

SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPACTS OF OTTOMAN FOUNDATIONS' SPIRIT IN CONTEMPORARY BALKANS: MACEDONIAN CONTEXT

“It would be absurd to search for the Ottoman heritage in Balkans for Balkans is the very Ottoman treasury”

Marija Todorova

1. Introduction

Keywords: *waqf*, solidarity, social cohesion, service of society, Ottoman legacy, modern foundations, Macedonia

Ottoman culture and civilizational perspective as an universal item, for more than five centuries was a dominant paradigm in Balkans and in the space of today's socio-political area called Republic of Macedonia. This worldview based on service to humanity contributed in society-building that has its impacts up to now throughout the Balkan Peninsula. *Awqafs*, i.e. *vakif (lar)* is one of the crucial components of Islamic system, and Ottoman rule, that contributed in creating sustainable development *via* social benevolence that generated solidarity and possibilities for low social stratum to cope with poverty and other social problems.

Based on this cultural heritage, Muslim community in Macedonia tries to continue in the way of integrativist and non-exclusivist approach, creating alternative institutions for mass benefit, like

* Güney Doğu Avrupa Üniversitesi(SEE University), Tetovë/ MAKEDONYA.

** Tetova Üniversitesi (State University of Tetova) /MAKEDONYA.

cultural, humanitarian, scientific foundations that are a different voice in a period of post-transitional society with high percentage of unemployment, moral crisis, intra-family turbulencies etc. In a time when some circles (especially *elitist* ones) express anti-Ottoman feelings, *demos* that still live in accordance with traditional *modus vivendi*, percept the foundations as very important tools that distribute not only material, but also spiritual and cultural support (public lectures, books, scholarships, courses etc.).

This paper offers an analytical approach for understanding the socio-cultural role of some foundations (Dauti Foundation, Renova Foundation, Dituria Foundation) and humanitarian and cultural organizations (el Hilal, Merhamet and Ensar) in Republic of Macedonia. It is supposed to derive perceptions on the mission and vision of those institutions, their traditional benevolent spirit and impact in everyday life of citizens.

2. The *Waqf* (Islamic foundation): Social activism and philanthropy as a mission

The Arabic word *waqf* (pl. *awqaf*), in the form *vakëf* or *vakuf* in Albanian, means retention, fulcrum, confinement, imprisonment, detention. The deepest meaning of this notion implies non-perishable property, the confinement of a certain property to humanitarian purposes and forbiddance of its usage for any other purpose (Kahf, 1). *Waqf* implies so the exclusion of a property from circulation, in order that its income be used for humanitarian and charity purposes (Sherif, 2007: 10). According to Sejid Sabik, the *waqf* in Islamic legislation implies the detention of the basis and the facilitation of the achievement of fruits; in other words, the detention of a property and the distribution of its profits in the path of Allah (Sabik, 2007: 386). The *waqf* implies a benefit that an individual (*waqeeef*) voluntarily allocates from his property by donating it in the name of God with the purpose that its income and other effects serve to the people. The *waqf* property cannot be sold, inherited, donated or altered in any manner.

The idea of *waqf* is as old as humanity itself. It has an ancient past as an institution of social policy. According to some, the institution of *waqf* is encountered with the Hitites first. An inscription dating from the time of king Hatusilis (1290-1280 B.C.) tells about a person who has made an act of charity (Sherif, 2007: 8). *Waqf* is one of the important tools used by the social state. *Waqfs* are universal, global institutions. In many world states today, from USA to Europe, these institutions carry various social functions. (Güngör, 2012)

In the Islamic worldview, according to *fakihs* (Islamic lawyers), the first *waqf* ever was the sacred building of Ka'bah in Mecca since the Qur'an itself (Al-Imran, 96) states that it is the first home, the first temple dedicated to the worship of God. Considered from the judicial perspective, the ownership of a *waqf* is positioned as distinguished from the founder of that *waqf*. Some jurists assert that Allah is the owner of that *waqf*.

According to the Islamic view, a *waqf* is an institution legitimized by God, considered as a way to get closer to Him and to earn His reward. It is narrated by Abu Hurayra that Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "When a person dies, his deeds cease while only three things of his deeds go on: continuous charity, knowledge that is benefitted from and a devout child who prays for him". The Prophet himself and his companions have left mosques, lands, wells, gardens and animals as *waqf* (Sabik, 386-7).

This institution has always provided public benefits, in education, healthcare, water provision, opening of roads, on voluntary basis by the non-public sector. It has generally been considered

as a religious and humanitarian disposition while also having a socio-economic and cultural role (Islahi, 2003:iii). The *waqf* constitutes the joint between human psychology and economy and social life (Güngör, 2012).

