



The Role Of The Shkodër Periodical Press In Configuring Albanian National Education (1897–1920)

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Abstract

This article examines the role of the periodical press in Shkodër in shaping the development of Albanian national education between 1897 and 1920. Drawing on historical periodicals as primary sources, the study analyses how these publications contributed to linguistic standardization, pedagogical discourse, and the formation of national consciousness. The findings show that the Shkodër press played an active role in promoting educational ideals and issuing models of schooling in a context where formal institutions were limited. By highlighting the interaction between print media, language, and education, the article demonstrates the importance of the press in the early development of a unified national education system in Albania.

Keywords: Shkodër press; national education; Albanian language; periodicals; nationalism; cultural history.

1. Introduction

The closing decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century represent a critical period in the formation of Albanian national identity and statehood. This transitional era—marked by the weakening of Ottoman authority, increasing geopolitical tensions in the Balkans, and the rise of national movements—created the conditions for new forms of cultural and intellectual activity. Within this context, the city of Shkodër emerged as a major centre of Albanian cultural, linguistic, and educational development.

In the absence of a centralized educational system, the periodical press in Shkodër assumed a key role in articulating ideas about schooling, language, and national

identity. Newspapers and journals became key platforms through which educational concepts were discussed, promoted, and issued. Through editorials, pedagogical writings, and linguistic debates, the press contributed to shaping public understanding of the Albanian school and its role in national development.

While existing studies have examined the importance of education and language during the Albanian National Awakening, less attention has been given to the press as an active agent in this process. This article addresses this gap by analysing how the periodical press in Shkodër contributed to the development of national education between 1897 and 1920.

Drawing on primary historical periodicals, the study examines how the press promoted educational ideas, supported the use of the Albanian language, and encouraged the establishment of schools. In doing so, it considers the press not only as a source of information, but as a medium that influenced and shaped educational and national discourse. This perspective aligns with broader approaches in nationalism studies that emphasize the role of print media in the formation of collective identity.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in theoretical perspectives from nationalism studies and print culture, which emphasize the significant role of communication and language in the formation of collective identity. A key point of reference is the concept of “imagined communities,” which explains how nations are socially constructed through shared cultural practices, particularly those enabled by print media (Anderson, 1983). According to this perspective, individuals who will never meet are nevertheless able to imagine themselves as part of a unified community through the circulation of texts in a common language. Print media, therefore, functions not only as a medium of information but as a mechanism for producing and sustaining national consciousness.

In multilingual and politically fragmented environments, such as the late Ottoman context in which Albanian nationalism developed, the role of print becomes especially significant. The standardization and dissemination of language through newspapers, journals, and educational texts contributes to the creation of a shared linguistic space. This process is intricately linked to what has been described as “print capitalism,” where the expansion of publishing networks enables the stabilization of language and the spread of common narratives. In this sense, print media functioned as both a cultural and structural force in the emergence of national identity.

Complementing this perspective, theories from the sociology of education highlight the importance of schooling as a central institution in the consolidation of the nation. Education systems play a critical role in transmitting standardized language, shared historical narratives, and collective values. As argued by scholars of nationalism, the development of a national education system is essential for creating a cohesive and literate citizenry capable of sustaining a modern state (Gellner, 1983). Schools

function not only as sites of instruction but as instruments through which national identity is reproduced and legitimized.

However, in contexts where state institutions are weak, fragmented, or not yet fully established, the functions typically associated with formal education systems may be partially assumed by other actors. In such situations, cultural institutions—including the press—can play a decisive role in shaping educational discourse and promoting the foundations of national identity. By advancing ideas about language, schooling, and civic responsibility, these institutions contribute to the development of a shared framework that precedes formal institutionalization.

Within this theoretical framework, the periodical press of Shkodër is analysed as an active agent in the formation of Albanian national education. Rather than being treated solely as a source of historical information, the press is understood as a mediating institution that connected linguistic standardization, pedagogical debate, and national ideology. Through its publications, it contributed to defining the role of the school, promoting the use of the Albanian language, and encouraging public engagement with educational initiatives.

