

## **The Yugoslav State Security Service and Physical Violence in Socialist Kosovo**

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### **Abstract:**

As the movement toward decentralization in Yugoslavia accelerated following the Brioni Plenum of 1966, the Kosovo branch of the League of Communists sought to support its demands for an expansion of the province's autonomy and Albanian nationality rights by revealing so-called "deformations" (*deformacije*), including violence of the state security service in Kosovo province. While it formally succeeded in that effort, on a local level this strategy undermined the political legitimacy of Yugoslav Communist rule in multi-ethnic Kosovo. Using court case files and documented interrogations of security service officials by party commissions, the article first reconstructs one of the most-debated incidents of extreme state violence in Yugoslav Kosovo: the confiscation of weapons from villagers in 1955-1956. The article then explores, using archival materials of the League of Communists of Kosovo and Serbia, the ways in which the Kosovar Communist leadership debated the state security and intelligence agencies' excessive use of violence a decade later. The author argues that the leadership's aspiration to reshape the memory of the earlier phase of Yugoslav Communist rule in Kosovo through releasing selected pieces of information caused outrage locally and undermined the leadership's effort to legitimate its rule more fully, particularly as the promised lustration failed to materialize. The moralizing discourse of the leadership, as opposed to legal

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accountability, merely emphasized this failure and ultimately contributed to narratives of victimisation at the hands of the national “Other.”

**Keywords:** Kosovo, socialist Yugoslavia, state violence, nationality policy

### A pre-view into 1968

In the afternoon hours of 27 November 1968, as the Yugoslav leadership had gathered in central Bosnian Jajce to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (*Federativna Narodna Republika Jugoslavija*, FNRJ; from 1963: *Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija*, SFRJ, Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), the Belgrade office of the Ministry for Internal Affairs (*Sekretarijat unutrašnjih poslova*, SUP, in literal translation “Secretariat for Internal Affairs”) was notified of demonstrations spreading in several towns in Kosovo, including Gjilan/Gnjilane<sup>1</sup>, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Podujevë/Podujevo and Prishtinë/Priština. Chants were echoing in downtown Prishtinë/Priština demanding a “Kosovo Republic”, “Self-determination and secession”, and a “constitution”, next to cheers wishing “Long live Enver Hoxha” and “Long live Tito”. When protesters were prevented from entering the assembly building and scuffles broke out with the police (*Narodna milicija*, “the People’s Police”), the latter opened fire, wounded several young protesters and killed the 17-year-old high-school student Murat Mehmeti. In the weeks and months to come, the alleged organisers of the “hostile” protests were charged and sentenced to several years in prison and a wave of political repression led to a new peak in the number of exclusions from the ruling party, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunista Jugoslavije*, SKJ). As the official state narrative branded the protests as nationalist, and denounced them as a direct attack against the party and the state, it omitted from its reports one of the key demands the protesting youth had raised, which, in fact, was much in line with the party and the state: To implement the conclusions of the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee (*Centralni komitet*, CK) of the SKJ, also known as the Brioni Plenum and to remove all those officials from the Ministry for Internal Affairs, who had been deemed to be driven by Serbian

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<sup>1</sup> Most original sources underlying this article were authored in Serbo-Croatian, whereas most places were inhabited by an Albanian majority in the period under discussion. I therefore provide Albanian toponyms, followed by the Serbo-Croatian variant, unless the two versions correspond. Translations from Albanian and Serbo-Croatian are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

nationalism or had otherwise abused office in the years since the national liberation struggle.

### **The impact of the July 1966 Brioni Plenum**

Although its constitutional make-up was that of a federal state with six constituent republics -with Serbia disposing over the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and the at first Autonomous District, and as of 1963 Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija- socialist Yugoslavia was initially characterized by a strong central government under the control of the Communist party. In early July 1966, on the Adriatic islands of Brioni, a liberal party faction had launched an attack against and successfully deposed of the hitherto ruling centralist and conservative party wing, whose power derived from the state security apparatus, and in particular the secret service UDB (*Uprava državne bezbednosti*; UDB, in literal translation “Administration of State Security”, also referred to as secret police)<sup>2</sup>. In its aftermath, the Kosovo party branch, one of the sub-branches of the Serbian party organization on the level of the province, publicly challenged the operating procedures and national composition of the UDB in Kosovo. However, despite an extensive campaign launched by the Party to prompt citizens to report violent episodes during the past decade, only a very few SUP officials stood trial for past abuse.

Until the Brioni Plenum, it was impossible to criticise the state security, thus far praised as the “shield and sword” of the Communist party. Hence, the sudden attack against the UDB sparked a heated debate concerning early Communist rule, both among members of the Party and society more generally. Similar in mechanism and in effect to the de-Stalinisation processes in the Soviet Union and the Eastern European satellite states following Nikita Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” in 1956<sup>3</sup>,

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<sup>2</sup> The security service and the SUP were renamed in 1964 according to the “Basic Law on the Internal Affairs Services” into *Služba državne bezbednosti* (State Security Service, SDB) and *Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova* (Ministry for Internal Affairs, MUP). However, I will use the terms UDB and SUP in this essay throughout the text, as both the population and the SDB staff continued to use those acronyms (albeit in its spoken form, Udba).

<sup>3</sup> Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev’s Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Polly Jones, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London: Routledge, 2006); Roger Engelmann, *Kommunismus in der Krise: Die Entstalinisierung 1956 und die Folgen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); Jan Foitzik, *Entstalinisierungskrise in Ostmitteleuropa: 1953–1956: Vom 17. Juni bis zum ungarischen Volksaufstand; politische, militärische, soziale und nationale Dimensionen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001).

the reform effort pushed by the SKJ leadership in 1966 sprang from revelations of past wrongdoings.<sup>4</sup> It suddenly denounced as repressive and “deformed” the power structures and governance techniques on which the Communist party had so far heavily relied to secure its rule against real and perceived internal and external enemies. *Deformacije*<sup>5</sup> (“deformations”) became an umbrella term for a broad range of unlawful behaviour, misuse of authority, manipulation of law, and disproportionate use of force within the Ministry for Internal Affairs, as well as surveillance practices of the state security and intelligence agencies that were now being condemned as excessive.

Adherents of decentralisation in the Serbian and Kosovo party branches thus strongly criticized and morally condemned the past use of physical violence as well as the widespread use of control and surveillance by the secret services in Kosovo, an autonomous province of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, inhabited predominantly by the country’s biggest non-Slavic minority.<sup>6</sup> This shift in the public memory of ongoing Yugoslav rule was a particularly sensitive matter, owing to both its inherent interethnic dimension and the wide-spread violence employed to reincorporate multi-ethnic Kosovo into the new Yugoslavia in 1944–1945.<sup>7</sup> Albanians in Kosovo had been denied their request at self-determination at the end of World War II and had violently resisted the Yugoslav partisans’ takeover. While Albanians accounted for the majority population, the vast majority of the personnel of the organs of internal affairs in Kosovo were of Montenegrin and Serbian descent, and in the UDB, Montenegrins and Serbs even constituted 86.6%.<sup>8</sup> In the aftermath

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<sup>4</sup> With Jones, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 3; I understand by de-Stalinization a wider reform process, such as the liberalization of the authoritarian political culture of Stalinism, a greater emphasis on individual welfare and material well-being, a greater freedom of expression.

<sup>5</sup> The term *deformacije* carried an ideological overtone and was used to denounce alleged deviations from political theory and practise as provided for and foreseen by the SKJ.

<sup>6</sup> Recently scholars have begun exploring the state socialist security services and their relations with minority populations, cf. Joachim von Puttkammer, Stefan Sienerth, and Ulrich A. Wien, *Die Securitate in Siebenbürgen* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Kosovo is not an exception here; cf. Michael Portmann, *Die kommunistische Revolution in der Vojvodina, 1944–1952: Politik, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft, Kultur* (Vienna: Verl. der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008); Srđan Cvetković, *Između srpa i čekića. Represije u Srbiji, 1944–1953* (Belgrade: Službeni Glasnik, 2006); Zdenko Radelić, “Opposition in Croatia, 1945–1950,” *Review of Croatian History* 1, no. 1 (2005): 227–251.

