

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CONFLICT: LESSONS FROM THE KOSOVO CRISIS

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Abstract

Ethnic identity and conflict often inter-married in countries where diversities on such grounds were seen as a threat. Conflicts in the post cold war period attained a new dimension. The Balkan region has been one of the most conflict prone regions in the world where conflict arising from ethnic difference was not uncommon. Kosovo, former province of Serbia is a case in point. The roots of Serbian and Albanian communities' conflict regarding Kosovo dated back since the medieval period after the conquest of Kosovo by Serbs. The primary cause may not be ethnicity, rather it is political but once conflict happen ethnic identity and history will play pivotal role to manipulate and galvanize support for each parties cause. This article try to assess the interplay between ethnic identity and conflict resulting the rise of dangerous ethno-nationalism in Yugoslavia and contributing repressive violent action against its majority Albanian province, Kosovo and its eventual declaration of unilateral independence.

Keywords: Kosovo, ethnic identity, conflict, ethno-nationalism

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War has profound impacts in the nature and processes of conflicts. The one's dominant inter-state conflicts in that period give way to the recurrent intra-state ethnic conflicts as a dominant trend in the post cold war period. One of the key flash points of inter-ethnic conflict is the Balkan region, the ethnic mosaic of Europe. Although ethnic conflict is not a new phenomenon in the Balkan, it was muted or frozen in the cold war partly because of ideology and perhaps charismatic leadership (of Tito). The death of Tito and the subsequent disintegration of socialism make those old frozen problems to quickly resurface particularly in Yugoslavia.

The institutional capacity of the former Yugoslavia was very weak. So it resorted to force to settle dissidents and have strong central control. In light of such challenges the multi ethnic Yugoslavia faced increasing ethnic

cleavage and polarization along ethnic lines that exacerbated its demise.

The main theme of this paper is to show how ethnic identities shapes and influences the Kosovo Crisis. Kosovo is considered by Serbs as their spiritual and cultural centre, even they call it as their own ‘Jerusalem.’ Albanians too considered it as the cradle of their national culture. When we see the history of the region, the earliest known inhabitants of Kosovo were called *Illyrians* by both Greeks and Romans.¹² Albanians are descended from the *Illyrian* tribe, which settled the area around 1200 BC. By the end of the 12th century they were conquered by the Serbian leader Stephen Nemanja.¹³ Life under the Serbs was so harsh that the Albanians were subject to heavy taxes and many left Kosovo. At the famous battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389 the Serbs and their allies were defeated by the Ottoman Turks and later became part of the Ottoman Empire. Most Albanians then converted to Islam, and were resettled again in Kosovo getting their lost land. Later Serbia became under complete control of the Ottomans and subjected to servitude. In 1878 the Congress of Berlin declared Serbia a state after a war between Russia and Turkey followed by the expulsion of thousands of Albanians to Kosovo.¹⁴

After the first Balkan war (1912) Serbia placed Kosovo under its military rule. In 1913, following the second Balkan war, the Great powers forced Albania to give Kosovo to Serbia in the London conference.¹⁵ Consequently any Albanian rebellion was dealt by force including expulsion, massacre and looting by Serbs. Colonization Commission was setup to restore a Serb balance in the area. Many historians and politicians of Serbia suggested forced expulsion of Kosovo Albanians. One of such Chauvinistic historian was Vaso Cubrilovic, in 1937 presented a memorandum of the Serbian cultural club called the *Expulsion of the Albanians*. He wrote that:

*The Albanians should be completely expelled from the Kingdom through the use of propaganda; taking away their rights, land and jobs; and destroying their culture. If none of this worked, armed terror tactics, riots, and the burning of villages would force the rest out. He warned that if the Albanian problem was not dealt with speedily, Serbia would pay a weighty price in the future.*¹⁶

After Tito came to power there were relative freedoms to Kosovar-

¹² Jansen, G. Richard. ‘Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, An Abbreviated History’, Colorado State University, April 1999, (updated June 5, 1999 and November 12, 2002)

¹³ Rezun, Miron. *Europe's Nightmare: The Struggle for Kosovo*. Praeger, Westport, CT, 2001,

27.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 25

¹⁵ Kosovo was made part of Yugoslavia as confirmed in the Versailles Conference of 1919.