This approach allows the study to move beyond a descriptive account of historical developments and instead interpret the Shkodër press as a constitutive force in the broader process of nation-building. By situating the analysis within established theoretical perspectives, the article demonstrates how print media can function as both a cultural and proto-institutional actor in the development of national education.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative historical research design based on the systematic analysis of primary source material, specifically Albanian-language periodicals published in Shkodër between 1897 and 1920. The choice of this corpus is guided by the aim of examining how the press contributed to the development of national education during a formative period of Albanian nation-building. The analysed publications include key periodicals such as *Elçija*, *Hylli i Dritës*, *Shkodra*, *Përparimi*, *Agimi*, and *Posta e Shqypniës*. These were selected due to their continuity, intellectual influence, and relevance to debates on language, education, and national identity.

The temporal framework (1897–1920) encompasses two critical phases: the late Ottoman period and the early years of Albanian state formation, including the Austro-Hungarian administration (1916–1918). This period allows for the examination of both pre-institutional and proto-institutional dynamics, capturing how the press functioned in contexts where formal educational structures were either limited or in consolidation.

The analytical approach combines thematic analysis and discourse analysis. First, the selected periodicals were examined to identify recurring themes related to education, language, and nation-building. These themes include the role of schooling in national development, the promotion of the Albanian language, pedagogical practices,

curriculum formation, and the social function of education. Articles were read systematically and categorized according to these thematic clusters to identify patterns and continuities across different publications and time periods.

Second, discourse analysis was applied to examine how these themes were framed and articulated. Attention was given to the language used in editorials, essays, and pedagogical texts, especially in relation to concepts such as “nation,” “mother tongue,” “school,” and “progress.” This approach makes it possible to understand not only what was discussed, but how educational and national ideas were constructed, legitimized, and communicated to the public.

Given that historical periodicals often reflect the ideological positions of their editors and affiliated institutions, this study adopts a critical reading of sources. A number of the publications analysed were connected to religious or intellectual groups, which may have influenced their perspectives. To address this limitation, the research draws on multiple periodicals with different editorial orientations and compares their content to find convergences and divergences in discourse.

By combining thematic and discourse-based approaches within a clearly defined historical corpus, this method ensures both analytical depth and transparency. It allows for a structured examination of the role of the Shkodër press in shaping educational ideas while acknowledging the contextual and interpretive nature of the sources.

4. Historical Context: Shkodër as a Cultural Metropolis

During the final decades of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, Shkodër emerged as a major cultural, intellectual, and typographic centre in the Albanian-speaking territories. This development was intricately linked to a combination of geopolitical, institutional, and cultural factors that allowed the city to function as a semi-autonomous enclave of Albanian intellectual life at a time when Ottoman authority was weakening and national institutions had not yet been established.

A decisive factor in shaping Shkodër's position was the Austro-Hungarian Kultusprotektorat, which provided protection for Catholic institutions and enabled them to operate with a degree of autonomy not found elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. This arrangement allowed religious orders, particularly the Jesuits and Franciscans, to establish schools, libraries, and printing presses that played a key role in early Albanian literary and educational activity (Boriçi, 1997). These institutions contributed to the development of literacy and the circulation of ideas in the Albanian language, at a time when such initiatives were often restricted in other regions.

Central to this cultural environment were the city's printing presses. The Jesuit Printing Press *Zoja e Papërlyeme*, founded in 1870, became an important centre to produce Albanian-language materials, including grammars, catechisms, primers, and school texts. It also published *Elçija i Zemrës së Krishtit* (1891), one of the earliest

sustained Albanian-language periodicals. Through its activities, the press contributed to the wider dissemination and early standardization of written Albanian (Boriçi & Marku, 2007).

The establishment of the Nikaj Press in 1909 further strengthened Shkodër's role as a typographic centre. Founded by Dom Ndoc Nikaj and later operated by the Franciscan order, the press was strongly associated with intellectual figures such as Gjergj Fishta and the publication of *Hylli i Dritës*. It also produced textbooks linked to the Society "Bashkimi," contributing to ongoing efforts toward linguistic standardization (Zelka, 2001).

Between 1870 and 1912, these presses produced a substantial number of Albanian-language publications, including religious, pedagogical, literary, and political texts. This output enabled Shkodër to exert considerable influence over the development of Albanian linguistic norms and educational discourse (Boriçi, 1997).

Shkodër's cultural role was further supported by a diverse intellectual community that included Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox contributors. Despite differing religious backgrounds, these actors shared a commitment to the promotion of the Albanian language and education. This interconfessional collaboration contributed to the emergence of a broader cultural framework that supported national cohesion (Fevziu, 2005).

