us as it was done in you. Despite this, we are more Turk and Turkish nationalist than you. We are grateful to the Turks for bringing the Islam here. Without them, we would be neither Turks nor Muslims in history today. "

It is also possible to observe the "hybridity" phenomenon mentioned like "I am both Albanian and Turk" arising from mixed marriages. When I asked a young adult in his 20s (Male, Skopje) in Macedonia what nationality he was, he answered *"50% Turk, 50% Albanian"*. When I asked a middle-aged person (Male, Skopje, 44) he replied: *"Turk married to Albanian, Albanian married to Turk, I am Albanian; but I am a Turk, too"*.

Another participant defining himself as a Turk in Kosovo (Male, 66, Prizren) drew attention to the difficulty of the search of genealogy and pure identification due to the mixed marriages in the Balkans during the historical processes. He explained how Turkishness should be understood in Balkans as follows: *“There had been so periodic times in the Balkans that it is not clear what genes people have. My father's grandmother is a Turk from the Ottoman period; from Niš, Serbia. There have been mixed marriages. Turkish and Albanian genes are present in our genes. Turkish identity is a cultural national identity.”*

The phenomenon of ethnic identity among the Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia is perceived as "having a common ancestor with genes and blood ties". This perception is clearly reflected in the expressions of the participants. A participant in Kosovo who defines his identity as "Kosovar Muslim-Turk" (Male, 32, Prizren) clearly explained this perception in his response as follows: *"This is a cultural identity, if we look at it from an ethnic point of view, maybe I am not a Turk; but this an identity that we embrace as the whole family."* Also, a participant in Macedonia (Female, 36, Skopje) said, *"I am Turk; but it is impossible to talk about pure-blood Turkishness. Albanian and Turk mingled. 600 years of common life, a cultural identity."* Thus, she explained Turkishness as a phenomenon experienced in cultural terms. As Eriksen (2004: 59) rightly argued, ethnic groups tend to have a notion of common ancestors to justify their togetherness; but how many generations do we have to go back in order to speak of common ancestors?

Turks of Kosovo and Macedonia have to deal with questions like "How come that you define yourself as Turk? When the Ottomans left, they all went." "Why do you speak Turkish?" in their daily lives. One participant (Male, Prishtina, 46) drawing attention to the feelings, explained his reaction in this way: *“An Albanian says “Your mother is Albanian. How do you define yourself as a Turk?” I say “How does it make you feel when you listen to the Albanian national anthem?” He says “I get goosebumps.” I feel the same in the Turkish national anthem”.*

When I learnt that a participant's grandfather was known as an Albanian, I asked him, *“What of it? Why don't you give up Turkishness and Turkish? I learnt that your grandfather was an Albanian.”* He gave me (Prizren, 58) the following answer:

“Astağfirullah, do you want me to give up my history, do you want me to change my culture? This is a gift of God to me. My grandfather did not know Turkish, yes, he used to speak Albanian; but my parents spoke Turkish. Our language, our culture is a Turkish culture, we are Turks.”

Interestingly, it is understood that this participant who describes Turkishness as "a gift of God" understands Turkish identity on the basis of religion, culture, language and a common history confirming the understanding of *“The one who thinks in Turkish is Turk”* which was previously proposed and theorized by a participant (Male, Prizren, 67). One year later, when I met the same participant defining Turkishness as "a gift of God", I reminded him of this answer, he said *“I stand behind my words”*. In addition, despite being Turk with their language, culture and religion he described those around him as "schooled Albanians" since they used to define themselves as Turk in the past but moved away from Turkishness in time under the influence of the assimilationist nationalism and a distorted history education they learnt at school.

In the final analysis, Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia do not regard Turkishness as an ethnic identity. It is often stated that it is a national identity maintained and lived within the culture. Despite this acceptance, when their identity is denied with questions like "Is there any Turk left here?", it becomes possible to observe discourses that contain ethnic and primordialist implications due to the reaction arising from the psychology of being the members of a minority. Such discourses are rarely voiced in the narratives of the participants.