¹⁶ Rezun, 2001, 29

Albanians especially after the removal of Aleksander Rankovic, the head of state Secret police, in 1966 that used repressive policies of *Serbianization* against the ethnic Albanians. The Kosovars continued to press the government to gain a republican status and even for independence. As a result the 1974 constitution made Kosovo a republic in all but name, giving it the closest to republic status under the Yugoslav republic of Serbia. Therefore, Kosovo had its own constitution, government, courts and national bank and an equal voice with in the collective Federal Presidency.¹⁷ The abolishing of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989 by Milosevic precipitated a crisis which hastened Yugoslav's collapse and ultimately invited NATO's air strike in 1999.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

Understanding concepts related to ethnicity and nationalism will help us to know the nature of ethnic conflicts well. These elements are the most important identifying factors for human beings especially in time of crisis.

Ethnicity: It is the state of being ethnic or belonging to a certain ethnic group according to Kellas.¹⁸ An ethnic group is defined as “a group of people who are generally recognized by themselves and/or the other as a distinct group, with such recognition based on social or cultural characteristics.¹⁹ Ethnicity as such may refer an ethnic affiliation derived from a shared cultural ties and historical experiences.

Nationalism: Ethnicity is highly linked to nationalism since the latter is based on real or assumed ethnic ties.²⁰ However, nationalism has broader meaning and may involve different groups in a state beyond particular identity. In this sense nationalism has politico-ideological dimensions.

Ethnic nationalism: It happens when ethnic identity is manipulated to promote nationalism. Here the source of identification is not political institutions rather it is culture. Thus, it will threaten the existence of the state especially in multi ethnic state where minority rights will be tramped by the dominant ethnic group. Particularly in a state where its institutional structures are weak, nationalism is likely to be based on ethnic distinctions.

In this regard Brown argued that the rise of ethnic nationalism in one

¹⁷ Bellamy, Alex J., “Human Wrongs in Kosovo: 1974-99” in Ken Booth's (ed.) *The Kosovo Tragedy, the Human Right Dimension*, 2001, 106.

¹⁸ Kellas Cited in Angeliki Sotiropoulou, ‘The role of ethnicity in ethnic conflict, the case of

Yugoslavia’ (Undated) http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/26506/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/bba173d5-10ab-4577-8d49-60d8256e778d/en/PN04.02.pdf

¹⁹ Cornell, 1998 cited in Angeliki Sotiropoulou's article.

²⁰ Ibid.

group will be seen as threatening by others and will lead to the development of similar sentiments elsewhere. This will sharpened distinctions between groups, make it more likely that minority groups will be persecuted and more likely that minority groups will demand states of their own.²¹

Most of the time ethnic nationalism manifested at the level of collectivity. This particular collective cultural identity is named by Smith as the *ethnie*, or ethnic community. *Ethnie* is a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared memories and cultural elements; a link with a historic territory or homeland and a measure of solidarity.²² Therefore, we can deduce that ethnic identity is a sense of belonging to the *ethnie*.

In light of the above key concepts, this paper will try to figure out how ethnicity, culture and historical factors are primarily manipulated for political purposes that contributed to the rise of dangerous ethno nationalism in Yugoslavia that result in repressive violent action against its majority Albanian province, Kosovo. In such conflicts ethnic identity plays pivotal role which can easily draw the attention of the people in the belief of common ancestry. This in turn arouses the passion and nationalistic feelings of the group as an opportunity for political elites to retain and consolidate their power and follow other claims like territory and economic objectives. This is especially so in time of rapid deterioration of the legitimacy of government because of political changes that governments cannot easily cop it in case of authoritarian regimes.

Thus, such leaders to distract the attentions of the people in retaining control of their power appeal to common ethnicity in terms of common cultural identity in order to bring social cohesion. Ethnic nationalism, as a result, develops a sense of ‘we’ and ‘others’ which hardened their respective stance towards one another.