The city's geographical position also eased the exchange of ideas with neighbouring regions and Western Europe. Through its connections with Italy and the Austro-Hungarian sphere, Shkodër became a point of entry for European educational models and cultural influences, which informed local debates on schooling and linguistic reform.

By the time of Albanian independence in 1912, many of the key elements necessary for the development of a national education system had already been articulated within Shkodër's cultural environment. The city's press and intellectual networks had contributed to shaping ideas about language, schooling, and national identity, providing an important foundation for later institutional development.

5. The Shkodër Press as Cultural Infrastructure

The emergence of Shkodër as the principal centre of Albanian print culture at the turn of the twentieth century was intricately linked to the development of an integrated cultural infrastructure combining technological capacity, institutional support, and intellectual activity. This infrastructure—formed primarily through the Jesuit Printing Press *Zoja e Papërlyeme* and the Nikaj (later Franciscan) Press—provided the material and conceptual foundation upon which the Albanian national school was imagined and developed.

The Jesuit Printing Press, established in 1870, played a significant role in the production of Albanian-language materials. Although initially created to serve

religious purposes, it expanded its output to include grammars, catechisms, school texts, and periodicals. Between 1870 and 1912, it produced more than 350 Albanian-language titles, significantly exceeding the output of other Albanian-speaking regions (Boriçi, 1997). These publications contributed to the stabilization of orthographic practices and supported the wider circulation of written Albanian, which was essential for the development of education.

The establishment of the Nikaj Press in 1909 further strengthened this infrastructure. Founded by Dom Ndoc Nikaj and later managed by the Franciscan order, it became associated with the publication of *Hylli i Dritës*, an important platform for cultural and educational discourse. The press also produced textbooks linked to the Society “Bashkimi,” contributing to ongoing efforts toward linguistic standardization (Boriçi & Marku, 2007).

Together, these presses enabled the regular production and dissemination of religious, educational, literary, and political texts. This output allowed ideas related to language, schooling, and national identity to circulate across regions, extending the influence of Shkodër beyond its immediate context.

The function of the Shkodër press extended beyond production to include the facilitation of public debate. Periodicals often addressed issues such as teaching methods, curriculum development, and the challenges of setting up Albanian-language schools. In this sense, the press functioned as a forum for the discussion and promotion of educational ideas at a time when no centralized educational authority existed (Fevziu, 2005).

At the same time, the press contributed to the transition from oral to written forms of communication. The increasing use of printed Albanian supported the development of a more standardized linguistic framework, which was necessary for the production of textbooks and the functioning of formal education. The circulation of these texts across different regions helped create a shared linguistic space among Albanian speakers (Zelka, 2001).

In a context where formal educational institutions were limited and external cultural influences were strong, the Shkodër press assumed a key role in shaping educational and linguistic development. By producing texts, promoting the use of the Albanian language, and easing pedagogical discussion, it contributed to the formation of the foundations of Albanian national education.

6. Education and the Albanian School in the Shkodër Press (Rilindja and Early Independence)

The periodical press of Shkodër played a significant role in shaping ideas about education and the development of the Albanian school during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the absence of a centralized education system, newspapers and journals functioned as the primary forum in which educational

concepts, pedagogical approaches, and linguistic priorities were articulated and debated.

During the final decades of Ottoman rule, Albanian-language education was often restricted, creating significant limitations for the development of formal schooling. In this context, the press emphasized the importance of education as a foundation for national development. Publications such as *Shkodra* (1909–1910) highlighted the role of the school as a key institution for the transmission of knowledge and the preservation of national identity. Education was presented not only as a cultural necessity but also as a means of strengthening social and political cohesion.

Beyond this discursive role, the press contributed directly to educational practice. Periodicals such as *Përparimi* (1914–1916) included articles on teaching methods, lesson structures, and the need for standardized textbooks in the Albanian language. These discussions reflected an increasing awareness of contemporary European pedagogical models and their relevance to the Albanian context. Through such content, the press functioned as an informal pedagogical platform, offering guidance to teachers and contributing to the development of educational standards.

Following the declaration of independence in 1912, the role of the press in educational matters became even more pronounced. Given the limited capacity of emerging state institutions, newspapers continued to advocate for the expansion of schooling, the training of teachers, and the distribution of Albanian-language materials. Publications such as *Populli* (1914–1915) and *Agimi* (1919–1922) called for the establishment of a more structured education system and emphasized the importance of state involvement in supporting schools.

