LOOKING BACK WITHOUT ANGER: FAVOURABLE FACTORS OF ETHNIC KOSOVAR CONFLICT REVISITED

Eduardo Infante Rejano
Social Psychology Department
UNIVERSITY OF SEVILLA

Abstract

The present work depicts and analyses macro-factors that contributed to the emergence of ethnic conflict at Kosovo province in former Yugoslavia. Geographical, historical, political, economical, sociological, anthropological, and psychosocial factors are considered in order to explain the conflicting nature of Yugoslav regions and the independent movements developed among its Balkan cultures. Kosovo’s conflict is then defined as both a religious and ethnic one but promoted by economical interests of national and international agents. Our reflections on the matter pointed out that power imbalance between primary parts, politics of autarchy, symbolic strategies around “ethnic cleansing”, sacred ideologies, and political pressures of outer countries are on the origin of this ethnic conflict. The definition of “nation” is then de-constructed to explain achievements of economical positions. Finally, the potential of a renewing war between Albanian and Serbian groups at Kosovo is also carefully thought using this theoretical analysis and content analysis of Spanish recent columns from three main newspapers of different social ideology.

Keywords: Balkan regions, cultural conflict, ethnic cleansing, conflict prediction.
A conspectus of old Yugoslavia

Yugoslavia is a region crossed by the Dinaric Alps from northeast to southeast and apart from the area flooded by the Danube River with it has little open grounds. It has got a strategic position between Occidental and Oriental that once served as homeland of many big European empires. The topography of this “European corridor” have made territory division very easy to achieved due to natural communication barriers. Yugoslav history is full of border’s conflicts between many ethnic groups and cultures: Serbs, Croats, Slovenians, Slovaks, Macedonians,…In the IX Century, Croats unified themselves followed by the Serbians. Ottoman’s domination took place between XIV until XVIII Centuries forcing Slavic groups to move to the North of the country. Motivated by the French Revolution, the most important Serbian insurrection was in 1804 which stimulate other Slavic independent movements. Yugoslavia suffered from the struggle of many other European empires of that period (Hungary, Ostrich, Turkey, and Russia). The Balkan League, promoted by the Serbians, was supported by Great Britain, France, and Russia during the next Century in order to prevent Turk incursion in Europe and Germanic pressure on the zone (First Balkan War). To compensate forces, Albania was “created” in the London’s Agreement (1910) to avoid Serbian reaching a way out to the sea. In the II Balkan War (August 1913) Bulgarians and Serbians fought against each other for Macedonian region which finally strengthen Serbian kingdom (Bucharest’s agreement of 1913) and disagreed Ostriches. Sarajevo’s attempt was the starting point of I World War (1914). Four years later, Serbians, Croats, and Slovenians officially consolidated their empires in June 1921. Nevertheless, Alejandro I named Yugoslav kingdom in 1929 after his state strike and wrote the 1931’s Constitution. In 1941, it was invaded by Italy and Germany that allowed a Nazi Croatian government independency against Serbian centralised authority. Yugoslav civil war took then place and ended in 1945 with the triumph of the federalist and communist Josip Broz Tito. Yugoslavia was integrated by 6 republics (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) together with two autonomous provinces Kosovo and Voivodina. In March 1945, first Kosovar conflict raised when Albans wished to dominate the region and dictator Tito forced a war state that lasted until 1966. In 1974, the Marshal created a Parliament and a Government for Kosovo despite the negative of the rest of Republics. The economical strength of Tito Government, situated in a weak agriculture, tourism and
immigrations, reached its worse crisis in the 80s and reactivated divergences among republics (Slovenian PIB doubled Kosovo’s one). After his death in 1980, great economical crisis collapsed the whole country and favoured Albanian nationalism. The civil war started in 1990 which ended in the recognition of Slovenian and Croatian independency in 1991. Serbian population is forced to abandon Kosovo region because of the social pressure of Alban majority (80% of population). Yugoslav military forces broke into the region causing more than 200 hundred people injured. Kosovo’s Government was dissolved. Outbreaks are frequency in Kosovo and Voivodina, at the North of Serbian Republic. Since 1974, an ultra-nationalist military group was being created by the command of Slobodan Milosevic supporting the motto “Serbia should join or will disappear”. Reports from the NATO stated that Serbian forces killed at least ten thousand of Albans from Kosovo since the beginning of the so-called “ethnic cleansing”. More than 300 dead-bodies have been recently found in collective graves. Living conditions are extremely difficult and begun even worse in winter time. The attempt of Bosnia war (1991-1992) to swept away all foreign ethnic group were finally interrupted by the NATO. After the Dayton Peace (1995) ethnic conflict renewed at Prekaz with tenths of Alban deaths (1998). Except Russia, the rest of the powerful countries refused Serbian actions. The NATO entered again in the region using air and land attacks in 1999.