<sup>8</sup> Pokrajinsko Izvršno Veće, Komisija za pripremu i sprovođenje reorganizacije u organima SDB, za internu potrebu, “Izveštaj o radu komisije na utvrđivanju deformacije i zloupotreba i o preduzetim merama na reorganizaciju u Službi državne bezbednosti u APKM”, Pristina, 1 November 1966, 19, fond: Đ 2, Centralni Komitet Savez Komunista Jugoslavije [CK SKS], 1966–68, kt. 22, Arhiv Srbije (AS), Belgrade. Earlier data are not available, but one can safely

of the 1966 Brioni Plenum, Albanian Communists in Kosovo took advantage of the new power constellation and publicly questioned the nature of *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (“brotherhood and unity”), one of the central founding narratives of socialist Yugoslavia. On the basis of the campaign to uncover “deformations”, Kosovo Communists demanded to liberalise the nationality policy toward Albanians, as well as to decentralise power structures and political rule, in favour of Kosovo province.

In this paper, based on an investigation of SKJ archival documents in Belgrade and Prishtinë/Priština, I analyse the ways in which the Communist leadership in Kosovo debated the SUP officials’ excessive use of physical violence in the context of the contested national identity of the multinational Yugoslav state and the political legitimacy of the Communist leadership. To this end, I examine the Communist leaders’ characterisation of the causes and motivating forces of the “deformations”. To better assess notions of violence, I offer a source-based interpretation of the infamous operation to confiscate weapons in 1955–1956. I explore the meaning the Communists attributed to mistreatment, reprisals, and abuse of authority, and I identify the ways in which they formulated responsibility and liability for violence in light of the nationality question and legitimacy of their rule. Given the large number and gravity of the accusations, I then look into some of the political consequences.

Further, I argue that Albanian-Yugoslav partisan leaders, such as Fadil Hoxha, Veli Deva, and Mehmet Maliki, pursued two conflicting aims in the campaign against “deformations”. On the one hand, they aspired to strengthen their own position vis-à-vis the federal and republican leaderships. To this end, they addressed state violence and abuses of authority in moral terms, seeking to lend weight to their demands for expansion of Kosovo’s autonomy. On the other hand, by reckoning with past crimes morally, they also aimed to mobilize the population in their support, presumably hoping to avoid accusations of complicity in bygone events and to broaden their power base.<sup>9</sup> On the

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assume that the national asymmetry in the 1940s and 1950s was equally, if not more, pronounced.

<sup>9</sup> Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, “Contested Memories and Moralities in Contemporary Kosovo,” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 41, no. 6 (2013): 953–970, argues that former members of illegal organizations in socialist Kosovo share a common morality that hegemonized the public Albanian discourse in the post-war context. This might be a mirror image of the strong emphasis of the Yugoslav Communists and their local representatives on Communist “morality.”

local level, this was a risky strategy, for the top-down criticism of the UDB and the release of incriminating evidence into the public realm undermined the Communist leadership's effort to legitimate its rule more generally. Both local Communists and ordinary citizens had knowledge of cases that had previously been silenced but were now officially unveiled. Much like the Soviet Communists listening to the "Secret Speech," as Polly Jones observed aptly<sup>10</sup>, citizens were dumbfounded when the CK SKJ, the subsequent Plenum of the Serbian CK, and the Kosovo Provincial Committee (*Pokrajinski komitet*, PK) in autumn 1966 declared them subject to investigation at the level of the party and the state, and thus rendered them matters of legitimate reflection and discussion.

The essay moves on two-time levels. I start with a look at the accusations raised at the Brioni Plenum against the SUP staff, the charges that triggered the campaign against "deformations". After a review of the violence that became a matter of debate, I discuss the ideological, political, and national rivalries and conflicts that surfaced. In this way, I attempt to achieve two things. First, by drawing on memoirs of the responsible actors in the Serbian and Yugoslav SUP<sup>11</sup>, interrogations of those locally responsible before party commissions, and court documents of five cases against executive staff in the District of Prizren, I intend to shed light on the causes of violence and depict the weapons confiscation in 1955-1956, thereby contributing to a historical-anthropological understanding of violence. Second, inspired by Jones's study of de-Stalinisation, I give an account of the efforts made by the Communist power-holders in Kosovo to stimulate reform a decade after the fact through a controlled release of information about the recent socialist past.<sup>12</sup> I explore the ways in which violence was publicly uncovered, explained, and narrated and describe the reactions of party members and the informed public. This analysis is based predominantly on minutes of meetings at the highest decision-making levels of the Kosovo, Serbian and Yugoslav party branches between July 1966 and summer 1968. These meetings addressed the question of how to deal with violations of civil and human rights that were committed mainly in the 1950s. I also consider complaints and testimonies that the party invited from citizens

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<sup>10</sup> Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 8-9, footnote 34.

<sup>11</sup> Vojin Lukić, *Brionski plenum - Opraćun sa Aleksandrom Rankovićem. Sećanja i saznanja* (Belgrade: Stručna Knjiga, 1990); Aleksandar Ranković, *Dnevičke zabeleške* (Belgrade: Jugoslovenska Knjiga, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed account of how information on terror under Stalin was released to the Soviet public and the reactions it triggered, cf. Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*.

and relevant communications of the Kosovo Public Prosecution Office reporting the progress of criminal procedures against suspected and accused former SUP officials. By focusing on the Communist actors' efforts to manage the discourse, this essay seeks to disentangle the national, social, and state dimensions of physical violence. I understand *nation* to refer to a process, an institutionalized form, a practical category, and a contingent and context-dependent event<sup>13</sup> that comes to center stage both when violence is occurring and when violence is a central theme in political discourse.

### The 1966 power-shift

Until the mid-1960s Yugoslavia was ruled by a strong central government and a party that exercised tight control over socio-political organisations. Accordingly, the autonomy of Kosovo and Metohija within the Republic of Serbia was quite limited, and the centralist political organisation guaranteed Belgrade a tight grip over its potentially disloyal southern province. While the constitution of 1963 represented first steps in the direction of decentralisation and encouraged liberal forces that supported the devolution of the party and the state, it was the Brioni Plenum in early July 1966 that marked the preliminary victory of the liberal forces in the ongoing factional struggle within the SKJ. Aleksandar Ranković, who was vice president of the SFRJ, former head of the secret police, and organisational secretary of the SKJ, Svetislav "Ćeća" Stefanović and Vojin Vojkan Lukić, other powerful figures in the realm of internal affairs, were attacked at the plenum and forced to resign under the pretext that they had formed a "factional and conspiratorial" group inside the party engaged in a struggle for power.<sup>14</sup> Liberal party factions understood that raising the subjects of abuse of authority and unlawful actions by the security services would help to discredit their unitarist political opponents.<sup>15</sup> Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslav state president and head

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<sup>13</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Rethinking Nationhood: Nation as Institutionalized Form, Practical Category, Contingent Event," in *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13-22.

<sup>14</sup> Aleksandar Ranković resigned at the Brioni Plenum from all his government and party positions, while Svetislav Stefanović and Vojin Lukić were removed from government office and excluded from the party. Slobodan Stanković, "Central Committee Plenums of Yugoslavia's Six Republics Approve Purge of Rankovic and Party Reforms", 3 October 1966, HU OSA 300-8-3-9923, Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports, Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest.