A particularly significant phase occurred during the Austro-Hungarian administration (1916–1918), when Shkodër became an important administrative and cultural centre. During this period, *Posta e Shqypniës* served as the organ of the Literary Commission of Shkodër and published materials related to educational organization, including school regulations, curricula, and language guidelines. These publications contributed to the development of a more standardized framework for education and illustrate the increasing institutional role of the press.

A central theme throughout these developments was the relationship between language and education. The press consistently emphasized the importance of using the Albanian language in schools, presenting it as essential for both effective learning and the formation of national identity. Educational discourse often linked the use of the mother tongue to broader goals of cultural unity and national development.

The press also addressed issues of access to education, including the need to expand schooling opportunities beyond urban centres. Articles often highlighted local initiatives to establish schools and called for community support in sustaining them. In addition, publications such as *Gruaja Shqyptare* (1920–1921) emphasized the

importance of women's education, arguing that the education of women was essential for broader social and national progress.

Through these various functions, the Shkodër periodical press played a significant role in shaping both the conceptual and practical dimensions of Albanian national education. It provided a space for debate, promoted pedagogical ideas, supported linguistic development, and contributed to the gradual formation of a more structured educational framework.

7. The Albanian Language Question in the Shkodër Press

The Albanian language question occupied a central position in the intellectual production of the Shkodër periodical press during the period 1879–1920. In a context shaped by complex cultural, political, and religious dynamics, language was understood not merely as a means of communication, but as a fundamental marker of national identity. Through editorials, linguistic debates, and pedagogical reflections, the press became a primary forum in which this identity was articulated and combined.

From the outset, Shkodër's periodicals emphasized the close relationship between language and nationhood. Writers in *Përparimi*, for example, argued that "the mother tongue is the foundation of knowledge and national dignity," highlighting the view that no nation could progress while staying detached from its linguistic heritage (Përparimi, 1915). The cultivation of the Albanian language was therefore consistently presented as a central condition for national development, while its suppression was associated with cultural decline.

A major dimension of the language question concerned the standardization of the alphabet. Prior to the Congress of Manastir (1908), Albanian was written in multiple scripts, including Latin, Greek, and Arabic, reflecting regional and religious divisions. Periodicals such as *Koha* and *Hylli i Dritës* played a significant role in advocating for a unified alphabet, promoting the Latin script as the most suitable for a modern national language. Gjergj Fishta, writing in *Hylli i Dritës*, argued that the adoption of a Latin-based script was not merely technical but a strategic cultural choice that aligned Albania with broader European traditions (Fishta, 1909).

The decisions of the Congress of Manastir were widely welcomed in Shkodër's press as a major achievement. Newspapers presented the adoption of a unified alphabet as a step toward national cohesion and emphasized its importance for the development of education, particularly in enabling the production of standardized textbooks and the expansion of schooling.

Another important theme in the language discourse was the relationship between language and religion. In a city characterized by religious diversity, the press promoted the use of Albanian as a unifying element across confessional boundaries. Periodicals such as *Elçija i Zembrës së Krishtit* argued that religious instruction was more effective when conducted in the Albanian language, reinforcing the connection

between linguistic identity and cultural cohesion.¹ This perspective supported the emergence of a civic understanding of nationalism, in which language functioned as a shared foundation beyond religious differences.

The pedagogical implications of the language question were also widely discussed. Shkodër's periodicals emphasized that instruction in the Albanian language was essential for effective education and for the intellectual development of students. Articles often addressed the need for standardized textbooks, trained teachers, and the expansion of Albanian-language schooling, while also criticizing restrictions imposed during the Ottoman period (Boriçi & Marku, 2007).

During the Austro-Hungarian administration (1916–1918), the language question acquired a more institutional dimension. The Literary Commission of Shkodër, whose decisions were published in *Posta e Shqypniës*, contributed to the formalization of orthographic norms and educational guidelines. Although these efforts did not fully resolve dialectal differences, they represented a crucial step toward linguistic standardization and the integration of language into the educational system (Fevziu, 2005).

Finally, the Shkodër press also engaged with questions of linguistic origin and historical identity, often referencing Illyrian heritage to reinforce the antiquity of the Albanian language. While such interpretations did not always align with modern philological standards, they played a key role in strengthening national consciousness and countering external narratives.

In summary, the Albanian language question in the Shkodër press encompassed debates on orthographic standardization, pedagogy, religion, and historical identity. Through sustained engagement with these issues, the press contributed to the transformation of Albanian into a unified linguistic framework capable of supporting national education and identity formation.