Waqfs, closely connected to the religious spirit, can be categorized according to the purpose, duties, function, character etc. A *waqf* might belong to successors or to a family, might be one of charity, humanitarian and profitable, temporary, movable or immovable, regular or irregular, evidenced, might belong to rulers or might be independent, partial etc. (Sherif, 2007: 28-41).

It might be said that *waqfs* are symbols of love for humanity, of solidarity and sharing in order to be alive after death. They are humanly acts in the name of God's mercy, tools for reducing the social antagonism between the rich and the poor, between different social classes (Sherif, 2007:11-15).

3. Ottoman heritage and *awqaf* in Republic of Macedonia

Ottoman heritage and culture are an inseparable part of the Balkans cultural mosaic in general, the later being an inexhaustible multicultural treasury. The cultural rise with Islamic colours in Macedonia started somewhere in the late XIV-th century with the Ottoman flow. Sacral and profane buildings like mosques, *masjids*, *imarats*, *madrasas*, dervish lodges, inns, caravanserai, residences, bridges etc. were built in various cities like Skopje, Tetova, Manastir, Strumica, Struga etc. (Jahja, 2012: 56)

The *waqf* as institution under the Balkans sky is directly connected to the coming of Ottoman Turks and their territorial enhancement throughout the peninsula. *Waqf* has a crucial role in the daily life of the Ottoman Empire, in the overbuilding of cultural, educational, religious and spiritual, social, economic life. Ottoman *waqfs* were the motor power factor of development in various spheres of life as education, healthcare, social security, urbanization, communication etc. The Balkans' people who have been under the Ottoman rule for 500 years, have been influenced by this state in the social-cultural spectrum, in their traditions, habits, daily life, language, folklore, literature, political, economic and commercial views (Balkan Günlüğü-3).

Based on postulates that "everything created is temporary and only God is eternal. Whoever loves Him loves every creature", that "the best of men is the most helpful to the people and the best property is that spent in the path of God," the Ottomans created a civilization line that remains alive and influential after some hundreds of years, a segment that has influenced in the creation of the *civilization of awqaf* syntagm. The Ottoman gave this worldview to the Balkans as well as other geographic areas within which the *waqf* has been the basis for peace and social justice. (Balkan Günlüğü-1, 2012).

The Ottoman concept about the state was based on the "Devlet-i Ebed Müddet" (the enduring state) syntagma, a view that has given this feature to the *waqfs*. The rulers of the state have made everything possible for the services of a *waqf* to go on forever, to remain alive after their death through philanthropic acts. It was a constant phenomenon for the rich and trader Muslims to donate money or immovable properties to the good of cultural and economic development of the environment in which they lived.

Through centuries the fate of *waqf* has been closely tied to the development of places or political structures in which they have found life with rises and falls. The period of foundation and

rise has been followed by that of decline and indifference to continue with a new one: that of resurrection and prosperity. (Çizakça, 1998: 44). The *waqf* in Balkan is a by-product of the Islamic-Ottoman worldview, a heritage of Ottoman culture and civilization that at the time was a civilizing power. The first *waqfs* under this sky were founded in the XV-th or XV-XVI-th century and played a positive role in the process of Ottoman power's strengthening, enhancement and stabilization (Sherif, 7). Since then to the fall of this major state, the *waqf* has been an institution with impressing social activity and which was ruined by the post-Ottoman Serbian-Yugoslavian system for the purpose of weakening the Islamic factor.

During the Ottoman period, the *waqf* in Macedonia has passed through three historical phases. The first from the beginning to the end of the XV-th century; the second from the end of XV-th century to the middle of XVIII-th century and the last one from this century to the end of Ottoman rule when the *waqf* saw a drastic fall. According to Prof. F. Karčić, during the transformation of property relationships in the Yugoslavian society, this being a necessary condition for passing to the market economy, in the period after World War Two, the question of reprivatization, of the return of confiscated property. Surely, among these owners, religious communities, deprived of their property inherited through centuries, hold a special place (Karčić, 1991:267-272).