CAUSES OF THE KOSOVO CRISIS

The perception of conflict between Serbia and Albanian communities regarding Kosovo dated back since the medieval period after Kosovo was conquered by Serbs. Many factors can be seen as a cause for the conflict like ancient hatred, domination, manipulated nationalism, etc. The primary cause may not be ethnicity, rather it is political but once conflict happen ethnic identity and history will play pivotal role to manipulate and galvanize support for their cause. Of course the Albanians were subject to Serbian repression since they incorporated to Yugoslavia. They wanted their own independent republic or merger with Albania. But this demand is not

²¹ Brown, Michael, ‘Ethnicity & Violence’ in Guibernau and John Rex (eds.) *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, 1997, 85.

²² Smith cited in Brown, Michael E., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, 28-29.

acceptable by Serbs as they claimed it is as ‘Old Serbia’ which was their historic cultural and spiritual centre. The Kosovo crisis was exacerbated apart from historical problems, by the death of Tito, the subsequent student movement, the deterioration of the economy, Milosevic’s nationalism, and negligence of the international community.

As already mentioned earlier Kosovo had given all privileges Yugoslav republics enjoys except republican status by the 1974 constitution. This has been seen as a protection from Serbian hegemonic ambition. So Kosovo became a *de facto* republic. The constitution which left Serbia largely undefined, allow Kosovo... a say in Serbian affairs but ensured that Serbia had no say in the affairs of its former provinces.²³ Obviously such provisions promoted grievance among Serbians that waits time to burst till Milosevic rose to power.

Tito wanted to create a Yugoslavia where there was no ethnic tension, where all were equal, where all were “Yugoslavs”. To this effect he wanted people to forget their national and ethnic history.²⁴ Also he allowed Albanians to settle in Kosovo and did not return the expelled Serb colonists but resettle them in Vojvodina and created an autonomous republic of Kosovo.²⁵ Largely, it can be said, his charismatic leadership contributed to the relative stability of Yugoslavia.

Following his death things started upside-down partly because there is no charismatic leader to take his position. In 1981, a year after his death, student demonstration at Pristina university demanding better living conditions at campus began. It, however, quickly grow throughout the province. Soon after, workers and citizens joined demanding Kosovo to be a republic. The demonstrations were put down through harsh police measures.²⁶

Indeed the Serbians aggrieved by the 1974 constitution have got a right opportunity following Tito’s death to target that constitution. And result in a significant resurgence of Serbian nationalism.²⁷ For instance, in 1986, 206 Belgrade writers, economists, historians, philosophers, and linguistics drafted the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences Memorandum as a critique of the Yugoslav system:

They felt that Serbia had been weakened by the 1974 constitution (the one that had given Kosovo near republican status) and that Serbs

²³ Griffiths, Stephen I. Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict: Threats to European Security
SIPRI Research Report, 5, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993,41.

²⁴ Rezun, 2001, 2

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 34.

²⁷ Griffiths, Stephen I. Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict: Threats to European Security
SIPRI Research Report, 5, Oxford University Press, New York 1993.

*were victims of physical, political, legal and cultural genocide in Kosovo. They felt that the hundreds of thousands of Serbs who had left Kosovo had done so because of this genocide.*²⁸

Hence gradually the hands of nationalists strengthened and the tense situation in Kosovo led to the rise of Milosevic to power, who embraced nationalism by abandoning communism. Measures taken by Milosevic include the removal of political rights, Serbianization of Kosovo by supporting mass movements of Kosovo Serbs. His regime acted to excluded Albanians from education, banned the official use of Albanian language, severely restricted the use of Albanian symbols and attempted to redress the demographic imbalance between the Serbs and Albanians.²⁹

To this effect the Serbian parliament, on 11 January 1995, passed the Decree for colonization of Kosovo of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.³⁰ So for those Serbs wishing to move to Kosovo the state offered loans to erect houses and buy apartments and offered plots of land free of charge. But it is clear that the worsening economic and political situation in Kosovo make very few Serbs to go to there. As a result forced colonialism became the alternative. Several thousand Serb refugees from the Krajna region of Croatia began to arrive in Kosovo in August 1994.³¹