**Genesis and conflict nature**

At a first glance, one can admit that Balkan ethnic conflicts emerged because of territory disputes between Slavic groups, primary Croats and Serbians. Historically, neighbour countries have always be behind internal conflicts to control results. The foreign aim was to avoid a Serbian way out to the Adriatic Sea that would end its actual solitary confinement. The conquer movements from Oriental empires – Turks, Bulgarians, Rumanians- were seen dangerous only when the invasions was greater than wished for the enemy. Therefore, former Yugoslav groups have served foreign wishes of powerful countries that took advantages of internal controversies to control the “big corridor”.
The internal war is favourable as it appears quietly, tacit, at first stage. Social tensions increase day by day because of difficult economical and living conditions. People looked out for someone or something to punish for the situation. They join efforts together in homogeneous groups according to race, culture, or common history. These associations are easy to do in an already socially separated country, especially at Kosovo where nearly 80% of population is Alban. Hates and suspicious fears increased as ethnic groups joined and began to treat each other with discrimination and offence. Therefore, interethninc differences are being used to escape from economic precarious situation of final 80s (inflation rate of 2.500% in 1989). Moreover, Kosovo represented only 8% of the GIP against 22% of Slovenians’ contribution. Traditionally, Kosovo, being the poorest region, has received money incomes from the rest of the Republics. Yugoslav union broke up because communist regimen forced rich population to open international relationships for economical purposes.

**Identifying conflict sides**

- **Main conflict characters**

**KOSOVO** [Area = 10,8 Km²; population (2003) 2,2 mill./h]: Autonomous region of Yugoslavia inside Serbian Republic. It is placed between Montenegro and Macedonia and makes frontier with Albania at the South (Sar Planina Mountains). Two out of three thirds of the population is Alban. First occupied by Illyrians, Tracius, and Romans, Kosovo was starting area of Serbian Empire in the low Middle Ages until they were defeated by Turks in the fourteen Century. The region was then given back to Serbia through the London Agreement in 1913 receiving his present name (although it was named Kosmet, fusion-word of Kosovo and Metohija, in 1945).

**ALBANIA** [Area= 28,7 Km²; Population (2003) 3,2 mill./h]: Extremely mountainous State that was once part of Bulgarian and Serbian Empires. After being submitted to the Turks, Albany gained his independence in 1913 which was lost between 1939 and 1946 because of Italian annexation. Albanian economy is based on agriculture apart from some clothing industrial activity and miner (petrol, chromo, lignite,…). Many
religious streams live together from Christians (Catholic and Orthodox) to Islamic. Its literature production is poor and young and usually deals with war, sadness, and nationalism titles. Since 1992, there is a armed group called Kosovo’s Freedom Army (UCK) placed near Tropoje frontier that argue against non-violence actions towards Serbians at Kosovo.