It can be easily said that from the Ottoman period, a symbolic part of the *waqf* has remained today. To say it more clearly, from a number of buildings like mosques, *madrassa*, inns, bridges, dervish lodges, *imarat*, *zawiya* and many other movable and immovable properties left as *waqf* by various people, only a small part is in functioning state while the remaining part has been altered by political authorities or has been destroyed by time. (Bislimi, 2006: 60). According to a researcher, only 10% of the Ottoman objects are present today (Ibrahimgil, 2008). The most well-known *vakeefs* in Macedonia are Sungur Beg son of Abdullah, Is'haq Beg son of Yigit Pasha, Isa Beg son of Is'hak Beg, Kebir Mehmed Chalabi, Sinadudin Yusuf Chalabi, Is'hak Chalabi etc. Charity buildings have been mostly in Skopje, Manastir, Ohrid, Tetova, Strumica etc. Evliya Chalabi notes that Skopje had a castle, 120 mosques and *masjids*, 2150 shops, a clocktower, nine *imarat*s, 20 dervish lodges, one *bezistan*, many *madrassas* and seven hospitality houses. (from Chalabi, Hamzaoğlu, 2010: 281)



Photo 1. Altered *waqf* property: The Hamam of Daut Pasha turned into an art gallery (Skopje)

Since the departure of the Ottomans from these lands, the Muslim peoples have remained “orphans” of environments that have always tried to finish with the remaining Turks (that is, Muslims), sometimes by attacking their property, sometimes their honor and sometimes by attempting to eliminate them even physically. On the other hand, Muslims have tried by all means to protect their authentic presence, their religious, cultural and national values, sacrificing everything to this end. *Awqaf* as an element of Islamic worldview, have shrunk exceedingly during these hundred years to today. The different systems and regimes have taken *waqf* property by force. They have destroyed, nationalized it, have made it a state property etc. They have reasoned their confiscations in the name of people, of agrarian reforms. In this manner some properties were put to the service of the state, some were distributed to public enterprises and some were given to physical persons who have altered them or made of them objects of economic transactions.



Photo 2. The Cultural Center (Tetovë) build on the spot of the old mosque and the foundation stone of Philharmony on the spot of Ibn Pajko mosque

The mothering institution of *waqf* properties today is Islamic Religious Community (BFI). Earlier during the communist era, the very demand for the return of *waqf* was considered an illegal act, since according to the communist logic, property that was taken by law has been serving to the people so no discussion at all was accepted in this direction. After the fall of communism, a more liberal spirit appeared and IRC has even started the judicial-formal process for the return of these islamic properties, a process advancing by the pace of snails and against the law for denationalization (1998, 2000), that also is merciless on the *waqf*. This law states that properties of common interest are not to be given back. They shall be compensated in cases determined by law (Bislimi, 2007:95, 96). Worthy mentioning are also the double criterions that the state uses in returning the property of religious communities. The Macedonian Orthodox Church is privileged over other communities. This also happens with the returning of nationalized properties. The Orthodox Church of Macedonia has long ago left the matter behind, while IRC has been given back only 15% (Halili, 2012:31).



Photo 3. The Ottoman clocktower in Manastir with a cross on top of it

4. Contemporary *awqaf* in the period of independent Macedonia: Foundations and charity organizations

In the Republic of Macedonia the *waqf* has physically undergone serious injuries while the spirit of Islamic solidarity has remained alive to this day. This is confirmed by the great number of foundations of humanitarian-cultural, charity organizations that act to the favor of human beings in general and of marginalized Muslims in particular. Today many societies function among us that offer religious, social, educative, urban services etc. This has a great weight when we consider the fact that the time we live in maybe has much civilization but people serving to people are rare.

Awqaf today are known under various names, as charitable trusts, foundations or non-profitable organizations with philanthropic, charity, educational, religious purposes and other activities that serve to the public interest, to the common good or to community. As part of the civil society they are also close to non-governmental organizations as implying organizations as a whole, societies and voluntary civil social institutions that constitute the basis of a functioning society, a multitude of institutional spaces, actors and forms that differ in their scale of formality, independence and power.

Table: Cronological and quantitative map of non-profitable organizations in the Republic of Macedonia

Year	Total	Sport	Culture	Professional	Voluntary	Other
1954	1004	27,6 %	10,3 %	3,7 %	55,6 %	2,2 %
1962	1138	28,1 %	11,4 %	7,3 %	41,0 %	12,3 %
1971	1535	30,9%	8,4 %	6,6 %	45,3 %	8,8 %
1980	3077	39,9 %	9,1 %	9,2 %	23,7 %	17,8 %
1990	4203	41,3 %	11,1 %	11,8 %	14,6 %	21,1 %
1998	6526	43,6 %	13,1 %	10,4 %	5,9	26,8 %
2001	3433					
2003	5769	35,6 %	10,4 %	6,7 %	1,6%	45,9 %
2009	10.700	27,6 %	4,5 %	8,1 %	-	59,8 %

(Sources: UNDP, 1999; MЦMC, 2003; Стојанова 2010:18)

