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*Journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies* is an interdisciplinary refereed journal focusing on the humanities and social sciences of the Balkan countries and the former Soviet republics. The journal welcomes contributions in the fields of history, economics, politics, international relations, culture, art, geography, literature, theology, ethnography and environmental sciences. The idea behind this initiative is to extend a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary approach over issues of regional importance. Under this light, the journal aspires to act as an academic forum for scholars in historical as well as contemporary context on a wide range of cross-regional issues and to provide the epistemological framework for a comparative investigation, which would enhance our understanding of the Balkan, and Black Sea societies, politics and communities. Furthermore, manuscripts connecting the region with wider scopes, such as technological applications, will be also considered.

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## Editorial

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*Journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies* is an Istanbul-based journal aiming at strengthening academic exchange among social scientists from Turkey, the Balkans, the Caucasus and Eastern European countries. We started the journal in 2018 and have published six issues until now. The sixth issue includes three research articles and a special issue consisting of six articles.

The special issue on “*Powershifts, Practices and Memories of Violence in the Balkans*” focuses on the problematic of violence in the Balkans during the “short” 20<sup>th</sup> century. Military occupations during the World Wars and repressive policies of militarist or socialist regimes in the Balkans caused countless human sufferings. Following an introduction by *Prof. Dr. Nathalie Clayer* (Paris) five authors deal with this problematic in this issue: *Jovo Miladinović* (Berlin), *Dr. Franziska Zaugg* (Bern), *Dr. Paolo Fonzi* (Vercelli), *Dr. Isabel Ströhle* (The Hague) and *Dr. Danilo Šarenac* (Belgrade). I would like to thank *Dr. Franziska Zaugg* and *Jovo Miladinović* for the preparation of this valuable thematic issue and for their collaboration with us.

The first article of the issue 6 titled “*Bulgaria’s Secret Empire: An Ultimatum to North Macedonia*” by *Dr. Tomasz Kamusella* discusses the Bulgarian political attitude towards the Republic of North Macedonia. The author analyses the political tensions between two countries within perspective of nationalism and Bulgarian national motives in the region.

The second article of the issue 6 titled “*The Problems of Studying Ottoman Heritage in Serbia*” by *Miloš Todorović* deals with the Serbian historiography on the Ottoman Empire and the Ottoman heritage in Serbia. He shows that although there are numerous studies dealing with the Ottoman period of the Serbian history there are still obstacles to study the Ottoman heritage because of a general negative attitude towards the Ottoman past.

The third and last research article of the issue 6 titled “*Kosovo: From the Ottoman Empire through Yugoslavia to Independence*” by *Dr. Sylë Ukshini* provides an overview on the historical background and emergence of the Republic of Kosovo from an Albanian perspective.

The issue also includes one book review. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu’s



book titled *The House of Sciences: The First Modern University in the Muslim World* (Oxford University Press, 2019) was reviewed by Prof. Dr. Tuncay Zorlu.

I would like to thank the editorial board members of our journal, especially *Cengiz Yolcu*, for their hard work and contributions to this issue. I also thank the authors of the articles and all the referees for their precious efforts during the evaluation process of the articles.

Mehmet Hacısalihođlu, Prof. Dr.

Editor in Chief

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## *Special Issue*

# **“Powershifts, Practices and Memories of Violence in the Balkans”**

Editors

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## Content of the Special Issue

13-18

Introduction to the Special Issue:  
Powershifts, practices and memories of violence in the Balkans  
Nathalie Clayer, Prof. Dr.,  
CNRS/EHESS, Paris, France

19-50

‘Justice’ or an Orchestrated Trial?  
The Lifeworld of Ferhad Bey Draga, the Lawsuit against Him, and the  
Local Communities in Mitrovica in the late 1920s  
Jovo Miladinović, M.A.,  
Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany

51-73

“Un centro d’intrighi”: The Tainted Collaboration of the Axis Powers in  
the Borderlands of “Greater Albania”  
Franziska Zaugg, Dr. phil.,  
Department of History, University of Bern, Switzerland

75-99

Political Violence in a Borderland.  
The Region of Kastoria under Italian Occupation (1941-1943)  
Paolo Fonzi, Dr. phil.,  
Researcher in Contemporary History University of Eastern Piedmont, Italy

101-130

The Yugoslav State Security Service and Physical Violence in Socialist  
Kosovo  
Isabel Ströhle, Dr. phil.,  
The Hague, Netherlands

131-154

The Rediscovery of the Serbian Great War Veterans in Socialist  
Yugoslavia (1970-1989). The Case of Momčilo Gavrić, the Boy Soldier  
Danilo Šarenac, Dr. phil.,  
Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade, Serbia

## Introduction to the Special Issue:

### Powershifts, practices and memories of violence in the Balkans

Nathalie Clayer\*

When the editors of this volume, Jovo Miladinović and Franziska Zaugg, contacted me and requested that I write this introduction, they referred to my approach in terms of “time, space and trajectories” that I was using and promoting in my most recent research. Indeed, the texts collected here represent a set of studies that aim at better understanding the issue of cycles of violence or sequences seen as continuities of violence in South-Eastern Europe. When read through such a prism (time/space/trajectory), they offer a new way of seeing the social mechanisms that lead to such cycles, be they experienced or perceived.

Conflicts and violence, especially inter-ethnic conflicts and violence in the Balkans, have been widely studied, also in terms of continuities and memories<sup>1</sup>. In the present set of texts, what appears to me as original is the fact that they all concentrate on moments of powershift, or potential powershift, and endeavour to give new insights on continuities and

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Wolfgang Höpken, “Performing Violence: Soldiers, Paramilitaries and Civilians in the Twentieth-Century Balkan Wars,” in *No Man’s Land of Violence: Extreme Wars in the 20th Century*, ed. Alf Lüdtke and Bernd Weisbrod (Göttingen: Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte / Wallstein Verlag, 2006), 211-49. Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), and the recent special issue edited by Hanna Kienzler and Endkeleja Sula-Raxhimi, “Collective Memories and Legacies of Political Violence in the Balkans,” *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 47, Special Issue: Collective Memories and Legacies of Political Violence in the Balkans, no. 2 (2019): 173-81.

discontinuities in the practices or memories of violence that play a central role in these shifts, in order to understand the social and political mechanism at stake, in particular legitimization, mobilization and ethnicization processes. Indeed, the volume presents, on one side, two cases of violent powershifts in relation to a military occupation (here the Italian, German and Bulgarian occupation of the regions of Kastoria and Kosovo during World War II), which introduces new actors on the ground; and, on the other side, three cases of non-violent powershifts or horizon of powershifts which also represent shifts in the public memory of violence: the Yugoslav elections of 1925, when the People's Radical Party tried to prevent an electoral defeat and consolidate its power hereafter; the political shifts of 1966 in Socialist Yugoslavia, which corresponds to the eviction of the Minister of the Interior, Ranković, and to a decentralisation of Communist power; and the political shift of the 1970s and 1980s again in Socialist Yugoslavia with, among others, the rise of Serbian nationalism and later, the growth of anti-Communism. I would like to introduce these five studies together using the prism of time/space/trajectories in order to highlight the mechanisms at work between powershifts and practices or memories of violence.

Let us consider first the two studies by Franziska Zaugg and Paolo Fonzi referring to the military occupation of the regions of Mitrovica in Kosovo and Kastoria in Greek Macedonia during WWII. At the first glance, these cases seem to show more discontinuities than otherwise concerning violence and inter-ethnic relations. The presence of the occupying forces not only imply the centrality of the new foreign actors on the ground, but the powershift also introduces important changes within the local society. First, during this period of war, time is running very fast; changes are quick and rapid; the consequence is that synchronic dynamics seem to count more than diachronic ones. As both papers show, violence that is committed at the end of the period is often linked to events or dynamics that have taken place in the previous weeks or months during the war, and not before. Military repression, circulations of arm and the formation of militias by the occupiers are new factors that allow or induce new mechanisms of violence. The changing of the spatial configurations that accompany the powershift is also significant. In both cases, the region under study becomes a border zone, with a neighbourhood that forms another zone of occupation. It also means that the circulation and supply of goods are radically changed, as is the circulation of people. In the case of Kastoria, however, Paolo Fonzi underlines the persistence of the spatial divide between the town and the countryside, even if at the micro-level – at the village level other factors

tend to influence, in different ways, the mobilization of peasants (here Slavo-Macedonians). In the case of Mitrovica, integration into the space of “Greater Albania” contributes to new relations between “Albanians”, “Serbs” and “Montenegrins”, to new conflicts, notably because of the involvement of Albanians from Albania mobilized there, in Kosovo, by the Italian authorities. Indeed, when paying attention to people and their trajectories, be they authority holders or not, it can be seen that such periods of powershift are periods of new constraints as well as new opportunities. In the midst of violence, death and shortages, people adopt varying and changing strategies of survival and resistance, but also, in some cases, of empowerment, as in the case of the family Draga studied by Franziska Zaugg, and more generally in the case of Slavo-Macedonian villagers around Kastoria who seized the opportunity to form armed units against the resistance and later to disband, or to join the ranks of the resistance. In fact, according to the two studies, mistrust seems to have been the common way of seeing the other and engaging with them, more than loyalty. Strategical use in both directions, top-down and bottom-up, was frequent. Besides, in the Greek case, new dynamics of conflicts were no longer over land but over supply; they were no longer peaceful, but armed and violent.

The three other cases are different, since they do not concern a period of war. But as I have already argued, the studies by Jovo Miladinović, Isabel Ströhle and Danilo Šarenac are also dealing with powershift (or potential powershift) sequences. There, violence appears more in terms of memory of violence. A past, thus time, no longer short and changing, is at the heart of the reshaping of public memory, which takes place in various main arenas: a trial in the first case, a Party commission in the second, and public media in the third one. In each case, some actors have an interest, for their own empowerment, to refer back to this past or to let the others discuss it: among others, the formation of armed units during the period of the Austro-Hungarian occupation (1916-1918) in the case studied by Jovo Miladinović; the 1955-1956 weapon confiscation campaign, and more specifically the post-1945 period of reintegration of Kosovo into Socialist Federative Yugoslavia in the case studied by Isabel Ströhle, and the period of the First World War in the case analysed by Danilo Šarenac. In the three cases, the reemerging past had been silenced for different reasons: by an amnesty law; because the perpetrators of violence were the legitimate organs of the state; or by the predominance of the Socialist narrative in which World War II was the founding event, at the expenses of WWI. If the past is then recalled, in the three cases, it is also because of a power balance between different spaces. The powershift or potential

powershift has a spatial dimension inasmuch as it is partly related to the negotiation of the relation between a province or a federative unit and the centre: centralisation, decentralisation, defederalization processes are all at work. At the micro level, in following the trajectories of the actors involved, the three authors show that these processes are the result of various competing personal and eventually collective agencies and that they are shaped by various personal and group interests: in the case studied by Jovo Miladinović, the interest of Ferhat Draga, his family and its local network, but also the interests of the networks of the political parties in competition; in the case studied by Isabel Ströhle, the trajectories of Yugoslav leaders in Belgrade cross those of local Communist leaders, but also those of local people which have suffered from past violence, when the study of Danilo Šarenac shows that, besides the interests of several anti-Communist and Serb nationalist milieus, there are the interests of the veterans of WWI themselves and probably the interests of publishers, journalists and historians.

In relation with this last point, the five studies bring to light three kinds of processes that are accompanying powershifts: legitimation/delegitimation, mobilization and complex ethnicization processes.

The redefinition of legitimate/non-legitimate, in particular of the legitimate/non-legitimate authority, but also of the legitimate/non-legitimate violence is at the heart of the powershifts under study. The reshaping of the memory of violence is a tool for delegitimizing and legitimizing past attitudes or deeds, but, above all, for delegitimizing or legitimizing present searches for empowerment. However, since these processes develop through interactions, there can be multiple and competing attempts of empowerment, made possible by the powershift (or the possible powershift). In the case studied by Isabel Ströhle for example, the Albanian Communist leaders of Kosovo use the denouncement of violence committed during the seizing of weapons campaign of 1955-56 in order to reinforce their power both towards the centre and the local population. In relation with violence or the memory of violence, shaping an image, legitimizing, or delegitimizing the Other, is also a manner of expressing a (dis)loyalty and of ensuring a capacity of mobilization or neutralising a mobilizing power during this powershift period. But, at the same time, this serves on one hand, the very power of Tito at the head of the Yugoslav Federation and on the other, it begins to give empowerment to the local society along nationalist claims through a process of ethnicization. Even in the case analysed by Danilo Šarenac on the use of oral history and testimonies of WWI veterans by political actors

for the reinforcement of their own position in a changing political field at the end of the Socialist period, one can also see the empowerment of Momčilo Gavrić himself, one of these veterans, in changing his own narrative according to the time and to his interlocutors.

What also emerges from these studies is that ethnicization is not a simple, natural and primordial phenomenon in Balkan societies. It has to be contextualized and historicized. In the case handled by Jovo Miladinović for instance, the memory of violence during the Austro-Hungarian occupation makes apparent the existence of local loyalties that cross ethno-confessional boundaries, despite the fact that media are covering the trial of Ferhat Draga with a mood, which opposes Muslim Albanians to Christian Serbs. Indeed, at the local level, factions around local leaders are generally not mono-ethno-confessional since they are built on socio-economic interests. It should also be noted, all the studies introduce notions such as moral economy, expectations, trust and mistrust, changing loyalties that are multiple, sometimes opposite, forces that are working the social matter, especially at the moment of powershifts.

In short, these essays invite us, rather than to analyse violence in terms of continuities and discontinuities, to look at processes of the reshaping of practices and memories related to reconfiguration of power. They drive us to analyse the top-down and bottom-up dynamics underpinning this reshaping and to observe personal and collective empowerment processes through the control and the reshaping of violence or memories of violence, and how through them legitimation (individual and collective), mobilization and ethnicization are renegotiated.



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## **'Justice' or an Orchestrated Trial? The Lifeworld of Ferhad Bey Draga, the Lawsuit against Him, and the Local Communities in Mitrovica in the late 1920s**

Jovo Miladinović\*

### **Abstract:**

This article examines the trial against one of the most prominent notables from Mitrovica, a town which was then located in the southern part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (= SCS), Ferhad Bey Draga. The lawsuit alleged that Ferhad Bey Draga had committed crimes against the Kingdom of Serbia during the Habsburg occupation. The work argues that the SCS ruling parties, which were aware of the fact that these past deeds could be wielded as a weapon, did not hesitate to arrange a political trial in order to eradicate local opponents from the political arena. By paying heed to Ferhad Bey's performance in the courtroom, the article underlines that even in such a situation, actors were able to negotiate with the state with the overarching goal of creating the best possible conditions for themselves. This was possible given their imagined or real influence on the locals. The essay also looks at whether this trial triggered war memories within the communities which consisted of the bilingual locals of the Muslim and Orthodox faith.

**Keywords:** Political Trials, Loyalty, Mitrovica, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Monarchy, Ferhad Bey Draga

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## Introduction\*

Through the 1921 pardon, the new decision-makers in the recently established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes tried to put an end to a dispute in public over the question of who supported the Habsburg or Bulgarian authorities in occupied Serbia and Montenegro between 1916 and 1918.<sup>1</sup> This dispute referred to accusations of the two main political parties in the kingdom -the Democratic Party and the People's Radical Party. Articles dedicated to mutual allegations about how the party members behaved during the occupation took up significant time and space in the press. Many of them actually revealed personal conflicts and political clashes, which were transmitted through the press to the public, making it easily noticeable that the notion of support and treason was often wielded as political leverage. Whenever political or election campaigns were about to begin, political polemics became more frequent.<sup>2</sup> Aside from seeking to end this reciprocal feud, there was also another possible motive for announcing the general amnesty: by deciding that all past deeds would be forgotten, the governing elites conveyed the message that they were ready to start from nothing in the new, post-World War I context.

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\*\* In order to avoid confusions, in the text it would be used the shorted version of the town Mitrovica.

<sup>1</sup> "Rešenje #6671 od 17.02.1921," *Službene novine Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, god. III, 25.02.1921, br. 43, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Marko Pejović, "Beogradska štampa o suđenjima za saradnju sa okupatorima u Srbiji 1918-1920. godine," *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju* XII, no. 1-3 (2005): 85-108. Although the author keeps using the term of collaboration without even reflecting whether the phrase was actually used in the political field within the new state, I have chosen the more 'neutral' label of supporting. This stems from the fact that a) I could not encounter such a term in the post-1918 state-produced sources, but rather supporter or friend was used and b) collaboration and treason, by becoming synonyms, turned out to be a highly charged and political battle concept. Since both labels have been very closely linked to nationalist discourses and quite often moral judgments, they above all emphasize the individual dispositions of the collaborators. More on the term and its use in the context of WWII see Christoph Dieckmann, Babette Quinkert, and Tatjana Tönsmeier, "Editorial," in *Kooperation und Verbrechen: Formen der Kollaboration in Südost- und Osteuropa 1939-1945*, ed. Tatjana Tönsmeier, Babette Quinkert, and Christoph Dieckmann (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag GmbH, 2012), 7-23.

The amnesty implied that those in power and those who committed 'treason' in the latter's eyes had pledged to entirely forget each other's conduct during the war since 'the past belongs in the past' and thus, it would no longer be a source of general distrust.<sup>3</sup> But, was the past really so easily discarded and forgotten? If that was the case, then, why exactly five years after the clemency was declared, was Ferhad Bey Draga, a prominent notable from Mitrovica and possibly one of the most dominant political figures among the Albanian and/or Slavic-speaking Muslims in the southern part of the kingdom, brought to court in the 1920s and accused of committing crimes during the occupation? By initiating a legal process against him, the ruling government -consisting of the People's Radical Party and the Independent Democratic Party- not only misused the judicial system to further their political goals but simultaneously engendered the revival of World War One (WWI) memories as well.

The aim of this paper is neither to defend nor to judge Ferhad Bey but rather to explain why several years after the amnesty was asserted, Ferhad Bey was suddenly arrested in the midst of the 1925 election campaign and between 1926 and 1927, he was put on trial four separate times to face both war and postwar charges. It argues that the ruling parties, which were fully aware of the fact that his past deeds could be utilized as a weapon, did not hesitate to arrange a political trial in order to eradicate opponents from the political arena. The paper also discusses Ferhad Bey's performance in the courtroom. In addition, and keeping the lawsuit in mind, the essay looks at whether the trial triggered war memories within the communities which consisted of the bilingual locals of the Muslim and Orthodox faiths.

This approach stems from that fact that national historiographies, while narrating about WWI in the Mitrovica area, continue speaking about the homogeneous and clear-cut national, and religious groups.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis is namely placed on the ethnic cleavages and ethnonational

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<sup>3</sup> For the general overview on forgetting verdicts in Europe and the Ottoman Empire see Maurus Reinkowski, *Düzenin Şeyleri, Tanzimat'ın Kelimeleri: 19. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Reform Politikasının Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırması* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2017), 213-20.

<sup>4</sup> For the notion of group-formation see Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 13. See also Fabio Bego, "Beyond the Albanian-Slav Divide: Political Cooperation and National Identities in the Balkans at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *East European Politics and Societies: and Cultures* 34, no. 1 (2020): 25-47, and Nathalie Clayer, "The Young Turks and the Albanians or Young Turkism and Albanianism?," in *Penser, agir et vivre dans l'Empire ottoman et en Turquie: Études réunies pour François Geogheon*, ed. Nathalie Clayer and Erdal Kaynar (Paris-Louvain-Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2013), 67-82, here pp. 68-70, 73.

violence. The narrative intends to show that the two groups were not capable of living in coexistence and that they were separated along a national and religious line, which thus labeled them exclusively as Serbs and Albanians.<sup>5</sup>

In the paper, however, a spotlight is shone on the coexistence between the persons of different confessional backgrounds who, in both the Ottoman and post-Ottoman times, were subject to the various dynamics of confessionalization, a process which did not end even in the interwar period and was not necessarily a linear and irreversible process.<sup>6</sup> Although the Greater War (1911-1923) influenced locals to start thinking about national and/or religious boundaries locally, the paper argues that in the face of danger, these people would help one another. Drawing on Burcu Akan's study on urban Muslims in post-Ottoman Macedonia, and Martin Schulze Wessel and Jana Osterkamp's notion of loyalty, this behavior can be understood as performing horizontal loyalty or *şehirli* identity.<sup>7</sup> To the contrary, national historiographies often depict Ferhad and his brother Nedjib Bey as Albanian national heroes only; as

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, see Andrej Mitrović, "Albanians in the Policy of Austria-Hungary towards Serbia 1914-1918," in *Srbi i Albanci u XX veku (ciklus predavanja 7-10. maj 1990)*, ed. Andrej Mitrović (Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti, 1991), 107-33. Bogumil Hrabak, "Kosovska Mitrovica pod austrougarskom okupacijom (1915-1918)," *Zvečan*, no. 1 (1996): 125-44. Božica Mladenović, *Grad u austrougarskoj okupacionoj zoni u Srbiji od 1916. do 1918. godine* (Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 2000), and Miloš M. Damjanović, "O nekim ubistvima srpskih civila iz okoline Kosovske Mitrovice tokom austro-ugarske okupacije u Velikom ratu," *Srpske studije* 7 (2016): 79-95.

<sup>6</sup> Nathalie Clayer, "The Dimension of Confessionalisation in the Ottoman Balkans at the Time of Nationalisms," in *Conflicting Loyalties in the Balkans: the Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire and Nation-Building*, ed. Hannes Grandits, Nathalie Clayer, and Robert Pichler (London-New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 89-109, here pp. 89-90, 2-5, 8-9. See also Nathalie Clayer, "Religious Pluralism in the Balkans during the late Ottoman Imperial Era: Towards a Dynamic Model," in *Imperial Lineages and Legacies in the Eastern Mediterranean: Recording the Imprint of Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Rule*, ed. Rhoads Murphey (London and New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 101-14, here pp. 2, and Nathalie Clayer, *Arnavut Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri: Avrupa'da Çoğunluğa Müslüman bir Ulusun Doğuşu* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2013), 31-41, 54-64, 477-80.

<sup>7</sup> For more detail about the concept of loyalty see Jana Osterkamp and Martin Schulze Wessel, "Texturen von Loyalität: Überlegungen zu einem analytischen Begriff," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 42, no. 4 (2016): 553-73. Jana Osterkamp and Martin Schulze Wessel, "Exploring Loyalty," in *Exploring Loyalty*, ed. Jana Osterkamp and Martin Schulze Wessel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2017), 1-16. and Martin Schulze Wessel, "'Loyalität' als geschichtlicher Grundbegriff und Forschungskonzept: Zur Einleitung," in *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik: Politische, Nationale und Kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten*, ed. Martin Schulze Wessel (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2004), 1-22. On the concept of social, *şehirli* identity see Burcu Akan Ellis, *Shadow Genealogies: Memory and Identity among Urban Muslims in Macedonia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

individuals who had spent their lives thinking about how to fight for the Albanian cause.<sup>8</sup>

However, the historiographies are incapable of grasping that in the moment when family members or personal holdings came into question, these individuals could easily change their national narrative. However, before discussing the trial, it is worth highlighting the lifeworld of Ferhad Bey up until the trial took place. The term of lifeworld refers to "the region of reality in which man can engage himself and he can change while he operates in it." It represents an intersubjective world, which is treated as a natural and social arena that sets the limits of one's or others' reciprocal actions. By participating, a historical actor seeks to revise and influence what is imposed upon him/her.<sup>9</sup>

### Lifeworld of Ferhad Bey Draga

The Draga family's economic base was located in the wide area around Mitrovica. Aside from their work as merchants and owning woodlands and a sawmill, the Dragas belonged to landowning elites as well.<sup>10</sup> Their influence in Mitrovica and its vicinity began as early as in the 1860s, when Ferhad's father, Ali Draga, was acting as a leader of one band and gradually obtained control of several villages in the area. In order to pacify the situation, the Ottoman authorities pardoned him several times and appointed him as a gendarmerie or a border officer.<sup>11</sup> Owing to their father's network and various forms of capital, Ali's sons Mehmed Nedjib, Ferhad, Aydın, and Şefket -all of whom had a title of bey- could enhance their cultural capital since they were educated in the Ottoman capital and therefore, would have held high administrative responsibilities in the Empire.<sup>12</sup> This allowed them to keep political contacts within the secretive

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<sup>8</sup> For instance see Draga, "Ferhat bej (1880-1944)," *Fjalor Enciklopedik Shqitar Botim i ri* (2008): 508. and Fazli Hajrizi, *Mitrovica dhe Shala e Bajgorës në fokusin e historisë (ngjarje, personalitete historike, hrrsimore dhe kulturore)* (Prishtinë: Shtëpia Botuese Libri Shkollor, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-world*, vol. 1 (London: Heinemann, 1974).

<sup>10</sup> Ali Hadri and Živko Avramovski, *Kosovska Mitrovica i okolina* (Kosovska Mitrovica: Institut za istoriju Kosova-Priština, 1979), 98, and Božica Ž. Slavković, "Političke, ekonomske i kulturne prilike na Kosovu i Metohiji 1929-1941" (Unpublished PhD Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filozofski fakultet, 2014), 22.

<sup>11</sup> Theodor A. Ippen, *Novibazar und Kossovo (Das alte Rascien): Eine Studie* (Wien: Alfred Hölder: K. und K. Hof- und Universitäts-Buchhändler, 1892), 115-16, and ÖStA/HHStA/Vienna, PA XXXVIII/385, #34, 7. Mai 1905, Mitrovica, Zambaur to Gotuchowski.

<sup>12</sup> ÖStA/HHStA/Vienna, PA XXXVIII/385, #34, 7. Mai 1905, Mitrovica, Zambaur to Gotuchowski; "Pogibija Bajram-Cura," *Vreme*, god. V, 02. 05. 1925, br. 1181, 1 and Milan

Young Turk Committee whereby some, similar to Nedjib Bey, were elected to the Ottoman parliament after 1908.<sup>13</sup> However, this does not mean that acting as an Ottoman state representative prevented the Dragas from having very different and opposing political preferences vis-à-vis the state since, by relying on social networks, they could act autonomously.<sup>14</sup> They maintained close contacts with the Habsburg consul from Mitrovica, his Italian peer from Prizren, the Serbian diplomatic representative from Prishtinë (Serbian: Priština), and the French Consul from Skopje.<sup>15</sup>

Benefiting from the multilinguistic background of their family and their education, the brothers knew other languages too, such as Bulgarian, Italian, French, German, and BHS.<sup>16</sup> It is apparent how Ferhad Bey acted closely with Nedjib Bey, whereby both of them became the preachers of Albanian nationalism under Ottoman rule, fighting for education in the Albanian language and the use of the Latin alphabet. They also attended the Ferizovik meeting (1908) where they played to the crowd by putting on their Albanian committee hats, thereby provoking them through emphasizing the threat of foreign intervention.<sup>17</sup> Their influence among

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Borisavljević, "Žitije porodice Borisavljević," in *Kazivanja Borisavljevića* (Nova Varoš: "Rujno" Užice, 1995), 23-153, here pp. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Kosovo*, Historical dictionaries of Europe, (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2011), 83. and George W. Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 141, 62.

<sup>14</sup> Nathalie Clayer, "The Albanian Students of the Mekteb-i Mülkiye: Social Networks and Trends of Thought," in *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy*, ed. Elisabeth Özdalga (London and New York: Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 291-311, here pp. 292, 94, 300. and ÖStA/HHStA/Wien, PA XXXVIII/385, #31, 3. Mai 1904, Mitrovica, Zambaur to Minister of Foreign Affairs Gotuchowski.

<sup>15</sup> Bogumil Hrabak, *Dženijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928*, (Beograd, VMD: Beograd, 2003); Eva Anne Frantz, *Gewalt und Koexistenz: Muslime und Christen im spätoosmanischen Kosovo (1870-1913)*, (München, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016), pp. 50 and pp. 136 respectively.

<sup>16</sup> Clayer, "Appendix," 313-43, here pp. 17. and Hajrizi, *Mitrovica dhe Shala e Bajgorës në fokusin e historisë (ngjarje, peshonalitete historike, harsimore dhe kulturore)*, 297.

