

THE ORIGINS OF ETHNIC CLEANSING IN THE BALKANS: THE UNTOLD STORY

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The ongoing drama in the Balkans has made me deeply frustrated as a human being. It is not a mere question of my heart being split between my allegiance to Canada (as my adopted country) versus my feelings for my relatives, friends, and ancient homeland afflicted with so many disasters. It is far more than that.

I abhor atrocities of any and all kinds. I must note how from my earliest childhood I heard time and again how terribly my people suffered under Turkish tyranny for centuries, and then under the Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian invaders in World War I. Furthermore, I myself underwent the experience of World War II in which Yugoslavia was dismembered, with her inhabitants exposed to terrible losses, oppression, and terror. However, unknown to the Western World, a reign of terror continued for many years after the war's end via the purges conducted in many districts in Serbia of monarchists known as Četniks, in which many families perished - among many other evil crimes hitherto not widely known over here that are to be noted in this essay before too long.

As a boy I was very proud of how, after the end of the First World War, the Serbian people were greatly praised by others: not only for their bravery, but also for their generosity and kindness even to their fallen enemies. This praise was given both on an individual and collective level (especially considering the terms imposed on their foes). Doctor Archibald Reiss, a Swiss war correspondent of the time, expressed his great admiration for the Serbs by asking in his will that his heart be buried on the battlefield of Kajmakčalan (altitude of 2,520 metres) where in September 1918 he had witnessed the Serbian army break through the Salonika front (near Thessalonika, Greece) with Allied help. He made this gesture as a token of deepest homage to the gallantry and valour of the Serb soldiers he had been with throughout their four years of war, sharing in their sufferings as well as in their ultimate victory.

I therefore find it exceedingly hard to believe the stories now being circulated and repeated endlessly in the Western media of the worst cruelty and evil being perpetrated by Serbs in Kosovo upon their Albanian brethren. Is it possible that a nation, proud of its mediæval glory, culture, and centuries-long struggle for freedom from various oppressors, can fall so low as to disgrace her entire past, disavow her ancestral fame and honour, turn her soldiers into the lowest barbarians, and expose her whole people to universal condemnation leading to the catastrophic ruin currently being inflicted?

Very likely there is some truth in these stories, but surely not to such an extreme extent.

In all great conflicts throughout history, whether they are intertribal skirmishes, civil clashes, or international wars, the truth is the first casualty. I used the word 'casualty' in terms of the truth being distorted, ignored, and filtered to suit various interests. There is no nation that can claim not to have had dark periods in its history, with atrocities, senseless massacres and enforced famines. Africa is a prime example with wars in Nigeria (Biafra), the Congo, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, and more recently in Rwanda and Burundi. Even now the cycle continues with the Sudanese, Kurds, Chiapas natives, Tibetans, Chechens, Armenians, east Timorese and others. It has been the same throughout history; except there often were no war reporters to document, or historians to research and preserve the facts about those horrors for posterity.

It is extremely hard for me to accept the discriminatory generalization of various measures and actions undertaken by the present authorities in Kosovo as presented by the American media and repeatedly rebroadcast throughout the rest of the member nations of NATO. I'm particularly appalled by the ease with which journalists, Members of Parliament, and even governing statesmen (and women) use provocative and

incendiary language. Do the events in Kosovo amount to “genocide,” or is the use of such terms rhetorical excess? Are we really dealing with a new “Holocaust,” or mere clichés that readily fit in with such defamatory and hate-inciting idioms? I don’t think more needs to be said about the utter inappropriateness of using such terms without substantiation nor the dreadful harm that can be caused by intentionally misusing such words.

Let us consider the accusations being levelled against the Serbian nation of “ethnic cleansing.” For a long time, I’ve been waiting for the Yugoslav authorities, or someone else, to explain the severe ethnical imbalance in the population of Kosovo and Metohia present at the outset of these past months’ unfortunate events. Surely, one ought to wonder how has it come to be that the Serbian presence in its own homeland has dwindled to where they are now an almost-negligible minority (10% of the total inhabitants)?! If this “cradle of Serbian civilization”, their “Jerusalem” was (and is) so dear to Serb hearts, how have they come to the point of losing almost all claim to it?!? In answer thereto, let me attempt a brief historical essay.