<sup>15</sup> Political analysts and academic literature commonly assert that this powerful and long-serving conservative party faction was marginalized because of its opposition to liberalizing political and economic reforms, see Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948-1974*

of the SKJ, stated at the Brioni Plenum that “We, comrades, made the mistake that we left our state security service in the twenty and more years of its existence, so to speak, to itself [...]”<sup>16</sup>. The UDB, modelled on the Soviet NKVD (*Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del*, People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs), was the revolutionary organ of the party, and multiple personal ties intertwined both bureaucracies. Although Tito acknowledged the merits of the UDB and of Ranković personally in the “liquidation of the class and all other enemies,” he insisted for the first time on a division of responsibility and subordinated the secret service to party control.<sup>17</sup> That some Communists accused Ranković of having created “our [a Yugoslav] version of Stalinism [...] using conspirational methods (sic!)”<sup>18</sup> suggests that Yugoslav liberals had indeed closely followed the Soviet de-Stalinisation campaign a decade earlier and used it as a model.<sup>19</sup> Although no leader cult comparable to

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(London: Hurst, 1977), 179-191; Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-building and Legitimations, 1918-2005* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2006), 218-219. This view was also supported at the time by RFE analyst Stanković in “Yugoslavia: Before and After the Purge (I and II)”. On the factional struggle within the party, see Othmar Nikola Haberl, *Parteiorganisation und nationale Frage in Jugoslawien* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1976), 34-37. According to Ramet, conservatives in the socialist Yugoslav context are politicians who support: “(1) a strong central government or party, (2) emphasis on the political goals to be accomplished through investments (e.g., equalization of living standards), (3) a less open society with tighter censorship and social controls, (4) tight party control of all sociopolitical organizations, (5) democratic centralism (operational party discipline), and (6) the rendering of priority to federal needs (or the needs of the LCY) over the needs of individual federal units in all cases.” In contrast, a “liberal” in the Yugoslav context is “someone who favored (1) decentralization and the deepening of federalism, (2) emphasis on profitability in investments, (3) a more open society with greater respect for human rights, (4) loose party supervision of society, (5) pluralism within the party, and (6) the placing of priority on the needs of one’s own republic”, see Sabrina Ramet, *Nationalism and Federalism in Yugoslavia, 1962-1991* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 83.

<sup>16</sup> Slobodan Stanković, “Yugoslavia: Before and after the Purge of Aleksandar Rankovic (I),” 7 July 1966. HU OSA 300-8-3-9937; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest, 2.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:54546cfa-8c98-475d-9985-b77f7ca69a72>.

<sup>17</sup> In Stanković, “Before and After the Purge (II)”, 4; the RFE researcher pointed out correctly a few days after the Brioni Plenum, the accusation of a “misuse of power” against Ranković, based on his personal union of directing UDB and cadre policy in the LCY, meant being “accused of something, they were expected to do, of course under party control.”

<sup>18</sup> Slobodan Stanković, “Yugoslavia: Before and after the Purge of Aleksandar Rankovic (II),” 12 July 1966. HU OSA 300-8-3-9936; Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute: Publications Department: Background Reports; Open Society Archives at Central European University, Budapest, 4.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10891/osa:5fc20de0-a25e-461e-9f43-b3893072d201>.

<sup>19</sup> As Jörg Baberowski, “‘Er gab uns das Lachen zurück’. Nikita Cruschtschow und die Entstalinisierung,” paper presented at a research seminar on East European history at the

that of Stalin or of Tito, for that matter, had developed around Ranković, he embodied the “strong-arm policy” (*politika čvrste ruke*) that had shaped Yugoslavia’s practice of authority<sup>20</sup> until the early 1960s.<sup>21</sup> In the new context, Tito successfully used this public perception of Ranković to distance and acquit himself of responsibility for the “deformations”.<sup>22</sup>

Although it was the federal party leadership that had initiated the re-evaluation of the recent past, the republican and provincial party organisations enjoyed sufficient autonomy to oversee and control public activities and discussions and to shape the historical narratives that were eventually produced. Accordingly, the new party leadership in Serbia and the leaders in Kosovo encouraged the population to rethink socialist Yugoslav rule under Ranković by disseminating their official critique and incriminating evidence of the UDB’s misconduct, and by inviting those concerned to recount their experiences.<sup>23</sup> By far the largest number of complaints and testimonies collected in 1966 referred to the state violence employed during the infamous operation to confiscate weapons a decade earlier, whose course and escalating dynamics I attempt to reconstruct here.<sup>24</sup>

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Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, 24 June 2013 pointed out, de-Stalinization was conducted as a “moral project” by Nikita Khrushchev and his followers.

<sup>20</sup> Alf Lüdtke, “Einleitung. Herrschaft als soziale Praxis,” in *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis. Historische und sozial-anthropologische Studien*, ed. Alf Lüdtke, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1991), 9-66.

<sup>21</sup> The harsh resistance and hostility to Ranković’s removal among some segments of the population who found his political legacy misrepresented, as well as the memoirs of Kosovar leaders, confirm the charismatic nature of his authority. See Veton Surroi, *Fadil Hoxha në vetën e parë* (Prishtina: Koha, 2010), 335-336.

<sup>22</sup> In a meeting with a Kosovar delegation, Tito criticized Ranković’s mistakes in sending external personnel of the partisans’ secret police OZN-a (*Odelenje za zaštitu naroda*) for counterinsurgency to Kosovo in 1944–1945. “Razgovor druga Tita sa delegacijom Kosova i Metohije”, 23 February 1967, Stenografske beleške, Belgrade 1967, fond: Savez Komunista Srbije za Kosovo i Metohiju [SKS KM], 1965-89, kt. 5, AS, Belgrade. The success of Tito’s strategy may be concluded from, Mary Motes, *Kosova, Kosovo: Prelude to War, 1966-1999* (Redland: Homestead, 1998), 23.

<sup>23</sup> Summaries of these irregular sessions were sent to Belgrade immediately by telegram. An overview of the sessions held from 2 July onward is to be found in, “Sastanak Sekretarijata Pokrajinskog komiteta (PK) SKS KM”, 12 July 1966, Beleška, Prishtina, SKS KM, 1965-89, kt. 1, AS, Belgrade.

<sup>24</sup> Other complaints about the undue use of force between 1952 and 1964 referred to mistreatment inside the facilities of the security organs in the context of arrests, upon summons to the station and in the course of interrogations. “Izveštaj o zloupotrebama i drugim deformacijama”, 9 September 1966, 12, SKS KM, kt. 1, AS, Belgrade. Another recurring subject of the reports was the shooting of ordinary citizens in the course of alleged escape attempts at the Yugoslav-Albanian border; *ibid.*

### The weapons confiscation, 1955-1956

To enforce a new gun control law that came into effect in the People's Republic of Serbia in 1954 and to secure state monopoly over the legitimate use of force, between December 1955 and March 1956 the state security and intelligence agencies in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija attempted to confiscate illegal weapons from the predominantly Albanian rural population.<sup>25</sup> The operation did not occur without historical precedents, but may in fact have echoed the earlier experiences of the counterinsurgencies and weapons' confiscations as conducted locally by the late Ottoman Empire<sup>26</sup> and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.<sup>27</sup> While the Yugoslav Communists' "spaces of experience" and "horizons of expectation"<sup>28</sup> had been shaped in war by the anti-communism of local Albanians, the Albanian peasantry harboured great resentment against the Communist authorities, whose brutal accession to power they perceived as illegitimate and even as a betrayal of wartime agreements. Mutual distrust had developed as the partisans harshly cracked down on a popular uprising in 1944-1945, when it became clear that Kosovo would be again incorporated into Yugoslavia, thereby closing off any prospects of a unification with neighbouring Albania. Until 1952, Yugoslav Communists continued to hold show trials and conduct public executions in an effort to intimidate the small bands that violently resisted Yugoslav rule in Kosovo.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This is also mirrored in the narratives of the interrogated officials. R. M. stated that "the commander of the station in Velika Kruša had already received instructions with regard to the methods to be used, including physical reprisals, because one cannot (*trpeti*) tolerate two armies in Kosovo." See "Zapisnik o ispitu okrivljenog R. M. kod istražnog sudije OS-a u Prizrenu", 7 December 1966, 1, fond: 45, kt. 8/67, Arkivi i Kosovës (AK), Prishtina. Lukić, *Brionski plenum*, 198.

<sup>26</sup> Nathalie Clayer, "Retour sur les 'révoltes albanaises' de l'après 1908," *Südost-Forschungen* 73 (2014), 200-205, 207-210.

<sup>27</sup> Vladan Jovanović, *Jugoslovenska država i Južna Srbija 1918-1929: Makedonija, Sandžak, Kosovo i Metohija u Kraljevini SHS* (Beograd: INIS, 2002), 178-185.

<sup>28</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, "Erfahrungsraum und Erwartungshorizont - Zwei historische Kategorien," in *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeit*, ed. Reinhart Koselleck (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 349-375.