But the most catalytic factor for the conflict can be attributed to the abolition of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, contrary to the quest for self determination claimed by Albanians. For the first time since 1946 Serbia assumed full administrative and executive power over Kosovo.³² In response Albanian members of the Kosovo government resigned in May 1990 to protest Serbia's interference. On July they met and voted for self determination but immediately the Kosovo parliament is abolished and its leaders fled to Macedonia where they declared Kosovo's independence.³³

The cumulative effect of economic deprivation or economic apartheid, education apartheid, political and other measures contributed to the further deterioration and radicalizations of the relations between the two conflicting parties.

Why autonomy or republican status denied to the Kosovo Albanians? Long years of repression since they became part of Yugoslavia forced the Albanians to aspire independence. Their quest for republican status was turned down as it was considered to be a challenge to Serbian territorial integrity.

²⁸ Rezun, 2001, 34

²⁹ Bellami in Booth (Ed.) 2001, 114.

³⁰ Ibid, 115

³¹ Rezun, 2001, 42

³² On 28 September, 1990, a new constitution definitely abolished the previous territorial autonomy of Kosovo, which fully incorporated into Serbia.

³³ Rezun, 2001, 37

Caplan reasonably argued that Kosovo might very well have been a republic as it has distinct ethnic groups. Population with clear borders though might be contested. However, the architects of the Yugoslav federal system had reasoned in 1943 that the status of Republic should be reserved for nations (*narodi*) as opposed to nationalities (*narodnosti*) the former having their principal homeland inside Yugoslavia and the latter outside Yugoslavia. The Kosovo Albanians were thus a nationality because they presumably had their home land in Albania.³⁴ So their demand for independence was rejected on the ground that self-determination was a right of republics and nations that built the Yugoslav federal state and not that of autonomous provinces and nationalities.

Politicization of Ethnic Identity for Elite Manipulation

Here comes the role of identity/ethnicity which exploited for political purpose. After he lost wars with Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia- Herzegovina which he himself started, Milosevic's legitimacy was dwindling and opposition at different corners flare up. The economic condition of the population worsened. Having looked at his position crumbling, he find another 'scapegoat' to remain in power. So he turned to Kosovo, since it is Serbia's province and felt that the international community had no business there and hence raise the specter of nationalism.

History is the most emotive factor to unite the group in time of adversaries and it has a special place in the Balkan. Milosevic was smart in invoking the 600 years old tradition of Kosovo to arouse Serbian people to rally behind him in placing the Kosovo Albanians in virtual apartheid. As mentioned in Smith's *ethnie* historical memories and myths constitute a crucial element of ethnicity. Such memories and myths supposed to unify groups with bonds of loyalty in order for social cohesion. History according to Booth is often painted in the darkest colours, but it is also a resource for rational hope.³⁵ So the myth of the battle of Kosovo remained part of Serbs memory transmitted through generations. Serbian-nationalism pictured Serbs as victims of history;

*The sweep of Serb national history from the middle ages until the present day broadly encompasses a long, seemingly cyclical tale of freedom, betrayal, enslavement or exile, patient servitude and finally a struggle of liberation. In the end, their chroniclers and poets teach only unity among Serbs can prevail over the outsiders.*³⁶

³⁴ Caplan, Richard, 'International Diplomacy & the Crisis in Kosovo'. International Affairs, Vol.74, No.4, 1998.

³⁵ Booth (ed), 21

³⁶ Rezun, 2001, 86

Such narratives create a sense of ‘we’ and ‘outsiders’. Accordingly the Kosovar Albanians are identified as ‘outsiders’ occupying Serb’s ‘homeland’. So, nationalist leaders targeted them as a way out to their political and economic folly. Albanians are always blamed for any misfortunes of Serbians, as a people not belonging to Serbia. Since Albanians are non-Slav and predominantly Muslims, they became an easy prey to Serb-nationalism given the historical hatred. As Serbs are Slavic people and dominantly Orthodox Christian they easily use this common culture against Albanians and dehumanizing them what ever their innocence. We understood from experience that cultural and religious nationalism is the most dangerous as shown between the Croats and Serbs, and Serbs over Bosnia.³⁷ This is because religious and cultural identities are less mutable especially in time of conflicts where its savagery will not easily be forgotten.