<sup>17</sup> "Draga, Ferhat bej (1880-1944)," 508. Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913*, 181. M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908*, Studies in Middle Eastern History, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 272. See also Clayer, "The Young Turks and the Albanians or Young Turkism and Albanianism?," 70-71, 77-81; Feroz Ahmad, *Jön Türkler ve Osmanlı'da Milletler: Ermeniler, Rumlar, Arnavutlar, Yahudiler ve Araplar* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2017), 7, 75-76, 79, 86; Gawrych, *The Crescent and the Eagle: Ottoman Rule, Islam and the Albanians, 1874-1913*, 152; Clayer, *Arnavut Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri: Avrupa'da Çoğunluğu Müslüman bir Ulusun Doğuşu*, 466-76, and Nader Sohrabi, "Reluctant Nationalists, Imperial Nation-State, and Neo-Ottomanism: Turks, Albanians, and the Antinomies of the End of Empire," *Social Science History* 42, no. 4 (2018): 835-70, here pp. 37, 44, 47.

the locals was evident not least because the local, regional, and vocational cooperation, as well as mutuality played an important role for building local esteem upon which the brothers could rely on.<sup>18</sup> This implies that this development does not represent a purely top-down process imposed by these social actors, but one should pay heed to the balance of power between other locals and the brothers.<sup>19</sup>

Due to this influence, they were not viewed in a positive light by the new occupying authorities after 1912. Nedjib Bey would even be interned in Belgrade alongside other prominent individuals from Skopje, Vučitrn (Albanian: Vushtrria), Priština and Mitrovica.<sup>20</sup> This also might have had something to do with the fact that Ferhad Bey headed a paramilitary unit during the First Balkan War.<sup>21</sup> At that time, Ferhad Bey began to act alone as a member of the so-called Albanian Committee while in the Ottoman capital, where, thanks to his network, a German ambassador spoke highly of him and recommended that Germany should put more effort into the Albanian-speaking regions.<sup>22</sup> However, this should not be understood that there was no chance for establishing vertical loyalty between the new authorities and the brothers. While Nedjib was incarcerated, the family estates had been partially destroyed during the interregnum period. This resulted in growing uncertainty and a deterioration of the family's financial situation.<sup>23</sup>

These factors may have played a decisive role in reconsidering whether national loyalty comes first before family loyalty.<sup>24</sup> Given all these circumstances, it seems that Nedjib Bey decided to approach the new authorities. This was confirmed in a telegram from Skopje, in which it stated that Nedjib Bey was coming to Belgrade to prove that he was a friend of the state and an opponent of the Albanian national idea, which could be used to spread confusion among the nationally minded Albanians.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the brothers managed to restore the destroyed sawmill

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<sup>18</sup> Clayer, *Arnavut Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri: Avrupa'da Çoğunluğu Müslüman bir Ulusun Doğuşu*, 16-20, 22-25, 43-45, 422-28.

<sup>19</sup> Clayer, "The Dimension of Confessionalisation in the Ottoman Balkans at the Time of Nationalisms," 104-05.

<sup>20</sup> DAS/Belgrade, MID-PO, 1912, R382, XIII/31, undated, Beograd, captured merchants to Nikola Pašić.

<sup>21</sup> ÖStA/HHStA/Vienna, PA XII/Kt. 385-1, Liasse XLV/3, #4395, Mitrovitza, 18.10.1912, Tahy to the MoFA.

<sup>22</sup> PA AA/Berlin, RZ 201, R 13385, #41, 08.02.1913, Pera, Botschaft an den Reichskanzler.

<sup>23</sup> Hadri and Avramovski, *Kosovska Mitrovica i okolina*, 98.

<sup>24</sup> DAS/Belgrade, MID-PO, 1912, R382, XIII/31, no date, Beograd, captured merchants to Nikola Pašić.

<sup>25</sup> AS/ Belgrade, MID-PO, 1913, R405, XVI/586, 17.09.1913, Belgrade, MoI to the MoFA.



and obtained the right for timber rafting.<sup>26</sup> They also continued to negotiate when the Habsburg Monarchy occupied the region in late 1915.<sup>27</sup> Having been aware of their influence among the Albanian-speaking population, the Habsburg authorities considered both brothers as being capable enough to encourage the locals to join the armies of the Central Powers. By boosting their economic basis, the authorities gradually succeeded in turning them into agitators of the enrollment. Protection for the brothers and their families was also granted.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the brothers were able to convince around 1000 recruits to join the Habsburg and Ottoman armies.<sup>29</sup>

Just as Ferhad and Nedjib saw a chance at regaining their status locally by cooperating with the Monarchy, so too did the new authorities recognize the brothers as some of the most influential persons they could rely on. In addition, these measures should be understood as an approach by the new authorities to establish vertical loyalty. This meant that in order to obtain these benefits, the brothers had to perform their allegiance to the cause by participating and supporting the enlistment. But this mutuality, which was based on economic factors was subject to change. Since the authorities took the control of their sawmill, they noticed how Nedjib Bey became particularly hostile towards them.<sup>30</sup> By acquiring the sawmill, the authorities called the brothers' status into question, who had various methods at their disposal which could undermine the Habsburg power, such as spreading rumors among the locals or fostering national propaganda in the region and beyond.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Bogumil Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928* (Beograd: VMD: Beograd, 2003), 287-88.

<sup>27</sup> B. Antić, "Suđenje Ferad beg Dragi: Prvi dan suđenja u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6703, 21.12.1926, 5 and "Treći dan pretresa Ferad beg Dragi, vodi Džemijeta," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1801, 23.12.1926, 3.

<sup>28</sup> DAS/Belgrade, VGG, 8-851, 20.11.1916, Lajos Thallóczy in Mitrovica District (1916), 7, 10-11; *ibid.*, 8-46, #13711, 17.09.1916, Belgrade, MGG/S to its Division 8 and ÖStA/HHStA/Vienna, PA I 976, 32k, Serbien, #21/8 A-G, 07.04.1918, Belgrade, Envoy to Ottokar Czernin.

<sup>29</sup> Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Kosovo*, 82.

<sup>30</sup> ÖStA/KA/Vienna, AOK Qu. Abt., 1917/2478, 163651/S, #30257, 26.10.1917, Belgrade, MGG to the AOK and ÖStA/HHStA/Vienna, PA I 973, Liasse Krieg 32a, Serbien, 03.12.1916, Mitrovica a/K, *Reise durch den Sandjak* (November 1916), 8.

<sup>31</sup> ÖStA/HHStA/Vienna, PA I 977, 32k, Serbien, #Z. 33/P C, 16. 05. 1917, Belgrade, MdÄ Proxy to the AOK; *ibid.*, #12.616, 21.05.1917, Belgrade, MGG/S to the AOK; *ibid.*, #28.868, 01. 09. 1917, Belgrade, MGG/S to the AOK; Clayer, *Arnavut Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri: Avrupa'da Çoğunluğa Müslüman bir Ulusun Doğuşu*, 447-65. Kurt Gostentschnigg, *Wissenschaft im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Militär: Die österreichisch-ungarische Albanologie 1867-1918* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2018), 502-06. See also Marvin Benjamin

The brothers also had unresolved issues with other prominent notables, such as with Derviš Bey Omerović and Hasan Bey Prishtina.<sup>32</sup> Disagreement between them stemmed from the fact that each of these persons inspired to be dominant locally. They realized that the mobilization policy could be used as a pretext for gaining power and even ensured that other competitors would be imprisoned.<sup>33</sup> In mid-1918, Ferhad Bey ceased supporting Hasan Bey -the cause of the split between the two and their factions was due to personal ambition.<sup>34</sup> Owing to this unstable and suspicious behavior, the Habsburg authorities arrested Ferhad Bey under the pretext that he liberated two alleged murderers.<sup>35</sup>

Following the end of Habsburg rule, Ferhad Bey was brought as a hostage to Sarajevo, where he obtained a permit to return home; yet, the new/old authorities did not change their views of him.<sup>36</sup> The local powers tracked him closely, believing that his actions would target the Kingdom of SCS.<sup>37</sup> After the general amnesty was proclaimed, Ferhad Bey could return to Mitrovica, where he actively participated in forming the religious and political organization called the Džemijet (Albanian: Xhemijet, Turkish: Cemiyet) whose foundations were laid by Nedjib Bey. By leaning on the support of the Muslim locals, they managed to benefit from the political struggle between the Democratic Party (DP) and the People's Radical Party (PRP), whereby Nedjib Bey supported the PRP until his death. Ferhad Bey furthered this policy too until the beginning of 1924, since mutual cooperation between these two parties was necessary for several key reasons. After the war, one of the main issues was the

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<sup>32</sup> DAS/Belgrade, VGG, 8-874, 04.03.1917, #3741, Belgrad, MGG/S to the AOK. Half-Month Report between 13.02. and 01.03.1917.

<sup>33</sup> ÖStA/HHStA/Vienna, PA I 1007, Liasse Krieg 50w, Albanien, #12056, 09.12.1917, Belgrade, Envoy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ottokar Czernin.

<sup>34</sup> ÖStA/KA/Vienna, AOK Op. Abt. B-Gruppe, 516, 1918, #143775, Na. Nr. 28700, 09.07.1918, Belgrad MGG/S to the AOK, Monthly Report for the time between 01. 05 and 31.05.1918.

<sup>35</sup> BOA, HR.SYS. 2456/44, 19.07.1918, Belgrade, Envoy for the protection of Ottoman interests and subjects to the MoFA.

<sup>36</sup> "Juče je počelo suđenje Ferad beg Dragi u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1799, 21.12.1926, pp. 3, "Suđenje Ferad-beg Dragi," *Prauda*, god. XXII, br. 349, 21.12.1926, 4 and "Kasacioni sud poništio je presudu kojom je Ferad beg Draga osuđen na 20 godina robjije," *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 1863, 25.02.1927, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928*, 46-47.

ongoing agrarian reform which left many members of the Džemijet afraid of losing their economic base, and as a result their influence.

In addition, other questions (namely concerning schools and sharia-courts) were also on the table. In contrast, the PRP sought a partner in order to pass the first constitution in the kingdom (1921). By voting for the first constitution, the PRP guaranteed financial compensation for the agrarian issue.<sup>38</sup> Nastas Petrović, a PRP member and an initiator for their cooperation, became a shareholder in the brothers' lumber mill. Again, allegiance was enforced upon providing and securing an economic base. As a result of the 1923 parliamentary election, Ferhad Bey entered into the National Assembly but soon problems arose on account of not receiving the financial compensation. Since Ferhad Bey could then see the realization of these goals by cooperating with the DP, the Džemijet gave support to the DP to form the government.<sup>39</sup> By not hesitating to use state apparatus to achieve its intention of staying in power, the PRP decided that the Džemijet had to be eliminated from the election race. Just one month prior to the elections Ferhad Bey was arrested and remained imprisoned until the end of 1927.<sup>40</sup>

Providing the detailed overview of Ferhad Bey's personal trajectory is crucial for several reasons. While supporting Nedjib Bey, he gained necessary experience in learning how one should negotiate and act vis-à-vis the state and different social actors in the region. Just as he was capable of encouraging the Muslim locals to join the army, he also managed to conjure the masses for political goals. That is why a daily declared that throwing out such a prominent agitator from the election struggle, who could steer "the mood of the Muslim masses in the right direction," was something that only the ruling party could profit from.<sup>41</sup> The brothers were aware of under what circumstances they should deploy a state narrative or say something that might please the authorities of different states, which was evident in the courtroom too. This implies that Ferhad Bey must be perceived as a social actor.

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<sup>38</sup> Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928*, 75-76, 79-80, 86, 88-89, 109, 15, 17, 30-31, 34, and Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva: Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2005), 173-76, 82-85, 88.

<sup>39</sup> Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928*, 86-87, 164-66, 88, 213, 29, 32, 87-88.

<sup>40</sup> "Hapšenje Ferad beg Drage," *Vreme*, god. V, br. 1120, 31.01.1925, 1; Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928*, 279. See also "Kasacioni sud osnažio je rešenje o pritvoru Ferat-beg Drage," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1483, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Bor. Antić, "Suđenje Ferad-beg Dragi," *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6700, 18.12.1926, 6.

Only through these persons could the ruling elites extend their control in this area. In cases when these individuals did not act as preachers of the state and when they were forced to leave their economic stronghold, they could be easily turned into an enemy. Therefore, their contact with various outlaws or their acting as preachers of nationalism come as no surprise. This was not something new since the state authorities were already doing the same.<sup>42</sup> When the space to maneuver was narrowed down, the brothers had to negotiate in order to save their family and property. In such cases, there was no other alternative because they would either play or take a chance and risk everything. Getting closer to the new occupying forces could open them up to new opportunities to regain their old status, meaning, the occupation revealed new courses of action, during which time these individuals “search for empire.”<sup>43</sup> The latter term refers to a political grouping that “aspires to place itself under the protection of an imperial power (or any power perceived to be an empire),” which could essentially be said for any state that occupied the Mitrovica region.<sup>44</sup>

It would be wrong to assume that governing elites were not familiar with hidden transcripts of these social actors.<sup>45</sup> Both Habsburg and Ottoman authorities were sometimes confused about what their true intentions were.<sup>46</sup> However, in order to achieve their goals, the new authorities needed the local players.<sup>47</sup> Certainly, this broad-mindedness had its boundaries. When Ferhad Bey’s goals did not run parallel with the Habsburg ones, he was arrested, which also happened in 1925. Keeping in mind Ferhad Bey’s influence on the voters in the region, his decision not to support the PRP but rather their opponents, and the moment when he

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<sup>42</sup> Xavier Bougarel, “The ‘Revenge of the Countryside’ Between Sociological Reality and Nationalist Myth,” *East European Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1999): 157-75, and Dmtar Tasić, *Rat posle rata: Vojska Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca na Kosovu i Metohiji i u Makedoniji 1918-1920* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2012), 396-99.

<sup>43</sup> Tatjana Tönsmeier, “Besatzungsgesellschaften: Begriffliche und konzeptionelle Überlegungen zur Erfahrungsgeschichte des Alltags unter deutscher Besatzung im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” 2015 in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 18.12.2015, accessed 24.03.2021, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14765/zsf.dok.2.663.v1>

<sup>44</sup> Xavier Bougarel, *Islam and Nationhood in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Surviving Empires* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 4 (citation), 27.

<sup>45</sup> James S. Scott, *Tahakküm ve Direniş Sanatları: Gizli Senaryolar* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2018).

<sup>46</sup> ÖStA/KA/Vienna, AOK Op. Abt. B-Gruppe, 510/1916, #34433, Präs. Nr. 6874, 15.11.1916, General Staff Officer of the MGG/M to the MGG/M and BOA, HR.SYS. 2319/4, Enclosure 78/4, 11.07.1917, Vienna, Ottoman Ambassador to the MoFA.

<sup>47</sup> Sohrabi, “Reluctant Nationalists, Imperial Nation-State, and Neo-Ottomanism: Turks, Albanians, and the Antinomies of the End of Empire,” 844.

was put in jail, all indicate that his arrest and the trial have to be imbedded in this context. The ruling elites, seeing no other choice, therefore decided to use judicial system in order to put Ferhad Bey behind bars. This argument sounds most tenable because it would be difficult to clarify the following question: Why was Ferhad Bey detained in January -just- as the election campaign moved toward the climax and not in 1921 or 1923? The trial had politically destroyed the Džemijet and thwarted his political career for some time.

### The Trial

In his seminal work on political trials Otto Kirchheimer claims that judicial proceedings serve to eliminate actual or potential foes of the regime from the political scene. In such cases, courts only serve political powers, not justice because courts have been transformed into a political arena. There are three main categories of political trials: a) the trial involving a common crime committed for political purposes and conducted with a insight to the political benefits which might ultimately grow from successful prosecution; b) the classic political trial: a regime's attempt to incriminate its opponent's public behavior with the goal of evicting them from political life, and c) the derivative political trial, where the weapons of insult, falsehood, and disrespect are manipulated in an effort to bring disrepute upon a political foe.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to criminal proceedings, which are more "cases rather than causes," the judicial machinery is initiated to reach political objectives in a political trial. However, it is the direct involvement in the struggle for political power that gives the political trial its proper designation. They are used to strengthen the position of the ruling party and weaken that of their political opponents.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, they are political because political trials involve political disputes of some social significance, and are both reflective and constitutive of power relations in a given polity.<sup>50</sup> By setting political justice into motion, the executive branch of governments attempts to bend

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<sup>48</sup> Otto Kirchheimer, *Political Justice: the Use of Legal Procedure for Political Ends* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), 6-8, 17, 46.

<sup>49</sup> Kirchheimer, *Political Justice: the Use of Legal Procedure for Political Ends*, 49-50, 52, 419.

<sup>50</sup> Jens Meierhenrich and Devin O. Pendas, "'The Justice of My Case Is Clear, but There's Politics to Fear': Political Trials in Theory and History," in *Political Trials in Theory and History*, ed. Jens Meierhenrich and Devin O. Pendas (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1-64, here pp. 51-62.

the trial to its own benefit.<sup>51</sup> Yet, political trials are to be distinguished from “show trials.” The features of a classic show trial in the Stalinist sense are: a) the total elimination of the element of chance and/or risk from the trial and b) the main function of the trial as a tool in ‘educating’ the public at home and abroad in order to reinforce ideological authority.<sup>52</sup>

The indictment against Ferhad Bey included five counts on which he was prosecuted: The first charge stated that between 1916 and 1918, Ferhad Bey organized so-called flying squads which were deployed in the fight against the paramilitaries which consisted only of the bilingual Muslims. He allegedly did this together with other local powerholders (Derviš Bey and Hasan Bey). The squads consisted of individuals who had been serious convicts and were released from the local prison before entering the military. Afterwards, this unit murdered local Serbs or denounced them to the occupying authorities, for which reason the Habsburg authorities hanged them (18 victims in total). The next allegation denoted that Ferhad Bey, together with Derviš Bey and Hasan Bey, gathered volunteers for the fight against the Serbian and allied forces at the Salonica Front. While heading the post of municipal president during the occupation, Ferhad Bey allegedly stole tools and equipment that belonged to the Kingdom of Serbia. Amid the 1923 election campaign Ferhad Bey supposedly insulted a state officer in Priština. The final accusation was that he, together with Ibrahim Čerkez, attempted to murder three persons during the same election campaign.<sup>53</sup> However, what makes this case even more interesting is the fact that the trial occurred more than once; in fact, it lasted almost three years.<sup>54</sup> But, how can it be argued that this lawsuit was a political trial?

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<sup>51</sup> Alex P. Schmid, “Terrorism, Political Crime and Political Justice,” in *Terrorists on Trial: A performative perspective*, ed. Beatrice Graaf and Alex P. Schmid (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016), 23-50, here pp. 39.

<sup>52</sup> Beatrice Graaf, “Conclusion,” in *Terrorists on Trial: A performative perspective*, ed. Beatrice Graaf and Alex P. Schmid (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016), 503-28, here pp. 08-09.

<sup>53</sup> A. B. Herenda, “Ferhad-beg Draga pred sudom,” *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1561, 23.04.1926, 5 and Bor. Antić, “Sudjenje Ferhad-beg Dragi,” *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6700, 18.12.1926, 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Vreme*, god. VI, 14.02.1926, br. 1483, 1. For the first trial: *Vreme*, god. VI, 23.04.1926, br. 1561, 5. Second trial: *Pravda*, god. XXII, 21.12.1926, br. 349, 4; *Vreme*, god. VI, 21.12.1926, br. 1799, 3; *Pravda*, god. XXII, 22.12.1926, br. 350, 3; *Vreme*, god. VI, 22.12.1926, br. 1800, 5; *Pravda*, god. XXII, 23.12.1926, br. 351, pp. 4; *Vreme*, god. VI, 23.12.1926, br. 1801, 3. Verdict of the first trial: *Pravda*, god. XXII, 23.12.1926, br. 351, 4; *Vreme*, god. VI, 24.12.1926, br. 1802, 5. View of the Court of Cassation on the first verdict: *Pravda*, god. XXIII, 23.02.1927, br. 53, 5; *Vreme*, god. VII, 25.02.1927, br. 1863, 4. Third trial: *Pravda*, god. XXIII, 17.05.1927, br. 131, 5; *Vreme*, god. VII, 17.05.1927, br. 1947, 5. View of the Court of Cassation on the second verdict:

By forming these accusations, Ferhad Bey became the first and only known person from the region who was accused of recruiting the locals. This allegation was labelled as high treason.<sup>55</sup> However, he was not the only person who participated in this act. Other individuals from Mitrovica and beyond, who were also engaged in the political and social life in the county, had participated in the same endeavor.<sup>56</sup> What is surprising, is the fact that a local court should have been familiar with the 1921 general amnesty that granted a pardon to every person for criminal deeds committed during the occupation. This means that the first three allegations made an individual had to be automatically dismissed even before the court ordered a session. Also, according to the 1914 Serbian-Ottoman peace treaty, the right was given to the former Ottoman subjects to opt for either Serbian or Ottoman subjecthood during the period of three years.<sup>57</sup> If the mobilization took place in 1916 or 1917, the court could not charge them because at that point it was not clear whether Ferhad Bey was a Serbian or an Ottoman subject.<sup>58</sup>

Turning to these deeds and merging them with those from the post-war time indicates that the Ferhad Bey trial belongs to the realm of political trials. It is highly improbable that the local authorities and the court were not familiar with the general amnesty. For instance, the opportunity to gain political capital out of the homicide charge may present itself as a natural consequence of an undeniably committed

*Vreme*, god. VII, 05.09.1927, br. 2050, 3; *Vreme*, god. VII, 18.10.1927, br. 2093, 4. Fourth trial: *Pravda*, god. XXIII, 13.12.1927, br. 339, 4; *Vreme*, god. VII, 13.12.1927, br. 2149, 4. The Court of Cassation and releasing from the prison: *Vreme*, god. VII, 27.10.1927, br. 2102, 4 and *Vreme*, god. VII, 29.12.1927, br. 2165, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Siding with the enemy army could put him in jail for twenty years. See *Vojni-krivični zakonik*, (Beograd: Knjižara izdavač Geca Kon, 1915), paragraph 84, pp. 59.

<sup>56</sup> A. Musanić, "Drugi dan pretresa Ferad beg Dragi, bivšem vođi Džemijeta," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1800, 22.12.1926, pp. 5.

<sup>57</sup> "Ugovor o miru zaključen između Kraljevine Srbije i Otomanskog carstva, Carigrad 1. (14) marta 1914," in *Balkanski ugovorni odnosi 1876-1996: Dvostrani i višestrani međunarodni ugovori i drugi diplomatski akti o državnim granicama, političkoj i vojnoj saradnji, verskim i etničkim manjinama*, ed. Momir Stojković (Beograd: JP Službeni list SRJ/SJU "Međunarodna politika", 1998), 409-15, here pp. 10, §3. *Dersaadet'te akdedilen Devlet-i Aliye-Sirbistan Muahedenamesi Ahkamı Mucibince Tatbik ve Takib Olunacak Olan Tabiiyet Meselesine dair Devlet-i Aliye Şehbenderlerine Tebliğ ve İrsal Olunacak Talimatnamedir*, (*Dersaadet: Matbaa-i Osmaniye*, 1330), here pp. 7-8, §15. See also Katrin Boeckh, *Von den Balkankriegen zum Ersten Weltkrieg: Kleinstaatenpolitik und ethnische Selbstbestimmung auf dem Balkan* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996), 88-92. and Tomislav Marković, "Srpsko-turski ugovor o miru 1914. godine," *Srpske studije* 6 (2015): 66-94.

<sup>58</sup> "Suđenje Ferad-begu Dragi," *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 351, 23.12.1926, 4 and "Ferad beg Draga je i na ponovnom pretresu osuđen na 20 godina robije," *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 1947, 17.05.1927, 5.

offense. Similar things could be said for the case involving corruption charges. The treason accusation was not used by the government for eliminating a political opponent but rather, was employed for better wooing and integrating the locals into elections campaigns.<sup>59</sup> Misusing the judicial system was not unknown among the political parties in the post-WWI period and this was not uncommon to the Yugoslav context.<sup>60</sup> The belligerent parties deliberately used crimes against humanity both during and after WWI in order to make the other side look as bad as possible or behaviors of political opponents were knowingly utilized as political leverage.<sup>61</sup>

Considering the voices raised by other prominent political individuals in the kingdom speaks for the argument that this trial was politically motivated. Some, such as Svetozar Pribičević, a leader of the oppositional Independent Democratic Party, stressed that the trial had been orchestrated with the support of the PRP.<sup>62</sup> Interestingly, Pribičević was a coalition partner of the PRP, when Ferhad was arrested. Both Ferhad Bey and his lawyers emphasized dozens of times during the trial that he was a victim of political persecution.<sup>63</sup> The issue of whether or not this hearing was politically motivated became one of the topics raised at the *Annual Assembly of the Association of Judges* almost one year after the legal proceedings were concluded. A judge from Belgrade highlighted "bright examples of judicial independence, when judges, despite pressure, remained at a high level," mentioning in particular the Ferhad Bey case.<sup>64</sup> As a result, the Džemijet lost its ground: while the organization won 14 seats in the 1923 elections, it secured no seats whatsoever in the 1925 elections, which were held one month after

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<sup>59</sup> Kirchheimer, *Political Justice: the Use of Legal Procedure for Political Ends*, 53, 62-63, 110.

<sup>60</sup> Pejović, "Beogradska štampa o suđenjima za saradnju sa okupatorima u Srbiji 1918-1920. godine," 85, 100-08.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel Marc Segesser, "Kriegsverbrechen auf dem Balkan und in Anatolien in der internationalen juristischen Debatte während der Balkankriege und des Ersten Weltkriegs," in *Der Erste Weltkrieg auf dem Balkan: Perspektiven der Forschung*, ed. Angelow Jürgen (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft verlag, 2011), 193-209, here pp. 195. and James E. Connolly, "Mauvaise Conduite: Complicity and Respectability in the occupied Nord, 1914-1918," *First World War Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 7-21, here pp. 12-13.

<sup>62</sup> M., "Zbor g. Sv. Pribičevića u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1637, 12.07.1926, 3.

<sup>63</sup> "Suđenje Ferad-begu Dragi," *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 351, 23.12.1926, 4, "Treći dan pretresa Ferad beg Dragi, vodi Džemijeta," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1801, 23.12.1926, pp. 3, "Ferad-beg Draga je i na ponovnom pretresu osuđen na 20 godine robije," *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 1947, 17.05.1927, pp. 5, and "Četvrti pretres Ferad-begu u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 2093, 18.10.1927, 4.

<sup>64</sup> "Godišnja skupština Udruženja sudija," *Vreme*, god. VIII, br. 2468, 05.11.1928, 4.



Ferhad Bey's arrest.<sup>65</sup> Thus, it comes as no surprise that the citizenry of Mitrovica held the impression that his political career was dead.<sup>66</sup>

It has to be emphasized that not every echelon of the judicial system was fond of partisan justice. Even if sources do not say whether the judge or jury members had been followers of the PRP, it is known that a person who ordered Ferhad Bey's arrest was a member of the ruling party. According to a local teacher, "while Ferhad was still lying in prison and waiting for the decision of the Court of Cassation, former district chief [Petar, J. M] Kunovčić came to prison and he talked to Ferhad Bey for a long time. [...] It soon became known that Kunovčić had suggested Ferhad to join the Radicals with all his friends and voters, and this action will get him be pardoned. Surely, this one had been longing for some time to get rid of long imprisonment, and he accepted eagerly the proposal." The Minister of the Interior at the time, a member of the PRP, made a pardon.<sup>67</sup> Thus, through the negotiations with the same party that had arranged his imprisonment, Ferhad Bey became a freed man. Given the lack of sources, it is difficult to validate the teacher's narrative. However, in late 1927, when it was more than clear that most of the charges would be dropped, Ferhad Bey announced a renewed political life and determination not to stray off the political path. At the outset of 1928, he was already in Belgrade, where he was seen having a meeting with no one other than Nastas Petrović, a former member of the PRP and a shareholder in his sawmill. In November of the same year, Ferhad Bey began to reestablish the Džemijet in the country.<sup>68</sup>

But is it feasible to illustrate Ferhad Bey's performance in the courtroom? The newspaper articles reveal that Ferhad Bey tried to persuade the jury that he was "forced to make a sacrifice" by accepting the post of municipal president under Habsburg rule, claiming how his role was "irrelevant" at that time. Together with his brother, "he had complained to the governor [about the decision], but they threatened to

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<sup>65</sup> "Kasacioni sud poništio je presudu kojom je Ferad beg Draga osuđen na 20 godina robije," *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 1863, 25.02.1927, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Voj. Baljžović, "Četvrto suđenje Ferad beg Dragi u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Pravda*, god. XXIII, br. 339, 13.12.1927, 4.

<sup>67</sup> ASANU/Belgrade, 13316/103, Ferad-beg Ali Draga: Prvak albanskog Kosovskog komiteta, turski, ital[i]janski i nemački špijun i jugoslovenski političar, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Voj. Baljžović, "Četvrto suđenje Ferad beg Dragi u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Pravda*, god. XXIII, br. 339, 13.12.1927, 4; "Dnevne vesti: Ferad beg Draga u Beogradu," *Pravda*, god. XXIV, br. 25, 28.01.1928, 5 and "Ferad beg Draga pokušava da obnovi Džemijet," *Vreme*, god. VIII, br. 2493, 30.11.1928, 7.

kill them if they do not take the position.”<sup>69</sup> “As the president of the Mitrovica municipality, I executed the orders of the Austrian occupation authorities (...) I had also nothing to do with the hangings, robberies, torture, and the ravages against the Serbs (...) This was done by the Austrian occupiers or through Derviš Bey and his men from the flying squads. I (...) took care of the town and I did not allow anyone to get hanged. Hence, I managed to remove many citizens from the gallows and save them being interned.”<sup>70</sup>

Ferhad Bey sought to show that every action or praise coming from the Habsburg side was a strategy directed against him and his brother. He emphasized several times that he was against the recruitment of volunteers and that he worked in opposition to this idea. Actually, had Ferhad Bey and his brother not conducted the recruitment, they would have been sent to the court.<sup>71</sup> As the president of the court mentioned in an official document, in which Ferhad, his brother and Derviš Bey are praised for their help and support, he specified that the document had caused him numerous damages because the Governor aimed to defame his brother and himself before the people as Austrian toadies and as people who worked in interest of the Habsburg Monarchy, and not for *Arnautluk*.<sup>72</sup> Namely, for every deed it was highlighted that the occupiers forced him and his brother Nedjib; ultimately, they could not go against the occupiers' aspirations *Drang nach Osten*.<sup>73</sup> “He and his brother were (...) never driven by money or other benefits [sic! Underlined by J. M.]”<sup>74</sup>

The same narrative was used when Ferhad Bey was accused of being a member close to the Kosovo Committee based in Shkodra. He continued repeating that he met members on the order of the occupying authorities, and he had to do it as the president because he could not avoid such interactions.<sup>75</sup> The defense stressed Ferhad Bey's possible assistance to the paramilitary commander Kosta Pećanac, as well as

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<sup>69</sup> “Juče je počelo suđenje Ferad beg Dragi u Kosovskoj Mitrovici,” *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1799, 21.12.1926, 3.