Origins of the Albanian and Serbian peoples

The famous American historians Will and Ariel Durant, in Books 3 [*Cæsar and Christ*], 4 [*The Age of Faith*], 5 [*The Renaissance*], and 6 [*The Reformation*] of their 11-volume *Story of Civilization*, write here and there about what was then the region of Illyria and later Albania exclusively in geographical, not ethnographical, terms. When asked about their genealogies, Albanians claim to be descended from the ancient Celts who settled on the eastern Adriatic coast in the region the Romans named Illyria. In the early nineteenth (19th.) century, Napoleon Bonaparte accepted this theory, which was then adopted by “enlightened” Western society as a counterbalance to the Pan-Slavic movement embraced by the southern Slavs and Russia. Here is what the Durants write:

“North of the Po and east of the Adige [rivers] lay Venetia. The district took its name from the Veneti, early immigrants from Illyria...” [*Cæsar and Christ*, p.454] The next reference is to an emperor who reigned from 249-251 AD.: “Decius, an Illyrian of wealth and culture whose devotion to Rome well deserved a name so honourable in ancient history.” [*Cæsar and Christ*, p.628] And again: “Domitius Aurelianus, Aurelian, successor to Claudius II, the emperor of the Oriental (Roman) Monarchy, was the son of an Illyrian peasant”, who reigned 270-275 AD. [*Cæsar and Christ*, p.638]

Now, that’s not very much to go by; so how can the present Albanians claim to be related to the Celts of long ago? Can any connections be proved on the basis of culture, religion, or language? Can they find any etymological connections to either the modern or the old Welsh, Breton, British, or Basque peoples, all of whom strongly claim Celtic ancestry? Or is it more along the lines of the Italians claiming to be descended from the Romans, the Hungarians from the Huns, the Swiss from the Helvetii, and the Spaniards from the Phœnicians, Ostrogoths, or Visigoths? Unfortunately, history is quite reticent in this regard. There seems also to have been an Asiatic Albania (somewhere in what now could well be the Kurdish region shared by Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria); however, it is highly unlikely to have had any relation to modern Albania other than the name.

The Durants are equally vague about the Albanians during the early history of the Balkans in the Middle Ages:

“At an alien distance, the Balkans are a mountainous mess of political instability and intrigue, of picturesque subtlety and commercial craft, of wars, assassinations, and pogroms.

But to the native Bulgar, Rumanian, Hungarian, or Yugoslav his nation is the product of a thousand years' struggle to win independence from encompassing empires, to maintain a unique and colourful culture, to express the national character unhindered in architecture, dress, poetry, music, and song." [*The Age of Faith*, p.657.]

To be fair, there is no mention either of the first Serbian states under Časlav, Mutimir and Trpimir in the eighth century, nor of Mikhailo or Bodin in the ninth and tenth centuries - particularly Mikhailo, who was acknowledged as King of Serbia by Pope Gregory VII in 1077 (as I learned in high school in Belgrade).

Durant next writes that "in 1159 the Zsupan (Chieftain, pronounced "Zhupan" - the zh being as in "pleasure") Stephen Nemanya brought the various Serb clans and districts under one rule, and in effect founded the Serb kingdom, which his dynasty governed for 200 years.... During these centuries, Serbian art, Byzantine in origin, achieved a style and excellence of its own. In the monastery church of St. Panteleimon at Nerez (c.1164) the murals reveal a dramatic realism unusual in Byzantine painting, and anticipate by a century some methods of treatment once thought original to Duccio and Giotto. Amid these and other Serbian murals of the twelfth or thirteenth century appear royal portraits individualized beyond any known Byzantine precedent. Mediæval Serbia was moving toward a high civilization when heresy and persecution destroyed the national unity that might have withstood the Turkish advance." [*The Age of Faith*, pp.657-8]

The tale about Serbia is continued in Durants' 6th volume (*The Reformation*):

"...the fourteenth century had been for the Balkans a peak in their history. In Wallachia (present-day Romania), Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, and Albania hardy Slavs cut the forests, mined and tilled the earth, pastured flocks, and eagerly bred their own replacements....The great man of Serbia in this century was Stephen Dušan (pronounced "Dushan")....He trained a large army, led it with masterly generalship, conquered Bosnia, Albania, Acarnania, Aetolia, Macedonia, Thessaly. Transferring his capital from Belgrade to Skoplje (Skopje), he convened there a parliament of nobles, and bade it to unify and codify the laws of his diverse states; the resultant *Zabornik Cara Dušana*, or *The Law book of Tsar Dušan* (1349), revealed a level of legal development and civilized usage not far below that of Western Europe. Financed and perhaps stimulated by this political exaltation, Serbian art in the fourteenth century rivalled the contemporary flourish in Constantinople and the Morea (today's Peloponnesus in Greece); magnificent churches were built, and their mosaics were freer and livelier than those normally allowed by the more conservative ecclesiasticism of the Greek capital." [*The Reformation*, pp.178-9]

Tsar Dušan died in 1355 while preparing a campaign against the Ottoman Turks. "His empire was too heterogeneous to be held together except by a man of alert intelligence and disciplined energy." Thus, the Serbian Empire fell apart, helping to open the door for Turkish invasions which culminated in the Serb defeat at the crucial battle of Kosovo on June 28, 1389.