Implying that Turkishness should not be solely perceived as a cultural construction, a participant (Male, 62, Prishtina) in Kosovo, with the saying *"Blood is not water"* added that *"Avoidably, there must be the same things. There is also a genetic link from the first settled Turks."* Again, a participant from Kosovo (Male, 70, Prizren), voiced a similar perspective as follows: *"We say blood is not water, yes, a child takes after his father with his character and shape... It has also an anthropological dimension. In Prizren, we recognize Serbian, Turk, Albanian from the faces, we understand this."*

This sensitivity is related to the psychology of being a member of a minority. In the context of minority psychology, identity turns into an ontology that needs to be dwelled on sensitively. A participant who received his university education in Turkey (Male, 41, AşağıBanisa) described the psychology of the members of an

othered and denied minority with the "shield" metaphor. The participant said, *"I say I am a Turk, I am a Muslim, Alhamdulillah. I lived five years in Turkey. I didn't need to say. Here it turns into a shield-like reaction due to the othering stemming from extreme nationalism."*

Identical Identities: Islam and Turkishness

In the Balkans, especially in Kosovo and North Macedonia, the word Turk is used as a synonym of being Muslim and naturally it is perceived as the identification of religious and national identity, so there are few definitions of identity voiced in the form of "Muslim Turk" by the participants. Generally, identity is defined primarily in the form of Turk, but expressions such as "I am a Muslim, Alhamdulillah I am a Muslim" are also mentioned. Only two participants, one in Kosovo (Male, 70, Prizren) and one in North Macedonia (Male, 87, Skopje) did not accept the generalization "Turk means Muslim". This approach is important since it includes the Christian Turks, like the Gagauz Turks, into the Turkish identity. However, Turkishness is identical with Muslim at least within the research universe, therefore without hesitation it can be said that "Turk means Muslim" in Kosovo and North Macedonia.

An interesting example of the identification of Islam and Turkishness was voiced by a participant (Male, 76, Skopje) as *"I am Turk, I never change my religion. I always spend time with Turks"* when I asked him "How do you express your identity?". And he warned me about the halal food by adding *"When you go to a restaurant don't worry if the owner of the restaurant is Turk; however, if the owner is not Turk, be careful."* More interesting than this, one of his Albanian friends speaking Turkish fluently pointed at our participant and said *"This is more Turk than we are"*. One of the other Albanians could speak Turkish fluently, too. Two of the others sitting with us couldn't speak Turkish.

"This is more Turk than we are" by a Turkish speaking Albanian, is a very important expression since it implies that Muslim Albanians cannot stay away from the Turkish identity as a result of the acculturation processes occurred on the basis of religion, culture, language, tradition and other phenomena in the historical phases. Although they identify themselves as Albanians, there exists a very large Turkish-speaking population, expressed in the official figures, watching Turkish television channels from the satellite and following the news from Turkey both in North Macedonia and Kosovo. Albanians in Macedonia and Kosovo are known as Muslims like Turks, except for "Catholic Albanians", having a small number of populations in Kosovo. In this regard, Albanians feel intimacy with Turks and Turkey both in terms of religious identity and cultural kinship.

To get back to the identification of Turkishness and Islam, a participant in Kosovo (Male, 40, Mamuşa) stated that Turkishness is a national identity blended with the spirit of Islam and nationalism among the Turks in Balkans should be understood as follows:

"Within the nationalism we understand, there is also the spirit of Islam. Religion-identity are identical. For example, when one says Bosniak in Bosnia, it is considered as Muslim. Turk is also like that. That's why he says I killed Turk, when a Serbian killed a Bosniak. Ours is not a corpse nationalism, but a nationalism with its soul."

When Turks express their consciousness of national identity, they also emphasize religious identity along with it. A participant in Macedonia (Male, 45, Skopje) explained this situation with the words *"Turkism and Islamism are a conjoined identity"*.

A participant (Female, 54, Prizren) who regard Turks as the "flag-bearers of Islam" and protectors of Muslims as it was in the past said: *"In our lives, national values go hand in hand with religious values. It's all blended in some way. Prizren is the place where Islamic life is practiced in the best way in Kosovo. Islam is lived, protected and defended together with Turkishness."* According to another participant (Male, 37, Skopje) Turkishness was formed as a national "upper identity" in the Balkans. Religion and national identity were two faces of the same coin during the Ottoman period. Therefore, Turkishness and Islam cannot be separated.