SERBIA [Area= 88,4 Km²; Population (2003) 9,8 mill./h]: After a wealthy period during the Middle Ages, it was forced to abandon his ‘place of birth’, Kosovo, by the Turks. Many Serbian activists have always promoted the nationalist movement using the idea of a Big Serbia in the Balkans.

- **Third parts**

NATO: His army opposed Serb’s military forces using air attacks over frontier posts without UN allowance. Although Kosovo conflict weekly started in 1981, these attacks took place from the 24th March until de 10th June 1999. His public social role had to do with humanity and logistic support to massive groups of refugees escaping from Pec, Pristina or Prizren to Albany.

**Power balance between conflict parts**

First of all, we must state that Serb’s army is more powerful and numerous than the Albans’. Kosovo is the poorest region of all and it politically depends of Belgrade capitol. International image in press show Serbians as the cruel and aggressive part being Albans from Kosovo victims of the conflict. Nevertheless, this conflicting parts change power positions according to join actions towards the encounter. Nationalist movements progressively joined Serbian Government which was supported by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Russia, and China. A possible Serb’s triumph in the event would probably weaken communist’s world position as it happened in other European Eastern countries in the 80s. On the other side, the Albans, 85% of the population at Kosovo, found international help from NATO, France, UK, USA, Italy, and Germany. Balkan’s geographical emplacement if also a important reason for nearest countries to avoid a strong consolidation of a Serbian empire. On the other
hand, they show their worries towards an Alban domination at Kosovo that would strengthen Islamism at Europe.

**Conflict emergence and domination strategies**

The idea of a Nation-State at the Balkans is a historical project proposed by many related activists. Under the name of “Yugoslavia” (literally, “Slavic form South”), the intention was to joined many ethnic groups, races, and cultures inside an abrupt geographic area with little immediate resources. The unique cohesive force between these cultures was a common past full of conflicts and warlike relationships. Internal relationships among communist regions must be cordial and communicative enough to defend autarchy policy and diminish external relationships. Social tension was increased due to economical crisis and families had serious problems to live under minimal conditions. When the crisis was on the highest point people looked for culprits and enemies. The easiest way of joining effort was counting with people from the same ethnic background which force to remove old traumas from the past. Its quite easy to found enemies when they use different language, religion, or culture which are not properly understood (ethnocentric strategy).

Serbians wanted to recover their ethnic roots and to promote once more their idea of the Great Serbia through the ethnic cleansing in an attempt to dissuade attention from real causes. They rise up political nationalist discourses to define mother country sacred as a lighthouse that guide salvation. They talked about past dates, gains, and achievements, and recognise Belgrade as capital of their country. Kosovo has little economical value with communication and transport problems and has at least 200 years of delay in modernization. So we have depicted all ingredients for an ideological domination at Kosovo that enhance ethnic discrimination among the following facts:

- **Central sacred idea:** national Serbian identity is a matter of social and cultural interest being define as the saving goal of political problems.
- **Institutional networks:** Belgrade Government, militia, Yugoslav army,…
*Worship objects and subjects:* Milosevic appear as the ethnic symbol of Serbs to place on him the idea of mother country and social identity. The region of Kosovo is described as the “cradle of Serbian culture”.

*Historical construction:* the project of Big Serbia is renewed with the historical identification of national symbolism: wing, hymn, territorial limits, traditions, idiom, commemorations,...). For instance, the 600 anniversary of Kosovo-Polie battle was celebrated on the 28th June 1989 with an enormous party that activated collective memory about the Serbian's failure: Turks ended with the first Serbian State created by the national hero Esteban Dusan in 1389. Therefore, the presence of Albans at the region is progressively perceived as dangerous and a sign of war.