<sup>29</sup> Also, in Eastern Bosnia and the Drina valley, warfare against armed *četas* continued until 1950. Christian Nielsen, "Die Entstehung und Entwicklung der jugoslawischen Volkspolizei (*Narodna milicija*), 1944-1954," paper presented at a research seminar, *Neue Perspektiven in der südost- und osteuropäischen Geschichte*, for the Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung, Regensburg, 21 April 2014. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, "Contested Memories and Moralities in Contemporary Kosovo," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 41, no. 6 (2013), 957; Nezir Çitaku, *Drenica në shekuj* (Ulqin: Ulqin, 2007), 540; Ethem Çeku, *Shekulli i llegal: Proceset Gjyqësore kundër llegalëve në Kosovë*. Prishtina: Brezi, 2004, 29.

Owing to poor results in the requested voluntary handover of arms, in late 1955 Aleksandar Ranković, as president of the Federal Council for Internal Affairs issued an order to state security and intelligence agencies to systematically identify and confiscate hidden and illegal weaponry.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, state security and intelligence officials summoned males whom they suspected of harbouring firearms to the station and demanded their hand-over. Evidence suggests that the police, in cooperation with the state security, systematically resorted to reprisals and mistreatment, thereby transgressing constitutional and other legal bounds during the operation.<sup>31</sup> For instance, Budimir Gajić, in his capacity as SUP chief in Prizren, described the procedure in an internal report in 1956 as follows:

The truncheon intimidated many, with the consequence that after its use many agreed to surrender [weapons]. [...] Our procedure was like this: We demonstrated persistence when summoning people and kept them until they handed over their weapons, for 4-5 days. There were also cases in which people were detained 4-5 days in the snow and beaten.<sup>32</sup>

In a similar vein, witness testimonies of participants in the confiscation -both officials and civilians- reveal the application of systematic beatings to those suspected of being in possession firearms.<sup>33</sup> Stanislav Grković, SUP chief in Gjilan/Gnjilane, the last district in which the campaign was implemented, admitted that "the old method" of

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<sup>30</sup> Lukić, *Brionski plenum*, 198; Ranković, *Dnevničke zabeleške*, 158.

<sup>31</sup> SUP superior Milošević testified that commander Mitrović informed him that "citizens are invited to the station, interrogated, convinced to hand over hidden weaponry, and if nothing else succeeds, then one may also apply physical pressure in those cases in which they are convinced that the individual owns a weapon and refuses to hand it over." From the testimonies it is also clear that those involved were aware of their unlawful operation mode: "I thought it is better violating the Constitution, but disarming and disabling the enemy of our state and social order, against whom I have been fighting wholeheartedly." "Zapisnik o ispitu okrivljenog R. M. kod istražnog sudije OS-a u Prizrenu", 7 December 1966, 3-4, fond 45, kt. 8/67, AK.

<sup>32</sup> "Izvod iz godišnjeg izveštaja SUP-DB Prizren za 1956 gd.u o pronalaženju i oduzimanju skrivenog oružja", 71-73, CK SKS, 1966-1968, kt. 23, Izvršni komitet CK SKS, Materijali u vezi IV. plenuma CK SKJ, II. deo, Ispitivanje političke odgovornosti bivših funkcionera SDB iz Pokrajine u Beogradu, AS, Begrade.

<sup>33</sup> "Zapisnik o ispitu okrivljenog M. M. kod istražnog sudije OS-a u Prizrenu", 2 December 1966, 2-3, fond 45, kt. 11/67, AK; "Zapisnik o saslušanju svedoka T. V.", 10 January 1967, fond 45, kt. 11/67, AK; "Zapisnik o saslušanju svedoka V. Đ.", 9 December 1967, fond 45, kt. 11/67, AK; "Zapisnik o saslušanju svedoka J. K.", 12 December 1967, 3, fond 45, kt. 11/67, AK; "Zapisnik o saslušanju svedoka B. G.", 20 January 1966, fond 45, kt. 11/67, AK; "Zapisnik o ispitu okrivljenog M. Đ. kod istražnog sudije", 4 March 1967, 2, fond 45, kt. 15/67, AK.

beating on the soles of the feet was used during the weapons confiscation.<sup>34</sup> On 27 April 1967, the council of judges at the District Court of Prizren had found Radoje Milošević, the former head of the political administration unit of the Ministry for Internal Affairs in the South Kosovo district of Prizren, and Miladin Mitrović, the former head of the police station in Krusha e Madhe/Velika Kruša in the Prizren-district, guilty of homicide.<sup>35</sup> The judges found that in February 1956 the two defendants beat the 75-year-old Albanian peasant Avdi Duraku indiscriminately with a truncheon inside the police station. In the course of a joint operation by the state security bodies, the secret police: the Yugoslav State Security and People's Police, to confiscate illegal firearms, members of the local police summoned Duraku to the station, insisting that he had obtained weapons during the Italian occupation in World War II.<sup>36</sup> According to the verdict, when he refused to surrender a rifle and in fact denied ever owning one, the accused heavily beat and kicked him. He suffered lethal injuries and died soon thereafter in the cellar of the police station. While denying the accusations, Milošević, for instance, admitted that "now and then I also hit someone with a rubber club, but only and exclusively on the backside. Because striking the buttocks is most unlikely to cause some unwanted consequences."<sup>37</sup> Mitrović described how "suspects" were ordered to lie face down on a broad bench before their backsides were beaten with truncheons. Both men insisted that they were careful not to hit other body parts.<sup>38</sup> Besides other state security officials indicted for homicide, two UDB officials from Suhareka/Suva Reka were indicted for killing Jetullah Kuçi, whom, according to the verdict, they beat alternately with a truncheon and a wet rope after summoning him to the police station in Suhareka/Suva Reka on 23 February 1956.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Stanislav Grković, head of SUP in Gnjilan, admitted that he had allowed the use of reprisals, "Prilozi uz izveštaj komisije Sekretarijata PK SKS za ispitivanje političke odgovornosti članova PK koji su radili u Službi državne bezbednosti u Pokrajini", 5 October 1966, Pristina, 42-43, fond 433: Komiteti Krahinor i Lidhjes Komuniste, kt. 68, AK.

<sup>35</sup> The two officials were sentenced to four years imprisonment each. "Presuda, Kž. br. 96/67", (signed by Ramadan Vraniqi, president of the council), 22 June 1967, fond 45: Okružni Sud Prizren, kt. 8/67, Omot Spisa: R. M. i drugih službenika SUP-a Prizren zbog krivičnog dela ubistva, čl. 135, Vrhovni Sud Srbije, Odeljenje u Prištini, AK. Despite several appeals, the highest judicial authority, the High Court of Serbia, Chamber of Pristina, ultimately confirmed the verdict.

<sup>36</sup> "Mišljenje islednika za povratnika D. H.", 28 September 1965, fond 45, kt. 8/67, AK.

<sup>37</sup> "Zapisnik o ispitu okrivljenog R. M.", 7 December 1966, 3, fond 45, kt. 8/67, AK.

<sup>38</sup> "Zapisnik o ispitu okrivljenog (M. M.)", 2 December 1966, 2, fond 45, kt. 11/67, AK.

<sup>39</sup> "Presuda", fond 45, kt. 15/67, AK.

Relevant documents of the SUP are not yet accessible to the public, and on the basis of the available source material it is difficult to reconstruct ultimate responsibility for reprisals and injuries suffered. Available material does suggest, however, that violence, rather than being ordered by Belgrade, escalated locally owing to a combination of factors. First, higher authorities within the SUP expressed an expectation and signalled that, for the sake of confiscating as many weapons as possible, they would tolerate the use of physical violence despite the 1952 legislation that made it illegal.<sup>40</sup> Second, the poor professional discipline among members of the SUP services posed a challenge to legality even in daily, routine procedures; their behaviour might easily have escalated into violence in such an exceptional situation.<sup>41</sup> Third, personal experiences had contributed to the formation of both a “culture of violence” and “group militancy” within the services, to use Schnell’s terminology.<sup>42</sup> As Höpken pointed out<sup>43</sup>, the militarized *habitus* and violent practices of former partisans carried over into peacetime. In fact, most members of the state security service had been personally involved in the partisan struggle and counterinsurgency in Kosovo up until 1952. Apparently, they either found the boundaries blurred between “revolutionary” and “legal” methods of “fighting the enemy” or even used the opportunity provided by the weapons confiscation to settle personal scores dating back to the war or post-war years.<sup>44</sup> Repeatedly,

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<sup>40</sup> Before the Brioni Plenum, only a few disciplinary procedures had been initiated with regard to the action. In the main trial, both R. M. and M. M. referred to the hierarchical structure of the service and to their obligation to execute orders “from our highest leaders,” see “Zapisnik o glavnom pretresu”, 24 April 1967, 5, fond 45, kt. 8/67, AK. In his appeal letter, R. M.’s defense lawyer, F. F., refers to a meeting, at which Đoko Pajković and Čedo Mijović were present and paraphrases them as follows: “every political action demands victims.” See, “Žalba protiv presude”, 27 April 1967, 3, F. F., Okružnom Sudu u Prizrenu, fond 45, kt. 8/67, AK. Several SUP officials in Prizren testified that Budimir Gajić allowed the use of reprisals “if convincing does not help,” See “Zapisnik o ispitu okrivljenog (M. M.)”, December 1966, 2, fond 45, kt. 8/67, AK. Jovan Đorđević, *Mala politička enciklopedija* (Belgrade: Savremena Administracija, 1966), 1131.