8. The Echo of Historical Events in the Shkodër Press (1879–1920)

The Shkodër periodical press between 1879 and 1920 constituted one of the most important documentary and interpretive arenas through which Albanians engaged with major political, military, and cultural events of the period. In a context marked by geopolitical instability—including the weakening of Ottoman authority, the rise of Balkan national movements, and the early efforts to establish an Albanian state—the press functioned not only as a chronicler of events but also as an active participant in shaping public consciousness and national discourse.

One of the earliest examples of this role is found in *Ishkodra* (1879), which provided early reflections on the challenges facing Albanian communities within the Ottoman Empire. Although primarily informational, it introduced a language of civic

¹ Early arguments in favour of Albanian-language religious instruction can be found in *Elçija i Zemrës së Krishtit* (1891).

awareness that anticipated later national debates. In the early twentieth century, periodicals such as *Shkodra* (1909–1910) and *Koha* (1910–1911) became increasingly engaged with political developments, addressing issues such as regional pressures, constitutional reforms, and the implications of political change for Albanian autonomy.

The Congress of Manastir (1908), which unified the Albanian alphabet, received significant attention in the Shkodër press. Newspapers such as *Koha* presented it as a decisive moment in Albanian cultural development and emphasized its importance for educational modernization and national cohesion (Koha, 1908). This interpretation reflected the broader view that linguistic standardization was essential for both education and national unity.

The declaration of independence on 28 November 1912 was similarly interpreted through the press. Periodicals such as *Besa Shqyptare* (1913–1915) highlighted both the significance and the fragility of independence, emphasizing the need for administrative organization, educational development, and territorial stability (Besa Shqyptare, 1913). Articles often stressed that independence required strong institutions, including schools, to be sustained.

The Balkan Wars (1912–1913) and the siege of Shkodër intensified the political tone of the press. Newspapers reported on military events and humanitarian conditions, while also framing these developments as threats to national survival. Editorials often linked these crises to the necessity of strengthening cultural and educational institutions, presenting education as a long-term strategy for national resilience.

During the First World War (1914–1918), Albania became a contested space among competing foreign powers. Periodicals such as *Populli* (1914–1915) and *Përparimi* (1914–1916) addressed issues of foreign intervention, political instability, and national sovereignty. These publications emphasized the importance of preserving Albanian cultural identity and highlighted the role of education in keeping national cohesion (Përparimi, 1915).

The period 1916–1918 marked a distinct phase, as Shkodër became an administrative centre under Austro-Hungarian occupation. During this time, *Posta e Shqypniës* functioned as a semi-official publication of the Literary Commission of Shkodër, publishing decisions related to language, education, and cultural policy. These included school regulations, orthographic guidelines, and administrative announcements, reflecting the increasing institutionalization of cultural and educational life (Fevziu, 2005).

The Shkodër press also kept strong connections with the Albanian diaspora. Newspapers such as *Dielli* (1910), although published abroad, circulated ideas that reinforced national identity and supported educational initiatives. This exchange contributed to the broader dissemination of national discourse beyond Albania's borders.

In the postwar period, journals such as *Gruaja Shqyptare* (1920–1921) addressed the social consequences of conflict and emphasized the importance of education in reconstruction. Attention was given to women's education, which was presented as essential for social development and national progress.¹

In summary, the Shkodër periodical press served as both a reflection and a driver of historical change. By interpreting major events through the lenses of language, education, and national identity, it contributed to shaping public understanding and reinforcing the significant role of education in nation-building.

9. Intellectual Elites and National Figures in the Shkodër Press (1879–1920)

The development of the Shkodër periodical press between 1879 and 1920 is inseparable from the intellectual elites who shaped its content and direction. Editors, writers, and scholar-clerics transformed the press into a vehicle of cultural modernization and nation-building, contributing to the formation of a shared linguistic, educational, and political framework (Boriçi, 1997; Boriçi & Marku, 2007).

Among these figures, Gjergj Fishta (1871–1940) stands out as a central architect of national discourse. As editor of *Hylli i Dritës*, he promoted the integration of linguistic unity, education, and national identity. His writings consistently emphasized that the consolidation of a standardized language and the development of a national school system were essential for cultural and political autonomy (Fishta, 1913–1914). Through his editorial work, *Hylli i Dritës* also became an important platform for debates on curriculum, textbooks, and teacher formation (Boriçi & Marku, 2007).