<sup>70</sup> “Ferad beg Draga, vođa džemijeta, osuđen je na 20 godina robije,” *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1802, 24.12.1926, 5.

<sup>71</sup> “Suđenje Ferad-beg Dragi,” *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 349, 21.12.1926, 4.

<sup>72</sup> “Ferad beg Draga je i na ponovnom pretresu osuđen na 20 godina robije,” *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 1947, 17.05.1927, 5.

<sup>73</sup> A. Musanić, “Drugi dan pretresa Ferad beg Dragi, bivšem vođi Džemijeta,” *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1800, 22.12.1926, 5.

<sup>74</sup> “Ferad-beg Draga je osuđen na dvadeset godina robije u lakom okovu,” *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 353, 24.12.1926, 4.

<sup>75</sup> “Ferad beg Draga, vođa džemijeta, osuđen je na 20 godina robije,” *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1802, 24.12.1926, 5.

various examples of how he helped poor people and the Serbs in the face of danger.<sup>76</sup> Loyalty to the state would also be highlighted too, “if we [Ferhad and Nedjib Bey] participated in politics, we were always following a legal way. Thus, we are not responsible for this either before God, or before the people. The best proof for the absence of any connections between me and this organization [The Kosovo Committee] (...) I took necessary steps against it with the help of high figures in Belgrade, in favor of the country in which I live, and which I gave an honorable oath that I will always work loyally.” Even the close relation between the family and the state was asserted by highlighting that “one family is being ruined here that worked loyally for this country.”<sup>77</sup>

By deploying this narrative, it is obvious that Ferhad Bey wanted to make a clear distinction between the occupiers and the local community, between *them* and *us*, between *the enemy* and *our country*. By repeating the categories *occupiers*, *occupying authorities*, *our people*, and *our country*, he tried to create distance from the previous actions, as if he wanted to find his own spot in the new setting. What is more eye-catching is how Ferhad Bey depicts his life and activities during the occupation. He *was obliged* to participate in every event organized by the Habsburg authorities. They *enforced* him to become a municipal president. He *could not* stop the policy of the Habsburg Monarchy in Mitrovica and its surroundings. He *had* to implement and fulfill their orders. It sounds like Ferhad Bey attempts to present himself as a *victim*, a *yes-man* who only obeys and does what the occupier ordered, and a *servant* in the hands of a stronger force. But this relationship was mutual inasmuch as the occupation had helped him not only in an economic sense, but also it gave him a chance to reestablish his status locally.

The fact that between the years 1914 and 1916 he was not in Mitrovica should not be disregarded; it would be enough time for someone else to be labeled as trustworthy in the eyes of the decision-makers.<sup>78</sup> During this time, different parts of the local community and power holders fought for social and economic dominance. This is not something that Ferhad Bey himself stated to the court, but what other witnesses confirmed during the trial and what Habsburg sources unearth

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<sup>76</sup> See Zija Smajiagić's statement, one of Ferhad Bey's lawyers in “Ferad beg Draga je i na ponovnom pretresu osuđen na 20 godina robije,” *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 1947, 17.05.1927, 5.

<sup>77</sup> See Ferhad Bey's account to the court published in “Ferad-beg Draga je osuđen na dvadeset godina robije u lakom okovu,” *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 352, 24.12.1926, 4.

<sup>78</sup> “Suđenje Ferad-begu Dragi,” *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 351, 23.12.1926, 4.

as well.<sup>79</sup> He was in a personal quarrel with Derviš Bey and in political conflict with Hasan Bey, both of whom were faithful supporters of the Habsburg policy.<sup>80</sup> Yet, this political conflict would not prevent him from cooperating with Hasan after 1918, while the latter was obliged to act politically from abroad.<sup>81</sup> But how did the locals respond to the trial?

### The Trial and the Local Community

The Albanians with the *qeleshe* grievously debate with rich beys. Most of them support Ferhad Bey Draga and defend him. 'Do not mix *din* into the crime of Ferhad Bey Draga!' yell some Albanians girdled with filled bandoleers. What do you want? (...) We have destroyed the *kachak* bands! Serbia is this, eh bey, shouts one Albanian, while hitting the bolt-action rifle with his hand. (...) Previously, there was evil, misery, poverty, and insecurity here. The *kachaks*, supported by the Džemijet, were all over Kosovo and Zvečan. It was such a desperate situation (...); now is peace and prosperity. (...) Everywhere the people are talking merely about Ferhad Bey; the Serbian folk seek a draconian sentence according the righteousness of the law, without any consideration and grace. The Albanians are divided, but most of them still desire a verdict of release because they believe that in that case the Džemijet would be reestablished, whereas roughly a third of them is silent or condemns Ferhad Bey and does not feel the need for restoring the Džemijet.<sup>82</sup>

In this manner, the correspondent of the daily *Vreme* depicted the atmosphere locally just one day before the trial began. Aside from illustrating the "Albanian" in the usual way, which was dominant in the public discourse, the reporter tends to elucidate that all problems of insecurity happening in the region stemmed exclusively from the *kachak* bands. Since they had finally been wiped out, according the narrative, prosperity could come to these parts of the kingdom. Still, the emphasis in this last section is directed to the question of whether one could really

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<sup>79</sup> "Treći dan pretresa Ferad beg Dragi, vodi Džemijeta," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1801, 23.12.1926, 3.

<sup>80</sup> "Suđenje Ferad-beg Dragi," *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 349, 21.12.1926, 4.

<sup>81</sup> UN Archive/Geneva, S391/56, 26 February 1924, Geneva, Bajram Curri, Hasan Prishtina and Bedri Pejani to Paul Hymans. I would like here to express my thanks to Franziska Zaugg who was kind enough to send me and draw my attention to this report.

<sup>82</sup> "Ferad beg Draga iziće će uskoro pred sud u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1798, 20.12.1926, 5.

speak about clear-cut and homogenous groups in relation to the trial. Is it possible to label the lawsuit as some kind of fictional fight between the “Serbs” and the “Albanians”? Did this process represent a perfect example of polarization within the post-war Mitrovica public along a national and/or religious axis as the newspapers try to demonstrate? Did the process reawaken bad memories? Ultimately, did the lawsuit bring back to life memories about WWI among the locals?

In the case of the imagined Albanian community, the conclusion can be drawn that it was far from being unified. The same correspondent writes that “[m]any Muslim notables do not advocate the release of the former leader of the Džemijet.”<sup>83</sup> Even the beys and front-runners of the party did not act as a group. It is hard to explain why this was a case. It is known that some of them saw this as an opportunity to rise up within the party structure by negotiating with the ruling elites. They sought to improve the status of the shattered organization.<sup>84</sup> Ferhad Bey could be *the* person who was capable of mobilizing and drawing in possible voters, but he did not have the upper hand within the organization.<sup>85</sup> However, this does not mean that there were not those among them who did not sympathize with his destiny and who did not perceive the tribunal personally. Although the conviction of 20 years in jail struck Ferhad Bey personally, it was received stronger by his friends and associates. After hearing that he was penalized to the longest possible sentence, they were down-hearted, depressed, and stood motionless for a whole minute.<sup>86</sup>

By reading the newspapers, one notices how much this case drew masses of people to attend the court sessions – not only from those who lived in the Mitrovica region, but also from beyond the region.<sup>87</sup> “It is natural”, writes a daily, “that the court case had to draw the attention of those who were observers of incriminated events, as well as people from

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<sup>83</sup> “Ferad beg Draga iziće će uskoro pred sud u Kosovskoj Mitrovici,” *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1798, 20.12.1926, 5. See also “Pred suđenje Ferad-beg Dragi,” *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6702, 20.12.1926, 5; B. Antić, “Suđenje Ferad beg Dragi: Prvi dan suđenja u Kosovskoj Mitrovici,” *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6703, 21.12.1926, 4. and B. Antić, “Suđenje u Kosovskoj Mitrovici: Ferad beg se brani,” *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6704, 22.12.1926, 8.

<sup>84</sup> B. Antić, “Treće suđenje Ferad-beg Dragu,” *Politika*, god. XXIV, br. 6844, 17.05.1927, 4 and Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928*, 235-36.

<sup>85</sup> Bor. Antić, “Suđenje Ferad beg Dragi,” *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6700, 18.12.1926, 6.

<sup>86</sup> Bor. Antić, “Ferad beg je osuđen na 20 godina robije,” *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6706, 24.12.1926, 6.

<sup>87</sup> “Kasacioni sud poništio je presudu kojom je Ferad beg Draga osuđen na 20 godina robije,” *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 1863, 25.02.1927, 4.

politics."<sup>88</sup> Hence, due to the second trial, "a large crowd of Muslims from Skopje, Vučitrn and other places also arrived" because "there is a lot of attention [locally] for the fate of this politician among both Christian and Muslim folk."<sup>89</sup> "From the early morning, a group of concerned Muslim faces entered court. Since the trial room was too small to accommodate the audience, two larger rooms were emptied out, where all were accommodated. There were very few Christians. They are largely convinced and expect the court to condemn Ferhad Bey even without being present in the court room."<sup>90</sup> Without a doubt, the trial was being followed and commented on not only by the local inhabitants, but also by those living in the adjacent towns and areas.<sup>91</sup>

But, how exactly did the trial resurrect wartime memories, by whom and ultimately, in which situation? Apparently, persons involved in the lawsuit were well aware of the fact that the trial could reawaken ghosts from the past. Already during the first trial session, Ferhad Bey's lawyers asserted that it would be wise to consider the mood of the people given the nature of these deeds. An eyewitness could see the *anxiety* among the population locally.<sup>92</sup> The word *revenge* would even resurface amid the legal proceedings and was used by the attorney of one of the victims.<sup>93</sup> By becoming the dominant topic among the inhabitants, war memories were revived because with every court session, emotions on the ground became apparent. A daily wrote that "[t]oday everything in the town is lively. Again, everywhere the main topic is tomorrow's trial of Ferhad Bey Draga. The Christian folk are peacefully, without any anxiety, talking about the prophecy regarding a new verdict; yet, without those noticeable signs of revenge, which one could detect last time deeply engraved on their faces [the second trial]."<sup>94</sup> After Ferhad Bey was again convicted to

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<sup>88</sup> "Suđenje Ferad-beg Dragi," *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 349, 21.12.1926, 4.

<sup>89</sup> "Pred suđenje Ferad-beg Dragi," *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6702, 20.12.1926, 5.

<sup>90</sup> B. Antić, "Suđenje Ferad beg Dragi: Prvi dan suđenja u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6703, 21.12.1926, 4.

<sup>91</sup> For example, see: "Ferad beg Draga iziće će uskoro pred sud u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1798, 20.12.1926, 5 and "Danas se ponovo sudi Ferad beg Dragi," *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 1946, 16.05.1927, 6.

<sup>92</sup> A. B. Herenda, "Ferad-beg Draga pred sudom," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1561, 23.04.1926, 5.

<sup>93</sup> "Treći dan pretresa Ferad beg Dragi, vođi Džemijeta," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1801, 23.12.1926, 3.

<sup>94</sup> "Danas se ponovo sudi Ferad beg Dragi," *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 1946, 16.05.1927, 6.

20 years in jail, a reporter uttered that the Serbs, and to an extent, the Albanians too, expressed their visible satisfaction with the verdict.<sup>95</sup>

What is problematic in the reporters' narrative is not so much the information presented to the readership, but *how* they portrayed the trial. The reader gets the feeling that there are two homogenous poles that are acting exclusively according to their confessional and/or national affiliation: One is *pro* (Muslims=Albanians) and the other one is *against* Ferhad Bey (Christians=Serbs). The press which is examined tacitly tries to summarize that relationship between the two solely function along this axis. According to one daily, the "Serbian" community behaved as a homogenous group, whereas the "Albanian" one was not as cohesive. But, could it be that the correspondents over-ethicized the situation on the ground? Relying on the witnesses' testimonies, the answer seems to be yes, meaning that not every event should be viewed through the national, religious and ethnic lenses.<sup>96</sup>

Despite Mitrovica endured the Greater War, this was not enough to engender a national and/or confessional polarization. There were bonds that held persons of different backgrounds together, which could even be reinforced during wartime. In a word, these projected national identities do not automatically assert that the latter would act in that manner.<sup>97</sup> By studying not only the press, but also other types of written sources, one should always question given interpretations which could mainly advocate *identities-*, *ancient national hatred-rhetoric*, or the primordial character of the fight. Though the newspapers underline two groups in their articles, their description does not fit with the picture at the time. Among the witnesses who testified in favor of Ferhad Bey, there were several non-Muslims. One of them was Anđelko Nešić, a local priest, whose testimony drew more attention from the local communities than with any other court session. His statement carried special weight since Anđelko, besides enjoying authority among the locals, had been interned while Ferhad Bey was municipal president.<sup>98</sup> After 1918, the priest

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<sup>95</sup> "Četvrti pretres Ferad-begu u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 2093, 18.10.1927, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Dimitris Livanios, "Beyond 'ethnic cleansing': Aspects of the Functioning of Violence in the Ottoman and post-Ottoman Balkans," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 8, no. 3 (2008): 189-203, here pp. 190.

<sup>97</sup> On national and other forms of indifferences see Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93-119.

<sup>98</sup> Damjanović, "O nekim ubistvima srpskih civila iz okoline Kosovske Mitrovice tokom austro-ugarske okupacije u Velikom ratu," 86.

became MP in the National Assembly.<sup>99</sup> In contrast, there were those belonged to the "Albanians," such as Sulejman and Mehmed Sezami, who acted as witnesses against Ferhad Bey, since the latter had experienced a personal conflict stemming back from the war.<sup>100</sup>

Being asked about the defendant's activity amid the occupation, Anđelko uttered that "I regret that I see him here on the bench and in general we should all regret it because he has done a lot of good deeds for our Serbian folk."<sup>101</sup> While the priest was speaking these words, the statement caused astonishment and bitterness among the whole audience and the Christian locals.<sup>102</sup> The priest spoke in detail about Ferhad Beys's conduct towards the local Christian community during the occupation; he underlined how Ferhad Bey helped the impoverished not only by providing them with food, but also by supplying them with carts in order to escape being incarcerated.<sup>103</sup> Although Ferhad Bey could not prevent Anđelko Nešić from being interned, he managed to prevent other town dwellers from being imprisoned. In fact, he vouched for all of them by ensuring a Habsburg commanding officer that he would prepare a register that every potential suspect had to sign each morning and night. In so doing, he safeguarded his fellow town dwellers.<sup>104</sup> Among those who were supposed to be interned, was Josip Popović who headed the post of municipal president at the time that the court proceedings took place in Mitrovica. He also proved to be supportive of Ferhad Bey.<sup>105</sup>

Dobrivoje Milenković defended Ferhad Bey in the court as well, exemplifying how Ferhad provided people with money so they could flee from the area and that he defended their livestock from requisitions. As a result, he came into conflict with the occupying authorities.<sup>106</sup> Stevan

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<sup>99</sup> Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928*, 65.

<sup>100</sup> "Drugi dan: Suđenje Ferad-begu Dragi," *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 350, 22.12.1926, 3.

<sup>101</sup> B. Antić, "Suđenje Ferad beg Dragi: Prvi dan suđenja u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6703, 21.12.1926, 5.

<sup>102</sup> "Juče je počelo suđenje Ferad beg Dragi u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1799, 21.12.1926, 3 and "Četvrti pretres Ferad-begu u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 2093, 18.10.1927, 4.

<sup>103</sup> B. Antić, "Suđenje Ferad beg Dragi: Prvi dan suđenja u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6703, 21.12.1926, 5 and "Juče je počelo suđenje Ferad beg Dragi u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1799, 21.12.1926, 3.

<sup>104</sup> B. Antić, "Suđenje Ferad beg Dragi: Prvi dan suđenja u Kosovskoj Mitrovici," *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6703, 21.12.1926, 5.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> B. Antić, "Suđenje u Kosovskoj Mitrovici: Ferad beg se brani," *Politika*, god. XXIII, br. 6704, 22.12.1926, 8.



Macura also spoken highly about Ferhad Bey's deeds during the occupation. Even though he was not native to the town, Stevan got a job at Ferhad Bey's sawmill as a German interpreter. He stated that the Draga Family helped the Serbs and that the family financially supported many Serb, keeping them from starving.<sup>107</sup> Finally, Vasa Petrović, director of Mitrovica Hospital at the time when the Habsburg troops entered the town, emphasized, "He always protested against killing without a judgment."<sup>108</sup> It therefore comes as no surprise that Ferhad Bey was distinguished locally as "one of the best Turkish beys."<sup>109</sup> Certainly, the aim here is not to claim that the relations were ideal and the possible national identification was not significant.

As Max Bergholz has illustrated in the context of Kulen Vakuf and Bosnia-Herzegovina after WWII, violence can completely change the perception of the people in the area that witnessed mass atrocities committed by individuals of different faith.<sup>110</sup> *Anxiety* was there, but did the trial cause this anxiety among the locals or was it from another previous event? While the state-backed violence was taking place prior to and during the 1923 elections, the polarization along a national axis was occurring. At the time of the 1923 election campaign, the Serbian youth in Pristina smashed shops of the prominent Muslim individuals. In such an atmosphere, Ferhad Bey arrived in the town and, after being insulted and afraid for his life, he used a gun to defend himself and his associates. On the day of elections in Mitrovica an armed clash happened between paramilitaries and gendarmerie forces, and the Albanian voters, who were prevented from voting and reaching the ballot box.<sup>111</sup>

The military had to safeguard Ferhad Bey's home since he also participated in the conflict, which resulted in six deaths, four severely

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid* and A. Musanić, "Drugi dan pretresa Ferad beg Dragi, bivšem vođi Džemijeta," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1800, 22.12.1926, 5.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid* and "Treći dan pretresa Ferad beg Dragi, vođi Džemijeta," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1801, 23.12.1926, 3.

<sup>109</sup> "Suđenje Ferad-begu Dragi," *Pravda*, god. XXII, br. 350, 22.12.1926, 3 and A. Musanić, "Drugi dan pretresa Ferad beg Dragi, bivšem vođi Džemijeta," *Vreme*, god. VI, br. 1800, 22.12.1926, 5.

<sup>110</sup> Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

<sup>111</sup> Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928*, 190-94. Hadri and Avramovski, *Kosovska Mitrovica i okolina*, 152, and UN Archive/Geneva, S391/56, 26.02.1924, Geneva, Bajram Curri, Hasan Prishtina, and Bedri Pejani to Paul Hymans.

injured, and twenty wounded.<sup>112</sup> The ruling elites instrumentalized violence with the purpose of securing victory for the PRP inasmuch as it had its own practical purpose as a strategy wielded in other parts of the kingdom too. This had seriously shaken the *raison d'être* of the state because the locals regardless of confessional belonging, noticed that the paramilitary terror was knowingly wielded several days prior to elections.<sup>113</sup> Thus, just as the Habsburg "enemy" utilized local conflicts to mobilize and establish control over the region, so too were the post-war trials and political violence prior to or during the voting easily used for homogenizing possible voters along the confessional line.<sup>114</sup>

Therefore, the national and/or confessional polarization was not as dominant in one post-war local community as some would assume. If this separation was omnipresent, then why would Christians/Serbs act as witnesses in favor of Ferhad Bey? Why would Ferhad Bey decide to help the "Serbian" people during the conflicts? Why would a grandson of Isa Boletini, Ismet, put his life at risk -and get injured- in the process in order to protect his younger comrades, who were "Serbs", from being attacked by the "Albanians"?<sup>115</sup> WWI influenced persons differently. In certain settings, it led to a collectivization along a confessional and/or national line, but in other situations it did not, meaning, the studies have to clarify

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<sup>112</sup> Hrabak, *Džemijet: Organizacija muslimana Makedonije, Kosova, Metohije i Sandžaka 1919-1928*, 190-91. On the use of paramilitary groupings in the post-WWI Yugoslavia see Džon Pol Njumen, *Jugoslavija u senci rata: Veterani u novoizgrađenoj državi, 1903-1945* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik 2017), 75-76, 86-87, 89-90, 174-86, 88, 200-03. Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva: Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918-1941*, 183, and Salko Užičanin, *Nacija i teror: Djelatnost nacionalističkih organizacija u Bosni i Hercegovini (1921-1929)* (Tuzla: Društvo istoričara i Akademija društveno-humanističkih nauka, 2019). On the ideological background of various paramilitary organization in post-1918 Yugoslavia see Vasilije Z. Dragosavljević, "Ideološki uticaji evropskog fašizma na jugoslovenske integralističke pokrete radiklane desnice u međuratnom periodu (1921-1941)" (Doktorska disertacija, Univerzitet u Beogradu Filozofski fakultet, 2017), and Sandra Prlenda, "Young, Religious, and Radical: The Croat Catholic Youth Organization, 1922-1945," in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, ed. John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (New York: Central European University Press, 2004), 82-109.

<sup>113</sup> PA AA/Berlin, RZ 206, R 73152, #775, 03. 09. 1923, Belgrade, Legation to the MoFA, 1-2; IAR/Novi Pazar, F284, Savo Čaković, *Hronika Sjenice*, 130-131 and Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs: Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

<sup>114</sup> Damjanović, "O nekim ubistvima srpskih civila iz okoline Kosovske Mitrovice tokom austro-ugarske okupacije u Velikom ratu," 81, 86, and Clayer, "The Dimension of Confessionalisation in the Ottoman Balkans at the Time of Nationalisms," 108-09.

<sup>115</sup> "Ismet Boljetinac unuk Ise Boljetinca braneći mlade drugove uboden je kamom od jednog kriminalnog tima," *Vreme*, god. XVI, br. 5220, 28.07.1936, 7.

why in one situation this drives some to perceive former neighbors as their enemies, and in some it does not.

Although the clergyman Anđelko Nešić was interned, he chose to testify in favor of Ferhad Bey. Yet, his daughter presented a new charge against Ferhad Bey.<sup>116</sup> Due to the lack of sources, it is practically impossible to explain what the reasons were behind this action. Still, all of this confirms that in certain settings people do not *act* simply because they are identified in sources as “Serbs” or “Albanians.”<sup>117</sup> However, the trial sparked memories of WWI and allowed bad experiences to come back. By debating the proceedings and Ferhad Bey’s behavior during the Habsburg occupation, it can be said that within certain parts of the communities, the projected national and/or confessional boundaries began to become more solidified.<sup>118</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

Writing about Ferhad Bey is not an easy task. His activity amid WWII in the Mitrovica area has drawn more scholarly attention than that of WWI or prior to the Balkan Wars.<sup>119</sup> Yet, the focus here has been directed towards his lifeworld in the Ottoman and post-Ottoman times. In addition to arguing why the trial against Ferhad Bey was initiated in 1925, the aim was also to show his performance in the courtroom, whether the process revived WWI memories, and more importantly, the reaction of the local communities. Certain branches of the government were willing to mishandle the judicial system prior to the general elections in order to remove Ferhad Bey from the political race. The judicial process, together with the backed violence, was used not only for homogenizing local voters, but also as a tool for intimidation, which in turn yielded the necessary outcome. While the trial was taking place, the WWI-memories were being re-experienced locally. However, it is worth stressing that the separation was not as dominant as one would assume

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<sup>116</sup> “Četvrti pretres Ferad-begu u Kosovskoj Mitrovici,” *Vreme*, god. VII, br. 2093, 18.10.1927, 4.

<sup>117</sup> Clayer, “The Dimension of Confessionalisation in the Ottoman Balkans at the Time of Nationalisms,” 106.

<sup>118</sup> Clayer, “Religious Pluralism in the Balkans during the late Ottoman Imperial Era: Towards a Dynamic Model,” 102.

<sup>119</sup> On Ferhad Bey’s role and his son’s activity, Ali Draga, during WWII see Franziska Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime in der Waffen-SS: von “Großalbanien” zur Division “Skanderbeg”* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2016). and Milutin Živković, *Između “Velike Albanije” i okupirane Srbije: Novi Pazar, Tutin i Ibarski Kolašin (1941-1944)* (Leposavić: Institut za srpsku kulturu Priština/Leposavić, 2018).

locally. Ferhad Bey's performance also shows how individuals are able to recognize the situation in which they should emphasize the state loyalty too since they are skilled enough to comprehend which narrative should be used in order to profit from the situation. Emphasis on the cooperation with the paramilitaries, denial that one worked together with the enemy organizations or other "state enemies," their denunciation to the state authorities, disavowal that one ever politically or economically benefited from the occupation, and proof that one is a loyal citizen, should all be seen as a kind of deployed *weapon of the weak*.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

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## **“Un centro d’intrighi”: The Tainted Collaboration of the Axis Powers in the Borderlands of “Greater Albania”**

Franziska Zaugg\*

### **Abstract:**

During the Second World War in the northeastern border areas of “Greater Albania”, Serbia, and Montenegro the two occupying powers, Italy and Germany, were forced to work together from 1941 to 1943. From the beginning, the collaboration, which evolved during the Balkans campaign in 1941 following the redistribution of the territories between the Axis powers, was marked by deep resentment and distrust. Both occupying powers acted against opponents in the most brutal manner in order to destroy enemy groups and keep their part of the territory under control. But at the same time, both wanted to keep the influence of the other occupying power as subdued as possible by manipulating and instrumentalising the pre-existing interethnic conflicts between locals for their own purposes. The following article seeks to shed light on these Italian-German occupation strategies, which have not been thoroughly investigated thus far.

**Keywords:** Second World War, Axis powers, Albania, Greater Albania, Serbia, Italy, Germany, persecution, recruitment

### **Introduction**

Despite the official image of a cordial friendship between Mussolini and

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Hitler, the everyday reality in “Greater Albania” and its border territories -where Italian and German authorities were obliged to work together from 1941 to 1943- was quite different. The relationship between the two Axis powers was hardly a cordial one, but rather corroded by suspicion, envy, and mutual accusations. These tensions became visible particularly in the territories near the demarcation lines in Northern Kosovo and the Sandžak region. Therefore, after a short introduction and overview, this article focuses on Italian and German occupation structures, their superficial collaboration, their efforts to harm the rival in “Greater Albania” and its border territories and their efforts to instrumentalise already smouldering interethnic conflicts of the region.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, this paper will shed light on intentions, strategies and the active involvement of local players within the machinations of the occupying forces.

### Becoming an Italian colony

After the 2018 Football World Cup “Greater Albania” became common talk once again. To build “Greater Albania” was not only an Albanian national intention since 1912,<sup>2</sup> but a long-term Italian project too, as we will see. On Christmas Eve of 1924, Fan Noli, one of the fast-changing prime ministers, who tried to lead the young state towards democracy, was overturned by a coup led by Ahmed Zogu and his followers.<sup>3</sup> Zogu immediately established a dictatorial regime, persecuted his opponents harshly and finally crowned himself King on 1 September 1928. Under Zogu, Albania became increasingly dependent on Italy and formed the base of Mussolini’s expansionist efforts in Southeast Europe in the interwar period.<sup>4</sup> The growing Italian influence in the economic sector became visible through the multitude of diverse Italian companies, which settled in Albania beginning in the 1920s and exploited mineral resources mainly for the Italian defence industry. In 1925 Mussolini founded the *Società per lo Sviluppo Economico in Albania* (SVEA), which would dominate

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<sup>1</sup> On various perceptions of Italians and Germans as occupiers see H. James Burgwyn, *L'impero sull'adriatico. Mussolini e la conquista della Jugoslavia 1941-1943* (Gorizia: LEG, 2006), 368-376 and Filippo Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano. La rimozione delle colpe della seconda guerra mondiale* (Roma: Laterza, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Since the Albanian National Congress on 28 November 1912 in Vlorë/Valona the discussion on the seize of the Albanian state never stopped. See for example report by Safranek, 21 May 1917, Liasse Krieg Serbien, AT-OeStA/HHStA PA I 977-32k.

<sup>3</sup> Zogu was supported by the Russian White Guard and the government in Belgrade. Bernhard Tönnies, *Sonderfall Albanien, Enver Hoxhas "eigener Weg" und die historischen Ursprünge seiner Ideologie* (München: Oldenbourg, 1980), 366.

<sup>4</sup> Elena Aga Rossi and Maria Teresa Giusti, *Una guerra a parte: I militari italiani nei Balcani, 1940-1945* (Bologna: Mulino, 2011), 30.

the entire Albanian economy.<sup>5</sup> A stereotypical example, which represents nearly all Italian enterprises in Albania in this period was the *Azienda Generale Italiana Petroli*, better known as *AGIP*. Founded in 1926 in Rome, its influence in Albania increased rapidly. A few years later, *AGIP* already had established a branch in Albania, the *Azienda Italiana Petroli Albanesi* (*AIPA*).<sup>6</sup>

Among the most remarkable expressions of the growing Italian influence were the two Tirana Agreements: The First Tirana Agreement was set for five years and was signed on 27 November 1926 as a “friendship- and security-pact”. The Second Tirana Agreement, a defensive alliance for the next twenty years, was formalized between the two states on 22 November 1927.<sup>7</sup>

On 22 June 1938, Ciano and General Alberto Pariani, Chief of the General Staff, discussed possible implementations for the further exploitation of Albania. The oil field of Devoll was seen as highly essential for the military autarky of the Italian state in the occurrence of a future military conflict.<sup>8</sup> In September 1938 the concrete lines of a military scenario to annex Albania had already been initiated, given that Yugoslavia and Greece remained neutral.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, Ciano and Mussolini set up a pro forma ultimatum for 6 April 1939.<sup>10</sup> During the night from 6 April to 7 April, Italian forces under the command of general Alfredo Guzzoni invaded Albania. An Italian newspaper headline demonstrates the official view on the occupation: “Albania connected to Italy forever!” The new Albanian government was portrayed as being grateful for belonging to the great imperial and fascist Italy now.<sup>11</sup> The German ambassador in Tirana Eberhard von Pannwitz

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<sup>5</sup> “Society for Economic Development in Albania” founded on 23 April 1925. Tönnes, *Sonderfall Albanien*, 375.