Serbs are strong willing, patient, and martial. Long time ago his ethnic hegemony on the Balkans was obstructed in part because of geographical dispersion. International organizations and countries seemed to have used this strategy to any Serbian conquer using peaceful and moralist argument to stop them. But why international communities supported the formation of former Yugoslav Republic of Kosovo and Voivodina? Why did they not achieve independence in the early 90s as it happened in the rest of Republic considering their overwhelming foreign population – Albans and Hungarians, respectively? We might think that the support of a multiethnic community will help to built confusing social identities among the population to be resolved by means of cultural not political struggles. Taking into account radical positions, the coexistence among ethnic groups could be guarantee without fights if the country topography allows ethnic isolated settlements with little opportunities for communication. This multiethnic living could also be assured thanks to communist regime that is characterised by an ideology of common wealth against the tyranny of individuals often seen at capitalist countries.

Nevertheless, nationalist movements were especially intensive when certain Republics started commercial relationships with outer countries in order to mitigate economical crisis. Many citizens learnt to live a double life, a communist one in the inside, and a capitalist one, on the outside to be able to subsist with very low wages. Marshal Tito guaranteed the union of the country by getting into debt with foreign countries that were not covered by the national tourism income. The political system of the
communism was unable to develop industry in the country because it did not promote investments on labour productivity. The death of Dictator Tito was an important sign for Serbian nationalists to rise up together with the political thinking of S. Milosevic, a radical nationalist leader. Milosevic will recover on people’s mind the Great Serbia Project and he presented himself as messianic activist. His political speeches were fanatic, fundamentalist, and linked youngster and intellectual’s spirit of independence in the same way as it happened with other Slavic countries (Slovenia, Croatia,...) or Russian (Lithuania, Estonia,...). They will use ethnic discrimination and criminal violence as pressure instruments of their wishes.

The social pressure was coincident with a period of economical crisis. The people is likely to look for a external enemy to accused of so much problems. Kosovo is the poorest region, with the highest rate of unemployment, and the one that most economical help receives. Giving this situation, it is easy to find Albans, majority in the region, guilty for the crisis. The motive to support this verdict is a sense of punishment towards them because of having profaned an historical and sacred zone for the Serbs: Kosovo.

On the other hand, Serbs were feeling unsafe because of major Albans presence in the region and asked for positive discrimination actions from Belgrade’s centralised power. The danger of losing this area was foreseen if it was finally joined to Albania a fact that would keep Serbs away from a way access to the sea. The social and political contagious effect is also referred in this conflict. Since 1989, Europe has being witness of the Could War ending and latter independence process of many Eastern ethnic group and countries. Many Yugoslav Republics did the same in the early 90s being aware of its economical development since then.

Finally, indirect factors that contributed to the conflict development dealt with the suspicious delay of the international defence and aid. War is sometime commercial strategy to pay back important debt of poor countries to rich ones. More over, alter the Balkan civil war many international governments have cancelled Yugoslav economical debts. Not in vain, United Status and France are the world most important fabricants and distributors of weapons.
Bibliography

Bellamy, Alex J., Kosovo and International Society (Houndmills; New York: Palgrave, 2002)
Bilder, Richard B, “Kosovo and the ‘New Interventionism’: Promise or Peril?”, 9 Journal of Transitional Law & Policy 153 (Fall 2001)
Chandler, David, From Kosovo to Kabul: Human Rights and International Intervention (Pluto, 2002)
Gerber, Paula, “Rebuilding the Law in Kosovo”, 76(1) Law Institute Journal 72 (February 2002)
Glennon, Michael, Limits of Law, Prerogatives of Power: Intervention after Kosovo (Palgrave, 2001)
Ignatieff, Michael, Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond (Picador, 2001)
Judah, Tim, Kosovo: War and Revenge (Yale, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000)
Matheson, Michael J., “United Nations Governance of Post-Conflict Societies”, 95 American Journal of International Law 76 (2001)
Mertus, Julie, Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999)
Reisman, Michael, “Kosovo’s Antinomies”, 93 American Journal of International Law 860 (October 1999)
Ruffert, Matthias, “The Administration of Kosovo and East Timor by the International Community”, 50 The International & Comparative Law Quarterly 613 (July 2001)