<sup>41</sup> Zapisnici, beleške i drugi materijali komisije Izvršnog Komiteta CK SK Srbije u vezi ispitivanja određenih pojava u SDB i o ličnoj odgovornosti pojedinaca, a u vezi zaključaka IV. plenuma SKJ, “Izjava Dragoslava Novakovića”, 6 September 1966, 1, 4, 8, CK SKS, 1966–1968, kt. 24, Izvršni komitet CK SKS, Materijali u vezi IV. plenuma CK SKJ, III. deo., AS; “Izvod iz zapisnika o razgovoru sa Mićom Mijuškovićem, 20 September 1966”, in *Prilozi uz Izveštaj*, 5 October 1966, 9, fond 433, kt. 68, AK.

<sup>42</sup> Felix Schnell, *Räume des Schreckens. Gewalt und Gruppenmilitanz in der Ukraine, 1905–1938* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Wolfgang Höpken, “Durchherrschte Freiheit? Wie autoritär (oder wie liberal) war Titos Jugoslawien?,” in *Jugoslawien in den 1960er Jahren*, ed. Hannes Grandits, Holm Sundhaussen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 46.

<sup>44</sup> “Zapisnik sa razgovora sa Budimirom Gajićem”, 21 May 1968, 26–27, CK SKS, kt. 23, Materijali o političkoj odgovornosti bivših radnika DB na Kosovu, AS.

SUP officials reported that group pressure incited even harsher treatment, that is, heavier beating, of those interrogated.<sup>45</sup>

On the whole, these factors temporarily restored the *Gewaltraum*, or “space of violence”<sup>46</sup>, that had come into being in Kosovo in 1944–1945. Baberowski and other scholars, mainly authors of histories of Soviet violence, use the concept to examine war time mass violence or mass terror.<sup>47</sup> “Spaces of violence” more generally facilitate the use of violence or make it more likely by offering an opportunity to the “violent few” to assert their interests through violence or, in this particular case, by creating a social space devoid of checks and balances and moral constraints that could limit the use of violence. External conditions and the personal constitutions of some members of the state security and intelligence agencies in rural Kosovo in 1955–1956 were such that a few empowered individuals overstepped all bounds and chose violence as a means of action.<sup>48</sup> Thus, even if the central authorities did not directly authorize the use of reprisals, they certainly accepted the predictable risk of a violent escalation when they ordered the (secret) police to disarm the population. Rather than trying to minimize this risk by providing safeguards, they prioritized their understanding of public security.

The actual extent of the violence, the numbers of victims, and the underlying motivations are highly contested in Albanian and Serbian sources.<sup>49</sup> The involved institutions took care to forestall the creation of written evidence during and immediately after the confiscation of weapons in 1955–1956.<sup>50</sup> The lack of contemporaneous forensic evidence

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<sup>45</sup> R. M. allegedly made M. M. look like a fool in front of other policemen, asking him in one interrogation: “Why are you beating people, like a coward?” See “Zapisnik o ispitu okrivljenog (M. M.)”, 2 December 1966, 3, fond 45, kt. 8/67, AK.

<sup>46</sup> Baberowski, “‘Er gab uns das Lachen zurück’”; Schnell, *Räume des Schreckens*.

<sup>47</sup> Jörg Baberowski, *Verbrannte Erde. Stalins Herrschaft der Gewalt* (Munich: Beck, 2012); Schnell, *Räume des Schreckens*; Alexander Korb *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien, 1941–1945* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013).

<sup>48</sup> Baberowski, *Verbrannte Erde*, 19.

<sup>49</sup> For an overview of the respective positions, cf. Edvin Pezo, *Zwangsmigration in Friedenszeiten? Jugoslawische Migrationspolitik und die Auswanderung von Muslimen in die Türkei (1918 bis 1966)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013), 299. Lukić, *Brionski plenum*, 203, merely mentions three dead, whereas according to the investigative report several thousand citizens were beaten and more than 10,000 were mistreated by unspecified “other means” in the course of the confiscation. “Izveštaj o radu komisije na utvrđivanju deformacija i zloupotreba”, 1 November 1966, CK SKS, 1966–1968, kt. 22, Pokrajinsko Izvršno Veće, AS.

<sup>50</sup> Immediately after the confiscation, authorities repudiated complaints, as is evident from the testimony of leading SUP personnel to the state commissions. “Zapisnik sa razgovora sa Budimirom Gajićem”, 21 May 1968, 17, CK SKS kt. 23, AS; “Dopuna izjave Šabana [Shaban] Kajtazija”, 19 July 1966, in *Prilozi uz izveštaj*, 5 October 1966, 62, fond 433, kt. 68, AK.

and political conflicts over how to establish the number of victims a decade later led to fluctuations in the number of reported dead from 37 to 69.<sup>51</sup> From the testimonies of those who participated in the action, describing the systematic search of villages district by district, it can reasonably be concluded that the vast majority of males in rural households were affected by the action. The final report of the investigative commission speaks of more than 1,000 complaints of mistreatment, sometimes amounting to torture. It is safe to assume though that many of the affected families were unwilling to report their experience to the very authorities they regarded as complicit and which they blamed for authorizing or failing to stop the violence at the time. The impact of this reluctance to testify in the campaign to uncover “deformations” will be discussed in the following section.

### **“Deformations” and Their Assessment**

It is worth inspecting in greater detail which aspects of the recent past the Communist Party elite in Kosovo selected for re-evaluation in the aftermath of the Brioni Plenum, and how they portrayed to the public the motives for state violence, as well as the actions and effects. In the following section, I explore how party members and the informed public reacted to these revelations. I show that the Kosovo leadership’s strategy of publicly criticizing and reckoning with the UDB’s operational practices resulted in challenges from many different camps. Calling into question the activities of the state security and intelligence agencies made it extremely difficult to direct and control the discourse, particularly because the state’s instruments of repression had been central to establishing and securing Yugoslav Communist rule in Kosovo. The fact that the Kosovo Party elite passed selective moral judgment on key events of the Ranković era, such as the confiscation of weapons, evoked heated reactions from critics both inside and outside the Party. These responses tended to either intensify or oppose the Kosovo Party’s judgment and thus to overstep the desired limits of debate.