Luigj Gurakuqi (1879–1925) played a complementary role through his contributions to *Koha*, *Bashkimi*, and *Populli*. His writings focused on the practical dimensions of education, including the training of teachers, the development of unified curricula, and the dissemination of Albanian-language textbooks. Gurakuqi consistently framed education as a cornerstone of state-building, arguing that a literate population educated in the mother tongue was essential for institutional consolidation (Boriçi & Marku, 2007; Zelka, 2001).

Hilë Mosi (1885–1933) contributed to the press through both literary and political writing, particularly in *Agimi* and *Besa Shqyptare*. His poetry and essays integrated patriotic themes with calls for unity and civic responsibility, reinforcing national consciousness and mobilizing public sentiment (Agimi, 1919). Through this work, literature functioned as a tool of civic education, shaping emotional and cultural engagement with the national project.

Dom Ndoc Nikaj (1864–1951) expanded the intellectual scope of the press through historical writing and prose literature. Associated with *Përparimi* and the Nikaj Press, he contributed to the construction of historical narratives that supported national

¹ *Gruaja Shqyptare* was one of the earliest Albanian journals dedicated to women's issues and played a key role in promoting education and social reform.

identity. His dual role as author and publisher also eased the production and dissemination of educational materials, strengthening the institutional capacity of the press (Përparimi, 1914).

The intellectual environment of the Shkodër press was further enriched by figures such as Palokë Daka, whose bibliographic work documented the development of Albanian periodicals and contributed to the formation of a historiography of the press (Daka, 1971). This work enabled a more systematic understanding of the scope and evolution of Albanian print culture.

A defining characteristic of Shkodër's intellectual elite was its interconfessional composition. Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox contributors took part in a shared discourse that prioritized language and education over religious divisions. This collaboration supported the development of a civic form of national identity and distinguished the Albanian case within the broader Balkan context (Fevziu, 2005; Zelka, 2001).

The influence of these intellectuals became particularly clear during the Austro-Hungarian administration (1916–1918), when Shkodër functioned as an administrative and cultural centre. During this period, *Posta e Shqypniës*, associated with the Literary Commission of Shkodër, published regulations, curricular frameworks, and educational directives. These publications reflected an increasingly institutional role for the press and demonstrated how intellectuals contributed to the governance of language and education (Fevziu, 2005).

From a broader perspective, the activities of these elites illustrate how the press functioned as a site for the production and dissemination of national knowledge. Through editorial strategies, linguistic choices, and public discourse, the Shkodër press contributed to the formation of an educated readership and to the normalization of the Albanian language in public life (Boriçi, 1997; Boriçi & Marku, 2007).

In sum, the intellectual elites of Shkodër were central to the transformation of the periodical press into a key instrument of national development. Through their contributions to journalism, literature, education, and public debate, they helped shape the cultural and institutional foundations of Albanian national identity.

10. Literary and Aesthetic Dimensions of the Shkodër Periodical Press

The Shkodër periodical press played a significant role in the development of Albanian literary culture during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Beyond its political and educational functions, it provided a space in which literature, criticism, and translation contributed to the formation of a standardized language and a shared cultural framework. In this sense, the press functioned as a “laboratory” of literary expression and public pedagogy (Boriçi, 1997; Boriçi & Marku, 2007).

A central figure in this process was Gjergj Fishta, whose work in *Hylli i Dritës* integrated literary production with cultural and national discourse. The journal published both poetic and critical texts, including materials from Lahuta e Malcis, which adapted oral epic traditions into written form. This process contributed to the integration of folklore into modern Albanian literature and supported the development of a national literary canon (*Hylli i Dritës*, 1913–1914; Elsie, 1995).

The cultivation of patriotic literature further illustrates the connection between aesthetics and national identity. Hilë Mosi's poetry, published in *Agimi*, employed themes of unity, sacrifice, and homeland, reinforcing civic values and national consciousness (*Agimi*, 1919). Through such works, literature functioned not only as artistic expression but also as a means of shaping collective sentiment and public engagement.

Translation represented another important dimension of literary activity in the Shkodër press. Journals such as *Përparimi* and *Koha* published translated texts from European literatures, often accompanied by commentary on style and language. These translations exposed readers to new literary forms while contributing to the development of modern Albanian prose and stylistic norms (*Koha*, 1911; *Përparimi*, 1914–1916).