There is no further mention of Albania as a nation or its rulers (except one note about the Bulgarian king John Asen II {1228-41}, who absorbed Albania into his kingdom) until 1464, when in a crusade against the Turks prepared by Pope Pius II, he [the Pope] expected at Ragusa (present-day Dubrovnik) to "join Skanderbeg of Bosnia and Matthias Corvinus of Hungary....." [*The Renaissance*, pp.390-1]

This Skanderbeg is regarded as an Albanian national hero, attributed with successfully fighting off the Turks in the second half of the 15th century. Durant says of him: "His real name was George of Castriota, and he

was probably of modest Slavonian lineage; but legends precious to his people endow him with royal Epirote blood and an adventurous youth.” Skanderbeg (shortened by time from Iskander Bey - “Alexander the Prince” - the name given him by the Turkish sultan Murad II) died in 1468, “and Albania became a province of Turkey.” [*The Reformation*, pp.186-7]

Serbian Resistance to Turkish Rule

Apparently the Albanians were content to submit to the Turks and Islam after the defeat at Kosovo; the Serbs, on the other hand, although Turkish vassals as well, nevertheless continued to exist as a state for another seventy years (1389-1459). They were able to keep their cultural identity, helped by their traditions, their nationalist Serbian Orthodox Church, and their past embodied in their uniquely epic poetry which surprised Europe and enchanted Goethe.

At first, Ottoman rule was relatively tolerable, providing religious freedom to the inhabitants on condition that they pay taxes in tribute as well as through forced labour (analogous to the French “*corvée*”), in addition to cooperating with the local rulers. As long as the central authority was strong and efficient, keeping local overlords in check, all was fine; however, these middlemen didn’t hesitate to take advantage of any weakness at the top to impose additional burdens as well as enforcing laws with excessive strictness (when it suited them), particularly in cases involving dispossession of property. In time, as these extra demands became too much for the people to bear, widespread protests and rebellions arose, resulting in exceptionally brutal reprisals. [Starting after the death of the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in 1566, the Turkish Empire began its decline into corruption and decadence, interrupted only between 1658-1683 when three strong Grand Viziers of the Kuprili family governed in the Sultans’ names.]

The heaviest of all the burdens imposed on the “*giaours*” was the “blood tribute” aimed at the gradual but total subjugation of the conquered states: this consisted of taking young Christian boys between seven (7) and ten (10) years of age from their families and then subjecting them to rigorous training designed to purge all memories of their parents, siblings, neighbours and initial upbringing, and inculcate a fanatical loyalty to the Sultan and the Islamic religion. The vast majority of these children ended up in the Turkish Army’s elite “*Yaničari*” corps (known to the West as “*Janissaries*”). This plan was primarily intended to both replenish and strengthen the Turkish army while at the same time weakening the vassal peoples’ resistance and inclination to revolt. In this way, the Turks perpetrated an apparently mild but cunningly hidden and very efficient form of genocide!

The Decline of the Ottoman Empire, Serb insurrections, and results thereof

The failure in 1683 of the Grand Vizier Kara Mustapha (the third member of the Kuprili dynasty helping to govern the Ottoman empire - he was then strangled) to capture Vienna (the second time the Turks had tried to do so - the first time being 1529) and the total rout of the Turkish forces there, followed by further defeats at Harkany, Gran, and Mohacs (avenging the battle there of 1526 that subjugated the Hungarians to the Turkish yoke in the first place), resulted in the Turks retreating deep into the Serbian territory they had occupied for so long. The victorious Austrians entered Buda in 1685 and Belgrade in 1688. Leopold I, the Holy Roman and Austrian Emperor of the time, proclaimed “that now the road was open to Constantinople, and the time and opportunity had come to drive the Turks from Europe.” [Will and Ariel Durant, “*The Age of Louis XIV*”, p.425]

However, Louis XIV, *Le Roi Soleil* (The Sun King), came to the Ottomans’ rescue. “The war of Bourbon against Habsburg seemed to the ‘Most Christian King’ more important than the conflict between Christianity

and Islam.” He resumed his war against Austria, whose “advance against the Turks ceased; Turkish assault was renewed.” Meanwhile, “the new Sultan, Suleiman II, called to the vizierate another Kuprili, Mustafa, brother of Ahmed.” [Ahmed Kuprili had governed the Ottoman Empire from 1661-1676. It is worth mentioning that both Albanians and Serbs claim the Kuprili family as their own.] “Mustafa pacified the Christians in European Turkey with extended freedom of worship, organized a new army, and recaptured Belgrade (1690); but a year later he was killed, and the Turks were routed, at Slankamen. Sultan Mustafa II took the lead of the army in person, but was defeated at Senta (1697) by the Christians under Prince Eugene of Savoy.” [Will and Ariel Durant, “*The Age of Louis XIV*”, p.425] All the same, the renewal of hostilities between Austria and France during The War of The Spanish Succession (1700-15) led to the Austrians having to retreat, leaving the unfortunate Serb insurgents in the lurch.