<sup>6</sup> Davide Conti, *L’occupazione italiana dei Balcani. Crimini die Guerra e mito della “brava gente” (1940-1943)* (Roma et al.: Laterza, 2016), 145. Bernhard Kühmel, “Deutschland und Albanien 1943-1944: die Auswirkungen der Besetzung auf die innenpolitische Entwicklung des Landes” (PhD diss., Universität Bochum, 1981), 32.

<sup>7</sup> Tönnes, *Sonderfall Albanien*, 384.

<sup>8</sup> Massimo Borgogni, *Tra continuità e incertezza, La strategia politico-militare dell’Italia in Albania fino all’Operazione “Oltre Mare Tirana”* (Mailand: Franco Angeli 2007), 257.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>10</sup> Galeazzo Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943: The Complete, Unabridged Diaries of Count Galeazzo Ciano, Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs 1936-1943*, ed. Hugh Gibson (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1946), 5 April 1939, 60. Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 8 April 1939, 62.

<sup>11</sup> News in brief “Albanien für immer mit Italien verbunden!”, *D.N.B.*, Nr. 557, 13 April 1939, PAAA, R102359. As Rodogno points out Albania was the only European conquest

observed on the morning of 7 April that, "Italian warships came to Durazzo during the night opening fire in the morning, to which the Albanians responded. Italian planes dropped flyers, which advised the population against resistance. Italian forces would stay in the country only until order, justice and peace would be established. Every resistance will be broken."<sup>12</sup> There were only a few exceptions like Abaz Kupa, an Albanian notable and former officer in Zogu's armed forces, who resisted with his private army in Durrës (Durazzo).<sup>13</sup>

### Creating "Greater Albania"

Mussolini and Ciano were well aware of the ethnic situation and irredentism throughout Albania and the bordering territories and knew of the integrational drive of the concept "Greater Albania" for the realization of their own intentions: Still in April 1939, only a few days after the invasion, Ciano considered the integration of about 850,000 Kosovars to double the population of Albania.<sup>14</sup> His goal was to focus the attention of Yugoslavia away from the Italian activities and towards the Kosovo region, "an inner Balkan problem" as he noted.<sup>15</sup> Mussolini himself saw Albanian irredentism as "a small light at the end of a dark tunnel". Both were convinced that this was "the ideal future lure to keep the Albanian national sentiment alive and unified".<sup>16</sup> One year later, in 1940, Ciano noted after a journey through the country that, "the Albanians are very belligerent and want Kossowa [sic] and Ciamuria. Therefore, it is easy for us to augment the sympathy by supporting the Albanian nationalism."<sup>17</sup>

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accomplished by the Italians without the help of the Germans. Davide Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire: Italian Occupation During the Second World War*, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57. Tönnes, *Sonderfall Albanien*, 415-416.

<sup>12</sup> Telegram, Consulate General Tirana, from von Pannwitz to Auswaertiges Amt (AA), 7 April 1939, PAAA, R28845.

<sup>13</sup> Hubert Neuwirth, *Widerstand und Kollaboration in Albanien 1939-1944* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 41. Tönnes, *Sonderfall Albanien*, 421.

<sup>14</sup> The number of potential "New Albanians" depends on the various sources: 850,000 (Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 21 April 1939, p. 69), 750,000 (see Willibald Kollegger, *Albaniens Wiedergeburt* (Wien: Wiener Verlagsgesellschaft, 1942), 147) and 500,000 (see von Pannwitz an AA, 11.10.1938, PAAA, R103286, p. 66). See for Albanian initiatives for a "Greater Albania" shortly after the Italian invasion Luca Micheletta, "Il sostegno alla grande Albania: Il caso del Kosovo," in *L'occupazione italiana dell' Jugoslavia (1941-1943)* ed. Francesco Caccamo and Monzali Luciano (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2008), 259.

<sup>15</sup> Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 21 April 1939, 69.

<sup>16</sup> Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 3 June 1939, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 22 May 1940, 254. Ciamuria/Tsamouria/Çamëria is a border region in the south of Albania towards Greece.

Two years later, in April 1941, the goal to enlarge the Italian occupied territory became reality: After the coup d’état of anti-German and anti-Italian officers in Serbia on 25 March against the government Dragiša Cvetković, the underage Peter II was crowned king. Only two days later, on 27 March, Hitler decided to destroy Yugoslavia as a state.<sup>18</sup> On 6 April the Balkan campaign started -and just days later on 17 April, the operation came to its conclusion.<sup>19</sup> Kosovo was separated in three parts: South and Middle Kosovo became “New Albania” and were now part of “Greater Albania” under Italian control. Northern Kosovo with parts of the Sandžak remained with Serbia under German military control, and a smaller eastern part now belonged to Bulgaria. Many of the Albanians in this region saw the Balkan campaign as a liberation of the so-called ‘Serbian yoke’, and therefore were willing to collaborate with the Axis powers.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, at the same time resistance against the invaders grew.<sup>21</sup>

### New neighbours: Quarrels and collaboration

Italy and Germany now became neighbours, and as allies they needed to collaborate and set up a functioning system to rule the region. The Germans were primarily interested in the economic exploitation of the “Greater Albanian” border territories. The Italians however, were looking for a political and military domination of “Greater Albania” - besides the satisfaction of economic interests. Holm Sundhausen characterized the resulting conflicts of interests with the following words: “A special problem was the diversification between the NS-‘Grossraumwirtschaft’ [wider area economy] and Italian spheres of interest in Southeast Europe. The distinction always remained hazy and noncommittal; additionally, it was obscured by distinct (and notably unrealistic) differentiations between political and economic spheres of

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<sup>18</sup> Detlef Vogel, “Eingreifen Deutschlands auf dem Balkan,” in *Der Mittelmeerraum und Südosteuropa: Von der “non belligeranza” Italiens bis zum Kriegseintritt der Vereinigten Staaten*, vol. 3, ed. Gerhard Schreiber, Bernd Stegemann, and Detlef Vogel (München & Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1984), 343-344. Jozo Tomasević, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia 1941-1945, Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: University Press, 2001), 47.

<sup>19</sup> Tomasević, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia*, 61-64.

<sup>20</sup> Henriette Riegler, “Angst vor Großalbanien – Konstruktionen, Realitäten und Szenarien,” in *Albanien: Geographie, historische Anthropologie, Geschichte, Kultur, postkommunistische Transformation* ed. Peter Jordan (Wien & Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 329-342, 333.

<sup>21</sup> For early resistance movements in the region see Franziska Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime in der Waffen-SS, Von “Großalbanien” zur Division “Skanderbeg”* (Paderborn: Schöningh 2016), 64-74. Franziska Zaugg, “Resistance and Its Opponents in the Region of Sandžak and Kosovo,” in: *Les Cahiers Sirice* 1, no. 22 (2019): 85-99.

influence and between super- and sub-spheres. This ambiguity created a lot of space for manifold interpretations, and was filled with most diverse contents (political, geopolitical, economic, ideological and ethnic-political) by the rivalling centres of power and authorities in the Third Reich."<sup>22</sup>

As a consequence, neither the diverging interests of the Axis powers nor those of particular Balkan states (Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria) were satisfied with the situation regarding Kosovo. A contrary scenario unfolded and, "in the Balkans evolved a permanent side theatre whose challenges the [German] political and military leadership couldn't take."<sup>23</sup> It became a hotspot of diverse overlapping conflicts between various local ethnic and political groups, between these groups and the Axis powers, and finally between the two fascist powers as well.

In the last years before the Italian invasion, the German ambassador in Tirana Eberhard von Pannwitz voiced misgivings claiming that there was an anti-Italian mindset among the population because they feared they would become part of a war theatre once again. Even the annexation of Kosovo would not change this attitude.<sup>24</sup> Shortly after the Italian invasion in July 1939, von Pannwitz noted sarcastically that the speed of the fascistisation confused the Albanians who were "used to oriental tranquility".<sup>25</sup> One year later he reported that the "noisy and feisty Italian attitude did not evoke integrity by the calm and serious Albanians" and therefore they would never respect the new rulers.<sup>26</sup> He labelled the Italians as being unmanly, deceitful and sneaky.<sup>27</sup> Fascist state visits were described by von Pannwitz as grotesque events: "When Ciano arrives, *Fascio*-girls are presented in uniform. They parade with 100 bicycles, 100 tennis rackets and 50 fencing masks and swords. But there are neither tennis courts nor a tennis instructor, nor a fencing hall, nor a fencing instructor. They only do some cycling from time to time." According to him, the Albanians were offended by the Italians' aimlessness, arrogance,

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<sup>22</sup> Holm Sundhaussen, "Improvisierte Ausbeutung - der Balkan unter deutscher Okkupation," in *Das organisierte Chaos: "Ämterdarwinismus" und "Gesinnungsethik": Determinanten nationalsozialistischer Besatzungsherrschaft*, ed. Johannes Houwink ten Cate, Johannes and Gerhard Otto (Berlin: Metropol, 1999), 56.

<sup>23</sup> Olshausen, *Deutsche Balkanpolitik*, 724.

<sup>24</sup> German embassy Tirana to AA, 4 August 1937, PAAA, R103286, p. 043-044. Von Pannwitz to AA, 11.10.1938, PAAA, R103286, 66.

<sup>25</sup> Von Pannwitz to AA, 10 July 1939, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/8, 238723.

<sup>26</sup> Von Pannwitz to AA, 20 April 1940, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/8, 238703.

<sup>27</sup> Von Pannwitz to AA, 10 July 1939, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/8, 238717. See also Bernd J. Fischer, *Albania at War 1939-1945* (London: Hurst & Company, 1999), 89.

and corruption.<sup>28</sup> It was hardly surprising when Ciano asked the *Auswaertiges Amt* to withdraw von Pannwitz.<sup>29</sup> In autumn 1940 Ernst von Weizsäcker had to recall von Pannwitz due to pressure from Mussolini and Ciano.<sup>30</sup>

According to Pfeiffer, at the consulate general in Tirana, the Italians’ distrust only increased during the Balkan campaign when an Albanian proverb was mentioned at that time, which said that the Italians would tear the tongue out of anyone who dared to speak positively about the brief period in government of the German Prince Wilhelm zu Wied in 1914. He also describes the case of an Albanian who was warned by an Italian officer after wanting to meet with an employee of the German Consulate General for a glass of wine over the phone. The Italian officer was prompted to stop such phone calls.<sup>31</sup>

In the same period, not only in the north-eastern periphery, but also in the south on the Albanian-Greek border, resentments between Italians and Germans were smouldering at their highest levels, as Ciano confirms: “By the way, I have had enough of the Germans since [Field Marshal Wilhelm] List signed the armistice with Greece behind our backs and ever since the soldiers of the Casale division, who come from Forlì and hate the Germans, found a German soldier on the Perati bridge who blocked their path and stole the fruit of victory [over Greece]. Personally, I have had enough of Hitler and his actions. I do not like conversations that are introduced by a whistle; whistles are used to call waiters. And what other conversations are these? I have to listen to a really boring and useless monologue for five hours.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Note von Pannwitz to AA, 4 June 1940, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/8, 238695.

<sup>29</sup> Von Mackensen to AA, 23 May 1938, PAAA, R103286, 047.

<sup>30</sup> Weizsäcker to Ribbentrop, 25 October 1940, PAAA, R28845, 25. The day after von Mackensen urged von Pannwitz to leave Tirana immediately, hence Ciano did not meet him again when he visited Tirana for the next time. Von Mackensen an Weizsäcker, 26 October 1940, PAAA, R28845, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Consulate general Tirana, Pfeiffer to the German embassy in Rome, “Notes on the situation in Albania”, 19 April 1941, PAAA, R28845, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 10 June 1941, 333. For detailed insights into the German and Italian war fare and occupation policy in Greece see e.g. Anestis Nessou, *Griechenland 1941-1945: Deutsche Besatzungspolitik und Verbrechen gegen die Zivilbevölkerung - eine Beurteilung nach dem Völkerrecht* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009) or Paolo Fonzi, *Fame di Guerra. L'occupazione italiana della Grecia (1941-1943)* (Rome: Carocci 2019).



Half a year later the newly drawn demarcation line added more tinder to the fire.<sup>33</sup> Shortly after the Balkan campaign, criticism arose due to the mutual economic claims in the region. The Italians were convinced that the Germans would not effectively contain the anti-Italian activities in northern Kosovo. On the German side it was rumoured that the Italians would try to destroy the amicable Albanian-German relationship.<sup>34</sup> Admittedly, the Italians got the major part of Kosovo and the territory around Debar and Struga in what is today Macedonia. However, the Germans insisted they would gain the region of Mitrovica and therefore inherit the mineral wealth found in the zinc and lead mines of Trepça/Trepča.<sup>35</sup> They also claimed the ore mine in the Ljuboten region.<sup>36</sup> The only German claims left unsatisfied were the economically enticing border territories east of Prishtina/Priština and Ferizaj/Uroševac.<sup>37</sup>

In November 1941, Otto von Erdmannsdorf, of the political department of the *Auswaertiges Amt*, continued to emphasize the importance of mutual “peace and order in political respect” for the implementation of economic interests in the region.<sup>38</sup> However, at the same time, Italian authorities began to suspect a growing anti-Italian movement on the German side of Kosovo.<sup>39</sup> The Italian ambassador in Berlin Dino Alfieri refers to a hub of intrigues in Mitrovica - “un centro di intrighi” - because the Albanians there who did not accept the Italian

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<sup>33</sup> Schliep an AA, 3 August 1942, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3. Generalkonsulat Tirana, Pfeiffer an German embassy in Rome, “Notizen zur Lage in Albanien”, 19.04.1941, PAAA, R28845, 31.

<sup>34</sup> OB Südost, name illegible, report “Entwicklung der militärischen Lage in Albanien im Herbst 1944”, undated, BArchF, RW 40/116a, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Kosovo: Kurze Geschichte einer zentralbalkanischen Landschaft* (Wien: Böhlau, 2008), 212. Originally, Trepča was set up in 1926 by the British. Živko Avramovski. “Treći Reich i ‘Velika Albanija’ posle kapitulacije Italije (1943-1944),” in *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu* 1 (1976): 93-213, 106-109. See also Klaus Olhausen, *Zwischenspiel auf dem Balkan: Die deutsche Balkanpolitik gegenüber Jugoslawien und Griechenland von März bis Juli 1941* (München: R. Oldenbourg 1973), 160.

<sup>36</sup> Avramovski, “Treći Reich,” 106-109. Neuwirth, *Widerstand und Kollaboration*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Klaus Olhausen, “Die deutsche Balkanpolitik 1940-1941,” in *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte: Materialien zur Außenpolitik des Dritten Reiches* ed. Manfred Funke (Kronberg: Athenäum 1978), 722.

<sup>38</sup> AA, Otto von Erdmannsdorf to general consulate Tirana, 15 November 1941, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3.

<sup>39</sup> On the ambiguity of the demarcation line see also “Linie von Wien” office of border questions to the Albanian cabinet, note Italian foreign ministry, Abteilung politische Angelegenheiten, 2 January 1942, ASD, AP, 1931-1945, Bulgaria, Busta 28, sottofasc. 2 “incidenti vari al confine”. See also report of Italian ambassador in Berlin to Italian foreign ministry, 5 November 1941, ASD, AP, 1931-1945, Bulgaria, Busta 28, sottofasc. 2 “incidenti vari al confine”.

domination went over to the German side and publicly boasted their support for the Germans. Therefore, the Italians requested to send some troops into the northern region.<sup>40</sup> However the ambassador in Rome, von Mackensen, had been instructed to forbid the Italians from doing so.<sup>41</sup>

Wegener, from the consulate general, did not deny the accusations, but brought up the objection that the Italians would support Četnik units in the same territory.<sup>42</sup> Vice consul Emil Geiger reported to Ribbentrop that the Italian intelligence service was ordered to implement an action in “New Albania” with the aim to enlarge the “Greater Albanian” territory again.<sup>43</sup>

*Volkstumsreferent* Dr. Otto Feninger confirmed that there was “camaraderie and banter among German military personnel and Albanians based on an anti-Italian bias”.<sup>44</sup> Some days later Ciano officially accused German military authorities of supporting an “Albanian irredenta” in the Serbian part of Kosovo. He did not fail to outline Italy’s own territorial claims, and that it would be an appreciated “gesture of the Fuehrer to allocate this territory to the ancestral Albanian homeland”.<sup>45</sup>

Wegener again did not neglect the German military support of the anti-Albanian resistance, but he related it to similar practices among the Italians: “We don’t have to do a ‘pater peccavi’ towards the Italians for they have committed similar sins and have quite a record because they try to convince the Albanians on our side to go for an Italian dominated ‘Greater Albania’”.<sup>46</sup>

To answer these Italian “infiltration plans” the Germans continued to set up and equip an Albanian security service in northern Kosovo,<sup>47</sup> “to promote connections between us, and the Italian occupied territories and finally to seek a close contact to the consul general in Tirana and the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. See also Christoph Stamm, “Zur deutschen Besetzung Albaniens 1943-1944,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 30, no. 2 (1981): 100.

<sup>41</sup> Von Bülow an Ribbentrop, 20 November 1941, PAAA, R101024, 006. Geheimrat von Bülow to Ribbentrop, 20 November 1941, PAAA, R101024, p. 005-006.

<sup>42</sup> German general consulate Tirana, in Vertretung: Wegener to Deutsche Botschaft in Rome, 12 November 1941, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3.

<sup>43</sup> Vice consul Emil Geiger, via Legationsrat Luther to Ribbentrop, 17 November 1942, PAAA, R101024, 011

<sup>44</sup> Von Bülow to Ribbentrop, 20 November 1941, PAAA, R101024, 005.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 004.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 005. Deutsches Generalkonsulat Tirana, in Vertretung: Wegener to Deutsche Botschaft in Rome, 12 November 1941, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3.

<sup>47</sup> Here were mentioned Albanian units under German command for the first time.

German district commander in Mitrovitza [sic]".<sup>48</sup> Because "the danger of the Mitrovica region becoming a source of German-Italian misunderstandings and frictions has to be avoided, in regard of the present necessary military and political collaboration with the Italians in the Balkans".<sup>49</sup>

A proposal from the German office in Belgrade to resettle about 100,000 persons of the Albanian *Volksgruppe* (ethnic Albanians) to "Greater Albania" and therefore satisfy at least a portion of the Italian claims -to ameliorate the atmosphere among Italian and German authorities and to calm the situation among Serbs and Albanians in the border territories of Mitrovica- had been discussed, but, has not been realized then.<sup>50</sup>

However, shortly after these vehement mutual accusations, the Commissioned Commanding General (*Bevollmächtigter Kommandierender General*) in Serbia, general of the infantry Franz Böhme admitted that the suspicion of the Italians was right.<sup>51</sup> To placate the allies he instructed all officers of units deployed in the Kosovska Mitrovica region to create more distinct relations in the future: hence, Albanians who had immigrated into northern Kosovo from the "New Albanian" part of Kosovo were to be deported back to the Italian territory. Personal contacts with Italian officers abroad should be stopped and private invitations should be refused in the future. Also, the Albanians in the Serbian part of Kosovo should be admonished to end their "undisciplined and wild hatred against everything, which is not Albanian".<sup>52</sup>

The continuing quarrels thwarted common proceedings and further destabilized the region. Due to the mutual charges and the bloody conflicts among Serbs and Albanians the poisoned atmosphere became more and more convoluted. During 1942 the situation deteriorated rapidly and the consul general in Tirana Martin Schliep was convinced

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<sup>48</sup> Von Bülow an Ribbentrop, 20 November 1941, PAAA, R101024, 004.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 006. The Italian accusations against the German proceeding in Mitrovica 1941/42 and the support of the anti-Italian movements in this region did not stop after the Italian capitulation. Report to the Italian foreign ministry, without signature, 19 April 1944, ASD, Albania Busta 51, fasc. Alb. 1/1, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Von Bülow an Ribbentrop, 20 November 1941, PAAA, R101024, 004.

<sup>51</sup> Bevollmächtigter Kommandierender General und Befehlshaber in Serbien Franz Böhme to Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost, General der Pioniere Walter Kuntze, "Italienische Wünsche bezüglich Kos. Mitrovica", 9 December 1941, BArchF, RW 40/23, 24.

<sup>52</sup> Parzer "Durchführung des Sonderauftrags des Bevollm. Kdr. General in Serbien an Major Parzer", 4 December 1941, BArchF, RW 40/23, 25-26.

that the Italians did everything to goad the Albanians into provoking further incidents; for example, the Carabinieri had no sense for Albania,<sup>53</sup> and would show a “remarkable indifference” towards the border incidents, pretending to have them under control.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the knowledge that only a straightforward collaboration among the axis-powers would lead to a detente of the interethnic conflicts and the containment of the growing resistance the two-sided accusations remained. Still in summer 1942, Schliep claimed that the Italians would try to turn the Albanian attention away from all other border issues and to the “Mitrovica question” by accusing the Germans of an anti-Italian resistance. Through an “intensive Italian whisper propaganda” they would try to integrate the Mitrovica region into their state. But he was convinced that this never would happen because “the inhabitants of the Kosovo region saw the German soldiers as the liberators from the yoke of Serbian foreign rule”. Therefore, they seemed willing to collaborate and remained loyal. However, the opinion persisted that the Italians instrumentalised the “alleged common wish of the Albanian population” for their own territorial claims.<sup>55</sup> Simultaneously, Ciano was convinced that the Germans were involved in the Bulgarian frontier violation in Albania because they were interested in the mines of Jerosina.<sup>56</sup> This was only two months after he himself questioned the demarcation lines which were drawn after the Balkan campaign 1941, claiming a territorial expansion, namely northern Kosovo, the Sandžak region and the Albanian territories that now belonged to Bulgaria.<sup>57</sup>

Distracted by these mutual intrigues, Italians and Germans failed to detect the growing resistance in the “New Albanian”, Serbian and Montenegrin border territories during 1942. An informant of the “Gruda” tribe reported to the Germans that the Italians admittedly had seven to nine divisions deployed in the region, but even Italian military officers

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<sup>53</sup> Schliep an Deutsche Botschaft in Rom, “Angebliche Kommunistentumtriebe in Albanien”, 23 March 1942, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/6.

<sup>54</sup> Schliep an AA, Bericht “Lage in Albanien”, 16 September 1942, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/7.

<sup>55</sup> Schliep an AA, Aufzeichnung “Albanische Grenzfragen”, 3 August 1942, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3. Also von Bülow reported Ribbentrop in the end of 1941 already that the Italians would plan a tortious influence to the German occupied Mitrovica-territory. See von Bülow to Ribbentrop, 20 November 1941, PAAA, R101024, 004-006.

<sup>56</sup> Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 16 August 1942, 516.

<sup>57</sup> Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, i.V. Müller to Himmler, “Italienischer Vorschlag zur Änderung der bisherigen Demarkationslinie zwischen Montenegro/Albanien einerseits und Serbien/Bulgarien/Mazedonien andererseits”, 2 June 1942, BArchB, NS 19/3896, 10.

did not trust that they would be ready to intervene before the end of winter.<sup>58</sup>

The rapid deterioration of the situation in “New Albania” is described in a letter by the soldier Luigi Memoli of the 72<sup>nd</sup> infantry regiment “Puglie” to Rita Bazzani in February 1943. “I am still in the ex-Yugoslavian territories annexed by Albania; here we become witnesses of an emerging situation from which who knows who is going to escape, a situation which is getting worse from day to day. [Concerning] the personal security one is not secure anymore like before, they begin to take advantage from our weakness, already some severe incidents happened. We are in the hand of the Lord!”<sup>59</sup>

Even Josef Merfels of the consular office in Tirana reported to the *Auswaertiges Amt* that the Albanians acted now in an “ostentatious anti-Italian manner”.<sup>60</sup> According to Merfels this evolution based on a “chain of Italian errors and mistakes wherein the many unfulfilled promises played a decisive role.”<sup>61</sup>

### **Instrumentalisation of interethnic tensions for military support and recruitment**

Such resentments as well as local smouldering conflicts often facilitated the recruitment efforts of one or the other occupying force. Early recruitments for the *Milizia Fascista Albanese* (MFA), the Albanian branch of the Italian *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* (MVSN), better known as *Camicie Nere*, can be traced back to Summer 1939.<sup>62</sup> To exploit interethnic tensions in the South and North of the country was considered an important strategy within the recruitment process. The German war correspondent Willibald Kollegger stated that the Albanians in Italian ranks had given the Greeks and Serbs many “a nut to crack”.<sup>63</sup> Here, the ‘nut-cracking’ metaphor refers to fighting methods

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<sup>58</sup> Von Scheiger, “Die Lage in Montenegro”, 3 January 1942, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3. Schliep an AA, Abschrift der Aufzeichnung “Lage in Montenegro” von von Scheiger vom 03.01.1942, 30 January 1942, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3.

<sup>59</sup> Censorship of the Prefecture of Pavia, Letter of Luigi Memoli, 72<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Rgt. “Puglie” to Rita Bazzani, February 15th, 1943, ACS, MI, D.G., Aff. Gen. 1940-1945, b. 55, fasc. 20, sottofasc. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Merfels über Unterredung mit Jacomoni to AA, 1 February 1943, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/7.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime*, 59.

<sup>63</sup> Kollegger, *Albaniens Wiedergeburt*, 65.

unacceptable to western understanding of the laws of war, i.e. the declared aim of the MFA was to drive out the non-Albanian population by looting, persecuting, torturing, and murdering. Albanian officers had been sent into the “New Albanian” territories “especially for such duties”.<sup>64</sup> In all Albanian border regions atrocities against resisters and civilians were tolerated or even commanded by superiors as Ciano and the German diplomat Peter Pfeiffer stated.<sup>65</sup>

In the eyes of Kollegger, the MFA soldiers acted “tough and brave, they have withstood wherever they were ordered to [serve]”.<sup>66</sup> The fact that they were ready to fight to the last is also mentioned in a commemorative publication written for the 19th anniversary of the MVSN: “The Greeks, superior in numbers, got to know the value of the Albanian legionaries”.<sup>67</sup> Their potential for violence reached unprecedented levels of infamy. In summer of 1941, even Ciano noted in his diary that one of Mussolini’s most favoured generals -probably general Alessandro Pirzio Biroli- encouraged his soldiers in Albania, “I have heard that you are good family men. That’s very well at home, but not here. Here, you will never go too far in being thieves, murderers and rapists.”<sup>68</sup>

In retaliation, soldiers of the MFA often fell victim to ruthless massacres as well: The German consulate general in Tirana reported after the MFA had deployed on the Greek front and, in the spring of 1941, on the Yugoslav front, to the embassy in Rome that the Albanian Blackshirts would be massacred if they were captured, in contrast to other soldiers in the Italian service.<sup>69</sup> The MFA Albanians who operated in the border areas with Montenegro suffered the same fate: “Blackshirts, however,

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<sup>64</sup> Letter o the brotherhood of Dibra, Galičnik und Struga to the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Bogdan Filov, 25 November 1942, ASD, AP, 1931-1945, Bulgaria, Busta 28, sottofasc. 3 “incidenti alla frontiera albano-bulgara a danno di cittadini bulgari”. Embassy in Tirana, Wegner to AA and embassy in Rome, 3 January 1943, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/7. See also: “Angebliche Kommunistentumtriebe in Albanien”, Schliep to German embassy in Rome, 23.03.1942, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/6.

<sup>65</sup> Pfeiffer to German Embassy in Rome, 14 October 1941, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3, report Nr.1007. Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 17 July 1941, 378.

<sup>66</sup> Kollegger, *Albaniens Wiedergeburt*, 65.

<sup>67</sup> Festschrift zum 19. Jahrestag der MVSN, ACS, SPD CO, b. 847, fasc. 500.020/II, 65.

<sup>68</sup> Ciano, *The Ciano Diaries*, 17 July 1941, 378.

<sup>69</sup> Consulate General in Tirana, name illegible, to German Embassy in Rome, 3 December 1941, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3.

were mostly cruelly massacred in retaliation for the acts of violence they had committed.”<sup>70</sup>

Two German specialists of the region, *Volkstumsreferent* Dr. Feninger and political advisor on Albanian affairs to the *Auswaertiges Amt* Franz von Scheiger, commented on the situation in the northern border provinces after the 1941 Balkan Campaign: “It follows that the Arnauts drive out Serbian settlers from the Albanian area by burning their houses, in some cases entire villages. However, these measures on this side [the German side] of the German-Italian demarcation line are far from reaching the level of the territories occupied by Italy, where -on your way from Mitrovica to Pec [Peć/Pejë] one can observe many burning Serbian villages and Serbian and Montenegrin refugees in large number in the streets.”<sup>71</sup> In spite of the ongoing interethnic conflicts, the Germans decided to recruit Albanians for support and to refill the ranks of their armed forces - whichever side -the Germans’ or Italians’- of the demarcation line the recruits came from. Such recruitments can be traced back to as early as December 1941, when Böhme ordered to limit recruiting -at least officially- to the German ruled part of Kosovo and Sandžak, and, as far as possible, to abstain from conscripting refugees from “Greater Albania”, which was under Italian control.<sup>72</sup>

In 1943 at the latest, the interdependence between the German support of Albanians, mostly Albanian Muslims of anti-Italian disposition, and the German toleration of pogroms against the Serbian population in this region became evident. A report of an Italian V-man documented the “constantly increase of coercive measures against the Serbs in Kosovo” lead by German-supported circles. Understandably, the Italians feared an eventual secession of the nationalist Serbs, for these insisted on the Italians being responsible “for the accentuation of the

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<sup>70</sup> Report ‘The situation in Montenegro’ by von Scheiger to AA, 3 January 1942, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/3.