The idea of *waqf* is present in our lands through the concept of various humanitarian and cultural societies, through many foundations. However, one thing is to be stressed: that a *waqf* differs from a foundation in the way that the direction of a foundation has the right to sell foundations's property, while endurance is stronger with *waqfs* (Kahf, 4). However, we hold the opinion that there is a certain organic and unbreakable affinity between *waqf* and institutions called today as foundations and cultural-humanitarian organizations. Both of them have purposes of solidarity, cohesion, interaction among people. In this aspect, it can be distinguished between the classical and modern *waqf*. To the first category we might include the Islamic Religious Community as a legitimate inheritor of *waqf* properties remaining from the Ottoman period. IRC achieves its purposes through teaching and cultivating values, educative and scientific-cultural institutions, through any religious, cultural, scientific and socio-economic activity for the advancement of population.

Our target subjects in this study will be the second category: foundations and non-governmental organizations of traditional spirit, namely some of them like Dituria, Renova, Dauti foundations and el-Hilal, Merhamet and Ensar cultural and humanitarian organizations. It can be easily said that foundations are focused more in educational, cultural and scientific activity, without excluding humanitarianism while the seconds' basic activity is helping the poor, the orphans, excluded social categories etc.

We'll start our elaboration with Dituria Foundation¹, which has a more educational spirit among foundations through scholarships, regular weekly discussions, scientific publications, the six-monthly scientific journal, international conferences etc. Its initiative activity was the encouragement of students – the professional scientific staff of the future – from some Balkan states to study abroad through assistance. Since 2006 this society started its *de jure* activity as well with its headquarter in Gostivar. The purpose of this foundation is expressed through the sentence: "Investment in knowledge and students is investment for eternity".

The foundation aims to build a research and scientific institute and to open a university in the near future. The directing board of the foundation has been inspired by the idea of Sultan Fatih Mehmed who used to finance the ministry of education almost doubly more than the other ministries. To *wazir's* question as why this investment needed when only 5% of students are successful, the Sultan replied: "It is worthy spending +95% of the budget for the sake of those 5% who become successful".

Dituria Foundation every year finances 60 university students of various departments, 15 of master studies and 5 of doctorate studies, most of them studying abroad. The foundation also has the department of publications. Within 5 years 10 books by authors and 12 translations have been published. Weekly discussions have been continuing for seven years. The foundation publishes a bilingual (English – Albanian) magazine of scientific thought, named *Dituria* and another one for the youth under the same name. Activities include courses on foreign languages and mathematics. In 2011 the Dituria Foundation organized also the first international 5-days conference "Contemporary Trends in Philosophical Thought". Participants to the conference were well-known names, university professors from different countries. For the second consecutive year, this institution organizes also a competition for high school students in spelling, monologue, figurative arts and music. Beside the cultural dimension, Dituria also helps the poor and the children of war martyrs of 2001. Dituria Foundation cooperates with a number of universities in and abroad, with non-governmental organizations etc. (Musai, 2011).

1 Founder of Dituria Foundation is the philanthropist from Gostivar Husniriza Kukuli, who is working in the Slovak Republic (www.dituria.org.mk).



Photo 4. From the international conference of philosophy organized by Dituria Foundation, Mavrovë (2011).

Differently from the above-mentioned foundation, Renova Foundation is a branch of activity of the company of construction materials Renova (Tetova). The idea behind it goes back to the year 1992, while it was realized in 2005 and has the mission of developing the consciousness of the youth and the level of high education which would enable essential change to the social, cultural and spiritual situation of citizens and the catching of contemporary trends. The affirmation of positive values, moral orientation, realization of true educational, cultural, recreative, sportive projects, improvement of women's status, avoidance of bad habits of the time through social activism based on religious values and Prophetic tradition are only some of the objectives of this institution. Renova has the motto that "People's lord is that who mostly serves the people". Actually this foundation distributes scholarships to 160 students. Besides it organizes campings, cooperates with international organizations (like el-Buhara from Malaysia). As humanitarian charity it offers monthly financial assistance to a number of societies in social and sanitarian danger, gives donations for the (re)construction of various buildings, supports institutions of education and healthcare, sponsors cultural and artistic manifestations, organizes sportive competitions for the retired people, supports the publication of texts and books, career projects (in cooperation with SEE University).

An activity similar to a *waqf* is also carried by Dauti Foundation, founded in 2011 by Dauti Commerce company. It aims at advancing the authentic social values, at lifting the level of social responsibility, protecting the society from deviant phenomenon, supporting public lectures, trainings, seminars, workshops and debates with students, supporting the publication of various books and magazines, rewarding the best education workers and students, helping schools with tools and other activities connected to the educational process. Dauti Foundation does not forget the poor as well. For this, they have foreseen help in food, in construction materials, medicinal assistance and other forms of help for endangered social cases. Besides, Dauti Foundation also aims at training staff of companies, organizing round tables with businessmen, seminars, discussions, business forums etc.