In these unhappy times, the Serbs, endangered by the full fury of impending Turkish reprisals, chose to save their soldiers and their people by abandoning their homes, lands, churches, and everything else dear to them. With heavy hearts, they retreated further and further north, even to the Pannonian swamps adjacent to the Save and Danube rivers, in what has been called “The Great Serb Migration.” This tragedy is often compared to the Battle of Kosovo because of its catastrophic effect on the Serbian people.

Thus, they left their historic homeland and their hearths, for a long time trying to survive in the dense forests and high mountains of present-day Serbia. They succeeded in preserving themselves, but at a heavy price that included relinquishing the tragic battlefield of Kosovo along with everything else materially close to their souls.

The nearby Albanians - mostly Muslims - took advantage of this circumstance to move in. They crossed the mountains separating them from Kosovo, leaving their infertile land and settled into what was essentially deserted territory, staying there as the majority people for the next three centuries.

From that time onwards, the Serbs were constantly fighting on the Austrian side against the Ottomans. The Austrians welcomed those who managed to cross the Turkish frontier, gladly having them settle the largely empty but swampy, malaria-infested border zones, strategically located in a large and deep bulwark territory that eventually became known as Vojna Krajina (War Region). This area, which was still under threat from the Turks in any one of the many wars that the Turkish and Austrian Empires fought throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, became the Yugoslav equivalent of what the Ukraine was for Russia, with its people occupying an analogous position to that of the Ukrainian, Don, and Kuban Cossacks. As to the remaining Serbs scattered in “zbechs” (refugee enclaves) across the territory of the present-day Serbia, it was a long, agonizing struggle throughout the 18th century to survive the cat-and-mouse, life-or-death game against continuing Turkish attacks. When they finally couldn’t take any more, they revolted. These rebellions in 1804 occurred far and wide, involving the whole country. For nine years, the Serbs enjoyed their self-liberation under Kara George before the Turks crushed them in 1813.

The Achievement of Serbian Independence

Starting in 1815, the Serbian people renewed their quest for independence, but using subtler, more politically astute tactics instead of open rebellion. Recognizing their military weakness against the huge Turkish Army, they submitted to Ottoman sovereignty on condition of their being granted internal autonomy, with the only Turkish presence being in the form of Nizams (military garrisons) stationed in all of the main cities; this autonomy they were granted in 1830. Using further such incremental deals, they obtained ever-greater concessions until their overlords withdrew their troops from all the cities including Belgrade in 1867. The heartland of Serbia was thus finally free.

In 1874, the Serb population of Bosnia-Hercegovina rebelled, and both Serbia and Russia came to their aid, declaring war on Turkey. Two successful wars which lasted from 1874 to 1878 led to the Treaty of San Stefano, whereby Bulgaria and Serbia gained substantial tracts of land; the Western powers (England, France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary) thereupon intervened, threatening war against Serbia and Russia unless their demands were met. The San Stefano treaty was annulled and replaced by the fateful Treaty of Berlin, in which the only gain for Serbia was formal international recognition as an independent state; otherwise, most of the Serb land-acquisitions from the Turks were disallowed. Although Austria-Hungary had not had any rôle in the fighting other than to intimidate Serbia, she was awarded Bosnia-Hercegovina, which was at the time populated mainly by Serbs, as a protectorate which she subsequently annexed in 1908. As is well-known, this great injustice led to severe tensions between Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, culminating in the events that brought about World War I.

In the Balkan War of 1912, Serbia gained all of the territory comprising the present Former Yugoslav Republic (FYR) of Macedonia, as well as Kosovo; Montenegro got Metohia. However, there was no time for either of them to consolidate their holds on these regions due to the outbreak of the First World War, started by the mighty “Kaiserliche und Königliche” (Imperial and Royal) Austro-Hungarian monarchy declaring war on Serbia in 1914.

Serbia during World War I and between the wars

For more than a year, Serbia was able to hold her own against Austria-Hungary and her far superior forces, repeatedly defeating the Imperial armies. It was only after Germany sent her troops and heavy armament against the Serb army that the latter were forced to retreat in October 1915. An invasion from the south by Bulgaria (which welcomed the opportunity to stab her in the back) at that very time compelled the Serbs to withdraw over the high, snowbound Albanian mountains in the face of attacks by the hostile Albanian populace. It should be borne in mind that about one-third of the Serbian Army, already gravely weakened by starvation, typhoid and spotted fever, and gruelling marches, perished in the actual crossing; another third, having been weakened by the privations endured during the march, died of sickness on the isles of Corfu and Vid after being ferried to those islands by Allied warships.

That ordeal was permanently seared in the memories of the sorrow-stricken survivors: the ghastly stories of Serb stragglers being ambushed and killed by the inhabitants of Albania left a legacy of hatred and sadness for generations to come. This heritage, aptly summarized in the proverb “whoever doesn’t know how terrible pain can be, let him cross the mountains of Albania on foot,” remained as a grievous stumbling-block to future ethnic relationships between Albanians and Serbs when Kosovo and Metohia were reintegrated into Serbia in 1918.