<sup>71</sup> Volkstumsreferent Dr. Feninger with the Bevollmächtigten of the Auswaertiges Amt in Belgrade, Report “On the journey into the Arnaut region of Kosovska Mitrovica and Novi Pazar”, 15-26 October 1941, PAAA, R261153, 53. See also: Report Franz von Scheigers to the Auswaertiges Amt, 25 October 1941, PAAA, Altes Amt, Tirana 4/7, 255900.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Schreiben “Italienische Wünsche bezüglich Kos. Mitrovica”, Bevollmächtigter Kommandierender General und Befehlshaber in Serbien, General der Infanterie Franz Böhme, an Wehrmachtbefehlshaber Südost, General der Pioniere Walter Kuntze, 09.12.1941, BArchF, RW 40/23, 24.

pressure against the Serbs and Montenegrins”.<sup>73</sup> One of the exponents of this persecution of the Serbs was a V-man in German services, the future Albanian Interior Minister Xhafer Deva. He had been accused of showing an obvious “Italo-phobic attitude”.<sup>74</sup> He became highly involved in the early recruitments of Albanian Muslims into the *Albanisch-Muselmanische SS-Freiwilligenlegion* in the region of Mitrovica in 1943 and later was responsible for the recruitments of the *13<sup>th</sup> Waffen-Mountain-Division of the SS “Handžar”* and the *21st Waffen-Mountain-Division of the SS “Skanderbeg”* division in 1944.<sup>75</sup>

### The role of local leaders and politicians

Xhafer Deva was only one of various local protagonists in the Axis powers’ Balkan theatre. Notably the local elites refused to be mere pieces in a Chess game, as one military report stated in October 1944.<sup>76</sup> They had their own agenda and on their part tried to instrumentalise the German and Italian authorities. A telling example is the Draga family from Mitrovica, well known for their restless political activities in the region and their decade-long involvement in the machinations of the Great Powers in the Western Balkans. Ferhad Bey Draga and his brother Nexhip had been strong supporters of the Austro-Hungarian occupation (“administration”) of the Sandžak of Novi Pazar, which lasted from 1878 to the Balkan wars and from late 1915 until the end of World War I. Because of this and his alleged anti-Serbian stance, Ferhad Bey was German-friendly, too; indeed, the German Wehrmacht, Waffen-SS and authorities in that region were often filled with Austrian personnel who

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<sup>73</sup> Auswertestelle Süd, 24 August 1944 unterzeichnet vom Chef der Heeresarchive Oberstleutnant Neumeister, “Lage in Albanien im Mai 1943”, 31 August 1944, BArchF, RH 18/407. The Germans still were convinced that the Italians would collaborate with Četnik-units. Report Reichel, AA Inland IIc, 12 April 1943, PAAA, Inland IIg, R100998. However, these circumstances should not hide the fact that the Italians too, implemented “a policy of persecution and repression of the Slavic populace in Kosovo e Macedonia, focusing on the exasperation of the interethnic conflict [...]”. Conti, *L’occupazione italiana dei Balcani*, 151.

<sup>74</sup> Bevollmächtigter des AA beim Militärbefehlshaber Serbien Felix Benzler to AA, 31 March 1943, PAAA, Inland IIg R100998. In this period Deva was a V-man in the German Wehrmacht in northern Kosovo. Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Berger to AA Abteilung D VIII, 9.4.1943, PAAA, Inland IIg, R100998, H297616. On the instrumentalization of interethnic tensions and conflict and the involvement of Xhafer Deva, Rexhep Mitrovica and Bedri Pejani in the recruitment of “New Albanians” into German units see Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime*, 143-147. Attempts for future recruitments were already noticed in the end of 1942. Generalstatthalter Albanien, Gabinetto Diplomatico to the Italian foreign ministry about the situation in Serbia, 7 December 1942, ASD, AG, 1923-1943, Busta 1492 (AG Serbia 54).

<sup>76</sup> Bericht “Entwicklung der militärischen Lage in Albanien im Herbst 1944”, undatiert, Name unlesbar, BArchF, RW40/116a, 14. Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime*, 250.



belonged to the *Grossdeutsches Reich* since 1938. In addition, residing in both Mitrovica and Tirana, he acted as personal advisor to the Italian general governor Jacomoni, who was deployed in Albania, thus gaining confidential insight about all processes within the Italian administrative apparatus. Through his son, Ali Bey Draga, he would be well informed about the German recruiting efforts in Northern Kosovo and the Sandžak region.<sup>77</sup>

Ali Bey became one of the protagonists of the anti-Serbian and anti-Italian movement, with Mitrovica as its centre, and bolstered by leading Albanians in the Serbian part of Kosovo, who generally refused to cooperate with the Italians -even though the latter were considered allies of the Germans.<sup>78</sup> As an Albanian *Volksgruppenführer* (ethnic group leader), employed in Serbian Kosovo, he became strongly involved in the early and later recruitments mentioned above. Ali Bey played a major role in rallying able young men and channelling them into the German ranks, while coordinating the recruitment for the Waffen-SS with local SS-authorities like *SS und Polizeiführer Sandžak* Karl von Krempler.<sup>79</sup>

### Escalation of violence against the former allies

On 8 September 1943 Italy surrendered; its forces in Albania remained uninformed. They heard the critical piece of information on the radio, as reported by second lieutenant Nazzareno Garat Crema.<sup>80</sup> Even the supreme commanders of the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> Italian army in Albania, General Ezio Rosi and General Lorenzo Dalmazzo, were ignorant and had no orders accordingly.<sup>81</sup> In consequence, chaos ensued. 100,000 or more Italians<sup>82</sup> were stranded in Albania at the time of the surrender, crowding the streets and squares, or waiting in vain in the harbour towns to be shipped back to Italy. Without any further orders most were lost and completely abandoned. Anti-Italian riots after the Italian surrender reveal the support of anti-Italian circles by German circles. Various

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<sup>77</sup> Bericht an das italienische Außenministerium, ohne Namensangabe, 19 April 1944, ASD, RSI, Aff. Pol., Busta 51, fasc. Alb.

<sup>78</sup> Bevollmächtigter des AA beim Militärbefehlshaber Serbien Benzler an AA, 30 October 1941, PAAA, R261153.

<sup>79</sup> SSPF Sandžak von Krempler to the commander of the Muslim Militia, Casim Sijaric, 1943 (without exact date), VA, HEM.OK. BOJCKA, 9/6/10.

<sup>80</sup> Report by sottotenente Nazzareno Garat Crema, 10/27/1943, USSME, I3/b13/f1. Cf. also Avagliano Palmieri, *Gli internati militari italiani, Diari e lettere dai lager Nazisti 1943-1945* (Torino: Einaudi 2009), 3.

<sup>81</sup> Rossi and Giusti, *Una guerra a parte*, 310.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

German reports testify the desperate situation of clueless Italian soldiers wandering about in Tirana and in other Albanian cities -persecuted now by the German Waffen-SS and Wehrmacht and the once suppressed Albanian population.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, many documents witness the Albanian population’s support for the former Italian soldiers with shelter, food, work and concealment - hiring them as employees or day labourers; this helped thousands of Italians to survive the wrath of their former ally.

But still, Dalmazzo’s and Rosi’s hesitation and indecision allowed the Germans to capture four of the six Italian divisions -the *Parma*, the *Puglie*, the *Brennero*, and the *Arezzo*. Meanwhile, parts of the 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division *Firenze* and the 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division *Perugia* defected to the partisans.<sup>84</sup>

Even though Italy’s Fascist rule frequently enforced its own punitive actions, the degree of their former allies’ cruelty towards civilians in Southeast Europe shocked the Italian soldiers. On the prisoner’s march to the concentration camps the Germans left a trail of destruction as Italian Roberto Rubolotta stated, “On the trip to Valona the Germans burnt down every single house they found”; several fellow comrades reported similar incidents.<sup>85</sup> Second lieutenant Moncalvo gave account how people desperately offered bread to the Germans hoping to avoid the destruction of their homes in doing so.<sup>86</sup>

After the capitulation, German and Italian relations rapidly deteriorated. In fact, the Germans were well prepared for Italy’s imminent surrender. As a preventive measure, parts of the 100<sup>th</sup> *Jaeger* division of the *Wehrmacht* deployed in Albania - approximately 1,000 men -in the summer of 1943<sup>87</sup>, followed by further units securing the airports and the harbour of Durrës on the eve of the capitulation. After 9 September 1943 parts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> tank army moved up and took the rest of

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<sup>83</sup> Report by sottotenente Nazzareno Garat Crema, 10/27/1943, USSME, I3/b13/f1. Hermann Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost 1940–1945: Bericht eines fliegenden Diplomaten* (Göttingen: Musterschmitt, 1956), 106.

<sup>84</sup> Ilio Muraca, “I partigiani all'estero: la Resistenza fuori d'Italia,” in *Dizionario della Resistenza*, ed. Enzo Collotti, Renato Sandri and Frediano Sessi (Torino: Einaudi, 2006), 173. Fate of the *Perugia* detailed cf. Rossi and Giusti, *Una guerra a parte*, 322-337.

<sup>85</sup> Report by Roberto Rubolotta, undated, USSME, I3/b13/f3, S. 2. Report by Camillo Magnaghi, USSME, I3/b13/f3, p. 3. Report by Marsilio Marsili, 6/19/1944, USSME, I3/b13/f3.

<sup>86</sup> Report by sottotenente Emilio Moncalvo, 9/21/1943, USSME, I3/b13/f1, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Aga Rossi and Giusti, *Una guerra a parte*, 309.

Albania.<sup>88</sup> The High Command Southeast (*OB Suedost*) reported the occupation of the cities would be completed “with relative ease”;<sup>89</sup> although Fischer states that -before the capitulation- the strength of the two and a half second rate German troops was critical when compared to the power of six Italian divisions.<sup>90</sup> But the ensuing chaos triggered by Italy’s disinformation crippled the resistance of its own troops.

In ornate style the *Sonderbeauftragter Suedost* Hermann Neubacher emphasises the muddled and violent situation. In parts, even the Germans had lost control as he stated. The disarming did not proceed in an orderly manner - in fact, “many Albanians seized the moment to increase the stock of their own armaments.”<sup>91</sup> After his return to Italy, second lieutenant Emilio Moncalvo described the changing situation in Albania, “Da alleati ad aperti nemici. Ora i tedeschi [hanno] gettato la maschera.” - “From allies to open foes. Now the Germans have dropped their mask.”<sup>92</sup>

The sources imply that the Germans lacked regulations for handling captive former Italian soldiers. If you had served the German army as a sworn auxiliary or a “Black Shirt” (*Camicie Nere*) prior to the armistice, you had nothing to fear; your allegiance to the German cause was accepted, your status remained intact.<sup>93</sup> If you were uncovered after hiding away, you most likely were shot on the spot;<sup>94</sup> if you surrendered or turned yourself in, you might eventually be executed, anyhow - especially if you turned out to be an officer. At best, you were unarmed and interrogated, and held captive. Then, you might be force-marched - e.g. to Prilep in Bulgaria- to one of various concentration camps under

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<sup>88</sup> Aga Rossi and Giusti estimate about 3,000 men. *Ibid.*, 310. Cf., also Marenglen Kasmi, *Deutsche Besatzung in Albanien* (Potsdam: ZMSBw, 2013), 9.

<sup>89</sup> Report “development if the military situation in Albania in autumn 1944”, German Field Army Command Southeast, name unreadable, undated, BArchF, RW 40/116a, 5.

<sup>90</sup> Bernd J. Fischer, “Kollaborationsregimes in Albanien 1939-1944” in *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz, Okkupation und Kollaboration (1938-1945), Beiträge zu Konzepten und Kollaboration in der deutschen Okkupationspolitik* ed. Werner Röhr (Berlin & Heidelberg: Hühig 1994), 372. Besides the 100<sup>th</sup> Jaeger division there was first the 118<sup>th</sup> Jaeger division, which was replaced by the 181<sup>st</sup> infantry division and the 297<sup>th</sup> infantry division. Kühmel, “Deutschland und Albanien 1943-1944,” 207. See also, Neuwirth, *Widerstand und Kollaboration*, 121.

<sup>91</sup> Neubacher, *Sonderauftrag Südost*, 107.

<sup>92</sup> Report by sottotenente Emilio Moncalvo, 9/21/1943, USSME, I3/b13/f1, 2. Cf. also report by Lamberto Francesconi and Roberto Ponsard, 10/31/1943, USSME, I3/b13/f1, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Report “development if the military situation in Albania in autumn 1944”, German Field Army Command Southeast, name unreadable, undated, BArchF, RW 40/116a, 43

<sup>94</sup> Reports by Ernesto Bianchi, 01/25/1944, USSME, I3/b13/f2, 2; and Lamberto Francesconi and Roberto Ponsard, 10/31/1943, USSME, I3/b13/f1, 7.

precarious humanitarian conditions; later, you might be deported to Italy or to “the Reich” for forced labour.<sup>95</sup>

Of the six Italian divisions in Albania, about 90,000 Italian soldiers were disarmed by German troops or Albanians. The Italian Domenico Perari recalls how he and his comrades were captured; when the German interrogator asked them to join the fight for *Greater Germany* they answered “No!” and demanded a treatment according to the Geneva Convention; even so, they were caged.<sup>96</sup> Of the Italian troops which were led to the mountains - to the partisans respectively - by their officers, some 7,000 soldiers left their formations and handed themselves over to the Germans; regardless of their request to be recruited in to the German army, they were detailed to forced labour.<sup>97</sup> Strangely enough, even Italian die-hard fascist troops like the “Black Shirts” were deported despite their wish to be incorporated into the *Waffen-SS*.<sup>98</sup>

The POW’s nutrition and the accommodation situation were critical. Surviving Italians testified that the disarmed soldiers were all undernourished, receiving only 100 grams of bread a day or no food at all<sup>99</sup> -insufficient for the forced labour, as registered by the commissioner of the Italian *Republican Fascist Party* in Albania.<sup>100</sup> Clothing was miserable, shoes lacked completely; the Italian prisoners had to walk barefoot even in snow. Concerned with the damaging effect these miserable former Italian soldiers might have on the prestige of the

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<sup>95</sup> Report “development if the military situation in Albania in autumn 1944”, German Field Army Command Southeast, name unreadable, undated, BArchF, RW 40/116a, p. 43. There exist many publications about Italian soldiers in German internment and concentration camps after September 1943. E.g. Avagliano Palmieri, *Gli internati militari italiani, Diari e lettere dai lager Nazisti 1943-1945* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009) or Gerhard Schreiber, *Die italienischen Militärinternierten im deutschen Machtbereich 1943 bis 1945: Verraten-Verachtet-Vergessen* (München: Oldenbourg, 1990.) See also: Nevila Nika, “Storie di italiani dopo l’8 settembre in Albania,” in *Caro nemico: Soldati pistoiesi e toscani nella resistenza in Albania e Montenegro, 1943-1945*, ed. Lia Tosi (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2018), 147-152.

<sup>96</sup> Report by Domenico Perari, 30/06/1944, USSME, I3/b13/f3, 2.

<sup>97</sup> Note for the German liaison staff, representative of the Republican Fascist Party in Albania, name unreadable, 7/14/1944, BArchF, RH 31-XVI/7, Bl. 127. Blackshirts cf. also Kuehmel, *Deutschland und Albanien*, 311.

<sup>98</sup> Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime*, 63, 91.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. Report by Tucci; Sivestri; Territo; Stefania, 12/21/1943, USSME, I3/b13/f1. To the Command of the Inf. Div. “Legnano”, 10/13/1943, USSME, I3/b13/f1, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Note for the German liaison staff, representative of the Republican Fascist Party in Albania, name unreadable, 7/14/1944, BArchF, RH 31-XVI/7, 128.

remaining fascist state of Salò -the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana*- the same commissioner pleaded their removal from Albania.<sup>101</sup>

In general, former Italian officers were eliminated -a strategical measure taken to cripple the enemy's cohesion even more. The officers - and common soldiers, too- were concentrated near Valona/Vlorë and shot by German Soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* and *Waffen-SS*. Many surviving Italians reported such atrocities. Like Marco de Ferrari, D'Ulivo, Fabbri, Sacchelli, Santi and De Vita tell us, "In Valona many Italian officers were butchered by the Germans. Every Italian officer -even if unarmed- was shot immediately by the Germans when found."<sup>102</sup> In the region of Cermenica the Italian officer Emilio Gamucci was shot together with over a hundred *Carabinieri*.<sup>103</sup> Another source tells us, "The Germans gradually advanced, killing everyone they found, mercilessly und indiscriminately."<sup>104</sup> To this day, many of these massacres remain unexamined -although thousands of Italian officers and soldiers were killed.

### Conclusion

The transitions between mutual accusations, support of anti-Italian, and -to a lesser degree- anti-German resistance and the active recruitment for the MFA and various *Waffen-SS*-formations were fluid. From today's perspective, the Italian accusations regarding the German support of an anti-Italian movement can be confirmed.<sup>105</sup> The military and financial support of mainly Albanian Muslims, which directly followed the Balkan campaign of 1941, can be seen as a precursor of the later German recruitments for the *Waffen-SS*, the "Handžar" and the "Skanderbeg" division in 1943 and 1944. Likewise however, on the Italian side efforts were made to support an irredentistic Albanian movement by recruiting Albanians for the MFA, and to create a "Greater Albania". This project was partially realised in 1941; it lasted until the Italian capitulation in September 1943 and the German retreat in November 1944 respectively. Both the Axis power's quarrels and their attempts to instrumentalise interethnic tensions for their own territorial, political and military claims

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<sup>101</sup> Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime*, 91. Note for the German liaison staff, representative of the Republican Fascist Party in Albania, name unreadable, 7/14/1944, BArchF, RH 31-XVI/7, 128.

<sup>102</sup> Reports by Marco de Ferrari, USSME, I3/b14/f2; D'Ulivo; Fabbri; Sacchelli; Santi; De Vita, undated, USSME, I3/b13/f1, 2.

<sup>103</sup> Comment beside picture of Emilio Gamucci, zone of Cermenica, USSME, I3, b14.

<sup>104</sup> Report by sottotenente Emilio Moncalvo, 9/21/1943, USSME, I3/b13/ 1.

<sup>105</sup> Kühmel, *Deutschland und Albanien*, 60-61. Zaugg, *Albanische Muslime*, 177-180.

in the region are well documented and can be made comprehensible today. However, as shown in this paper, not only German and Italian authorities instrumentalised local conflicts for their own purpose, but local players exploited the occupying forces for their own intentions, too. In this way it becomes clear that local elites were not only passive pawns, but played an active role during the occupation.

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## **Political Violence in a Borderland. The Region of Kastoria under Italian Occupation (1941-1943)**

Paolo Fonzi\*

### **Abstract:**

This article investigates the history of the province of Kastoria (Western Macedonia) during the Italian occupation of Greece between 1941 and 1943. Inhabited by an ethnically mixed population comprised of Greeks, Vlachs and Slavophones, this province became during occupation the site of armed clashes between Slavophone militias set up by the Italian occupation authorities and the left-wing resistance. Several factors leading to the formation of these collaborationist units are investigated with reference to the history of this region in the 1920ies and 1930ies and of the occupation years until the formation of the Slavophone militias in 1943. In contrast to existing scholarship, it is argued that interethnic violence was neither the necessary outcome of preceding ethnic cleavages, nor merely the result of the Italian policy of *divide et impera*. Rather, it derived from socio-economic dynamics that allowed for the reemergence of latent patterns of ethnic polarization.

**Keywords:** Fascist occupation of Greece, Interethnic conflicts, Political Violence, Macedonia

### **Introduction**

The town of Kastoria<sup>1</sup> lies in Western Macedonia, on a peninsula jutting into Lake Orestias, sitting at an altitude of 630 m. on a promontory

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encircled by mountains. The town and the surrounding region became part of the Ottoman Empire in 1385, remaining under the rule of the Porte until the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), when the Treaties of London and Bucharest sanctioned their incorporation into the Greek state. As was with most areas acquired by Greece with the Balkan Wars, Kastoria had a religiously mixed population comprised of Christians, Jews and Muslims and a strong linguistic diversity with Turkish-speakers, Greeks, Vlachs - a linguistic group speaking a dialect akin to Romanian- and Slavophones.<sup>2</sup> This article is focused on the history of this small province during the Axis occupation of Greece, when the Italian Royal Army promoted the formation of collaborationist units of Slavophones, under an umbrella organization called Bulgaro-Macedonian Revolutionary Committee (*Boulgaro-Makedoniko Epanastatiko Komitato*), to quell the spread of anti-Axis resistance. Continued by the Germans after the Italian capitulation in September 1943, this policy unleashed political polarization along ethnic lines and led the left-wing EAM (National Liberation Front) and of its armed branch ELAS (Greek People's Liberation Army) to establish a separate resistance organization of Greek Macedonians, the Slavomacedonian Popular Liberation Front (SNOF), to curb Slavophones' support for the Axis.<sup>3</sup>

Most historians hold that the formation of the Committee in March 1943 was stemmed from cooperation between Italy and Bulgaria and that the pro-Slavophone stance of the Italian authorities was set from the very beginning of the occupation.<sup>4</sup> In line with this interpretative scheme,

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 1940 census the population of the eparchy of Kastoria was 68,237 inhabitants, 33,206 men and 35,031 women. The population of the town itself accounted for 10,181 inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> Terminology on ethnic groups has been highly contentious in the scholarship about Macedonia. The most common terms used for the Slav-speakers of Macedonia are Slavophones, Slav Macedonians, Bulgarians. I decided to employ the term Slavophones, as this seems the most neutral one. With a similar motivation the same term is employed by Andréas Athanasiádis, *Stī skiá tou "voylgarismoý". Apotypóseis "politikón kai ethnikón fronimatōn" tōn politōn tīs periféreias Flórinas katá tīn período tou Mesopolémoy* (Thessaloniki: Epíketro, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Historians have long debated about the role played by Yugoslav intervention in the creation of this organization, with anti-communist historians accusing the EAM of subalternity to Tito's plans for the annexation of Greek Macedonia. Recent historiography sees the formation of the SNOF rather as an attempt to integrate the Slavophone population into the resistance, thus curbing support for the Axis, see Giórgos Koymarídīs, "Snof kai slavomakedoniká tágmata (1943-1944): Mia proséggisi," *Archeiotáxio*, 11 (2009): 55-87; Ílias Groýios, "SNOF: Í sygkrótisi kai ī drási tou stī Dytikē Makedonia," (Master's thesis, University of Western Macedonia, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> A brief review in Tásos Kóstópoulos, "To 'Axomakedonikó' Komitáto kai Ochrána (1943-1944): mia próti proséggisi," *Archeiotáxio* 5, (2003): 40-51.

much scholarship argues that the convergence between the Axis powers and the Slav Macedonians was a predetermined outcome, since a common objective of both was to “plunder loyalties”<sup>5</sup> and thus denationalize Greek Macedonia. Based on yet unexplored records of the Italian army, this article challenges this view. In fact, initially the Italian authorities in Kastoria had little interest in arming any ethnic group and opposed any pro-Bulgaria or Macedonian movement. Far from being cordial, relations between Italy and Bulgaria were characterized by mutual mistrust and competition. Only later on, when confronted with the challenge posed by the resistance, did Italians employ ethnic minorities to regain control of the province. Contrary to accepted wisdom, though acting as a precipitating factor, the occupiers were not always the most relevant force at play. In fact, with their decisions to hand over arms to the Slavophones the Italian authorities rather sanctioned a complex social transformation process that led political violence to be coded in the language of ethnicity.

To support this argument, the following essay first sketches the history of the region in the interwar years, when patterns of political behaviour took form that were to resurface during the war. Hence, it examines the governance strategies employed by the local occupation authorities and the way the socio-economic crisis led to a disintegration of the social fabric. Finally, the last section addresses the formation of the collaborationist units and the role they played in the Italian counterinsurgency.

### **The Slavophones of Kastoria in the Interwar Years**

Insurgencies and inter-ethnic conflicts had a long history in the whole of Macedonia, gaining momentum at the turn of the century and markedly between 1903 and 1908, when the region became the site of inter-ethnic strife between pro-Bulgarian and pro-Greek paramilitary formations, the so called “Macedonian Struggle” (*Makedonikós Agónas*). Kastoria was an important center of pro-Greek activity with prominent citizens becoming legendary “Macedonian fighters” (*makedonomáchoi*) and, thus, influential political figures in local politics in the interwar years.<sup>6</sup> The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO), a

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<sup>5</sup> John Koliopoulos, *Plundered Loyalties: Axis Occupation and Civil Strife in Greek West Macedonia, 1941-1949* (London: C. Hurst, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Vasilis K. Goynaris, “Voyleytés kai Kapetánioi: Pelateiakés schéseis stī mesopolemikē Makedonía,” *Elliniká*, 41 (1990): 313-335. One of them, Filolaos Picheon, was appointed mayor during the Italian occupation.

political movement with a Macedonian-autonomist, at times pro-Bulgarian agenda developed its activity during the Macedonian Struggle and kept operating in the following decades.<sup>7</sup> Armed conflicts, however, were not only driven by nationalistic agendas. In fact, economic demands played a key role as political affiliation was partly determined by the prospect of the dispossessed peasants to gain land.<sup>8</sup>

The incorporation of Macedonia into the Greek state in 1913 and the post-World War I population exchanges -the voluntary one with Bulgaria and the compulsory one with Turkey- impacted significantly on the demographic outlook of the region. As a consequence of these developments, nearly all Muslims, representing 1/4 of the population at the turn of the century, left and the Slavophone community shrunk dramatically, being replaced by incoming refugees.<sup>9</sup> Though relevant per se, these events impacted Western Macedonia less than the Central and Eastern part of this region, as the former area had a comparatively smaller amount of arable land to be used for resettlement. Furthermore, for the sake of maintaining good relations with neighbouring Yugoslavia, the Greek government refrained from settling great masses of refugees in Western Macedonia and avoided a large emigration of Slavophones. This explains why in the interwar years the provinces of Kastoria and Florina still hosted the largest number of Slavophones in the whole of Macedonia.<sup>10</sup> A statistics from the General Administration of Macedonia reported the population of Kastoria in 1925 as being composed of:<sup>11</sup>

- 17,737 Greeks (natives), a category that excluded the refugees who arrived from Asia Minor after the population exchange with Turkey:
- 2,195 pro-Greek Vlach-speakers
- 213 Muslim-Albanians, exempted from the population exchange

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<sup>7</sup> IMRO lost the support of the Bulgarian authorities in 1934, after the creation of the Zveno-dictatorial regime that promoted good relations with Yugoslavia, becoming a rather marginal phenomenon Stefan Troebst, *Mussolini, Makedonien und die Mächte, 1922-1930: die "Innere Makedonische Revolutionäre Organisation" in der Südosteuropapolitik des faschistischen Italien* (Köln: Böhlau, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Raymondos Alvanos, "Parliamentary Politics as an Integration Mechanism: The Slavic-speaking Inhabitants of Interwar (1922-1940) Western Greek Macedonia," *History and Anthropology* 30, no. 5 (2019): 622.

<sup>9</sup> Raymōndos Alvanōs, *Koinōnikés Sygkroyseis kai politikés sumperiforés stin periochē tis Katoriás* (PhD diss., Aristotle University Thessaloniki, 2005), 37. 17,894 Muslim and Slavophone inhabitants left, while 8,370 refugees were settled in the region.

<sup>10</sup> Vasilis K. Goynaris, "Oi slavofonoι tis Μακεδονίας. I poreia tis ensōmátōsis sto ellinikó ethnikó krátos, 1870-1940," *Makedoniká*, 29 (1993-1994): 209-237, here 229.

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Kontogiorgi. *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia: The Rural Settlement of Refugees 1922-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 250.