The press also supported the emergence of literary criticism and reflection on language. Authors such as Dom Ndoc Nikaj contributed essays that addressed issues of style, orthography, and literary development. These discussions provided guidance for both writers and readers, contributing to the standardization of literary language and the formation of critical discourse (*Përparimi*, 1914).

Editorial and typographic practices further shaped the literary function of the press. The organization of texts into thematic sections, the use of editorial notes, and the presentation of material through consistent formatting contributed to the development of a structured reading culture. These features reinforced the educational role of the press and supported the formation of a literate public (Boriçi & Marku, 2007; Zelka, 2001).

An important aspect of this literary activity was the incorporation of folklore into print culture. Periodicals such as *Hylli i Dritës* published edited versions of oral traditions, transforming them into standardized written texts accessible to a broader audience. This process contributed to the construction of a shared cultural heritage and supported the development of national identity (*Hylli i Dritës*, 1913–1914; Elsie, 1995).

Bibliographic efforts also played a role in combining Albanian literary culture. The work of Palokë Daka documented the production of periodicals and literary texts, contributing to the formation of a systematic understanding of Albanian print culture (Daka, 1971).

Overall, the literary and aesthetic dimensions of the Shkodër press were intricately linked to its educational and linguistic functions. Through the publication of literary texts, translations, and critical essays, the press contributed to the standardization of language, the development of cultural values, and the formation of a national literary identity. These activities supported the broader process of nation-building by providing the cultural and intellectual foundations necessary for a unified educational system.

11. Discussion

Across the period 1879–1920, the Shkodër periodical press appears not simply as a reflection of Albanian social and political life but as a constitutive medium that contributed to the formation of national modernity. The evidence presented in this study indicates that the press fulfilled four interconnected functions: (1) cultural–linguistic standardization, (2) pedagogical planning and dissemination, (3) political orientation and mobilization, and (4) aesthetic formation of a reading public (Boriçi, 1997; Boriçi & Marku, 2007). Together, these functions reveal a cultural infrastructure capable of shaping public discourse and compensating for the absence of fully developed state institutions.

First, the cultural–linguistic function of the Shkodër press was foundational. The concentration of printing capacity in institutions such as *Zoja e Papërlyeme* and the Nikaj Press enabled the production and circulation of a large body of Albanian-language materials, including grammars, primers, and periodicals. This output contributed to the stabilization of orthographic practices and the wider dissemination of written Albanian (Boriçi, 1997). Debates surrounding the alphabet, particularly those culminating in the Congress of Manastir (1908), transformed linguistic standardization into a central cultural and educational priority. Periodicals such as *Koha* framed the adoption of a Latin-based alphabet as a step toward both educational modernization and broader cultural alignment (Koha, 1908; Zelka, 2001).

Second, the press assumed a pedagogical and administrative role that extended beyond advocacy. Through serialized discussions on curricula, teaching methods, and textbook production, it contributed to shaping the conceptual framework of the Albanian school. This role became more explicit during the period 1916–1918, when *Posta e Shqypniës*, associated with the Literary Commission of Shkodër, published regulations, curricular guidelines, and educational directives. These publications reflect an increasing degree of institutionalization and illustrate how the press functioned as a substitute for formal educational authorities (Fevziu, 2005; Boriçi & Marku, 2007). Similar dynamics can be seen in other emerging national contexts within the former Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian spheres, where periodical press also played a key role in linguistic standardization and educational development. However, the Albanian case remains distinctive due to the extent to which the press assumed proto-institutional functions in the absence of combined state structures.

Third, the Shkodër press consistently reframed political crises as pedagogical and linguistic challenges. During the Balkan Wars, the siege of Shkodër, and the First World War, periodicals such as *Besa Shqyptare*, *Populli*, and *Përparimi* linked geopolitical instability to the necessity of strengthening education and promoting linguistic unity. These publications emphasized that the development of schools, the training of teachers, and the dissemination of textbooks were essential for sustaining national identity and resisting external pressures (Besa Shqyptare, 1913; Populli, 1915; Përparimi, 1914–1916).

Fourth, the press played a significant role in shaping literary and aesthetic culture, which contributed to the formation of a national reading public. Periodicals such as *Hylli i Dritës*, *Agimi*, and *Përparimi* combined literary production, translation, and criticism, promoting both linguistic standardization and cultural development (Elsie, 1995). Through these activities, the press helped establish a literary framework that supported the educational system and reinforced national identity.