Therefore the regime justified ethnic cleansing against Kosovo Albanians and make Kosovo’s territory Serbianized. This policy is largely associated with the political idea of creating homogenous Serbian state by forcefully expelling, assimilating, or even by persecution and murder. That is ‘pathological homogenization’ as a means of state building is used. It refers to the methods state builders have used to define the state as a normative order and cumulative identification through targeting those designed as outsiders (in this case Albanians) for discriminatory and often violent treatment.³⁸

Clearly ethnic Albanians are distinct culturally and that since that identity is difficult to change, assimilate or forcefully convert to the main stream Serbian culture, the most likely measure is expulsion or extermination. And hence ethnic cleansing pursued, by giving symbolic attachment to Kosovo as their existence is threatened because of the existence of what they call it aliens ethnic groups, i.e. Albanians. On the other hand, Albanians had also developed strong symbolic attachments with the land as they claimed historical rights derived from the ancient *Illyrians* who populated the Balkans before the settlement of the south Slavs.³⁹

Reactions of Kosovar Albanians

As Albanians in Kosovo are considered outsiders and subject to different harsh treatment at the hands of Serbians that resulted in their rights tramped, the people kept poor and illiterate because of economic, political and educational apartheid. Hence Albanians by and large had no choice but

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Rae, Heather, *State identities and homogenization of peoples*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

³⁹ Angeliki Sotiropoulos, ‘the role of ethnicity in ethnic conflict: the case of Yugoslavia.’ University of Bath. See foot note no.7

to fight back.⁴⁰ So Albanians see bleak future in the absence of autonomy and self-determination. Lake and Rothchild argue that ethnic conflicts result from the collective fear of the future (often lived through the shared memories of the past) by groups that feel unprotected by the state.⁴¹ Thus, Albanians rather than getting protection faced persecution by the state.

The development of Serb nationalism as such reinvigorates Albanian nationalism at the same time. Kosovars as a minority in Serbia fears extinction as their survival is questionable including physical safety and security in the face of Serbian hegemony and repression. Ethnic apartheid in Kosovo exacerbated ethnic mistrust and heightened the insecurity of the Kosovars.⁴² Such insecurity increased ethnic Albanian solidarity and deepening the mutual hatred. In such adversarial situation individuals will sacrifice for their groups cause that further escalated the conflict.

The Kosovars used the same logic as Serbians, of ancient hatreds, a sense of historic victimization and exploit those myths for group solidification. Walling in his article, ‘the History & Politics of Ethnic Cleansing’ rightly indicated that:

*Ethnicities made fearful by repressive state measures may struggle more ardently for statehood. Statehood is idealized to the degree that an ethnic group without a state is viewed as a politically incomplete and vulnerable because it lacks the protective power that the state provides.*⁴³

Asymmetry of power is the striking features of ethnic conflicts between the government and the rebellion. As a result the militarily weak groups will has strong incentives to conduct guerilla campaigns and launch ‘terrorist’ attacks against soft, high value targets, like cities, towns, villages, in an attempt to force powerful adversaries in to acquiescence.⁴⁴

In response to harsh measures Kosovars began non-violent protest. Ibrahim Rugova, the late president of Kosovo, founded the Democratic League of Kosovo (DLK) in 1989. He countered the policy of concerted repression with the Gandhian non-violent resistance, set up parallel government for the Kosovar Albanians during the years of Serbian rule in the 1990s.⁴⁵ Because its autonomy was officially revoked and subject to Serbian administration, parallel informal economic, political and cultural structures

⁴⁰ Rezun, 2001; Booth (ed.), 2001

⁴¹ Lake and Rothchild cited in Ken Booth’s (ed.), *The Kosovo Tragedy: the Human Right Dimensions*, 2001, 57.