- 7,339 Slav-speakers, former Patriarchists
- 14,807 Slavs-speakers former Exarchists
- 135 Vlach-speakers pro-Romanian, namely the Vlachs that openly expressed their support of a separate Vlach identity.
- 525 Jews
- 5,962 Greek refugees.<sup>12</sup>

With a pattern common to most of the Balkans and Eastern Europe, ethnic and religious cleavages in Kastoria intersected with social stratification. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Kastoria developed a burgeoning fur production and trading activities that made the town the knot of a large commercial network spanning throughout Europe. While Jews were particularly active in fur trade, craftsmanship was mostly performed by Greeks, working in close collaboration with Jewish merchants. Cooperation between the two groups was smooth and made the economy of the town flourish, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most Slavophones, instead, were peasants, inhabiting the surrounding area of Kastoria who used to come to town mostly on market days.<sup>13</sup> Not unlike the town itself, the countryside was ethnically mixed, with the Northern part of the province being predominantly, but not exclusively, inhabited by Slavophones and the South mostly by Greek speakers.<sup>14</sup>

All over Greece the refugees' settlement was marred by conflicts over the distribution of the land. Former Muslim property was to be used

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<sup>12</sup> Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange*, 250. The difference between the number of refugees reported in this survey and the overall figure of 8,370 is due to the fact that the settlement process took several years to be completed. This survey is has to be taken with a grain of salt, as taxonomies used to categorize the population were largely the product of nationalistic biases. Greek authorities usually saw ethnic groups through the lens of political categories, distinguishing e.g. between pro-Greek and pro-Romanian Vlachs. The same applies to the Slavophones (also called *voylgarizontes*) that were split into former Patriarchists and Exarchists, the latter term meaning those who had joined the Bulgarian de-facto autocephalous Orthodox Church founded in 1870 and were considered of "Bulgarian consciousness". See Iakovos D. Michailidis, "The statistical battle for the population of Greek Macedonia," in *The History of Macedonia*, ed. Ioannis Koliopoulos (Thessaloniki: Museum of the Macedonian Struggle Foundation, 2007), 269-283; on the systematic underestimation of non-Greek ethnic groups in the Greek population censuses from the foundation of the state see Tasos Kostopoulos, "Counting the 'Other': Official Census and Classified Statistics in Greece (1830-2001)," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas*, 5 (2003): 55-78.

<sup>13</sup> Raymónδος Alvanós, "Koinōnikés kai politikés ópseis tīs synýparxīs Christianōn kai Evraion stīn póli tīs Kastoriás," in *To olokajtōma tōn ebraion tīs Elládas*, ed. Giórgos Antōnou, Strátos Dordanás, Níkos Záikos, Níkos Marantzídīs (Thessaloniki: Epíkentro, 2011), 353-378.

<sup>14</sup> Vasílis K. Goýnarīs, "Oi slavófonoι tīs Μακεδονίας. Í poreía tīs ensōmátōsis sto ellīnikó ethnīkó krátos, 1870-1940," *Makedoniká*, 29 (1993-1994), 212.

to resettle the refugees but it proved insufficient as those who left were significantly less numerous than those who arrived. In addition, the land to be distributed had been tended for years by local sharecroppers who now claimed their right to own it. Moreover, after 1912, when the first Muslims had started leaving the regions of Northern Greece, many of them had sold their land to locals or these had just taken possession of it. These acts were not recognized by the Greek state thus becoming a source of bitter quarrels over the following decade, as land distribution was a long process that lasted until the mid-30s.<sup>15</sup> Finally, the resettlement process was plagued by administrative inefficiency creating fertile ground for grievances.<sup>16</sup> As a consequence of all this, land issues sparked conflicts between natives (*dópioi*) and refugees, with the former regarding the new inhabitants' claim to land ownership as illegitimate.

Faced with such transformations, Slavophones in Kastoria adopted different and contradicting strategies. One was to join the local Greek element in its attempt to oppose the settlement of refugees.<sup>17</sup> To support their claim to land, refugees represented themselves as more "Greek" than their local co-nationals spurring other groups to compete in the same arena. Material conflicts, thus, came to be articulated in the language of ethnic belonging, largely as a negotiation over the meaning of Greekness, a symbolic capital that promised access to a larger share of resources. "The local leadership of the Slav speaking villagers", has written R. Alvanos, "knew very well the role that the refugees had come to play in the region, i.e. that of Hellenization. As far as this role threatened the interests of the native villagers these perceived that they should play this game by the same rules: by exposing their own "local" Greekness.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the Slavophones showed a strong tendency to assimilate with the Greek culture, which among other things is witnessed by their increased propensity to join agricultural cooperatives.<sup>19</sup> In addition to these factors came the agrarian reform of the early 20s -whereby former Ottoman *tchifliks* were distributed to peasants creating a large class of smallholders. As land issues were managed mostly by local politicians who acted as intermediaries with the political center, land distribution integrated the Slavophones into the patronage system.<sup>20</sup> Polarization between Slavophones and refugees was thus mirrored in national politics with the

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<sup>15</sup> Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange*, 165-185.

<sup>16</sup> Goýnarís, "Oi slavófonoí tis Makedonías," 225-226.

<sup>17</sup> Alvanós, *Koinōnikés sygkroýseis*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> Alvanós, *Koinōnikés sygkroýseis*, 59.

<sup>19</sup> Alvanós, *Koinōnikés sygkroýseis*, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Alvanos, "Parliamentary politics".

latter largely supporting Venizelism and the Liberal Party and, largely as a consequence of this, the former siding massively with the opposite bloc, the Popular Party.<sup>21</sup> Despite the fact that the Communist party of Greece in 1924 officially adopted the Comintern guidelines supporting Macedonian independentism, communism never really challenged the Popular Party's hegemony among the Slavophones.<sup>22</sup>

In some instances, Slavophones adopted a different strategy to claim a larger share of material resources, namely that of appealing to external powers (Yugoslavia and Bulgaria). Motivated by territorial revisionism, these countries sought to exploit the land issue as a means to acquire political foothold in the region. Victimized Slav speaking peasants, thus, saw a professed belonging to a foreign nation state as a way to claim international protection by the League of Nations.<sup>23</sup>

The attitude of the Greek authorities towards what they considered as "ethnic aliens" was rather ambiguous. While embracing the idea that increasing the "density" of Greek settlements in a border region such as Western Macedonia was desirable, most Greek officials also understood that favouring too much the refugees could stimulate the Slavophones to claim with more force their "otherness". All in all, however, efforts of the public authorities to Hellenize the Slavophone population intensified in the interwar period, especially as local officials were particularly zealous in pursuing this policy.<sup>24</sup>

The outcome of these conflicting trends was not straightforward. Historian R. Alvanos holds that the forces pushing towards assimilation prevailed over those fostering deepening ethnic cleavages. As a result, in the interwar years and up to 1936 ethnic identifications in Kastoria lost political momentum.<sup>25</sup> The advent of Metaxas' authoritarian regime in 1936, though, inverted this trend. The 4<sup>th</sup> August regime's attitude towards non-Greek groups was one of deep mistrust and resulted in increased repression, with the Slavophones being prohibited to speak their language in public.<sup>26</sup> Assimilationist policies that in the interwar

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<sup>21</sup> Goýnarīs, "Oi slavófonoι tis Makedonías," p. 233.

<sup>22</sup> Giorgios T. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922-1936*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press 1983), 249-252.

<sup>23</sup> Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange*, 200-230.

<sup>24</sup> Philipp Carabott, "The Greek State and its Slav-Speaking Minority," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas* 5, (2003): 141-159.

<sup>25</sup> Alvanos, *Parliamentary politics*.

<sup>26</sup> Tásos Kóstópoulos, *Í apagoreyméni glóssa. Kratikē kataistolē tōn slavikōn dialēktōn stīn ellīnikē Makedonía* (Athens: Βιβλιόραμα, 2008).

years had been advocated and carried out only by a fraction of state officials -the most nationalist faction- now became state ideology. Moreover, as a consequence of the Emergency Law 376/1936, the regions inhabited by Slavophones were declared "surveillance areas" where special prohibitions limiting the citizens' liberties could be issued. Many of them were put to confinement as communist or individuals accused of anti-national behavior.<sup>27</sup> The suspension of parliamentary politics added to this, bringing to an end the patronage system, a powerful mechanism of integration for the Slavophones. Furthermore, the economic policy of the Metaxas regime that intensified tobacco production sharpened economic inequalities between refugees and natives. The former benefitted from state control over production as, being considered more reliable than the Slavophones, they were granted more easily permits to cultivate tobacco. Efforts of the regime to undermine stockbreeding were a further source of hardship to the Slavophones.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the 1940-1941 war between Fascist Italy and Greece further escalated ethnic polarization. Slavophones, already perceived during the interwar period as enemy agents, were now strongly suspected of supporting the invader. Thus, along with Chams and Vlachs, a number of members of this minority were also interned, as they were perceived as a potential threat.

### **Italian Plans for Macedonia**

As a consequence of the invasion of Greece by the Axis powers, in April 1941 Macedonia was split into three occupation areas: Eastern Macedonia went to Bulgaria becoming part of the new Bulgarian province of Belomorje; most of Central and parts of Western Macedonia were occupied by German troops; Italy was allotted the smallest share of the region, with only two towns, Grevena and Kastoria. Italian authorities had no definite political plans for Greece before the attack of October 1940 and even after the invasion their war aims remained rather generic. In preparation for the Italo-German conversations held at Vienna in April 1941 and in the following months, a number of memoranda were drafted by Italian state agencies regarding the post-war settlement in the Balkans.<sup>29</sup> Most of these plans converged on the idea that a large portion

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<sup>27</sup> Surveillance or controlled areas (*epitiroýmenes zónes*) created a sort of internal frontier within the Greek territory. They continued to exist after the war and well into the 1990s, see Lois Labrianidis, "Internal Frontiers as a Hindrance to Development," *European Planning Studies* 9, no. 1, (2001): 85-103.

<sup>28</sup> Alvanós, *Koinōnikés sygkroýseis*, 188-193.

<sup>29</sup> See e.g. "Promemoria relativo al nuovo confine tra l'Albania e la Grecia", 1 June 1941, Politisches Archiv Auswärtiges Amt (hereafter PA AA) 105125; Comando Supremo a



of North-Western Greece, an area lying to the West of the Pindus Chain and of a line running up to the Arta Gulf, should be carved out and attached to Albania. Along with the annexation of Kosovo and parts of Montenegro, this would fulfill the aspirations of the Albanians to incorporate their ethnic kin living within foreign states. On the contrary, Macedonia was to remain part of Greece, in fulfillment of one of the basic tenets of Fascist empire building i.e., as Mussolini said in a much-quoted speech, that Italy's New Order should make "the ethnic element" correspond with the "political and geographic".<sup>30</sup> In line with this principle, Italy strove to create political bodies with homogeneous ethnic character, avoiding the creation of large ethnic minorities. Since the Italian authorities considered Macedonia as thoroughly "Hellenized" by Athens in the interwar years and, therefore, an inseparable part of the country, they deemed it unadvisable to attach it to Albania. The possibility of creating an independent Macedonian state was considered but rejected for fear that this new creature would become a proxy of Bulgaria or Germany.<sup>31</sup> All this, though, did not apply to Kastoria that was considered separately from the rest of the region. Most Italian authorities shared the view that the Slav-speaking population of this province, which they estimated around 1/3 of the total, were incapable of developing a real national identity as they were mostly peasants without political consciousness. Pro-Bulgarian attitudes among the Slavophones of Kastoria were seen as the product of Bulgarian propaganda among illiterate peasants rather than a spontaneous national movement. Given the composite nature of the population and the strategic position of this province, therefore, most internal documents suggested attaching it to Albania.<sup>32</sup>

Such plans did not come to fruition. Being defeated by the Greeks on the battlefield and forced to seek for German military support to invade the country, the authorities of Rome had to abide by the German wish to establish a regime of classic military occupation, with a Greek government and institutions in charge of running the administration of

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Ministero degli Affari Esteri, "Nuovo Confine tra Albania e Grecia", 17 luglio 1941, PA AA 105125

<sup>30</sup> *Corriere della Sera*, 11.06.1941.

<sup>31</sup> Paolo Fonzi, *Fame di guerra: L'occupazione italiana della Grecia (1941-43)* (Roma: Carocci, 2019), 36.

<sup>32</sup> A typical example of this attitude is in the memorandum Ufficio del Generale Delegato del Comando Supremo presso la Commissione Centrale Delimitazione Confini del Comando Supremo presso la Commissione sulla confinazione nella Macedonia occidentale, "Studio sulla confinazione nella Macedonia occidentale" August 1942, Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (hereafter AUSSME) E10-41.

the country. Moreover, since the Greeks did not consider itself as a defeated country, Prime Minister Georgios Tsolakoglou, head of the collaborationist government, set as a precondition to his appointment that Italians territorial claims be silenced, as fulfilling them would have undermined its legitimacy towards the Greek population. This attitude compelled Germany to impose the postponement of these claims to the territorial settlement to be negotiated after the end of the war. As a result, besides a number of regions where the Italians appointed civilians governors, over the two following years they governed the country through a sort of indirect rule, largely relying on the collaboration of local elites.<sup>33</sup>

### Italian Governance in Kastoria

In observance of the armistice, the areas of Greece assigned to Italy were initially garrisoned by the Wehrmacht, which handed them over to the Italian army after a few weeks. As in much of Northern Greece, in Kastoria this initial phase was characterized by an institutional void, with key state institutions such as the gendarmerie and the tribunals not performing their duties and the administration being solely entrusted to village councils and mayors. This state of exception ended upon arrival of the 13<sup>th</sup> Rgt. of the Pinerolo Division, on 27 June 1941, when the local Metropolit Nikiforos went to Athens to ask the government for the appointment of civilian authorities. Gerasimos Voulieris, who was to run the administration of the district until April 1942, was thus designated sub-prefect (*éparchos*).<sup>34</sup>

Despite its brevity, the interlude of self-government gave the Slavophone villages a sense of independence from the central Greek authorities, with “civil guards” (*politofylakē*) taking over policing duties.<sup>35</sup> In the uncertainty following the collapse of the Greek army, some communities asked to be attached to Bulgaria or ruled by Bulgarian personnel. It goes without saying that this increased the mistrust of the Greek authorities towards the Slav-speaking population. In the eyes of the Greek officials appointed in May-June 1941, their major task was to save the region from slipping into anarchy and from the spread of foreign propaganda. In part, as already mentioned, this attitude had informed the

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<sup>33</sup> Fonzi, *Fame di guerra*, 86-112.

<sup>34</sup> When in July 1941 the province of Kastoria was made independent from the prefecture of Kozani, he became its prefect (*nómarchos*), Decree 325/1941, ΦΕΚ 257/Α' /31.07.1941.

<sup>35</sup> Sofia Iliádou-Táchou, *Ta chrómata tis vías stí Dytikē Makedonía 1941-1944. Katochē - Antístasī - Ethnotikēs kai Emfylies Sygkroýseis* (Thessaloniki: Epíkentro, 2017), 100.

behaviour of the Greek authorities already in the interwar years. As these areas had bordered states that tried to exploit the national issue to expand southwards, such as Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, state officials appointed there had a sort of “trench mentality”, considering themselves as outposts of Hellenic civilization in foreign territory.<sup>36</sup>

Cooperation between the Italians and the Greek local authorities ran smoothly in the first months. As the Italian authorities’ primary concern was to reestablish the rule of law, they regarded the attempts of the Slav population to oppose law enforcement as an undesired source of chaos. Also, they were apprehensive about the activity of the Bulgarian representatives who toured the region distributing foodstuffs to Slavophone villagers and conducting pro-Bulgarian propaganda.<sup>37</sup> To strengthen their appeal to the population the Bulgarian envoys promised that, with the annexation of the region to Bulgaria, local peasants would be returned all that had been seized from them by the refugees.<sup>38</sup> Worried by the prospect of losing control of Macedonia, the local Italian authorities expelled repeatedly Bulgarian envoys and had food distribution entrusted exclusively to the Greek authorities.<sup>39</sup>

To be sure, the initial synergy between the Italians and the Greek authorities was a mere marriage of convenience. In fact, Italians were suspicious also towards Greek officials, as they saw that their conduct was guided by anti-Slavic sentiments. They understood, for example, that the gendarmerie displayed far greater harshness in punishing crimes committed by Slavophones than by Greeks. Furthermore, in order to persecute suspected communists they could not but rely on the

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<sup>36</sup> A similar attitude shaped the mentality of the Italian officials posted by Rome in the Italian borderlands with Yugoslavia, where a peculiar “frontier Fascism”, imbued with violent anti-Slavic stereotypes, developed. See Annamaria Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria: Il fascismo al confine orientale 1918-1941* (Roma & Bari: Laterza, 2011).

<sup>37</sup> On the tense relations between Bulgaria and Italy between 1941 and 1943 due to the conflicting territorial claims of both sides in Vardar Macedonia see Alberto Basciani, “Alleati per caso. Italia e Bulgaria durante la Seconda guerra mondiale,” in *40 anni di relazioni fra Italia e Bulgaria. Diplomazia, Economia, Cultura - 140 ГОДИНИ ОТНОШЕНИЯ МЕЖДУ ИТАЛИЯ И БЪЛГАРИЯ ДИПЛОМАЦИЯ, ИКОНОМИКА, КУЛТУРА (1879-2019)*, ed. Stefano Baldi and Alexander Kostov (Sofia: Tendril Publishing House, 2020), 155-186.

<sup>38</sup> This information about Bulgarian propaganda was given by a local informant Galáteia Christodýloy, “Schéseis synergasías kai sýgkroyisis tôn chōrión toy Dímoy Makedonón Kastoriás katá ton eikostò aíóna.” (BSc thesis, TEI Western Macedonia, 2004), 22. This paper is based mostly on oral sources.

<sup>39</sup> In September 1941 Ivan Dujčev, Professor of Bulgarian History at Sofia University, who worked as an interpreter for the Italian authorities was removed and expelled, Comando divisione Pinerolo, “Organizzazione comunista macedone (Comunisti Organòsis Makedonias)”, 19 April 1942, AUSSME N1-11-660.

information provided by the Greek authorities<sup>40</sup> and on lists compiled during the Metaxas years.<sup>41</sup> All this was a source of great concern to them as they clearly saw that this information was biased against the Slavophones. It was, however, impossible for the Italian authorities to take over the administration of the region or to replace the Greek personnel as they lacked sufficient knowledge of the environment and had to rely initially on the local Greek administration to sort out opponents. Only in November 1941, in the context of a general reform of the gendarmerie, the Italian authorities managed to have some of members of the local gendarmerie, whom they designed as “ultranationalist”, removed.<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Italians’ attitude was, and remained until the very end of their occupation in September 1943, one of extreme mistrust towards the multi-ethnic environment they were in. Significantly, Gen. Cesare Benelli, Commander of the Pinerolo Division, in a report from January 1942<sup>43</sup> distinguished the population of Western Macedonia and Thessaly into five groups: Slavs, Aromanians, Jews, Greek elites and Greek peasants. In the General’s opinion all of these groups were unreliable as collaborators, except for the Greek peasants who, he believed, admired Fascist Italy sincerely as a country with real social justice. Particularly worrying for the General was the presence of a Jewish community, as witnessed by numerous anti-Semitic passages in his reports.<sup>44</sup> Although Jews were never interned and survived safely the Italian occupation, being deported by the Germans in 1944, the Italian intelligence service kept them under strict control and imposed restrictions on their freedom to communicate through telephone.<sup>45</sup> Jews who escaped to Kastoria when the first wave of persecutions by the

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<sup>40</sup> Comando Divisione Pinerolo, “Relazione sulla situazione politico-amministrativa”, 3 settembre 1941, AUSSME N1-11-462.

<sup>41</sup> Such stereotypes were common in Italy, especially in the army. However, Italians did not necessarily regard the local Slav speaking communities as Slavs and applied the Slavocommunist stereotype rather to the Bulgarian officers in the region and to Bulgaria in general. For the anti-Slavic stereotypes in Italy see Enzo Collotti, “Sul razzismo antislavo,” in *Nel nome della razza: Il razzismo nella storia d’Italia 1870-1945*, ed. Alberto Burgio (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), 33-61.

<sup>42</sup> Fonzi, *Fame di guerra*, 128-129.

<sup>43</sup> Comando Divisione Pinerolo, (Nucleo P), “Relazione mensile”, 20 January 1942, AUSSME N1-11-542.

<sup>44</sup> See e.g., Comando Divisione Pinerolo (Ufficio Affari Civili), “Relazione quindicinale sulla situazione politico-amministrativa”, 20 January 1942, AUSSME N1-11-542.

<sup>45</sup> Comando Divisione Pinerolo, “Relazione sulla censura postalegrafica effettuata nel territorio di giurisdizione nel periodo dal 1° al 15 aprile 1942”, AUSSME N1-11-660.

Germans took place in Salonika were arrested by the Italians.<sup>46</sup> All in all, it can be concluded that ethnic cleavages were not seen by the Italians as an opportunity to establish collaboration but rather as a mere threat to public order and the enforcement of state law.

### Smuggle and Food Crisis

As wartime Greece was hit by a severe food crisis immediately after the inception of occupation, black marketeering became a common social praxis. The collapse of the internal transport system and the parallel decrease in food availability was conducive to the development of a large para-state.<sup>47</sup> Border regions such as Kastoria were particularly well suited for smuggling. The abrupt end of the war meant that the Greek army was not demobilized in an orderly manner but dispersed rather chaotically, with many soldiers returning home by their own means. Although they soon gathered in the major ports in search of a possibility to embark on ships, a large amount remained for some time in the northern areas. Here they sold large amounts of army stock, such as pack animals and weapons, to the population, which resulted in the inhabitants largely engaging in smuggle over the next years and in a strong concentration of weapons.

As soon as the war ended in April 1941, a large stream of commerce set on between Albania and Kastoria. Greek authorities complained that Albanian merchants would come to Kastoria and buy any sort of items as prices in the region were initially particularly low in comparison to those in Albania, where, as an effect of war and of the Italian large investments, inflation was already on the rise.<sup>48</sup> The proximity of different boundaries in a small area hindered law enforcement, as outlaws could easily seek refuge over the border. Tightening the borders around the plateau of Kastoria became, thus, one of the foremost targets of the Italian authorities, though to little avail. As an effect of the partition of the region

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<sup>46</sup> Comando Presidio Italiano Kastoria, "Relazione mensile", 26 July 1942, AUSSME N1-11-789.

<sup>47</sup> Giórgos Margarítis, *Apó tîn êtta stîn exégersi: Elláda, ánoixi 1941-fthinópōro 1942*, (Athens: Polítis, 1993); Giórgos Margarítis, *Proaggelía thyellōdōn anémōn...O pōlemos stîn Albanía kai ī próti períodos tis Karochēs* (Athens: Bibliórama 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Comando Divisione Pinerolo, "Relazione sulla situazione politico-amministrativa del territorio occupato", 10 July 1941, AUSSME N1-11-462; in June 1941 the Prefect of Kozani ordered harsh punishments against citizens who traded illegally with Albania, Geórgia I. Tzavára, "Koinōnikē geōgrafia tis peínas stîn Elláda tis Katochēs (1941-1944): Ī dīmografiikē sumperiforá tou Ellinikoý plithysmoý kai ta thýmata tis peínas" (PhD diss., Panteion University Athens, 2017), v. 1: 266.

into different occupation areas, people from Kastoria exploited differences in economic conditions between the German area (the demarcation line run a few km north-east of the town), Bulgaria occupied Bitola (80 km. from Kastoria) and Albania. Familiarity with the culture and the language of Macedonia increased the Slavophones' disposition to exploit connections with neighbouring Bitola. These movements were mostly of non-political nature, namely motivated by the will to escape social conditions prevailing in the district, when food scarcity made itself felt. Later on, when Italian authorities started to persecute political opponents, passing the border became an easy way to escape prosecution and many Slavophones found refuge in the Bulgarian part of Macedonia.

Although the small town of Kastoria never experienced the same dramatic rise in starvation deaths as Athens or Salonika, it did suffer hard economic setback.<sup>49</sup> First, manufacture that constituted a main source of income for the town underwent a general crisis. Collapse of trade networks and shortages of raw materials struck a hard blow to the once flourishing local economy. The multiplication of borders aggravated the economic crisis. The Kastoria plateau was detached from most of its surrounding areas, in particular from Florina, which fell under German rule. Adding to the collapse of transport caused by the dearth of vehicles and fuel, this led to increased isolation. For vital items such as fuel, for example, Kastoria had to be supplied from Florina and Salonika, which implied lengthy negotiations and often run against the lack of cooperation with the German authorities.<sup>50</sup> Finally, just as the rest of Macedonia, Kastoria saw an influx of refugees from Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, under Bulgarian occupation, who escaped persecution. Until the Greek government introduced a redistribution scheme of the refugees in all regions of Greece, most of them concentrated in the immediate adjoining areas, namely German and Italian occupied Macedonia.<sup>51</sup>

While in terms of foodstuffs the town was never completely self-sufficient, its agricultural surroundings may have assured a certain degree of food security. Initially, local Italian authorities planned to feed the town off its hinterland. Greek state authorities imposed mandatory

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<sup>49</sup> Tzavára, "Koinōnikē geōgrafia tis peínas," v.1: 265-295, v. 2: 126-168.

<sup>50</sup> Comando Divisione Pinerolo, "Relazione sulla situazione politico-amministrativa del territorio occupato", 27 August 1941, AUSSME N1-11-462; 4464, Befehlshaber Saloniki/Ägäis, "Montalicher Verwaltungsbericht September-Oktober 1942", Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv Freiburg RW 40-161.

<sup>51</sup> The exchange of messages between the Greek Government and the German authorities on redistribution is in Archeio Ypourgeio Exoterikón, Athens KY 1941.3.3

crops collection on the peasants but, as Italian reports signalled as early as August 1941, collected quotas were only a tiny fraction of estimated production. Much of the local crops found their way into the black market and to other regions where demand and prices were considerably higher.

In the whole of Greece, the food crisis undermined the legitimacy of the state. As state intervention in the economy had increased in the interwar years, particularly in the field of food production and distribution, the failure to meet the demands of the population was particularly harmful to the legitimacy of the public authorities.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, hyperinflation and food crisis undermined state governance, as public officials' pay did not keep pace with price increases. This resulted in widespread corruption and delegitimization in the eyes of most citizens. In the first year of occupation, riots against local Greek officials broke out all over the country. In some cases, they even led the population to ask for the Italians to take over the administration.<sup>53</sup>

Conflicts between the state and the peasants over the control of food resources reached their peak in the summer of 1942. To prevent the peasants from selling agricultural produce on the black market, the occupation authorities and the Greek gendarmerie went great lengths in trying to enforce mandatory crops collection by the use of violence. In regions with multi-ethnic population these conflicts intersected with ethnic cleavages. In Kastoria, for example, conflicts over crops were coded in "ethnic terms" following a pattern that, as already seen, had established itself in the region in the interwar years. Thus, in Slavophone villages opposition to public crops collection was conceived of as a form of resistance to the Greek state. Interestingly, the same occurred in Thesprotia (Chameria), a Greek region at the border with Albania, where the Muslim-Albanian population put up particularly strong resistance to public crops collection.

Applying a simplified template, much of the scholarship explains the collapse of state institutions with the intentional activity of the

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<sup>52</sup> Increasing state intervention, especially in the agricultural sector, was a global phenomenon in the '30s, see. e.g. Karl Schiller, *Marktregulierung und Marktordnung in der Weltagrarwirtschaft*, (Jena: Fischer, 1940); Kiran Klaus Patel, *The New Deal: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 56-65. A similar link between state intervention and a crisis of legitimacy in Vichy France, Shannon L. Fogg, *The Politics of Everyday Life in Vichy France: Foreigners, Undesirables, Strangers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2 and passim.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., the account of the riots in the village of Astakós, in Aetolia-Acarmania, Comando XXVI CdA, "Relazione settimanale," 1 October 1941, AUSSME N1-11-376.

Slavophone minority that, influenced by the Bulgarian propaganda, refused to obey the Greek authorities. Recent studies tend to explain the increase in ethnic attrition with the interwar repressive policies that reached their peak during the Metaxas regime.<sup>54</sup> In my opinion, both explanations are only partially correct and need to be combined to fully grasp the dynamics at play. While the history of the interwar years set the templates in which local conflicts were articulated, these were not their only possible manifestation. The process through which local conflicts over material and symbolic resources became increasingly ethnicized occurred as a consequence of several factors. As the economic crisis deepened the split between the town and the surrounding countryside, this cleavage came to be seen increasingly as an opposition between “state” and “Slavophone countryside”. It should be regarded, therefore, as a crisis of hegemony that induced those groups that perceived themselves as “subaltern” to resort to one of the social codes through which opposition had been articulated in the interwar years.

### Towards Armed Collaboration

It was not long before cooperation between Greek authorities and Italian occupation forces began to fall apart. Italians were in principle adverse to favouring the pro-Bulgarian movement and saw their main goal being that of disarming the population and recognizing the state representative and the occupiers as the only legitimate bearer of arms. With the passing of time, though, they became increasingly aware that Greek authorities pursued their own ethnic and political agendas and were therefore dysfunctional to their governance. In addition, Italians encountered strong difficulties in disarming the population and became extremely concerned about their lack of control of territory. As an effect from all this, in a matter of months relations with the prefect began to sour. Though initially content with their behaviour towards the Slav population, in October 1941, Prefect Voulieris complained that the Italians favoured explicitly the Slavs and repressed with particular harshness the refugees.<sup>55</sup> Not surprisingly, in April 1942, he was interned by the Italians and substituted with a new prefect.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Giórgos Margarítis, *Anepithýmioi sympatriótes. Stoicheía gia tìn katastrofē tòn meionotētōv tis Elládas. Evraíoi, Tsámides*, (Athens: Βιβλιόραμα, 2005).

<sup>55</sup> Nomarch of Katorias to the Greek Government, “Ékthesī perī tis epikratoýsis en tō Nomó katastáseōs”, 10 October 1941, A. E. 4/14, Records of Leonidas Mpatrinos, 1941-1945, Elia-Met, Salonika.

<sup>56</sup> Fonzi, *Fame di guerra*.