An added defining feature of the Shkodër press was its interconfessional composition. Contributors from Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox backgrounds took part in a shared discourse that prioritized language and education over religious differences. This pluralism supported the development of a civic form of nationalism and distinguished the Albanian case from more confessional models in the region (Fevziu, 2005; Zelka, 2001).

The role of intellectual elites further strengthened these processes. Figures such as Gjergj Fishta, Luigj Gurakuqi, Hilë Mosi, and Dom Ndoc Nikaj used the press to articulate educational, linguistic, and cultural programs that contributed to the formation of national identity. Their work across multiple periodicals demonstrates how the press functioned as a platform for coordinated intellectual and institutional development (Boriçi & Marku, 2007). At the same time, the bibliographic work of Palokë Daka provided a systematic record of Albanian print culture, supporting the development of a historiography of the press (Daka, 1971).

From a broader perspective, the Shkodër press illustrates how media can function as a central mechanism in nation-building, particularly in contexts where state structures are not yet fully established. By shaping language, education, and public discourse, the press contributed to the formation of a cohesive national framework. Its activities prove that the development of national education in Albania cannot be understood independently of the role of print culture.

In this sense, the Shkodër periodical press can be interpreted as a proto-institutional structure that assumed a number of the functions later assumed by the modern state. By standardizing language, promoting education, mobilizing public engagement, and shaping cultural values, it played a foundational role in the emergence of Albanian national identity and educational development (Boriçi, 1997; Fevziu, 2005; Zelka, 2001).

12. Conclusion

Between 1897 and 1920, the periodical press of Shkodër operated as a central cultural mechanism through which Albanian nationhood was articulated and progressively institutionalized. What distinguishes the Shkodër case is not only the scale of its printed output but the structural role the press assumed in the absence of combined state institutions. Through newspapers, journals, and printing houses—particularly *Zoja e Papërlyeme* and the Nikaj/Franciscan presses—the press functioned as an infrastructure of governance, contributing to the standardization of language, the development of educational practices, and the formation of a national public sphere (Boriçi, 1997; Boriçi & Marku, 2007).

The analysis finds two interconnected phases in this development. In the first phase (c. 1897–1912), periodicals emphasized linguistic unity, civic awareness, and the importance of education as a foundation of national identity. The alphabet question, resolved at the Congress of Manastir (1908), was presented as a decisive moment in aligning Albanian education with a standardized linguistic framework and broader European models (Koha, 1908; Zelka, 2001). In the second phase (1916–1918), during Austro-Hungarian administration, the press—particularly *Posta e Shqypniës*—assumed a more explicitly administrative role by publishing regulations, curricula, and educational directives. This development illustrates how the press moved from advocacy to coordination, functioning as a proto-institutional structure (Fevziu, 2005).

A key feature of the Shkodër press was its interconfessional character. Contributors from Catholic, Muslim, and Orthodox backgrounds took part in a shared discourse that prioritized language and education over religious differences. This collaboration supported the emergence of a civic form of nationalism and enabled the development of a unified educational framework across diverse communities (Fevziu, 2005; Zelka, 2001).

The press also established a strong connection between literary production and civic education. Periodicals such as *Hylli i Dritës*, *Përparimi*, and *Agimi* integrated poetry, translation, and criticism with pedagogical and institutional content. These activities contributed to the standardization of language and the formation of a reading public capable of supporting a national education system (Elsie, 1995).

In addition, the Shkodër press consistently framed political crises as educational imperatives. During periods of conflict, including the Balkan Wars and the First World War, publications such as *Besa Shqyptare*, *Populli*, and *Përparimi* emphasized the importance of schools, teachers, and textbooks as essential elements of national resilience (Besa Shqyptare, 1913; Populli, 1915; Përparimi, 1914–1916). In this way, the press translated political instability into concrete educational initiatives.

From a historiographical perspective, these findings highlight the need to consider print culture as a principal part of nation-building. The bibliographic and historical

work of scholars such as Palokë Daka has demonstrated the scale and continuity of Albanian periodical production, while also pointing to the importance of preserving and systematizing these sources for further research (Daka, 1971; Boriçi, 1997).

In conclusion, the Shkodër periodical press functioned simultaneously as a medium of communication and as a proto-institutional structure that assumed key functions of the modern Albanian state. By standardizing language, shaping educational discourse, mobilizing communities, and fostering cultural identity, it played a foundational role in the development of Albanian national education. The formation of modern Albanian identity cannot be fully understood without recognizing the significant role of print culture in this process.

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