In the newly-created Kingdom of Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929), good intentions managed to prevail over the desire for vengeance on the part of many Serbs. There were no persecutions of any minorities although there were many who were guilty of atrocities and crimes committed while Serbia was occupied by the Germans, Austro-Hungarians, and Bulgarians. Ethnic Germans (who were half a million strong at the time), Hungarians, Bulgars, Albanians, and even Turks (numbering about 160,000 people): all were left in peace. I don’t know of any cases of land or property expropriations affecting ethnic Albanians or any other minority at the time.

According to the Yugoslav Census of 1931 (published in 1939), the ethnic Albanian population amounted to 700,000 people, most of whom lived in the Kosovo-Metohia region. The remainder, aside from a small enclave in the Sandjak, were scattered throughout the rest of the country. There was no special status for

them or for any other of the ethnic minorities; all Yugoslavs had the same rights and responsibilities. In so far as I can remember, Kosovo-Metohia was divided into three (3) parts named the Moravska, Zetska, and Vardarska “Banovinas” (the last of which currently forms almost all of the FYR of Macedonia).

Serbia had been particularly devastated by the war. Being almost exclusively an agricultural society, there was an acute shortage of land due to the large holdings kept by the former, often foreign, nobility as well as the previous Turkish oppressors (some of whom shortly thereafter emigrated to Turkey to help resettle areas around Smyrna/Izmir just cleared of their former Greek inhabitants); these estates, mainly located in the very fertile northern plains, had been promised to the war veterans. Thus, Serbia embarked upon an ambitious programme of land reform. This programme was however effectively obstructed and delayed by the landowners, using legal loopholes and bribery when needed. Even when some of the lands were successfully expropriated by the state, it couldn't help the new settlers with anything else. These people had no tools, seed, livestock, start-up capital or credit. Thus, many of those newly-created war-veteran-farms never progressed beyond the most primitive survival stage by the time World War II engulfed Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941. [Albania meanwhile was invaded and occupied by Italy in 1939.]

World War II, the Interim Occupation, and afterwards (to the present)

After Yugoslavia's capitulation on April 21, 1941, and the Kosovo-Metohia region's occupation by Bulgarian and Italian forces, the Albanians - many of whom gladly collaborated with the Axis and served as auxiliaries (“balilas”) in the police and the army - were given a free hand in establishing a full-fledged reign of terror including the intimidation, jailing and eviction of all Serbs and Montenegrins with little or no notice. This was a full-scale campaign of ethnic cleansing, carefully hidden and covered up afterwards by the postwar government of Josip Broz Tito in the name of “Communist Brotherhood and Unity.” The larger public was never allowed to find out the truth about what happened there during 1941-5. There were no foreign reporters to photograph the wretched Christian refugees (including old, crippled and sick people, nursing mothers, and pregnant women), to chronicle their sufferings, or to record the tales of beating, torture, and starvation at the hands of the Albanians. Serbia had to take in most of those who were lucky enough to reach her, despite the severe war shortages of all goods and the great influx of other refugees who barely escaped with their lives from Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

In those years, dark and obscure beyond all measure - everyone had reason to close their consciences and memories to the evils happening - very few Albanians initially joined the Yugoslav Resistance movement, from either Albania (occupied by Italy) or Kosovo-Metohia. It was only after the tide of the war had turned and the outcome was no longer in doubt that any significant numbers of Albanian people entered the ranks of the Yugoslav and Albanian partisans and took to the mountains and forests of the area, aiming to recapture power. The Albanian partisans' numbers and strength soared after the Italian capitulation in 1943, helping Albania to be very generously treated by the West as an innocent victim of fascist aggression, and even more so by the Communists - particularly Tito - as a proletarian state of the Eastern Bloc.

During the final phases of World War II, the Soviets under Stalin conceived a very subtle strategy by which to bring all of the Balkans under their direct control. They pressed Yugoslavia to unite with Bulgaria, or at least to incorporate Albania (with Kosovo!) into their body politic as a seventh republic in addition to the other six comprising the Yugoslav Federation. It seemed that this scheme was well on the way to becoming reality although it was a closely-guarded secret known only at the highest levels. The well-known Yugoslav dissident Milovan Đilas, who from 1943 to 1954 was Tito's second-in-command, publicised the plan only after having fallen into disfavour; the exposure of the plot provided yet another pretext for sending him back to jail. [In postwar Yugoslavia, with shortages of practically everything (for two years I had not even one

pair of socks in spite of my being a notable state official), people wondered why, in spite of not receiving any foreign aid whatsoever, their state was actually helping Albania in the latter's construction of naval docks, harbours, roads and railroads as well as supplying it with Soviet-made tanks, artillery, and ammunition.]