A participant (Female, 46, Prishtina) who repeated the generalization that "According to us Turk means Islam" stated that Islam does not constitute an impediment in living and maintaining the national identity, on the contrary, Islam protects Turkishness. She explained as follows:

"I am saying this very sincerely: It was our devotion to our religion that protected our Turkishness. Especially in Yugoslavia, in order to work in the public sector and to be in the bureaucracy, you couldn't reflect your religious identity. Thanks God, we preserved the language and religion. We do not separate Turk and Islam"

from each other."

In short, majority of the Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia think that religious identity go hand in hand with national identity. They cannot be separated by sharp boundaries from each other. However, it is observed that Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia insist on living Islam in Turkish, in the way as their ancestors brought it to the Balkans. The views of a participant (Male, 66, Prizren) on this subject are the summary of this issue:

"I am Turk. We are descendants of an Ottoman family. Our language, culture and love are Turk. I am also a Muslim but I am a Muslim Turk. There are also Muslim Albanians here. Albanian is our brother; but when I pray, I want to make it in Turkish. Let him do it in Albanian. "

As it can be understood from the quotations recorded from the opinions of different participants, while identifying themselves, Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia emphasize the importance of their religious identity as well as their national consciousness. Within the historical periods in the Balkan peninsula, especially in the research universe Turkishness and Islam became an identical consciousness. Today it is the same and they cannot be separated from each other.

Conclusion

Turks of Kosovo and North Macedonia do not regard Turkishness as an ethnic identity. It is perceived as a national identity lived and maintained within religion, culture, feelings, emotions, a glorious history, language and thought. Despite this consciousness, when their identity is exposed to denial with questions like "Is there any Turk left here?" in daily life, it rarely becomes possible to observe reactions containing ethnic and primordialistimplic

ations stemming from the minority psychology.

As it can be inferred from the narratives of the participants, Turkish identity is perceived as a historical and settled identity lived and maintained not only with the celebration of religious and national festivals on the same dates with Turkey, but also in some traditions such as Mawlıds, practices of Sufism, Hıdırellez, Nowruz and even in some rituals derived from Shamanism. These traditions rise from Turkestan following its unique path through a wide Turkic-Islamic region reaching to the Balkans. Thinking in Turkish is maintained with dreaming in mother tongue, emotions rising during the Turkish national anthem or famous Turkish mehter (Ottoman military band), love of Turkish flag, respect shown to ancestors and a glorious history, regarding Turkey as the motherland and watching Turkish channels as mentioned by a participant can be summarized with "We always think of Turkey, even while going to bed and waking up in the morning". In this regard, perception of Turkishness in the Balkans is also theoretically close to ethno-symbolist approach.

More importantly, since Turkishness in the Balkans is far from the obsession of seeking genealogy, it has historically developed in an inclusive manner rather than an exclusionary nature. In this respect, it is more compatible with the understanding of the nation expressed in Gökalp and Renan as the unity of destiny and ideal. Therefore, the tradition of identifying themselves as Turks among Muslims in the Balkans, although they do not speak Turkish, can be explained as the identification of religion and identity, as well as a perception of nation that finds its place in the expression "The one who thinks in Turkish is a Turk".

However, it can be clearly witnessed in the North Macedonia and Kosovo that Muslims have been moving away from the Turkishness, which can be conceptualized as alienation from Turkishness due to the denial and assimilationist attitudes both in the past and at the present. The Turkishness found its expression as "Alhamdulillah I am Turk" among some Muslims when it was the identity of the dominant nation. Today it is still but rarely voiced among Muslims. While the Turkishness was voiced in a loud voice among Muslims in the past, today it has lost its inclusiveness. However, although they are few in number, Turks want to exist in the countries they live in with a great passion. Therefore, they continue to make an intense effort to protect their identity and culture.