⁴² See Carrie Booth Walling in Ken Booth (ed.) ‘The Kosovo Tragedy, the Human Right Dimension’, 2001, 60.

⁴³ Ibid, 59.

⁴⁴ Brown in Guibernau & Rex (eds), 1997, 92.

⁴⁵ Rezun, 2001, 78

were formed to offset some of the problems.

By deliberately avoiding violence he calculated that he would avoid providing the Serb authorities in to open conflict and that he would gradually gain the support of the international community for Kosovo's independence.⁴⁶ Indeed the non-violent tactic of resistance earned him great support from the international community. Even Milosevic tolerated his pacifism precisely because it was kept the Albanians quite since at the time Milosevic was trapped by Croatian and Bosnian war so it's not surprising for that tolerance. But after the war Milosevic turn to Kosovo as another scapegoat for his domestic problems.⁴⁷ Following Milosevic's turn to Kosovo, the non-violent movement became ineffective. The major blow comes with the Dayton Accord of 1995 which made no mention of their predicament.⁴⁸ The international community has always made clear that it would not support an independent Kosovo because it would not support secession and a redrawing of international borders which might awaken latent or historical claims elsewhere in the region.⁴⁹ Therefore the inability of non-violence to yield result compounded with the non consideration of their problem in the Dayton Accord and the failure of the international community to give effective support to the Kosovar Albanians in their struggle for self-determination led to increasing number of Albanians to support the militant separatist Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

The radicals hand is strengthened and the moderates ignored, even targeted by the radicals. Hence, Rugova was seen as lenient and lost credibility. So they demand nothing short of independence. As a result the non-violent movement gave way to violent means. This led to the brutal reprisals by the Serbian government and the conflict further escalated. Ethnic polarization and radicalization increased as violence increases. Since power is asymmetric and Serbia's military was the most powerful, hundreds of thousands of Albanians were forced to flee and thousands murdered, persecuted and raped.

Till the Dayton Accord the international community had been little interest to the Kosovo issue partly because of the gap between the inviolability of borders enshrined in the UN charter and the principle of self-determination.⁵⁰ The two sides locked in to a spiraling ethnic violence and reprisal.

The brutality and the ensuing ethnic cleansing forced the

⁴⁶ Richard Caplan, International diplomacy and the crisis in Kosovo, International Affairs, vol. 74, No. 4, 1998.

⁴⁷ Rezun, 2001

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See Article 2(7) of the UN Charter.

international community, particularly the Western powers to intervene, and asked Serbia to stop the actions taking against the Kosovars indiscriminately. To address the problem peace talks was held at Rambouillet, near Paris, on February 1999.

The Romabouillet Accord for peace and self government in Kosovo contains various articles.

It includes democratically elected government in Kosovo that would allow self government, but not actual independence for at least three years before a vote was to be cast. It demands end to force and withdrawal of Serbian forces, return of refugees, release of all prisoners, etc. Once these provisions were undertaken a new constitution for Kosovo would allow for Yugoslavia to control territorial integrity, the market, defense, foreign policy, custom, federal taxation and federal elections. The proposed police force was to be supervised and monitored by the organization for Security & Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Implementation Force, which was to be given unrestricted movement and access and was to monitor and inspect all law enforcement activities. It was also to supervise elections. In addition NATO was to establish a force to support the Kosovo Force (KFOR) to ensure compliance. The force would stay in Kosovo for three years leading to a referendum after which Kosovo would decide its own future.⁵¹

The last provisions were not accepted by the Serbs as interference in the domestic affairs and violation of sovereignty, so they could not allow OSCE and NATO to come in Kosovo.⁵² The Kosovars signed the Accord while Serbia refused to sign because of the above reason. Western powers gave ultimatum for Serbia to sign otherwise will face bombardment by NATO. Serbia failed to sign the accord and was heavily bombed causing enormous material and human costs that forced her to accept the Accord. The fear of Serbia was if she accepts the Accord Kosovo will go after sometimes with a referendum.