To foil Stalin's plans, Tito instead chose a middle way: allay the Albanians' fears of reprisals by their Serb and Montenegrin victims on the one hand, while at the same time securing for Serbia her "national cradle" within her internal jurisdiction. He resisted all attempts by his subordinates to follow the examples of Czechoslovakia and Poland in expelling their ethnic German minorities. [The Czechs expelled all the "Volksdeutscher" from the former Sudetenland; the Poles reshaped their country by trading away an area on their eastern frontier claimed by the Russians in return for the right to permanently annex German Silesia as well as Pomerania (including the cities of Breslau and Stettin - they became Wroclaw and Szczecin - read as if spelled 'Vroclav' and 'Ščecin' respectively) and expel the entire German population thereof. The ethnic Albanians of Kosovo-Metohia had very strong reason to fear such a fate after all the atrocities they were guilty of in World War II.] Instead, led by his "ideology" of "communist solidarity" and the desire to practically demonstrate "proletarian largesse" in the treatment of ethnic minorities regardless of their past misdeeds, Tito pardoned all of Yugoslavia's enemies for their crimes (as the Regent Alexander did on behalf of his father King Peter I of the Kingdom of Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes in 1918) and reaffirmed equal rights for all. To prevent reprisals against the ethnic Hungarian population (fairly numerous but not assembled in compact communities) in Yugoslav territory to the north of the Danube river, he created an "Autonomous Province of Vojvodina" within Serbia's confines; similarly, for the sake of the ethnic Albanians, he gave the same status to Kosovo-Metohia. Thus, while the fertile, well-developed, and agriculturally rich Vojvodina now had to feed the entire Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, Kosovo-Metohia became a serious liability to Serbia on account of its poverty and backwardness.

It is worth noting what for fifty years could only be whispered in secret: the strong conviction that Tito was extremely suspicious of the Serbs. The very fact that Serbia was the largest, strongest, and best-developed of the Yugoslav republics; that the Serbs had managed to not only liberate themselves from the Turkish yoke but also to resist the Austro-Hungarian Empire for an extended period of time and finally to help in its downfall - resulting in freedom for other South Slav peoples; that they had been the first to reject the Tripartite Pact of March 25, 1941, and thus expose themselves to the full fury of the Nazi Germans; that during the Axis occupation, Serbia was the first to resist, temporarily free part of its territory, and then form the core of the Yugoslav partisan movement, and finally to be able to claim rightly what no other nation conquered by the Nazis and Fascists could do - the liberation of their country by themselves: all these things were enough to cause Stalin, the Cominform leaders, and consequently, Tito himself to look upon Serb nationalism as a threat to proletarian internationalism and (in Tito's case, to his) communist rule.

Unfortunately for the Serbian people, Tito became the darling of the West (and of the Serbs equally) for not giving in to Stalin; they therefore ignored his internal policies. He thus was able to openly attack the Serbian people for extreme nationalism "harmful to the common cause" and to national harmony, using every opportunity to denounce it as chauvinism and ambition for national hegemony. In order to destroy its supposed roots, he had all of his opponents within the partisan movement declared "Četnik" (monarchist) traitors; as soon as hostilities ended in Yugoslavia, broad swathes of Serbian, Montenegrin, and Bosnian territory were systematically and brutally cleansed of "Četnik bandits" along with many rural families implicated as their accomplices by his security forces, including the army. Furthermore, when he delineated the borders of the six "peoples' republics", Serbia, as the largest, most populous and liberal thereof, was forced to include two strong ethnic minorities both known for their ignominious treatment of Serbs during the Nazi Occupation: the Hungarians (Magyars) in Vojvodina and the Albanians in Kosovo-Metohia. To make matters worse, both of these territories were given full autonomy from Belgrade. They were

indisputably within Serb boundaries; however, the Serbian authority over them was severely weakened. [In contrast, all other formerly autonomous districts (from the earlier Kingdom of Yugoslavia, before World War II) - Istria, Krajina, East Slavonia, and Dalmatia (all having had self-governing privileges, and all but Istria including substantial Serb minorities) - had their autonomy totally taken away and were put under Croatian rule.] Finally, to punish Serbia for having efficiently kept much of her territory relatively free of Communist influence during the occupation, immediately after entering Belgrade in triumph in October 1944, Tito ordered the full mobilization of all Serbian men of military age and sent them virtually untrained and unarmed into the front-line of the offensive launched at that time against well-fortified German and Ustaša (Croat Nazi collaborators) positions on the “Srem” front. These raw recruits suffered terrible losses in return for virtually no territorial gain: it was like a summary execution of these youths, with the difference being that it was enemy bullets which mowed them down. The casualties were never publicized; Đilas (who was also responsible for this unnecessary massacre), in his book “The Revolutionary War,” estimated that between 18,000 and 20,000 young men lost their lives.