In the aftermath of Brioni, the SKJ entered one of the most intense phases of political mobilisation and political agitation since the

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<sup>51</sup> “Zajednička sednica Predsedništva i Izvršnog komiteta PK SKS KM”, 15 March 1968, Stenografske beleške, Pristina, 14, SKS KM, 1965-89, kt. 3, AS; Pezo, *Zwangsmigration*, 299, quotes the final report of 37 dead. In his interrogation of Gajić, Ivković speaks of 69 dead, five suicides, 84 invalids as a result of grievous bodily harm, and 27 who escaped across the Albanian border,” see Izvršni komitet CK SKS, Materijali u vezi IV. plenuma CK SKJ, II. deo, 4, CK SKS, 1966-1968, kt. 23, AS.

abandonment of post-war “agitprop” (agitation and propaganda) in the early 1950s. In this context, the Executive Council of the PK of the SK Kosovo established a state “Commission for investigation of deformations and deficiencies in the SUP and for the reorganisation of the UDB.”<sup>52</sup> The Commission, staffed by several high-ranking veteran politicians from Kosovo, directed research into “deformations” in the Ranković era by investigating the UDB archives and collecting accounts of both “victims” and “perpetrators” of state violence. To this end, leading personnel of the SUP and the UDB were called to provide testimony concerning the “deformations” before the Commission and at the Seventh Plenary Session of the Provincial Committee in October 1966, before a more general public.<sup>53</sup> Further, whereas complaints had been rejected in the aftermath of the confiscation of weapons, local party organisations now invited citizens to report cases of misuse of authority and violent transgressions. In the many sessions organized by the party and the mass organisations, such as the Socialist League of the Yugoslav Working People (*Socijalistički savez radnog naroda Jugoslavije*, SSRNJ) to communicate and explain the removal of Ranković and to direct discussion of the recent past, party members and other citizens were not only informed about the top-down criticism of the UDB but also urged to contribute further facts and details. From a mere 121 charges registered within the first three months, the campaign gained momentum during the fall, with the number of charges rising to more than 1,000.<sup>54</sup> The initial reluctance is a good indicator of the high degree of disorientation and irritation that the campaign created in the population, who did not trust this sudden change of course. The investigation of “deformations” took place in a tense political climate and stirred highly emotional reactions, both among the broader population and among Communist functionaries in Serbia and Kosovo, with sensational media coverage adding further

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<sup>52</sup> Two sub-commissions debated “the reorganization of the UDB” and investigated “the deformations in the work of UDB as a whole and the abuse in single organs of UDB as well as in other organs of SUP in the province” from 16 July to 4 October 1966. Permanent members of the Commission were: Mehmet Maliqi, Ilija Vakić, Sahit Zatriqi, and Blažo Ljutica, while Ali Shukriu, Blažo Radonjić, Asllan Fazliu, Sinan Hasani, and Kadri Reufi participated temporarily.

<sup>53</sup> Intense media coverage of these sessions was likely to reach an audience beyond the party, cf. the speeches of Shaban Kajtazi (15/1-16/3) and Rajko Vidačić (BU/ŠE/70/3-LJ,71/2) at the session, “Sedma Plenarna Sednica PK SKS KM”, 12 October 1966, Stenografske beleške, Pristina, fond 433, kt. 68, AK.

<sup>54</sup> These are not available in the archival records as original submissions, but rather are integrated in the reports of the Investigative Commission without further mention of how the data were obtained. Whether the originals were removed from the archival records cannot be verified, owing to the lack of systematization in the collection of AK, fond 433.

fuel to the fire.<sup>55</sup> National sentiments and interethnic animosities had been openly expressed in Kosovo since Ranković had resigned from office.<sup>56</sup> As the Yugoslav leadership had feared, the discrediting of the secret police unleashed more general expressions of discontent with regard to economic underdevelopment, social disparities, and national inequalities within Yugoslav society. Since Brioni, the Communists had anxiously monitored the public mood, registering the singing of nationalist songs on the street and acts of vandalism.<sup>57</sup> Situation reports criticized nationalist triumphalism among the Albanians, as evinced in the subversive play on words referring to the “second liberation.”<sup>58</sup> Kosovo Serbs, in a similar, but diametrically opposed logic, interpreted the investigations against UDB officials, the reorganisation of the UDB, and the introduction of a national quota for SUP staff members as an anti-Serbian policy shift.<sup>59</sup>

The official narrative advanced by the Kosovo party leadership for its plenary session did not calm flaring tempers. Its line of argument may be summarized as follows: “Deformations” in the agencies of the SUP were graver in Kosovo than in other parts of Yugoslavia for several reasons.<sup>60</sup> First, the “Ranković-Stefanović faction” controlling the SUP had followed a political agenda, which viewed those of Albanian nationality as inclined toward accepting foreign propaganda, inciting conflicts between national groups, and damaging *brotherhood and unity* with their stance. Second, UDB officials in Kosovo allegedly had acted high-handedly and repressively, essentially driven by Serbian nationalist motives and aspirations. The confiscation of weapons was singled out as one of the worst “deformations” because it was now thought to have been

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<sup>55</sup> “Sastanak Sekretarijata PK SKS KM”, 12 July 1966, Pristina, 2, SKS KM, 1965-89, kt. 1, AS; “Informacija razmatrana na sastanku Sekretarijata PK SKS”, 8 July 1966, Pristina, 3, SKS KM, 1965-89, kt. 1, AS; Milija Kovačević, in: “Sedma Plenarna Sednica PK SKS KM”, 12 October 1966, 20/5-20/7 Bu/SĐ, fond 433, kt. 68, AK.

<sup>56</sup> See “Pokrajinski Komitet SKS KM, Aktivnost SKS na Kosovu i Metohiji na sprovođenju odluka četvrtog Plenuma CK SKJ i naredni zadaci”, 12 October 1966, Pristina, 7, SKS KM kt. 1, AS.

<sup>57</sup> “A policeman from Obilić sang about Ranković while others present cheered. Also, in Kosovo Polje a group of young men sang in honor of Ranković. In Istok a journalist smashed a TV with a chair,” see “Sastanak Sekretarijata PK SKS KM”, 12 July 1966, 2, SKS KM, 1965-89, kt. 1, AS.

<sup>58</sup> The Communist takeover was officially labeled a “liberation” (from fascist occupation; in Serbo-Croatian *oslobodjenje*, in Albanian *çlirimi*), see Motes, *Kosova*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Immediately after Brioni the number of Albanian personnel in the SUP was adapted to the national quota, *Borba*, 15 November 1966.

<sup>60</sup> No attempt was made to prove singularity, as investigations in the different parts of Yugoslavia were never put in comparative perspective. For instance, it would be interesting to compare Kosovo, Vojvodina, and Herzegovina.

based on manipulated evidence concerning the hostile attitude of Albanians toward Yugoslavia. Drastic methods had led to the Albanian population's loss of trust. In turn, the faction had created a bad image of Kosovo and the Albanians in the eyes of the Yugoslav and Serbian leaderships, for the assessments it provided to Belgrade allegedly differed from those forwarded to the party organs in Prishtinë/Priština.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, Greater Serb nationalists rather than irredentist Albanian nationalists were now identified as the biggest threat to *brotherhood and unity*. The SKJ was facing the need to create conditions and undertake measures to guarantee the full equality of the Albanian and Turkish nationalities in all aspects of social and political life.<sup>62</sup>

The Kosovo party elite tried to support this interpretation with a moralizing discourse, as is evident from the ways in which revelations were presented to higher party organs. For instance, testimonies of citizens who were now acknowledged as victims of state violence were bundled into internal reports without being edited or analysed. In syntax and vocabulary, these testimonies closely resembled colloquial speech. They were clearly unsuitable for evidentiary purposes and gave little information conducive to further investigation. These features were used to denounce the campaign as "tendentious" and based on "manipulated evidence" by the targeted politicians in Serbia.<sup>63</sup> In their unedited state, however, the testimonies supposedly conveyed authenticity by giving a voice to intimidated and victimised citizens – with the Communists accepting to pay the prize that this portrayal stood in open contrast to the image of an empowered citizenry otherwise promoted by the ruling party. In reports to the Serbian party branch and in declarations passed at the October Plenum, which was closely followed in Belgrade, the highest Kosovo party body, the Secretariat, opted to appeal to emotions.<sup>64</sup> With regard to the confiscation, it reported "daily summonses, insults, threats, slaps in the face, the detention of people in the cold, forcing them to walk through water, heavy beatings leading to dozens of deaths, suicides, and attempts to escape across the border."<sup>65</sup> It quoted an anonymous author

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<sup>61</sup> See PK SKS KM, "Aktivnost SKS na Kosovu i Metohiji na sprovođenju odluka četvrtog Plenuma CK SKJ", 12 October 1966, 13, SKS KM, kt. 1, AS.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> In October the Executive Committee of the Provincial Committee supported its final declaration with these findings; see "Pregled deformacija u SUP-u i državnoj bezbednosti", Pristina, September 1966, fond 433, kt. 70, AK. Lukić, *Brionski plenum*, 202-203.

<sup>64</sup> This argument is further supported by the fact that the author was unable to find any complaints registered after the decisive Seventh Plenum in October 1966.