References

- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities- Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.
Bilgin, N. (2007). *Kimliğinşası*. TurmaksYayınları.
Calhoun, C. (2012). *Milliyetçilik*. Bilgen Sütçüoğlu (Transl.), İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

- Eriksen, T. H. (2004). *Etnisitevemilliyetçilik- Antopolojikbirbakış*. EkinUşaklı (Transl.), AvestaYayımları.
- Gellner, E. (1992). *Uluslarveulusçuluk*. B. E. Behar & G. G. Özdoğan (Transl.), İnsanYayımları.
- Gökcalp, Z. (1999). *Türkçülüğün Esasları*. MEB Yayımları.
- Güvenç, B. (1995). TarihiPerspektifteKimlikSorunuÖzdeşimleriniBelirleyenBazıEtkenler, TarihEğitimiveTarihte “Öteki” Sorunu. 2. *UluslararasıTarihKongresi*, 8-10 Haziran 1995, TarihVakfı Yurt Yayımları.
- Hamzaoğlu, Y. (2000). *Balkan Türklüğü (Araştırmalarİncelemeler- Makedonya, Sırbistan, Hırvatistan)*. Cilt I, T.C. KültürBakanlığıYayımları.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1995), *1780’den günümüzemilletlervemilliyetçilik“Program, mit, gerçeklik”*. Osman Akınhay (Transl.), AyrıntıYayımları.
- Hutchinson, J. (2008). Milliyetçilik, KüreselleşmeveMedeniyetlerÇatışması, 21. *YüzyıldaMilliyetçilik*, U. Özkırmı (Ed.), İstanbul BilgiÜniversitesiYayımları.
- İnalçık, H. (2005). TürklükBilgisi 3. *Bal-Tam*, Eylül- 2005, Balkan TürkolojiAraştırmalarıMerkeziYayımları.
- İnalçık, H. (2009). *Devlet-ialiyeye - Osmanlıimparatorluğuüzerinearaştırmalar - I Klasikdönem (1302-1606): Siyasal, kurumsalveekonomikgelişim*, TürkiyeİşBankasıKültürYayımları.
- Jable, E. (2015). KosovaTürklerininDil(sızlığı)iveHak(sızlık)ları. *YeniTürkiye*, 69, 5008-5012.
- Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç. (2004). *Yeniİnsanveİnsanlar*, SosyalPsikolojiDizisi. EvrimYayımları.
- Karpat, K. H. (2013), *Osmanlı’ dangünümüzeetnikyapılanmavegöçler*, BaharTırnakçı (Transl.), TimaşYayımları.
- Kymlicka, W. (2003). *Multicultural Citizenship - A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. Clarendon Press.
- Oran, B. (1994). Religious and national identity among the Balkan Muslims: A comparative study on Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Kosovo. In: *CEMOTI*, n°18, 1994. Le Tadjikistanexiste-t-il? Destinspolitiquesd'une nation imparfaite, sous la direction de Stéphane A. DudoignonetGuissowJahangiri. pp. 307-324. <https://doi.org/10.3406/cemot.1994.1116>
- Ortaylı, İ. (1998). Millet KimliğiÜzerine. *TürkiyeGünlüğü*, Mart-Nisan Gündemi, 50, 5-8
- Özkırmı, U. (2016). *MilliyetçiliKuramlarıEleştirelBirYaklaşım*, DoğuBatıYayımları.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Method*, Sage Publications.
- Renan, E. (1882). “Millet Nedir?”. *NutuklarveKonferanslar*, Ziya İshan (Transl.), SakaryaBasımevi.
- Smith, D. A. (2012). MilletinSavunusu. *MilletlerveMilliyetçilikler*, Mümtaz’erTürküne (Ed.), EtkileşimYayımları.
- Tatar, T. (2008). Kimlik: ÖtekiniBelirlemekYa da KendiniBilmek. *TürkKültürüveHacıBektaşVeliDergisi*, Sayı: 48, 185-200.
- Yüksel P. &Yıldırım S. (2015). Theoretical Frameworks, Methods, and Procedures for Conducting Phenomenological Studies in Educational Settings. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, January 2015, 6(1).1-20. DOI: 10.17569/tojqi.59813