[The tragedy of the Bohemian village of Lidice, which the Nazis wiped off the face of the earth in retaliation for the assassination of the Deputy head of the SS [Schütz-Staffel] Reinhard Heydrich by Czech partisans, and where 5,000 Czechs were slaughtered by the Germans as part of their reprisals, is well known to the West. I however wonder how many people in the West know about the 7,000 men (including high-school boys) executed in three days of October 1941 in Kragujevac (35,000 inhabitants at the time), with another 5,000 being similarly shot two days later in Kraljevo (then a community of 19,000), in retaliation for the lives of a few German soldiers (killed by Communist partisans)? It was due to atrocities like these (and more of the same threatened by the Nazis) that the Serb population did its best to keep the Communists out of their region as much as possible.]

Early on the morning of April 6, 1941, on the Serbian Orthodox Easter Sunday of that year, the German Luftwaffe (without any declaration of war!) bombed Belgrade (as savagely as they did to Coventry, England) with 25,000 Yugoslav casualties; on April 16, 1944, Allied B-24 “Liberator” bombers, on Tito’s alleged request, repeatedly bombed Belgrade pulverising thousands of buildings into rubble which buried a large but never-recorded number of victims. That same date was again Orthodox Easter Sunday - a very strange coincidence indeed!

Furthermore, although Tito retained Belgrade as the capital of the “Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia” in a calculated move to placate Serb anger at what he had caused to happen on the Srem front, a good number of postwar measures (direct as well as secret) were enacted against the Serb population in Serbia proper. This was felt first through the forceful promotion of the Latin alphabet: all federal institutions (all of which were/are headquartered in Belgrade) as well as most of the offices of the republic governments of Serbia and Montenegro were provided only with Latin-alphabet typewriters. [Serbs and Montenegrins traditionally use the Cyrillic alphabet.] Also, every member of the Communist Party was strongly advised to use only the Latin alphabet whenever possible. Almost at the same time, in spite of official laws guaranteeing religious freedom, Orthodox Christians faced systematic discrimination by Communist officials - who were otherwise very tolerant of Islam and Roman Catholicism. What’s more, all cities of the Vojvodina that had a substantial Hungarian minority (e.g., Subotica, Novi Sad, Sombor, Senta) also had to have Hungarian names for their streets.

Harder for the Serbs to bear were the arbitrary levies against the larger and richer peasant families who were compelled to turn over unreasonably high quotas of their products at outrageously low prices. [It should be borne in mind that northern Serbia and Vojvodina have traditionally been Yugoslavia’s “bread-basket” producing the bulk of the nation’s food-staples.] Even Milovan Đilas acknowledged that these measures

amounted to legalized confiscation. Furthermore, both Serbia and Vojvodina were particularly hurt by the forcible collectivization of peasant holdings, especially intensified following the rupture of relations between Yugoslavia and the rest of the Eastern Bloc (Cominform) countries in 1948. This policy was especially targeted at the best peasants having the most fertile land, who were the most resistant to being subdued into the brute servitude of the “working proletariat” in the cities: their holdings were forcibly loaned out to coöperatives with the poor and unproductive elements therein assuming commanding positions. It is hard to describe all the harm done by such ridiculous measures, often brutally enforced, including arbitrary surtaxes and the quotas mentioned earlier requisitioned at absurdly low prices which within a short time forced the best farmers to give their land “voluntarily” either to the “Peasant Workers’ Coöperatives” or to the state itself in order to get into the lower-quota brackets and thus reduce their exposure to various forms of mistreatment and even downright persecution in their own country! Finally, many people - primarily Serbs and Montenegrins - who were favourably inclined towards Stalin and Russia for their help in the Serbian liberation (also due to Russia’s helping them earlier in World War I) were imprisoned and subjected to all sorts of degradation by their former Party “comrades.”

At any rate, in the new Yugoslavia of 1945 all ethnic minorities were given equal status with the majority Slavic population. Old grievances and wounds had to be forcibly effaced and magnanimously forgotten - let bygones be bygones! **Or was enough truly enough?** By a special decree in late 1944, kept secret throughout the period of Tito’s rule and known only at the highest levels, the Serb and Montenegrin refugees from Kosovo-Metohia were **forbidden to return to their homes!** Why? No one knew and nobody dared to ask if by chance the existence of such an order was acknowledged. In that way, the Albanians - now the majority population in Kosovo-Metohia - were further aided in gaining the upper hand in the region resulting in the direst consequences for the remaining Serb population **in their own home-country!**

So, since Tito had so frivolously given full autonomy to Kosovo-Metohia, the Albanian authorities, aided by the remoteness of the region, bad communications and public unawareness, took advantage of the autonomy to continue purging the region of the remaining ethnic Serb and Montenegrin population. First covertly, then more aggressively and violently, the Albanians in control redoubled their anti-Serb policies with the distinct goal of forcing all non-Albanians to flee in fear, leaving everything behind. Every means was used including slaughtering of Serb livestock; damaging and/or destroying Serbian crops, fruit trees and vineyards as well as other forms of attack upon Serb property including arson; mugging, maiming, and even the murdering of Serb children and other defenceless people (including the old) if caught singly or in small numbers.