<sup>65</sup> "Izveštaj o zloupotrebama i drugim deformacijama", 9 September 1966, 14, SKS KM, kt. 1, AS.

describing a horrendous scene from the mountainous region of Rugova/Rugovska Klisura in Western Kosovo:

Those cases in which people were not beaten until they passed out are rare. [People] were forced to walk barefoot through the snow, and four peasants died from the beatings. One, who could not endure the beatings any longer, jumped from a rock to commit suicide, but survived and now has to live with the consequences of his leap.<sup>66</sup>

Moral indignation and the attempt to reckon with past injustice in these reports were, on the one hand, supposed to demonstrate to the Communist elites on the federal and republican level the inevitability of a decisive change in policy, that is, a quick implementation of decentralisation. On the other hand, this style sought to mobilize the Kosovo population, to offer a route for a broader political participation by contributing to the revision of history. The documents suggested that any ordinary citizen's testimony could have found its way into the official representation of events.

Although violations of rights were emphasized as a trope in both the internal and external reports, the way in which the Communists interrogated SUP officials addressed breaches of Communist ethics more than it permitted a finding of clear legal responsibility. I argue that the decision to render moral judgment was intended to create "moral" capital (in modification of Bourdieu's forms of capital, 1993) that would support subsequent demands for political reform. Armed with the investigative report and the accumulated charges against SUP officials, the secretariat of the Kosovo party branch was able to turn the past practice of collective suspicion of the Albanian nationality into a political lever for a more liberal nationality policy. Given the strictly hierarchical organisation of the security agencies, however, the Commission's emphasis on examining the "personal responsibility" of individual SUP staff members was considered nonsensical and unfair by the middle and lower ranks of the Ministry for Internal Affairs, who insisted they merely had executed orders from the top. Presumably acting on the assumption that they would be unable to hold lower officials liable because of the strict hierarchy in the security agencies, and that they would have no chance to prosecute the higher echelons of the SUP for political reasons, liberals in Kosovo and Serbia turned to the argument of Communist ethics to

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

advance their political goal.<sup>67</sup> The language used by the members of the Commission carried a strong moral overtone. For instance, individuals under interrogation were asked how they, as long-term Communists, could have possibly doubted fellow participants in the revolution simply because they were of a different national background.<sup>68</sup> As a related matter, SUP officials were accused of having alienated the Albanian population by their discriminatory practices and reprisals.<sup>69</sup> Ljubimir Ivković, a member of the Serbian investigative commission interrogating the SUP officials, who in the meantime had moved to Belgrade, used even more radical language to describe the effects of state violence in his interrogation of Gajić. He called the confiscation of weapons an infliction of “violence and terror,” causing a “psychosis,” and “such a grievous situation, not only resulting in a registration and confiscation of weapons, but almost leading to something like an uprising”, a “mass trauma,” involving several tens of thousands of citizens.<sup>70</sup>

In October, after several months of investigation, the plenum of the provincial committee confirmed the “political” and “personal” responsibility of the leading SUP echelons in Kosovo for the reprisals carried out under their authority. Grković, formerly the Chief of SUP in Gjilan/Gnjilane in 1955–1956, was declared personally responsible for the “confiscation of weapons conducted with the maximum use of physical pressure against honest citizens, [as well as] special forms and different ways of torture and extortion.”<sup>71</sup> However, no attempts were made to actually explain or understand how the violence escalated or to establish a narrative that would support the possibility of legal prosecution. Rather than clarifying events, the conclusion of the official account that “the operation was implemented without any control and UDB and police officials were given broad authorisations, which led to this situation” gave rise to further nationalist mystification.<sup>72</sup> The way in which the

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<sup>67</sup> Communist morality or ethics referred to staying true in political practice to the values of the Yugoslav socialist revolution, for instance to brotherhood and unity. On the ambiguous attempts to introduce a Communist code of ethics in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, see Hoffmann (2003, 57ff.)

<sup>68</sup> “Odluka o isključenju Miće Mijuškovića iz PK i SKJ”, 12–13 October 1966, fond 433, kt. 70, AK. Also, accusations of “a dishonest stance” and “lack of reflection on mistakes” point in that direction.

<sup>69</sup> “Izvod iz zapisnika o razgovoru sa Mićom Mijuškovićem,” 20 September 1966, in *Prilozi uz Izveštaj*, 5 October 1966, 13–14.

<sup>70</sup> He repeatedly asks Gajić about his responsibility as a longstanding Communist, “Zapisnik sa razgovora sa Budimirom Gajićem”, 21 May 1968, 14–15, 19, CK SKS, kt. 23, AS.

<sup>71</sup> “Odluka o isključenju Stanislava Grkovića iz SKJ i PK SKS”, 12–13 October 1966, 2, fond 433, kt. 70, AK.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

identified culprits were held liable is also significant. Mićo Mijušković, provincial SUP secretary in the mid-1960s, and Stanislav "Nita" Grković, Shaban Kajtazi, and Rajko Vidačić, assistants to the provincial SUP secretary, were excluded from both the SKJ and the PK for having failed "as Communists and as members of the PK."<sup>73</sup> However, no criminal investigations awaited them. The members of the Commission had understood early on that the evidence gathered was insufficient for legal action.<sup>74</sup> In clearer cases, the Kosovo leadership intended, and did in fact make attempts, to put incriminated SUP personnel, such as Budimir Gajić, on trial. After all, at the Brioni Plenum, criminal investigations against 16 leading functionaries of the federal state security service, including Ranković and Stefanović, had been announced. But Tito, who saw the discussion getting increasingly out of hand, with journalists, ordinary citizens, and local Communist functionaries starting to challenge the need for a secret police force, decided to spare them from prosecution in December 1966.<sup>75</sup> Social and moral judgment, Tito announced, had punished them enough.<sup>76</sup>

Ultimately, the Yugoslav leadership appears to have intercepted and halted lustration in Kosovo in 1967–1968, as the public trials stirred popular outrage and increased national and political polarisation even further.<sup>77</sup> The few trials, seven or eight altogether, that were held in the Districts of Prizren and Peja/Peć provoked extremely harsh criticism from adherents of the disempowered party faction, who still enjoyed the backing of a strong lobby in both Belgrade and Prishtinë/Priština. The trials also led to unrest among former UDB members, usually professional revolutionaries, who felt betrayed, first because they had to stand trial while their superiors remained untouched, and second because they considered their sacrifices and achievements unacknowledged. In their communications, or those of their lawyers, with the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Court, the accused strongly rejected the

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<sup>73</sup> "Odluke o isključenju iz SKJ i PK SKS", 12–13 October 1966, fond 433, kt. 70, AK.

<sup>74</sup> "Sedma Plenarna Sednica PK SKS KM – II. Deo", 12 October 1966, fond 433, kt. 68, AK.

<sup>75</sup> His proposal was accepted by the federal assembly, albeit not without resistance. Nine MPs voted against the decision. *Borba*, 10 December 1966. Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948–1974*, 188f.; Miloš Mišović, *Ko je tražio republiku Kosovo, 1945–1985* (Belgrade: Narodna Knjiga, 1987), 75.

<sup>76</sup> *Borba*, 10 December 1966.

<sup>77</sup> "Razgovor druga Tita sa delegacijom Kosova i Metohije", 23 February 1967, 20–21, SKS KM, 1965–89, kt. 5, AS; "Razgovor predsednika Savezne Skupštine E. Kardelja sa delegacijom APKM", 21 March 1967, Zebeleške, Belgrade, 27, SKS KM, 1965–89, kt. 5, AS; "Zajednička sednica Predsedništva i Izvršnog komiteta PK SKS KM", 15 March 1968, SKS KM, 1965–89, kt. 3, AS.

charge that they had acted out of personal, or even worse, nationalist motives. They even had Albanian Communists submit statements on their behalf.