What is more, the province displayed increasing instability. This is testified by the fact that Italian reprisals against civilians occurred much earlier in this province than in the rest of Greece. As early as December 1941, Italians conducted in Kastoria mopping up operations with a large use of torture and beatings. Also, in July 1942, in response to the killing of two Italian soldiers, two suspects were killed without trial and their village was set on fire, a practice that at that time was extremely rare in the Italian occupation area.<sup>57</sup> Evidence shows that in those months the Italian authorities of Kastoria started relying increasingly on the Slav-speaking population. Though still refusing any commitment to a pro-Macedonia policy, the Italian army used them increasingly, along with the Vlachs, as guides and informants in mopping up operations outside the region.

Despite this early escalation of violence, armed resistance in the Kastoria district developed only at a relatively late stage. While a first network of EAM-activists was formed early on by a group of communists liberated at the request of the Bulgarian government from the internment camp of Akronauplia, guerrilla activity followed only with a certain delay. The first armed band started operating in the mountains in April 1942, but it dispersed after two months owing to Italian repression, lack of supply and the hostility of the Slavophone population.<sup>58</sup> A former resistance member explained this delay with the entrenched anti-Communist feelings of the urban bourgeoisie and the ethnic conflicts between Greeks and Slavophones.<sup>59</sup> A more active resistance began only in the first months of 1943 and increasingly in March, with the formation of local ELAS-units and the arrival of bands from South-West Macedonia. By that time large parts of Macedonia south of Kastoria and Thessaly were already under partisan control. In February, the Italians had started giving up isolated posts scattered in the countryside and had ordered the disarmament of Greek gendarmerie to prevent them from being captured or make common cause with the partisans. In the battle of Fardykampos (near Siatista), on 5-6 March 1943, an entire Italian battalion was taken prisoner by the partisans and two weeks later, the town of Grevena was abandoned by Italian forces. As a consequence, the Italian garrison of Kastoria and the few military posts in the region became a sort of enclave

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<sup>57</sup> Comando Presidio Italiano Kastoria "Trasmissione foglio notizie ed istruzioni nr. 12", 26 July 1942, AUSSME N1-11-789

<sup>58</sup> Athanásios Kallianiótis, *Oi archés tis Antístasis stin Dytikē Makedonía (1941-1943)*, (PhD diss., Aristotle University Thessaloniki 2000), 34-35; Kolliopoulos, *Plundered Loyalties*, 92.

<sup>59</sup> P. Douvalídīs, "To xekínima tou ethnikoapeleytherōtikoy kinēmatos stin perifēreia Kastoriás (1941-1944)", *Ethnikē Antístasi*, 27 (1981): 146-149.

encircled by the enemy. Supply lines were interrupted since Kastoria and Grevena could only be reached from Korça (Albania) through Amynteion, situated in the German occupied area.

Facing complete isolation, in March 1943 the Italians had to overcome their reluctance to distribute weapon to minorities and decided the formation of armed units of Slavophones. There are no reliable figures on the number of armed men, as Italian records are extremely scarce in this period, but Bulgarian sources provide a number of 1,600. While approximately 1/3 of them were engaged in mopping-up operations and were mobile, the majority were employed in self-defense units in their own villages. The region was divided into areas comprising several villages and led by a commander subordinated to a so-called Bulgaro-Macedonian Revolutionary Committee (*Boulgaro-Makedoniko Epanastatiko Komitato*), based in Kastoria. Italian instructions mandated that in case of a partisan attack armed Slavophones from other villages of the same area should come in support of the attacked village. If attacked the Italian Command of Kastoria could request each village to provide 20% of its armed men to form units that were to be dissolved when the emergency was over.<sup>60</sup> Securing supply lines was one of the key motivations behind the formation of these units. As the intelligence of the 1<sup>st</sup> German Mountain Division noted in the summer of 1943, during a tour of the Italian area, most "Bulgarian militias" were formed in villages lying along the Florina-Kastoria road.<sup>61</sup> Italian forces rarely abandoned the town of Kastoria, leaving to the Slavophone units the task of fighting the partisans, their support being confined to aircraft bombing and shelling villages under partisan control.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, they did not supply these bands, or did this only insufficiently, so that they resorted massively to pillaging. The management of violence was thus largely left to local chiefs proving in many cases counterproductive. Not before long, the alliance between Italians and Slavophones underwent a serious crisis and in August the Committee was close to dissolution.

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<sup>60</sup> Spyridōn Sfétas, "Ἰ ἰδρυσὶ καὶ ἰ δράσῃ τῆς Οὐχράνας (1943-44) στὴ δυτικῆ καὶ κεντρικῆ Μakedonía, στα πλαίσια τῆς πολιτικῆς τῆς VMRO καὶ τῶν ἰταλο-germanικῶν ἀρχόν Katochēs," *Valkaniká Sýmmeikta* 11 (1999-2000): 341-376, here 353.

<sup>61</sup> Strátos Dordanvás, *To áima τῶν athῶn. Antípoina τῶν germanικῶν ἀρχόν katochēs στὴ Makedonía, 1941-1944* (Athens: Εστία, 2007), 390.

<sup>62</sup> A similar pattern was used by the Italian army in the cooperation with the Chetniks in former Yugoslavia. While Italians garrisoned towns, they assigned control of the countryside to the collaborators, see Federico Goddi, "L'occupazione italiana in Montenegro. Forme di guerriglia e dinamiche politiche del collaborazionismo četnico (1941-1943)," *Qualestoria* 43, no. 2 (2015): 65-80.

In this period, the Bulgarian military tried to convince the Italians to allow them to take control of the Slavophone units. Bulgarian representatives travelled from Bitola to meet the officers of the Italian Command of Kastoria and asked to be entrusted the command of the Slav Macedonian military units. "In my opinion", recalled Italian Lieutenant Giovanni Ravalli in a post-war interrogation, "it is incontestable that Marinoff's intention to establish Bulgarian troops in our zone and still more to place Bulgarian officers at the head of the *comitadjis* bands had one sole object: to reinforce the Bulgarian interference in Kastoria and even his visit had that aim".<sup>63</sup> As clearly expressed by Ravalli's words, Marinoff's intervention increased the Italians' mistrust of the Slavophones as they feared that this might raise expectations of political autonomy.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, the Bulgarian authorities held similar reservations as they saw the formation of the Committee as an Italian initiative they could hardly keep control of.

While IMRO or other political forces had in this phase little or no real influence in the region and did not played a role in the formation of the Slavophone units<sup>65</sup>, armed collaboration seems to have followed rather a bottom-up logic. Generally speaking, there was, in those who sided with the Committee, a sense of empowerment as collaboration was seen as a chance to overturn existing hierarchies, in particular that between the Greek town and the Slavophone countryside. According to the memoirs of a gendarmerie officer, armed villagers blocked all accesses to the town under the motto: "Until now you sucked our blood. It is now our turn".<sup>66</sup> Crops collected by the state were seized by the villagers and entrusted to the Committee that was put in charge of food distribution. The Italian authorities also promised to dismiss officials originating from Southern Greece and replace them with Slavophones. According to Tasos Kostopoulos,<sup>67</sup> villages that engaged in armed collaboration were not

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<sup>63</sup> Sworn Testimony of the Witness Ravalli, Athens, June 17, 1946, UNWCC, 67.041, reel 10, Holocaust Museum Washington DC, f. 1403.

<sup>64</sup> Magistrati (Italian Representative in Sofia) to Italian Foreign Ministry, 21 April 1943, ASMAE AP 31-45 Grecia b. 21.

<sup>65</sup> Ivan Mihailov, the leader of the organization who during the war resided in Zagreb, tried several times to meet Mussolini, but the Duce refused. According to S. Sfetas, at the beginning of 1943, Croatian leader Ante Pavelić went to Rome and convinced Mussolini to arm the Slavophones. Sfetas, "Ἴ ίδρυσι και ἰ δράσι τῆς Οχράνας," 349. In Italian records, though, there is no evidence of this intervention.

<sup>66</sup> Κόνσταντίνος Σπ. Αντόνιου, *Ἴ slayikē kai kommunistikē epivoylē kai ἰ antístasis tōn Makedōnōn* (Thessaloniki: self-publishing, 1950) quoted in Ραϋμόνδος Αλβανός, "Mesopolemikēs politikēs kai ethnotikēs sygkroýseis: O ellīnikós emfýlios pólemos stin periochē Kastoriás, *Epistēmī kai Koinōnía: Epithēōrīsī Politikēs kai Íthikēs Theōrías* 11 (2015): 71-110, here 83.

<sup>67</sup> Κóstopoulos, "Axomakedonikó Komitáto".

those that in the interwar years were characterized by Greek state sources as “*voulgarizontes*”. Therefore, no clear link connects the political struggles of the interwar years with collaboration during the war. In fact, ethnic conflicts as they developed during occupation were a decisive factor. Yet, also this explanation has to be taken with a grain of salt, as it does not account for all of the choices made in those months. A further factor to be taken into account, according to Kostopoulos, were the relations developed between a certain village and the occupying forces. Villages that had experienced Italian violence in previous years mostly chose to side with the resistance. Also, the existence of strong links with Bulgaria, for example in villages that had had a consistent emigration to Bulgaria in the interwar years, led to side with the Committee. Finally, of course, the existence of a strong network of EAM-activists in a village prevented it from joining the collaborationist forces.

By this time the Italian authorities had shifted significantly their strategy of governance. If they had initially relied on the Greek state authorities as an instrument of indirect rule, they now took the collapse of the Greek state’s monopoly of violence as a matter of fact and sought therefore to establish a direct alliance with social and ethnic groups. Both strategies of governance -the one adopted in 1941-1942 and that of 1943- were largely the result of a lack of knowledge about the local society and of sufficient resources to govern it by creating strong and reliable alliances with local actors. If we understand occupation as a form of “inter-organizational organization”<sup>68</sup>, in which a military force rules a foreign society through collaboration of locals, be they state officials or differently legitimized social actors, the Italian occupation suffered from its very beginning of a shortage of resources to activate collaboration. The relations between the Italian garrison and the Committee show sufficiently that the Italian way of indirect rule was highly inefficient. Moreover, it was hampered by the constant lack of trust towards groups perceived as ethnic minorities that derived from Italian weakness as a protecting power in the region.

## Conclusion

The history of Kastoria allows us to observe the development of interethnic violence with a micro-analytical approach, dismissing explanations based exclusively on political ideologies.

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<sup>68</sup> Cornelis J. Lammers, “The Interorganizational Control of an Occupied Country,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1988): 438-457.

The occupiers' policy was not the cause of ethnic conflicts, nor was it the preceding history of discrimination against the Slavophone population, though these for obvious reasons were preconditions to the deepening of ethnic cleavages. Crucial was the unleashing of social dynamics during occupation and the complex interaction between multiple actors -Italian occupation authorities, Greek state authorities, Bulgarian representatives, Greek resistance- that led to the ethnicization of conflicts over resources. Recent studies on inter-ethnic violence in the Balkans during WWII<sup>69</sup> suggest that, although inter-ethnic conflicts were part of social life before the war, they were not necessarily the only way social conflicts were coded. In the case of Kastoria, as we have seen, ethnicity was only one of the possible ways to play out social conflicts in the interwar years. This pattern was reactivated during the Metaxas years leading to a dramatic surge of violence in the context of the economic crisis and famine unleashed by occupation. This interpretation is consistent with what social scientists have argued about the dynamics of civil conflicts in different regions. While pre-existing collective identities do play a role in unleashing ethnic conflicts, group-making is largely the product of social variables, among which modernization is a key factor conducive to the rise of grievances against the political center.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, according to recent scholarship, the inability of failed states to control a peripheral region is crucial in determining the rise of insurgencies.<sup>71</sup> Finally, the case of Kastoria shows that civil strife is sparked by conceptions of moral economy shaping the expectations of actors about the fair distribution of resources.<sup>72</sup> Thus, it reminds of us of the importance of avoiding sharp distinctions between material and symbolic factors in explaining violence and civil war.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Alexander Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkrieges. Massengewalt der Ustasa gegen Serben, Juden und Roma 1941-1945* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013); Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* (London: Cornell University Press, 2016).

<sup>70</sup> A review of existing theories in Stuart J. Kaufman, *Ethnicity as a generator of conflict* in *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict*, ed. Karl Cordell and Stefan Wolff (London & New York: Routledge, 2011): 91-102.

<sup>71</sup> James D. Fearon and D. D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1, (2003): 75-90.

<sup>72</sup> A strong case for this interpretation of the peasants' behavior has been made by James Scott, *Moral Economy of the Peasant Rebellion and Subsistence in South East Asia* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1977). For a contextualization of Scott's arguments see Marc Edelman, "Bringing the Moral Economy Back in... to the Study of 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Transnational Peasant Movements," *American Anthropologist* 107, no. 3 (2005): 331-345.

<sup>73</sup> For the debate see *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, ed. Mats Berdal and David Malone (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000).

While conflicts and violence were the result of the interaction between multiple actors, a dynamic in which the occupiers were not always the driving force, the Italians did constitute an important variable as they had the higher instance in the managing of weapons. In fact, the Italian decision to arm the Slavophone villages exacerbated leading ethnic polarization leading to the formation of two opposing camps one identifying with Bulgarian nationalism and the other with the resistance in its different versions, the SNOF or the EAM/ELAS.

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

Isabel Ströhle\*

### **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/ŠD,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/SD, 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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## **The Rediscovery of the Serbian Great War Veterans in Socialist Yugoslavia (1970-1989). The Case of Momčilo Gavrić, the Boy Soldier**

Danilo Šarenac\*

### **Abstract:**

The article puts in its focus the reappearance of the Serbian Great War veterans during the two last decades of the existence of socialist Yugoslavia. It has been argued that the public's demand for more and more stories from the first hand was propelled by a number of reasons including lack of previous systematic dealing with the war and its consequences. In addition, the need to strengthen the Serbian national identity also played an important role in this process. As an illustrative case study of these phenomena, the fate of the famous boy soldier of the Serbian army, Momčilo Gavrić, has been reconstructed and analyzed. Ultimately, the popularity of the old former warriors had a number of consequences for the Serbian and Yugoslav society. One of the most important was that oral history began to be perceived in the eyes of the public as a much more trustworthy discipline than was the case with the works of professional historians.

**Keywords:** Serbia, Yugoslavia, Momčilo Gavrić, First World War, Veterans

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## Introduction

On the morning of 30 April 1993, a military funeral took place at the Belgrade's New Cemetery. The name of the departed was Momčilo Gavrić.<sup>1</sup> He died at the age of 87. He was no 1941 partisan hero nor a senior retired general of the Yugoslav People's Army. In fact, he was a Serbian boy soldier from the days of the Great War. Since the interwar years, this was the first veteran of the 1914-1918 war who had received military funeral honors. However, Gavrić was for most of his life an anonymous figure. He became a prominent veteran only at the very end of his life. Gavrić's rise to fame was part of a wider phenomenon – the public's rediscovery of Serbia's First World War. Within this process the remaining veterans of the Serbian army, the so called 'Salonika men' such as Momčilo Gavrić, (serb. Solunci) played essential and multiple roles.

With their wobbly and shaky voices, wearing their numerous decorations and many of them appearing in the elements of the traditional Serbian folk costumes, these men deeply affected the Serbian public of the 1970s and 1980s. It is worth here explaining the term 'Salonika'. Namely, in late 1915 when Serbia was overwhelmed by the invading enemy forces – the bulk of the troops, some 150 000 soldiers, managed to reach Greece and to subsequently continue their struggle, together with the Entente troops, at the newly established Salonika front. Consequently, the term 'Salonika men' implied much more powerful symbolism that was the case with the usual wording like 'veteran' or 'former warrior'. In the essence, the term 'Salonika men' implied that these men did not desert nor did they surrender as many others did during the ruinous retreat of 1915.

The fate of the remaining Serbian veterans reflected the wider societal attitudes within Yugoslavia concerning the traditions of the First World War. These men were utterly forgotten by the state after 1945 and their status barely changed until the 1970s. However, things begun to drastically change during the last two decades of Yugoslavia's existence. During the 1970s and especially in the 1980s the 'Salonika men' finally managed to reassert their position as respectable and praise worthy individuals. Their prestige was even, if not greater, to the one they had once experienced in the interwar years. During the 1970s and 1980s several processes became interlinked. Firstly, Serbia's rediscovery of the First World War was gaining momentum at the beginning of the 1970s. A genuine curiosity was propelling this phenomenon as the dramatic 1914-1918 period definitely presented one of the most dramatic episodes of the national past. The

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<sup>1</sup> Branislav Goldner, *Momčilo Gavrić: Najmladi kaplar na svetu* (Beograd: Partenon, 2013), 186.

importance of this period for Serbia's self-image can hardly be overestimated. However, this war was under researched and underestimated in the official commemorative culture.

Moreover, the 1914-1918 period gained the status of a 'forbidden fruit' in Yugoslav Communism. Also, the public became weary and saturated with the complete dominance of the Second World War narrative in the public life. These characteristics also coincided with what Professor Jasna Dragovic Soso called the "outburst of history" which struck the entire Yugoslavia but especially Serbia.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, the links between the revival of the Serbian nationalism and the Great War were very close ones.

The 'Salonika men' were vital for each of these processes. The authority and the immediacy of a witness was a commodity which could hardly be replaced or compensated any other way. Along the way these men were finally properly honored by the state representatives and other social subjects, but the veterans were also manipulated and were used in undermining socialist Yugoslavia as well as propelling Milošević's Serbia of the early 1990s. Furthermore, in the course of this process, the 'Salonika warriors' became the proper 'stars' who were able to position themselves as the highest authorities for the general public's interpretations of the 1914-1918 war.

### The Great War in Socialist Times

After 1945, the communist guerillas replaced the iconic image which was cherished in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: the Serbian Salonika 1918 soldier, usually depicted in a victorious posture holding his rifle and wearing his steel French 'Adrian' helmet. As the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) saw the resolving of the national question as one of its main tasks, the role of the Serbian nationalism was treated with great attention. As the Serbs were the most numerous nations within the state their nationalism was seen as potentially the most dangerous problem in this respect.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the new authorities developed a very complex relationship with the Serbian pre-1945 traditions, especially with the 1912-1918 'liberation' wars. For example, some associations which cherished the glory of the Serbian army were simply dissolved and banned. Others however were kept. For example, the most powerful Yugoslav veteran's pre-1941 network, the *Volunteer Federation*, (Serbian: Savez dobrovoljaca)

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<sup>2</sup> Jasna Dragović Soso, *Saviours of the Nation: Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* (London: Hurst and Company, 2002), 64.

<sup>3</sup> Dejan Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2009), 10.

was declared illegal in 1947. The court stated that their activities were “not in accordance with aspirations of the people of the Federal Democratic Republic of Yugoslavia”.<sup>4</sup> Besides, in the Second World War, some of the key members of this organization openly expressed their anti-communist views. However, the true animosity of the socialist leadership was reserved for the Karadjordjević dynasty. For example, more than 200 monuments honoring this dynasty were destroyed all over Yugoslavia after 1945.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, there were examples of a much more relaxed approach. For example, the veterans of the regular Serbian 1914-1918 army were seen ideologically less dangerous than the Serbian volunteers. Namely, if the volunteers were seen as overzealous Serbian nationalists, the regular 1914 Serbian servicemen were treated as men ‘who simply did their job’ - defending the country from a foreign invasion. Consequently, the pre-war *Society of the Albanian Commemorative Certificate* was allowed to function as before. This society was established as late as 1938 in order to cherish the memory of the Great Serbian Retreat of 1915/1916.<sup>6</sup> As already mentioned, this historical event brought some 150,000 Serbian soldiers into the exile. The retreat took place in freezing temperature and across the inhospitable mountainous terrain in Montenegro and Albania. The service men who took part in this retreat were saw themselves as the most loyal citizens as they followed their commanders even beyond the state borders. As the pick of their hardships came in Albania the entire retreat of 1915/1916 became known as ‘the Albanian Golgotha’ in the Serbian tradition.

After the war, the veterans who participated in the retreat were issued a special document: the *Albanian Certificate*. This piece of paper symbolized the state’s gratitude for the soldier’s extraordinary services in the winter of 1915/1916.

Ultimately, finding the ‘appropriate’ level of 1912–1918 traditions in the Yugoslav public discourse proved to be very difficult for the new authorities. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war’s outbreak presented a formidable test in this respect. The rediscovery of the First World War became a wider European trend starting in the 1960s, just around the 50<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Momčilo Pavlović, “Zabrana rada Saveza dobrovoljaca oslobodilačkih ratova (1912-1918) 1947. godine,” in *Dobrovoljci u oslobodilačkim ratovima Srba i Crnogoraca: Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa održanog u Kikindi 11. i 12. aprila 1996*, ed. Petar Kačavenda (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1996/Kikinda: Udruženje ratnih dobrovoljaca 1912-1918 njihovih potomaka i poštovalaca), 395-405, here pp. 03.

<sup>5</sup> Uglješa Rajčević, *Zatirano i zatrto: Oskroljeni i uništeni srpski spomenici na tlu prethodne Jugoslavije* (Novi Sad: Prometej, 2001), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Danilo Šarenac, *Top, vojnik i sećanje: Provi svetski rat i Srbija 1914-2009* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2014), 153-73.

anniversary of the war's outbreak.<sup>7</sup> In 1964, Žika Mitrović, already a distinguished Yugoslav film director, decided to make a movie about the first Serbian and, at the same time, the first Allied victory in the war (the Cer battle). The film was entitled *The Drina March* (Serbian: Marš na Drinu). From the start, the project was linked with controversies. The director was worrying will his project be censored or completely canceled. On the other hand, the officials feared that this movie might boost Serbian national feelings beyond any acceptable limit. This tension was reflected in the fact that the state provided very limited logistical support. This was in stark contrast to 'partisan films' which could rely not only on lavish support of the Yugoslav National Army in terms of equipment and extras but could also count on full scale assistance by the state. For example, just five years after Mitrović made his movie another partisan movie spectacle was made. This was *the Battle of Neretva* where foreign star such as Yul Brynner and Orson Welles were hired with the full state support.

In contrast, Žika Mitrović was provided the extras for the battle scenes from the local army garrison only for two days a week, so he had to hurry up and make the entire movie in just one month. Ultimately, *The Drina March* won the audience's award at the most prestigious Yugoslav Pula film festival in 1964.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it became the hallmark patriotic movie shown as part of the education of the recruits of the Yugoslav People's Army. Even today, it remains the most respected Serbian war movie and has evolved into a specific cultural phenomenon.

However, the television and the press were mostly closed for the content dedicated to the Great War. The most dominant way 'the 1914-1918' was still kept alive in the public sphere were books. The market was overwhelmed with partisan literature, diaries and recollections. However, the public was still waiting its *big novel* about the Great War. While waiting for the novel and historical synthesis, a very peculiar new type of literature emerged -the commemorative volumes. These were the collections of testimonies made by the remaining veterans. The first such book appeared in 1968. It was published by the *Society of the Albanian Certificate*. Entitled *Through Albania* this was the collection of oral testimonies focusing on the famous Serbian retreat.<sup>9</sup> It is worth mentioning that this organization was led by some of Belgrade's finest academics and well-respected citizens who made the driving force of this organization. This fact certainly had a

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<sup>7</sup> Jay Winter, "Historiography 1918-Today," in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War* ed. Ute Daniel et al. (Berlin 2014-11-11: issued by Freie Universität Berlin, 2014), 1-17. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10498.

<sup>8</sup> Šarenac, *Top, vojnik i sećanje: Provi svetski rat i Srbija 1914-2009*, 245-47.

<sup>9</sup> *Kroz Albaniju: 1915-1916. Spomen knjiga*, ed. Kosta Todorović (Beograd: Prosveta, 1968).

positive impact on communist authorities when discussing the future fate of this society. However, these men were doctors, architects, pharmacists and artists, not historians.

In 1971, another volume was published by the same organization: *The Golgotha and Resurrection of Serbia 1916-1918*.<sup>10</sup> The phrasing *Golgotha and Resurrection* was the trope used in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia when referring to the 1915/1916 retreat. Imbued with religious connotations the title must have sounded strange in a deeply socialist context of the early 1970s. This edition was followed by another book with a similar Christian inspired title: *The Thorny Road of Serbia*, published in 1974.<sup>11</sup> All of these books were luxurious A5 volumes with illustrations and editorial notes made by the famous Yugoslav doctor and a Serbian veteran, Kosta Todorović. Todorović underlined what he saw as the key qualities of these collections: “plainness and authenticity” when describing war.<sup>12</sup> It is important to stress that these books were no samizdat editions but were published by major state publishers.

Besides stressing bluntness and genuineness, the aforementioned volumes brought other novelties as well. This was the focus on an ordinary soldier. Such an approach was in sharp contrast with the interwar literature where the former officers dominated the marked publishing their own books and testimonies. This shift of the 1970s seemed to be acceptable for the communist officials. This shift in focus fitted well into the general interpretation of the 1914-1918 war -a just and defensive struggle of the ordinary Serbian citizens.

In the meantime, the country suffered from political turbulence. In many respects, this was part of the global developments of 1968. Tensions increased in Kosovo and the status of the Serbian minority became the debated and divisive issue. Two members of the Party’s leadership, Dobrica Ćosić and Jovan Marjanović, were excluded from the Party due to their opposition to the official policy regarding the Kosovo crisis.<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that both men were very much interested in history. Jovan Marjanović was a distinguished Yugoslav historian while Ćosić was

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<sup>10</sup> *Golgota i vaskrs Srbije 1916-1918*, ed. Kosta Todorović (Beograd: BIGZ, 1971).

<sup>11</sup> *Trnovit put Srbije 1914-1918*, ed. Aleksandar Deroko, Kosta Todorović and Milorad Petrović (Beograd: BIGZ, 1974).

<sup>12</sup> Kosta P. Todorović, “Uvodna reč o spomen knjizi *Trnovit put Srbije, 1914-1918*,” in *Trnovit put Srbije, 1914-1918*, ed. Kosta Todorović (Beograd: BIGZ, 1974), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Jović, *Yugoslavia: A State that Withered Away*, 115-18.

already a well-known writer. It was the latter who will dramatically challenge the official stance about Serbia's Great War.

In 1972 Dobrica Ćosić finished his novel entitled *A Time of Death*. This became only the first out of four sequels. These books marked the entire decade. The second part was published in 1973 and a new one in 1976. The final chapter was published in 1979.<sup>14</sup> The plot followed the fate of the Serbian peasant family during the Great War and it ended at the shores of the Albanian coastline in early 1916. These novels became immensely popular and were continuously republished with massive circulation. Ćosić later explained the evolution of his interest in the First World War and in many respects, his story was emblematic for the entire communist nomenclature. He said that he got interested in the Great War while still a senior communist official. "As a young writer and a man belonging to the ideology, I nourished a very unjust perception of the Great War. I have also used to pronounce the term *Salonika profits* (Serbian: solunastvo) in a very negative connotation".<sup>15</sup>

However, he began the work on his novel already in 1954-1955. Interestingly, he argued that his motivation was to deal with "the deeply tragic theme of human suffering".<sup>16</sup> However, due to his clash with the fellow communists over the fate of the Kosovo Serbs, Ćosić's interest evidently evolved. He became the man 'who opened the Serbian question within Yugoslavia'. This 'question' implied the renegotiations of the Serbs position within Yugoslavia. Consequently, Ćosić's novel was by the late 1970s read less as a universal quest for knowledge and more as part of the Serbian peculiar quest for the lost roots and neglected national identity. The fact that the Yugoslav crisis was gaining momentum only strengthened such interpretation. Namely, the period from 1968 until 1971 was marked by an intense internal crisis and ended up with the new state arrangement with emphasis on federal organization.<sup>17</sup> If numerous European countries were heading towards post-national commemorations of the Great War, in Yugoslavia the dynamics was quite the opposite.

By mid-1970 the publishing activity of the *Society of the Albanian Commemorative Certificate* had ceased as the key protagonists of the society departed. However, the model they installed had been taken over by other

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<sup>14</sup> Dobrica Ćosić, *Vreme smrti*, vol. I-IV (Beograd: Prosveta, 1972-1979).

<sup>15</sup> Slavoljub Đukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu: Razgovori sa Dobricom Ćosićem* (Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 1989), 330.

<sup>16</sup> Đukić, *Čovek u svom vremenu: Razgovori sa Dobricom Ćosićem*, 330.

<sup>17</sup> Branko Petranović, *Istorija Jugoslavije, 1918-1989*, vol. 3: Socijalistička Jugoslavija, 1945-1988 (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), 402.

publishers. The edited collections of oral accounts continued to appear in the bookshops. There were two volumes entitled *The Golgotha and the Resurrection of Serbia* published in 1986.<sup>18</sup> Though they had the same title as the books from the 1970s these were not reprints but volumes with new, previously unpublished testimonies. The editors, Silvija Djurić and Vidosav Stevanović, were journalists and writers. All over Serbia 'Salonika men' were interviewed by local journalists.<sup>19</sup> As seen before, the collections brought raw, immediate, and compelling materials from the war.

The presence of the oral testimonies in the public sphere was lifted to a new degree in 1979. The short, colorful, and highly emotional stories from the Salonika front began to appear regularly in the weekly and daily press. Nothing like this ever happened in socialist Yugoslavia, Antonije Djurić, journalist of the popular *Politika Express* paper wrote a feuilleton about the surviving 'Salonika men'. This was a great success and he decided to edit his articles and collected in a special volume. In 1979 his book was published, entitled *the Salonika Men Speak. This is How it Was*. The second part of the title revealed the author's intention to tell 'the truth about the Great War' presuming that the official account of the war was false and dishonest.