All of these actions were exacerbated by Tito’s former war-comrade Fadilj Hoxha (pronounced as if written “Hodge-ah”), an Albanian, who was given overall command over much of the state machinery in Kosovo. This namesake of the extra-tyrannical Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha (the worst of Stalin’s puppets) helped aggravate matters by having the Albanian border poorly supervised, thus actually encouraging (albeit secretly) a steady flow of illegal immigrants from Albania proper, who then settled the land from which Serbs had been evicted. Meanwhile, the Serb authorities in Belgrade, muzzled by Tito, turned a blind eye to all the evil happenings there. [As said earlier, any news or rumours about what was taking place was systematically suppressed by the higher authorities (both federal and republic), with anyone who dared to report anything being summarily denounced and silenced by arrest, imprisonment, and political liquidation.] Finally, as if to add more fuel to the fire, these authorities tacitly endorsed that part of Sharia (Islamic law) authorizing polygamy (up to four wives per husband) - one more tactic used by the Albanians to boost their population.

The reader will have hopefully realized by now that throughout the period 1941-1989, the Slav (Serb and Montenegrin) population in the Kosovo-Metohia region (as well as throughout the rest of the country, as seen earlier) came to be treated as evil aggressors and interlopers usurping the place, rights, and privileges of the

supposedly native ethnic Albanian inhabitants. The Slavs in other words were there to oppress the others regardless of the centuries-long struggle against the Turkish yoke and in spite of all of Slavic traditions and history manifested through the remnants of relics, books, and other artifacts both current and old. All this was going on within their own republic and country of Serbia, in the heart of their ancient empire, against the backdrop of their ceaseless struggle to survive the most horrible persecutions and privations unleashed by their sworn enemies in the hope of one day being free on their ancestral land. Just as the dawn of freedom was shedding its light of better days to come, they - as victims of an alien ideology, inimical and unacceptable to them - were now forced to renounce their religion, disavow their rich heritage, accept that their former masters were once again to lord it over them and resign themselves to being second-class citizens in their own country! Is there any other country in the world where the people after whom it is named possess fewer rights, privileges, and opportunities than their minority brethren? As difficult as it may be to believe, such has been the case.

Thus, it is in this way that the Slavic component (Serbs and Montenegrins counted together) of the population of Kosovo-Metohia shrunk from about 44% in 1944 to 10% in 1998-9; all the more so when one realizes that Tito's anti-Serb policies remained in full effect for almost a full decade following his death in 1980. It was only in 1988, when the Serbs were about to commemorate the six-hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, that the true state of affairs was exposed when Fadilj Hoxha was overheard silencing a Serb's complaint about his daughter having been raped by Albanians with the words: "**Serbian women are good only for brothels!**" [This was on top of a fateful witnessing by the current Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević around that time of a protest by Serbs in Priština (capital town of Kosovo-Metohia) being brutally beaten back by Albanian-Kosovar police forces, when he pledged to those unlucky demonstrators, "You'll never be beaten back again!" It was these incidents, among others, which he used as his springboard for power as well as for revoking Kosovo-Metohia's autonomy, provoking the other republics in turn to think about his being a danger to them: hence the break up of Yugoslavia (instigated in part as well as blessed and generously helped by the West!) and all the attendant evils of that catastrophe, be it in Bosnia, Croatia, or elsewhere in that former country.]

These events became too much even for the Communist "Brotherhood." People suddenly got angry and the old repressed animosities revived. The Serbian authorities in Belgrade came reluctantly to their senses and under strong public pressure started to investigate. An endless story of horrifying discrimination, crime, harassment and other wrongdoings emerged. What had been previously dismissed out of hand as fabrications and "reactionary" defamation by "rabid" Serb nationalists turned out to be factually true.

It is in this light that one must judge what has been - and is - happening in Kosovo these days. As one views the columns of Albanian refugees fleeing Serb reprisals (and NATO bombs) now that Serbian rage and frustration about earlier wrongs have found an outlet, one should bear in mind that the Serbs never wanted this state of affairs to happen; particularly considering their generosity in giving the Albanian Kosovars such unrestrained authority in the Serbs' own home region! Simply put, "don't do unto others as you would have them not do unto you!"

Again, let it be made abundantly clear that I don't sanction or condone any terror, murder, harassment, or "ethnic cleansing" of any sort any more - or less - than I could ever sanction what NATO is now doing to Yugoslavia.

Let everyone judge according to his or her conscience.

[Postscript re. pronunciation: č and ć are both pronounced ‘tch’ as in “witch” (unaccented c = ‘ts’ as in “bolts”, while ċ being heavier in sound than ć); j as ‘i’ or ‘y’ in a diphthong (e.g., “boy”); ġ = soft ‘g’ as in “gym” or “gin”; ž = as in “pleasure”; and š = ‘sh’ as in “shore”.]