M. M., who denied having beaten the late A. D., protested in his testimony:

The biggest absurdity one can imagine is the claim that I [...] preserved in my subconscious national intolerance toward Albanians. As proof of my having been and being a big friend of the Albanian nationality in Kosovo and Metohija: I was educated like this from 1938 as a member of the progressive movement and member of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia [...]. Without pressure [...] I managed to master the Albanian language like a mother tongue, which saved my life in Albania in 1941 [...].<sup>78</sup>

Consistent with the accounts in the published memoirs of Ranković and Lukić, the accused members of the UDB justified the confiscation of weapons by the threat that illegal weaponry and illegal organisations posed to public order and security, and they emphasized the large numbers of allegedly confiscated arms.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, civilian witnesses recalled that search units relentlessly demanded the handing over of weapons by citizens who possessed none, with the result that these citizens purchased weapons so that they could surrender them to the police as demanded.<sup>80</sup> In their view, the confiscation was a mere pretext to promote the emigration of Albanians to Turkey in order to diminish the share of Albanians in the population of Kosovo.<sup>81</sup> As these conflicting accounts indicate, the different “spaces of experience” and “horizons of expectation” that had already clashed in the mid-1950s found their continuation in different “memory communities”<sup>82</sup> a decade later. The campaign against “deformations” and the ways in which specific events like the confiscation were retold did not bring consensus closer, but rather led to openly conflicting histories of socialist rule, as it went on.

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<sup>78</sup>“Zapisnik o ispitu okrivljenog R. M.”, 7 December 1966, 5, fond 45, kt. 8/67, AK.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 3. Lukić, *Brionski plenum*, 197-199; Ranković, *Dnevičke zabeleške*, 158-159.

<sup>80</sup> “Zapisnik o saslušanju svedoka pred istražnim sudijom OS-a u Prizrenu o krivičnom predmetu protiv R. M. i M. M. zbog krivičnog dela iz čl. 135, st. 1 KZ”, Istražni sudija: D. M., Svedok: Dž. A. D., 10 December 1966, fond 45, kt. 8/67, AK; See also interviews regarding the confiscation in the Oral History Project of Qendra Multimedia “History of Kosovo of the 1960s and 1970s, as told by contemporaries,”

<http://www.kosovarhistory.org/sq/po.nentemat-aksioniimbledhjes.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Burke, “History as Social Memory,” in *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind*, ed. Thomas Butler (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 97-113.

Similarly contested was the time frame for legitimate debate and reflection. The Party elite intended to discredit the UDB leadership, but of course it did not want to undermine Yugoslav rule or its own power. For this reason, it had restricted discussion to the period from 1952 to 1966. While the introduction of “socialist legality” in 1952 justified this decision formally, the selective discussion seemed artificial and incomprehensible to the local population, as evident from the minutes of local party meetings and from the Seventh Plenum. The population was aware of continuities among the personnel of internal affairs from the extremely violent post-war period to the mid- or late 1950s. Often the very same individuals implemented the violent requisitioning of agricultural products in the post-war years and the confiscation of weapons a decade later.<sup>83</sup> Particularly in rural organisations, the participants in the party meetings were unwilling to accept that physical violence employed by the state security and intelligence agencies was declared legitimate in one case but condemned in another. The party leadership later admitted to having invested great efforts into stifling such unwanted debate, as may be understood from Veli Deva’s remarks about this subject:

We firmly had in mind to limit the deformations and under no circumstances go back to the year 1945 or the following years, attempts we observed. If you [...] remember the first charge we received, that was the first sign, that there would be aspirations to reach back in time with the action and to include 1945 as well [...] [W]e had to invest all authority and power to close that debate.<sup>84</sup>

Yet another controversy for the Communists, both those in Serbia and local functionaries, was related to the denial of complicity. An outraged functionary from Mitrovica accused the political leaders, stating that “they must have been informed about the operations of the UDB, particularly the weapons confiscation. Also, the courts and the public prosecutors have a huge share in responsibility for what we are discussing today, and particularly for the mysterious homicides”.<sup>85</sup> His resentment may be partially explained by the fact that the secretariat of the provincial committee had excused itself entirely in the preparatory material for the meeting by claiming that “neither the secretariat nor the provincial committee knew about the scope and character of deformations, nor about the working methods of the UDB [...] and cannot

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<sup>83</sup> “Zapisnik sa razgovora sa Budimirom Gajićem”, 21 May 1968, CK SKS, kt. 23, AS.

<sup>84</sup> Veli Deva, in: “Proširena Sednica Izvršnog komiteta PK SKS KM”, Magnetofonski snimak, 23 January 1968, 17, SKS KM, 1965-89, kt. 4, AS.

<sup>85</sup> Mišević, *Ko je tražio republiku Kosovo*, 70.

share responsibility for the misconduct of individuals.”<sup>86</sup> The Kosovo party leadership, however, also rejected direct responsibility and maintained that the security services submitted to the republican and federal levels evaluations of the ideological and political situation in the province that differed from those they sent to Prishtinë/Priština, in an effort to ensure Belgrade’s direct influence.<sup>87</sup> The controversy revealed a general discontent among the party base concerning a leadership style that they considered outdated, undemocratic, and repressive.

### Conclusion

In this essay I attempted to put in perspective the state violence that was used by Yugoslav state security and intelligence agencies against the civilian population in Kosovo, mainly in the mid-1950s, and to examine how the Kosovo leadership strategically placed the issue on the political agenda more than a decade later. To an external observer it may seem surprising and even ill-advised that the Kosovo leadership broached a sensitive topic so likely to evoke the question of its own complicity. All political manoeuvring aside, some of the involved Kosovo Communists of Albanian descent appear to have felt genuine indignation at some aspects of the operational practices of the UDB and at having been side-lined and suspected by locally leading UDB figures, such as Budimir Gajić. Apart from the question of their own involvement at the time -one we are unable to answer on the basis of the currently available body of source material- the campaign against “deformations” was in part a moral cause for some members of the Party elite. For its implementation, they could draw on prominent historical examples when drafting a political strategy. Despite the Soviet-Yugoslav split, it is worthwhile to analyse internal Yugoslav events with reference to reform tendencies in the Soviet Union.

In a process similar in its mechanisms to, and most likely inspired by, de-Stalinisation under Khrushchev, the SKJ leadership in 1966 promoted reform based on revelations of past wrongdoing of their political rivals. Because the subject of “deformations” had been broached by a higher party forum, Kosovo Communists likely chose attack as the best defence and attempted to capitalize on the “deformations” in the upcoming process of decentralisation. In an effort to compensate their otherwise weak leverage, they successfully levelled demands for a

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<sup>86</sup> PK SKS KM, “Aktivnost SKS na Kosovu i Metohiji na sprovođenju odluka četvrtog Plenuma”, 9, SKS KM, kt. 1, AS; See Dušan Ristić’s statement, “Sedma Plenarna Sednica PK SKS KM”, 12 October 1966, 11/2-5, fond 433, kt. 68, AK.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

substantial expansion of Kosovo autonomy and Albanian nationality rights by raising the issue of violent transgressions of the state security and intelligence agencies. Arguably, they also tried to absolve themselves of a share in the responsibility for state violence in the eyes of the disenchanted Kosovo population, whom they tried to mobilize to increase the pressure on the Serbian/Yugoslav leaders.

However, calling into question the recent socialist past and the use of physical violence to secure their rule, the Communists in Kosovo had opened a Pandora's box, as illustrated by the 1968 protests. Even though the province's autonomy was expanded and Albanians gained in rights, the release of incriminating evidence into the public domain caused upset in Kosovo society and shook the foundations of the Communist leaders' claim to legitimate authority. Revelations that the authorities had openly acknowledged using violent practices met with indignation and dismay, particularly because the promised lustration failed to materialize. The leaders' moralising discourse only emphasized this failure and ultimately evoked criticism from all over the political spectre: from the party base and a younger generation of Communists, who inferred a higher level of complicity of the older Party elite than it would admit; from supporters of a stronger political control and security apparatus, both on the local level and from Belgrade; and from the Yugoslav leadership that put an end to the lustration campaign. On a different level, the moralising nature of the 1966 campaign hampered the reconstruction of the underlying motives and collection of useable evidence on crucial events like the confiscation of weapons, based on which personal responsibilities could have been determined. The failure ultimately played into the hands of nationalist actors who exploited the events to create narratives of victimisation at the hands of the national "Other." With the Albanian majority population and party base and the Montenegrin/Serbian state security officials having already started from diametrically opposed "spheres of experience" and "horizons of expectation," the narrativization of events in the course of the campaign against "deformations" contributed to an even greater incompatibility of the various histories of lived socialism, as it went on. These were to become a powerful mobilising force for nationalist actors in the 1980s and during the state's final disintegration.

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