THE POST 1999 WAR PERIOD AND KOSOVO'S FUTURE

Following the end of the war, although by law still part of Serbia, Kosovo has separate administration and was a *de facto* independent state under international supervision.⁵³ Kosovars want complete independence. Moderate solutions seem unacceptable. Today all political groupings in Kosovo agree that a simple return to the 1974 autonomy is unacceptable

⁵¹ Rezun, 2001, 51-52

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 78

since in their view the two republic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of 1997 is a construction fundamentally different from Tito's six-republic SFRY.⁵⁴

Added to here is also that Montenegro one of the two only remaining republics of Yugoslavia was declared independence on June 2006 peacefully through referendum from Serbia. The Kosovars has reasons to claim independence. Montenegro and Serbia culturally and ethnically has same Slavic roots and their relations were peaceful. Albanians on the other hand can reason that they are ethnically and culturally different vis-à-vis Serbia and their relation is one of the worst mutual hatred.

Even after several years since the end of the 1999 war virulent hatred is alive today as it was at the beginning of the war. The blood feud and retaliations by the hate-filled Albanians is pervasive. For instance, the KLA want to derive out all the Serbs that they remained in Kosovo after the war no matter their innocence.

*The trauma of the war and the subsequent deep rooted mutual hatred is not easy to forget. For instance the city of Mitrovica has been symbol of ethnic hatred. The French peacekeepers have kept the city divided much like the city of Berlin at the height of cold war. Albanians live in the South and Serbs in the North divided by a bridge manned on a full time basis by peacekeepers. At night each side plays loud patriotic songs trying to drown out the other.*⁵⁵

Such hatreds, thus, pose a serious obstacle to bring peace in the post war Kosovo. Many Serbs left Kosovo following the end of the war fearing reprisals and of course many revenge killings on both sides reported. For instance in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, only elderly Serbs remain. They are generally housebound, frightened to leave lest they be attacked.⁵⁶

Given the above factors it seems that condition for independence is ripe and many believe separation as the best alternative to end a century old problem.

The minority Serbs, however, indicated that they will never accept an independent Kosovo that seem a great challenge. Of course the UN proposal for independence give special protection for Serb minorities in Kosovo to have large autonomy including direct link with the mainland Serbia in business matters and other social linkages. Serbia's influence in Serb dominated regions of Kosovo is high and Serbian parallel systems in all areas are operating. Although it is not entirely negative the tendency to operate in the shadows is what makes the Serbian parallel system a serious

⁵⁴ Troebst, Stefan' Conflict in Kosovo, Failure of Prevention?', An Analytical Documentation, 1992-1998

⁵⁵ Rezun, 2001, 82.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

challenge to United Nations Missions in Kosovo (UNMIC).⁵⁷

UNMIC under Res. 1244 is in charge of interim administration, even did not state for independence of Kosovo rather allow Serbian leadership to argue for the inclusion of Kosovo in Serbia.⁵⁸ Some advocated division of Kosovo into two.

*For instance Nebojsa Covic, a member of Milosevic regime and after his fall the Serbian vice-prime Minister, proposed that Kosovo should be divided into two territorial entities, 'Albanian and Serbian'. He argued that this would avoid a total separation of Kosovo from Serbia, and balance 'Serbian historical right' and Albanian 'ethnic' rights of the region.*⁵⁹

The UN proposal for the future status assigned to Ahtesaari, former Finnish president, indicating independence as the clear option to settle the problem;

*On March 26, 2007 Ahtisaari distributed to the UN Security Council his final package of proposals for Kosovo, which included a clear recommendation that Kosovo should become independent, subject to a period of international supervision. Immediately after the proposals become public, the United States and Germany (in its capacity as EU Presidency) issued strong statements of support. The EU's Parliament has also declared its full support to Ahtisaari's plan. Russia, however, has called for new rounds of negotiations.*⁶⁰

Some Europeans and Russians are skeptical, believing it would trigger a war in Macedonia or Bosnia. Serbia rejects any independence for Kosovo, while Pristina welcomes the proposal. The main sufferers may never dream again to be part of Serbia in whatever arrangement, remembering their traumas of centuries.