The second category of our analysis includes cultural-humanitarian organizations. The most well-known Islamic charity society in RM is Humanitarian and Cultural Organization el-Hilal (1991), founded by voluntary activists whose mission was the softening of transition's conse-

quences, the idea of humanity based on the religious-national traditions that says that “man always needs man”. This organization deems itself as a honoured successor of charity and cultural societies that have acted in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, like Merhamet, Shefqat and Hidayet (Ahmeti, 2012:19). El-Hilal has had a great activity for two decades, helping refugees in the Yugoslavian crisis (Bosnia '92-'95, Kosova 1999), helping the poor, orphans and students, distributing food during Ramadan, giving scholarships to students and helping them with monthly tickets, bags and school equipment), founding sacrifices, organizing blood donation etc. This organization does not forget activities in the sphere of culture, science and education, organizes scientific conferences, tribunes, round tables etc. el-Hilal cooperates with various national societies like MCMS, Soros Macedonia and international ones, like IGMG (Germany), IHH, Muslim Aid, SEE-ERA, European Muslim Union, CEI, CRS etc. It also communicates with political circles, as it was the case in 2009 with candidates for president, with those for head of municipalities, always aiming the public good.



Photo 5, 6. From the activities of humanitarian organizations in RM

One of the important entities that conduct activity close to the concept of *waqf* is also Cultural and Humanitarian Organization “Merhamet”. It was founded in 1997 as if by a feeling about the humanitarian catastrophes that happened to the people of Kosova in 1999 and to the people of Macedonia in 2001. Merhamet’s philosophy and idea is based on the principle of Islamic help to the needy. As an organization with six sectors (publication, information, humanitarian help, education, development and women’s department) it has branches in Skopje, Tetova, Kumanova, Struga, Gostivar, Dibër, Kërçovë and Prishtina. Only during the 2001 crisis Merhamet has offered help to 12.000 families affected by the war. This society also gives assistance to students in and abroad, distributes books (over 54.000 pieces) to schools, students and libraries, organizes courses, quizzes, etc.

The cultural and humanitarian society Ensar (Skopje), founded in 2002, has adopted as its mission the protection of spiritual and material values and culture, helping the poor, orphans and students in need, cultivating moral values. Ensar, that has strong ties with Turkey, organizes conferences, meetings, discussions and manages two dormitories for students, one for boys and one for girls. Ensar is particularly active in eastern Macedonia, where the Turkish-Islamic culture is very weakened and needs cultural and humanitarian “injections” as tools of national and religious identity consolidation. Among other things, this organization also attributes importance to reliving the concept of the *esnaf* at Skopje bazaar, based on the tradition of cooperation, affinity and education on the line of the *esnaf* who has consideration for the environment and clients.

Societies and foundations acting in our country play a very important role in reducing social anomalies, in supporting groups in need, in developing the cultural life, in preserving the traditional and national spiritual values, in cultivating the generations. In short they constitute an important segment that helps the community in its own alternative ways, generating social cohesion and functionality, organic solidarity, interaction between social layers, affirming knowledge and science in interconnection with authentic values, creating a different psychology with the people, more positive for life and society.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

We can come to the conclusion that the *waqf* culture in Macedonia has been transformed into that of foundations and societies that by essence and mission carry an activity close to the Ottoman concept of *waqf*. *Waqfs* as an important brick of Islamic and Balkans culture, are part of a history and worldview that held as epicenter the humanitarian sense, charity and social support of the poor individual and society in general. The Ottomans created an inexhaustible source of development for culture, education, economy, whose tracks we still encounter today. In Balkans we find the *waqf* in its classical form as well as in the contemporary version: foundations and cultural-humanitarian organizations which, encouraged by the Ottoman-Islamic nucleus, have a positive effect in softening the cataclysmic situations in the country. They are active in charity, social assistance, feeding, financial assistance for home construction, in education and culture, various events like artistic exhibitions², promotions, tribunes, conferences, youth meetings, publications (books, magazines, booklets, CD, web sites) and in many other spheres as well. Their role is very desirable in a society with ¼ unemployment, with high vulnerability, with a population that faces crucial financial problems (Pajaziti, 2010:35).

We suggest that the many foundations and societies in Republic of Macedonia must:

- cooperate more intensively among themselves and with international organizations.
- specialize in different spheres, not to double their activity but each one to have its own priorities.
- advertise their activities more in order to lift the curb of charities and the trust that donations go to the right destination.

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