Finally, Kosovo unilaterally declare independence on February 2008 and today gained recognition by nearly 100 states of the world including powerful states like the USA and several EU countries. However, its independence is vehemently rejected by Serbia and its allies primarily Russia. As expected many Serbs in Kosovo also rejected its separation and rule by the dominant Albanians. They recognize only Serbian authority and are still not under direct control by Pristina.

Belgrade also attempted to challenge Kosovo's independence at the International Court of Justice. The court, however, decided in July 2010 that

⁵⁷ Hoxhaj, Euer 'The politics of conflict regulation in Kosovo'. 2005, Centre for the Study of Global Governance.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 38

⁶⁰ See UN: independence is future for Kosovo, by Vesna Peric Zimonjic in Belgrade, and Peter Popham, Published: 27 March 2007

the declaration of independence did not constitute a violation of international law.⁶¹

It seems that Serbia's government is attempting to accept and work with the existing reality in Kosovo. They started a dialogue in 2011 under European Union facilitation. Yet no agreement is reached regarding the status of Kosovo, Serb dominated areas of northern Kosovo (largely loyal to Belgrade), periodic violence among the two communities arising from the fervor of nationalism and mutual suspicion.

CONCLUSION

Post-communist Yugoslavia and the Balkan as a whole plunged into negative nationalism created by ideological vacuum. The regime of Yugoslavia unable to manage economic, political and ethnic matters finds one another scapegoats to distract the troubles of its population into a means of prolonging the government's tenure. After losing several republics, the regime turns to Kosovo appealing for historical claims over the region. Such historical appeal wisely exploited by Milosevic in time where his legitimacy wane and succeeded to retain his popularity by aggressively defending the minority Serbs right in Kosovo.

Hardin (1995) rightly observed that in the disintegrated post communist Yugoslavia it was not the past that dictated to the present but the present that manipulated the past.⁶² Ethnicity is a soft target along with history and myth which emotionally outburst the respective groups to respond to elite manipulation. Here the Albanians and Serbs have developed competing and conflicting histories and interpretations of specific events. As a result polarization along ethnic faultiness intensified leaving no room for moderate compromise. They put their demand in absolute terms. Fear, hatred and insecurity derived from ethnic mistrust, denial of identity and consideration of 'outsider' or 'foreign body' in their own home land further deteriorated the situation and radicalizes Kosovar Albanians.

The setbacks for inter ethnic interactions in Kosovo largely to be blamed on Serbian authorities who adopted forced Serbianization and apartheid like attitude towards the majority Albanian population. Rather than inciting ethnic hatred to cover their political folly the authorities should have been worked in creating civic identity and civic nationalism to maintain the semblance of the nation.

The more the political elites of Serbia became nationalist, the more the targeted Albanians to become radicalized. Ethnic tension is not the

⁶¹ Perritt, Jr., Henry H. *The Road to Independence for Kosovo*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2010.

⁶² Hardin cited in Katrina Limeno Poul "The Politics of Ethnic Identity in the Balkans in a Post Communist Power Vacuum", Sep. 2004.

demand of the people to procure some benefit; rather it is used by political elites as an instrument to further their interest through mobilizing large population. Because of the pressure and burden of culture the various groups identified themselves with their own ethnic identity and excluding the rest. And hence solidified a sense of 'we' and 'others/outside' so they demonize their enemies/ 'others' who did not share the same identity.

The Kosovo war gives big lesson to the world no matter its controversy. It directed the significance of intervention to avert major humanitarian catastrophes by irresponsible government on its citizens under the guise of domestic matter. Nationalism, though, need not necessarily be unpacific, in Yugoslavia and the Balkan in general has bloody history.

The future status of Kosovo need to be determined based on the aspiration of the people's of Kosovo for self determination given the historic experience of Serbs hegemony and oppression. Again minority rights with in Kosovo must be protected by instituting democratic governance and institutions in maintaining ethnic diversity rather than ethnic transfer or territorial partition. If the issue is not solved on the people's demand the problem will be transferred to future generation resulting recurrent deadly conflicts that continued to sow the seeds of revenge. It is only, through the will of the people and democratic administration that the dark history of the region could come to an end.

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