After the book was published nothing was the same. It became immensely popular and widely read. Almost each year an additional edition had to be printed. In his preface, Djurić wrote on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 1978 (the anniversary of the Salonika front's breakthrough): "This book presents just a small authentic history of the past events, not written by historians, but those who made history – the participants in the events themselves".<sup>20</sup> Again, as before, the old warriors were seen as the men who were 'as close as possible to the source of history'.

Also, Antonije Djurić did not only used the model used by the previous publishers established back in the late 1960s. Namely, he introduced another powerful element: he expressed his anticommunism quite openly. Firstly, Djurić already had an aureole of an anti-communist dissident as he spent 7 years in prison due to his opposition to the Yugoslav

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<sup>18</sup> Silvija Đurić and Vidosav Stevanović, *Golgota i vaskrs Srbije, 1914-1915*, vol. I (Beograd: BIGZ / Partizanska knjiga, 1986); and Silvija Đurić and Vidosav Stevanović, *Golgota i vaskrs Srbije, 1915-1918*, vol. II (Beograd: BIGZ / Partizanska knjiga, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> In 1974 a well-known Serbian avantgarde film director, Purisa Đorđević, decided to make a 10-minute long documentary dedicated to one of the well-known Salonika men, Budimir Davidović. The film was entitled *Dve zvezde 1914-1918* [Two Stars 1914-1918]. Puriša Đorđević, "Karađorđeva kralja Aleksandra" [The Karadjordje Star of King Alexander] in *NIN*, 18.09.2008, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Antonije Đurić, *Solunci govore: Ovako je bilo* (Gornji Milanovac: Kulturni centar, 1978), 9.

authorities. Consequently, his admirers liked to see him as the “Serbian Solzhenitsyn”.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, he contextualized the oral history materials of the veterans in such a way so to stress the neglect and the injustice these men suffered during the communist rule. Perhaps his conception was most clearly stated in his 2000s forward notes to yet another edition of his book. There the author wrote that his book was composed of “disturbing recollections which are destroying the shameful oblivion and sinister destruction of history”.<sup>22</sup> It is essential to stress, however, that these testimonies were transmitted to paper without any critical apparatus nor reflection.

By the early 1980s, the Great War was becoming the topic symbolizing the head-on clash with the Yugoslav system.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the Great war was becoming part of the popular historical consciousness.<sup>24</sup> As was the case in other communist countries oral history became a political tool for delegitimizing socialism and communism. Old men 'who knew how it was' became the symbols of alternative memory.<sup>25</sup> The Serbian veterans were eager to be heard while many nationalists were eager to exploit their testimonies in undermining the existing political system.

Rifts were now seen everywhere in Yugoslavia including the federal army. For example, historian Petar Opačić who worked at the Military Historical Institute in Belgrade found himself in trouble because he decided to write his Ph.D. thesis about the Salonika front. He faced continuous internal disciplinary measures in the early 1980s.<sup>26</sup> However, as the decade was ending and the early 1990s were starting this historian published

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<sup>21</sup> Anonim, “O autoru,” in *Po zapovesti Srbije*, ed. Antonije Đurić (Beograd: Princip Press, 2018), 427-28.

<sup>22</sup> Anonim, “O autoru,” 427-28.

<sup>23</sup> A unique phenomenon during the transformation of the Great War traditions into the mainstream of the Serbian media attention was the novel written in 1985. It was *Knjiga o Milutinu* [the Book about Milutin] written by Danko Popović. The key character of this novel was the old warrior who was telling his life story from a prison cell. Danko Popović, *Knjiga o Milutinu* (Beograd: Književne novine, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> Another case where a press feuilleton evolved into a very successful book was the following example: *Junaci srpske trilogije govore: Dragoslav P. Đordjević, Sinisa Đaja, Svetislav Krejaković*, ed. Kosta Dimitrijević, (Beograd: Industrodidakta, 1971). Here, a journalist, Kosta Dimitrijević decided to find and interview the main characters from the cult Serbian interwar novel about the Great War: *Srpska trilogija* [The Serbian Trilogy].

<sup>25</sup> Natalia Khanenko and Gelinada Grinchenko, “Introduction,” in *Reclaiming the Personal: Oral History in Post-Socialist Europe*, ed. Natalia Khanenko and Gelinada Grinchenko (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Petar Opačić, *Solunski front: Zejtinlik* (Beograd/Jagodina: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika / Gambit, 2004), 8-9.



several biographies of the senior Serbian commanders and these editions saw great success.

This was all related with the palpable political changes which were taking place in Serbia. Since the summer of 1986 the Serbian communist were led by Slobodan Milošević. During 1987, Milošević fully consolidated his power over the political leadership in Serbia.<sup>27</sup> It should be added that already by the early 1980s, Belgrade became the focal place in Yugoslavia where criticism towards the state ideology and various social taboos was formulated.<sup>28</sup> However, in historiography, the bulk of the controversy was linked with the Second World War and the potential themes of discord concerning the 1912-1918 wars were still kept at a low profile.<sup>29</sup>

In the late 1980s, the Great War finally became the regular topic for the Belgrade television. Documentaries and reportages were becoming growing expressions of appreciation towards Serbia's Great War. In 1987 Belgrade television made a 45 minutes documentary dedicated to Momčilo Gavrić, seen more and more 'as the youngest Serbian soldier of the Great War'. This documentary unearthed the story for the wider audience and Momčilo Gavrić became instantly a 'star' among the veterans.

In 1990 television movie was made, *the Battle of Kolubara*.<sup>30</sup> It was based on Dobrica Ćosić famous novel *A Time of Death*. The script was written by Ćosić's friend and the famous Serbian writer Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz.<sup>31</sup> The movie instantly became a success. It is worth mentioning that in the 1990s Ćosić's novel entered curriculum in Serbian elementary schools. Similarly, the famous collection edited by Anotnije Djurić was adapted for the theater. This is how one of the most popular Serbian plays

<sup>27</sup> Kosta Nikolić, "Osma sednica: Kraj borbe za Titovo nasleđe u Srbiji," in *Slobodan Milošević, put ka vlasti: Osma sednica CK SKS. Uzroci, tok i posledice*, ed. Momčilo Pavlović, Dejan Jović, and Vladimir Petrović (Beograd/Stirling: Institut za savremenu istoriju / Centre for European Neighbourhood Studies, 2008), 121-47.

<sup>28</sup> Dejan Jović, "Osma sjednica: Uzroci, značaj, interpretacije," in *Slobodan Milošević, put ka vlasti: Osma sednica CK SKS. Uzroci, tok i posledice*, ed. Momčilo Pavlović, Dejan Jović, and Vladimir Petrović (Beograd/Stirling: Institut za savremenu istoriju / Centre for European Neighbourhood Studies, 2008), 33-68, here pp. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Serbian historian Veselin Đuretić provoked great turmoil when publishing his books about the Second World War where he branded the Serbian royalist movement as the second antifascist army within occupied Yugoslavia. Veselin Đuretić, *Vlada na bespuću: Internacionalizacija jugoslovenskih protivrječnosti na političkoj pozornici Drugog svetskog rata* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga / Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1982). and Veselin Đuretić, *Saveznici i jugoslovenska ratna drama* (Beograd: SANU, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> TV movie "Kolubarska bitka" [The Kolubara Battle], directors: Arsenije Jovanović, Jovan Ristić <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0200782/>.

<sup>31</sup> Borislav Mihajlović Mihiz, *Kolubarska bitka: Strategijska drama u dva čina. Prema romanu "Vreme smrti"* (Beograd: Jugoslovensko dramsko pozorište, 1985).

was created – *The Salonika Men speak*.<sup>32</sup> The play was performed in the Serbian National Theater as much as 400 times between 1981 and 1993.<sup>33</sup> Some of the performances were characterized by very intense emotions as surviving veterans were seen in the front row together with the Serbian patriarch and other dignitaries.

September 1970 the remaining veterans, together with their families, founded the organization named *Society for Cherishing the Traditions of Serbia's Liberation Wars 1912-1918*. This organization organized in the late 1980s regular commemorative trips to sites of Salonika front as well to countries once belonging to the Entente. The Great War was becoming the mainstream. The only component that was lacking in the process of full public acceptance of the Great War was public recognition by the main political actors who were still, at least formally, communists. This happened in 1989. In May 1989 the rising star of the Serbian communists, Slobodan Milošević organized a reception for the old warriors.<sup>34</sup> Momčilo Gavrić as well as Živojin Lazić, the two most well-known 'Salonika men' were there as well. Besides, on the 16th of November 1990 the governing body of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia issued to Gavrić one of the highest state decorations: *The People's Medal for Merits with the Golden Star*.<sup>35</sup>

The Great War traditions were essential in reshaping the image of the Serbian communists in the wake of the first multi-party elections in Yugoslavia which were planned for December 1990. The decorations given in November the same year were the highest decorations Serbian leadership could offer at the moment. Paradoxically, the medals were given by the state which was already on the brink of its collapse. Since January the same year, the League of Communists of Yugoslavia practically did not exist and the country was sliding into a complete serious paralysis. Milošević met the veterans once more, in July of 1991.<sup>36</sup> To understand these processes better it is necessary to narrow the perspective to one peculiar case, one of the already mentioned Momčilo Gavrić.

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<sup>32</sup> Šarenac, *Top, vojnik i sećanje: Prvi svetski rat i Srbija 1914-2009*, 253-54.

<sup>33</sup> Šarenac, *Top, vojnik i sećanje: Prvi svetski rat i Srbija 1914-2009*, 253-54.

<sup>34</sup> Stari ratnici kod Slobodana Miloševića [Slobodan Milošević Receiving the Old Warriors], *Politika*, 11.05.1989, 7.

<sup>35</sup> The Presidium of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, the Medal Office: Certificate confirming that Momčilo Gavrić is the recipient of the Medal for People's Merits with the Golden Star. Document no. 82, issued on November 16, 1990. Gavrić family archive.

<sup>36</sup> Milisav Sekulić, *Sa Gučeva u legendu: Životopis Momčila Gavrića, najmladeg ratnika Srbije* (Beograd: M. Sekulić, 2009), 95.

### The Boy and the War

In the early hours of the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1914, the Austro-Hungarian invasion of the Kingdom of Serbia begun. The direction of the incursion supposed to stun the Serbian army. However, the element of surprise was lost and by the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, the bulk of the two armies met and fiercely clashed in Western Serbia. This was the Cer battle (18–21 August), the one which inspired the Yugoslav director Žika Mitrović, to make his famous movie from 1964. After being victorious, the Serbian units had reoccupied the ground they lost during the first few days of the enemy invasion. They soon made shocking discoveries. It became apparent that the enemy troops treated local civilians with immense brutality. Indiscriminate shooting and killing were widely practiced in the whole front-line zone. The Swiss criminologist, Rudolph Archibald Reiss, was invited to Serbia to make an independent investigation about the atrocities. He estimated that somewhere between 3000 and 4000 civilians were killed while around 500 were taken across the border as internees.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the war, such behavior was never repeated, but the crimes from the first weeks of the war placed a deep imprint on the 'Serb-Austrian War' – as the contemporaries called the 1914 conflict.

One of the villages affected by this violence atrocities was Trbušnica, a small hamlet on the northern slopes of the Gučevo Mountain. Trbušnica was less than 5km far away from the state border. It is thus very likely that the Austro-Hungarian troops arrived in the village in the early hours of the invasion. It is hard to reconstruct the exact chain of events, but the result of the Habsburg presence was utter devastation.

This is what Momčilo Gavrić said to the Yugoslav media on several occasions in the late 1980s.<sup>38</sup> Namely, the Gavrić family was one of those living in Trbušnica. Momčilo Gavrić, an 8-year-old boy, was one of the youngest among the eleven of the family's children. The only family members absent from the house that day were the two of Momčilo's elder brothers. They were already summoned to the Serbian army. Besides, his elder sister was married and was living in a neighboring town. As it became apparent that the village will be sucked into the war zone, Alimpije Gavrić -Momčilo's father, decided that family should flee. He urged Momčilo to run to uncle's house and borrow a pair of oxen and a wagon.

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<sup>37</sup> Rudolph Archibald Reiss, *Zločini nad Srbima u Velikom ratu*, ed. Miloje Pršić (Beograd: Svet knjige, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> Miloš Bato Milatović, *Najmladji podnarenik u istoriji ratova, Momčilo Gavrić* [The Youngest Sergeant in the History of Warfare, Momčilo Gavrić], TV Belgrade 1987; Sekulić, *Sa Gučeva u legendu: Životopis Momčila Gavrića, najmladeg ratnika Srbije*.

However, by the time Momčilo returned he saw that family building on fire. His mother and father were killed as well as seven of his brothers and sisters.<sup>39</sup> Momčilo Gavrić managed to escape. He went in the direction where he saw the Serbian soldiers moving the same morning. Soon he stumbled on one Serbian artillery unit. The boy was soon 'adopted' by this outfit and became its member.<sup>40</sup>

Momčilo Gavrić also explained how the soldiers tailored him a boy sized uniform and subsequently promoted him to the rank of corporal. Momčilo stayed with the soldiers and even retreated with the same battery across the Albanian mountains in the winter of 1915/1916. The boy stayed with this outfit as it soon saw action again. At the Salonika front, the boy was wounded and soon sent to school in the rear of the front. Ultimately, he was dispatched to England in 1918, to continue his education. He came back to Serbia in 1921. As an ordinary citizen, he continued his life in Belgrade. He worked as a chauffeur, gardener, and depo worker. No one was aware of his extraordinary fate. People simply did not believe him when he tried to explain them that he was actually in uniform during the Great War. In addition, he was often ridiculed by his surroundings when trying to tell his story.<sup>41</sup>

However, his fate was not fully unknown to those who fought at the Salonika front. On the 9th of February 1917, one of the Serbian papers circulating in Greece printed a song dedicated to Momčilo Gavrić. It was written by a well known Serbian poet, Mladen St. Đuričić.<sup>42</sup> However, as the war ended the memory of a boy soldier faded. In many aspects, this forgetfulness of Gavrić's extraordinary fate reflected the wider trend in the Serbian commemorative culture of the post-1918 world. The public was very much saturated with stories from the war while the level of Serbia's devastation was appalling. After yet another world war it was even less probable that anyone would unearth this strange episode about the little boy in uniform.

Things began to change with the 50th anniversary of the war's outbreak. On January 19th, 1964, Gavrić's younger son rushed into the house. He said to his father that "the papers were writing about him".<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Miloš Bato Milatović, TV Belgrade 1987.

<sup>40</sup> Miloš Bato Milatović, TV Belgrade 1987; Sekulić, *Sa Gučeva u legendu: Životopis Momčila Gavrića, najmlađeg ratnika Srbije*, 13, 16-17.

<sup>41</sup> Sekulić, *Sa Gučeva u legendu: Životopis Momčila Gavrića, najmlađeg ratnika Srbije*, 14-16.

<sup>42</sup> Mladen St. Đuričić, "Podnarednik. Momčilu Gavriću" [The Sergeant. To Momčilo Gavrić], *Velika Srbija*, February 9, 1917, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Sekulić, *Sa Gučeva u legendu: Životopis Momčila Gavrića, najmlađeg ratnika Srbije*, 27.

The most influential Yugoslav daily, the *Politika*, published the article under the title: *Where is Corporal Momčilo?*<sup>44</sup> What happened was that second lieutenant Svetislav Ćirić, the immediate superior to Momčilo in his platoon, had decided to contact the press and try to find out what happened to Momčilo after his trip to England in 1918. On the other hand, the press was eager to publish more material about the World War as the 50th anniversary was approaching.

Former second lieutenant Ćirić told how Gavrić was placed into his platoon after joining the battery, and how the two developed close bonds. Ćirić waited in vain for Gavrić to write after his return from England, as was agreed between the two. After reading the published article Gavrić went to the newspaper. Two days later, *Politika* published a new piece: *Reporting to his Superior Fifty Years Later*.<sup>45</sup> The two former soldiers met in a cordial atmosphere. It was clear how strong were the deep-rooted bonds made during the war. However, there was no follow-up in the press. Momčilo Gavrić will wait for his next interview for almost 25 years. As was the case with many other 'Salonika men', journalists were the ones interested in publishing their stories. Historians, on the contrary, still kept themselves at distance from these topics. Dragiša Penjin, a journalist from the small Serbian town of Šabac, visited Gavrić and made a series of tape recordings. He used these materials to write a romanticized account of Gavrić's war years.<sup>46</sup> However, television was the key media at the time and things changed once the state television decided to make a documentary about Gavrić's life.

In 1987 state television broadcasted the documentary *The Youngest Sargent in the History of Wars*, written and directed by a well-known name of the Serbian television, Miloš Bato Milatović.<sup>47</sup> The movie was conceptualized in such a way that Gavrić was filmed while telling his story to a class of high school students. From a mocked figure Gavrić now became a guest lecturer. The second part of the movie showed how Gavrić and his fellow veterans were passing the time within their society in

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<sup>44</sup> Ž. Todorović, "Odiseja najmladjeg vojnika u Prvom svetskom ratu. Gde je kaplar Momčilo?" [The Odyssey of the Youngest Soldier in the First World War. Where is Corporal Momčilo?], January 19, 1964, 10.

<sup>45</sup> Ž. Todorović, "Javio se podnarednik Momčilo. Raport posle pedeset godina" [Sergent Momčilo Came. Reporting to his Superior Fifty Years Later], *Politika*, January 21, 1964, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Dragiša Penjin, *Sin Drinske divizije: Roman o najmladem vojniku svih armija sveta* (Beograd: Nova knjiga / Jugoslovenska estrada, 1986).

<sup>47</sup> The movie made by Miloš Bato Milatović can be found on the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glc3y7QxZWU>

Belgrade. The movie also reflected the evolving modern-day status of the 'Salonika men'.<sup>48</sup>

Gavrić's rise symbolized the transformation of the lives of all the remaining 'Salonika men'. Most of them did not end up becoming television stars but they did become guests at local schools and town halls. This documentary found a ready audience as the interest for the Great War was immense. Gavrić's was invited to visit Serbian cemeteries in Greece, he also traveled to London in September 1987 to participate at the Salonika Society Luncheon in London.<sup>49</sup>

One of Gavrić's friends, Milisav Sekulić published Gavrić's biography in 2009. Though rich with data the book was full of romanticism and has no footnotes. Moreover, it was attuned so that it could more fit into the prevailing context of the early 1990s. Namely, Milisav Sekulić linked anti-Croat and anti-Albanian sentiments into Gavrić's biography. Namely, within the Gavrić family, the information was preserved that Momčilo Gavrić ended up in prison for one year, sometime between 1946 and 1948 as he protested against the party members who knocked at his door asking donations for Yugoslavia's neighbour, People's Republic of Albania. This arrival of party men allegedly provoked Gavrić who expressed his resentment towards the Albanians mentioning his experiences while retreating at the end of 1915.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, there are no documents which could confirm or fully discredit this version of events.

Milisav Sekulić also linked the massacre in Gavrić's village with the Croats members of the Austro-Hungarian troops which were part of the first invasion of Serbia in 1914. This way the clash of August of 1914 was not portrayed as the Austro-Serb war but as the first episode of an imagined century long Serb-Croat conflict.<sup>51</sup> In any case, Gavrić's experiences with the Croats and Albanians, be them real or false, became a standardized segment of his biography which circulated in the Serbian public. These parts of the 'Gavrić narrative', though unverified and unsupported by any documents from the family archive, played an important role in attuning this personal biography into wider

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<sup>48</sup> Antonije Djurić, "Priča o devetogodišnjem podnaredniku" [The Story about the Nine Years old Sargent], *Radio TV revija*, September 23, 1988, pp. 32-33.

<sup>49</sup> Octavius C. Haines, *My Dearest Mama and Papa: War Letters, 1914-1918*, ed. Barbara Beck (Cowbridge: D. Brown & Sons, 1994).

<sup>50</sup> Sekulić, *Sa Gučeva u legendu: Životopis Momčila Gavrića, najmlađeg ratnika Srbije*, 25-26.

<sup>51</sup> Sekulić, *Sa Gučeva u legendu: Životopis Momčila Gavrića, najmlađeg ratnika Srbije*, 43, 60-61. Ivana Stojanović, "Najmladji srpski solunac od Srbije nije dobio ni hvala" [The Youngest Serbian Salonika Man did not get even a *Thank you* from Serbia], <https://noizz.rs/big-stories/najmladi-srpski-solunac-od-srbije-nije-dobio-ni-hvala/v3vkcky> 20. 08. 2017.

developments in the Serbian political and social context. The story acquired new features which were optimal for fueling nationalism of the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

### Oral History and its Variations

From their first appearance in the late 1960s and well until early 1990s hundreds of veterans' accounts were published. Each testimony had a different narrative logic and structure. Their content was often imprecise and was riddled with questions about chronology and facts. All this becomes apparent in the case of Momčilo Gavrić. Luckily, his family preserved much of his papers.<sup>52</sup> Also, he gave many interviews. Consequently, the sources for studying his life are much more numerous than it is usually the case with the typical 'Salonika man'. This provides the opportunity not only to show how was it to be a 'Salonika men' from 1918 until 1993 but to also reflect on several specific problems – emblematic for the 'Salonika men' testimonies.

Belgrade Television's documentary from 1987 became the most important source for disseminating Gavrić's life story. However, there are other sources as well. The Gavrić family owns two small autobiographies of Momčilo Gavrić, each only a few pages long. Nevertheless, these documents offer somehow a different perspective in comparison to the data presented in the mentioned documentary made by the Belgrade branch of the Yugoslav broadcasting corporation. Finally, there are two sources with the 'military' background. These were written by Gavrić's superiors. Firstly, the second lieutenant Svetislav Ćirić, when contacting the Belgrade press in 1964, left important information about 'the boy soldier'. The second source was written by no one else but the very commander of the battery which became Gavrić's 'second home' amid war. This is the diary of Colonel Stevan Tucović. This, high profile source was unexpectedly published in 2016, as part of the Centenary efforts of the Serbian Užice archive.<sup>53</sup> Such a favorable situation with sources offers the possibility to 'compare and contrast' different materials and perspectives. Three key components have been chosen here for the analysis: Gavrić arrival to the unit; his subsequent promotions and his fate at the Salonika front.

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<sup>52</sup> The grandson of Momčilo Gavrić, also named Momčilo Gavrić in honor of his grandfather, was kind to show me the documents and correspondence left by his grandfather for my research.

<sup>53</sup> Stevan Tucović, *Ratni dnevnik pukovnika Stevana Tucovića*, ed. Aleksandar V. Savić and Đorđe Pilčević (Užice / Čajetina: Istorijski arhiv / Čajetina, 2017).

In 1987, Gavrić explained to the television audience how he lost his family. He also provided details about his meeting with the soldiers and officers whom he met after his family was murdered in 1914. This version of events is however faulty in terms of military logic of the time. In any case, Gavrić, explained how he met the battery commander, colonel Stevan Tucović. Gavrić immediately asked for a cannon, so that he could “avenge his family”.<sup>54</sup> However, the commander declined his request, explaining that the gun is “a big weapon” and that his wish cannot be granted. However, according to Gavrić, the commander nevertheless decided to launch a brief strike. He sent the boy back to his village with one able soldier. The idea was to go to the site of the massacre and throw some hand grenades at the enemy. Gavrić completed this vengeance mission as a great success. Later, Gavrić was given the army uniform and promoted to corporal. Gavrić underlined that his ‘initiation’ happened around the time of the Cer battle, thus already in August of 1914. In 1987 movie, Gavrić also mentioned that he was promoted to sergeant by no one else but by the field marshal Živojin Mišić whom he accidentally met at the Salonika front. It is worth underlying that Živojin Mišić was one of the ablest and most respected Serbian military commanders from the First World War. Moreover, his popularity skyrocketed in the late 1980s.

The first one of the two autobiographies Gavrić wrote was probably created soon after the end of the Second World War. Namely, Gavrić stressed in this manuscript that he was never a member of any party nor part of any of the military formation operating during the occupation of Yugoslavia. His allegiance to the new socialist state was also underlined by his statement that he had no family members living abroad. When the Great War was concerned Gavrić mentioned that, besides being a soldier, he also spent some time in an elementary school in Greece and that he was sent to high school in England, in August 1918. This means that he was not in Greece at the time when the Central Powers collapsed at the Salonika front, which happened in September 1918.<sup>55</sup>

The second autobiography offers a bit more information about the 1914-1918 developments. This document has been written in 1987 or 1988. Namely, Gavrić made this brief account of his life at the request of the British author, Barbara Beck, who worked on her book about the Great War. The two met at the Salonika Society luncheon in London in 1987. In the manuscript, Gavrić explained what had happened to him after his family was killed and after he met the Serbian gunners in the local woods.

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<sup>54</sup> Miloš Bato Milatović, TV Belgrade 1987.

<sup>55</sup> Gavrić family archive/autobiography no. 1.



However, his account was a bit different from the version he offered for the television in 1987. Namely, in his second autobiography, Gavrić wrote that colonel Stevan Tucović did not allow any retaliatory action against the Austro-Hungarian soldiers in Gavrić's village. The colonel allegedly said: "You must do nothing, we have to retreat as the enemy is now stronger and the situation will remain like this until we get some reinforcement".<sup>56</sup> The legendary scene with the vengeance was cut.

Gavrić also wrote that he was with his unit already at the time of the Cer battle. He added that it was after this famous battle that he was promoted to corporal and was issued the military uniform for the first time. As in the previous statements, Gavrić claimed that he was promoted to sergeant at the Salonika front, and that it was a direct initiative of the Field Marshal Živojin Mišić. Also, Gavrić underlined that he was at the front near Salonika in September, meaning at the time of the breakthrough. Namely, he now situated his departure to England not in August, as claimed before, but in December 1918. The few of the inconsistencies already visible so far significantly multiply when 'military sources' are introduced into the picture.

The first source of military provenience was the interview with second lieutenant Svetislav Ćirić from 1964. Ćirić was the immediate commander to Momčilo Gavrić. Ćirić's version of events is very different from the Gavrić shared with the TV audience. Svetislav Ćirić situated their first meeting, not in the midst of 1914 and the Cer battle, but at the very end of the same year or possibly at the beginning of 1915. Ćirić mentioned that his battery was "recovering after the great battles of 1914" when he met Gavrić for the first time.<sup>57</sup> As the last battle of 1914 ended in mid-December, Ćirić probably referred to the early months of 1915. Ćirić recalled that during the unit's lunch breaks one boy used to approach the soldiers asking for the remnants of the food. The boy explained that he lost his family and that he was living with his small sister in the town of Loznica, with some neighbors. Soon, the boy became a regular guest in the military kitchen, always bringing with him "one big old pot".<sup>58</sup> However, one day he did not show up. The soldiers asked around and found out that the boy was ill. The officers were afraid that he had caught typhus. The motif of typhus also helps to situate these events in early 1915 as this was the time when Serbia was struck by a devastating epidemics which lasted until the spring

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<sup>56</sup> Gavrić family archive/autobiography no. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Ž. Todorović, "The Odyssey of the Youngest Soldier in the First World War..."; Ž. Todorović, "Sergent Momčilo Came...".

<sup>58</sup> Ž. Todorović, "Sergent Momčilo Came...".

of the same year. Anyway, the soldiers found the boy and brought him to their camp for therapy and recovery. Uniform was made and he was practically 'adopted' becoming the 'soldier' of the battery. Svetislav Ćirić underlined that Momčilo was always very bold, disciplined, and extremely brave.<sup>59</sup>

According to Ćirić Gavrić was indeed promoted to corporal but not in 1914. Ćirić situated this episode in the context of the Great Serbian retreat, which started in late 1915. During the march, an infantry Lieutenant Colonel, Jovan Joca Petrović, who commanded with the 10th infantry regiment, stumbled on Momčilo. The Lieutenant Colonel was impressed seeing a child in uniform. After asking around who was the boy's superior the officer launched the initiative to promote Gavrić into sergeant. Ćirić also explained how Gavrić, after spending some time at the island of Corfu left England. Consequently, from Svetislav Ćirić's perspective, the meeting of the boy with the gunners was less dramatic than Gavrić claimed and it took place sometime after the massacre of his family.

There were other variations as well. For a start, Ćirić got Gavrić' birthplace wrong. He mixed the famous village of Tršić with little known Gavrić's village of Trbušnica. Both places were close to the town of Loznica and it was easy to make such a mistake. Ćirić also said that he could not remember what exactly happened to Momčilo after the unit's recuperation at the island of Corfu in early 1916.<sup>60</sup> He had forgotten Momčilo's days at the Salonika front and his school days in the rear of the front. Only after instigated by Gavrić, during their meeting, Ćirić managed to recall that the boy did spend some time with the unit at the Salonika positions.<sup>61</sup> This moment clearly shows how frail is the memory of the contemporaries.

What did the battery commander write about his famous child soldier? Interestingly, Colonel Tucović also situated the first meeting with little Gavrić in 1915. Namely, the colonel wrote how he was moved by the immense suffering of the Serbian refugees in the autumn of 1915. Colonel noted in his diary especially the hardships of children: "At every corner, you could see small and abandoned children, who, terrified, could not speak anymore. Our hearts wanted to burst of sadness, looking at our youth which was being lost and was in the process of disappearing."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ž. Todorović, "Sergent Momčilo Came...".

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Tucović, *Ratni dnevnik pukovnika Stevana Tucovića*, 130.

While moving with his column, Colonel Tucović explained that he met a small boy “pretty looking and bright”<sup>63</sup> This was Momčilo Gavrić. Colonel wrote how the boy explained that his family was killed and that he was afraid “the Svabas would kill him as well”. The colonel felt pity and continued the conversation. Finally, he offered the boy the possibility to join the artillery unit. The boy enthusiastically accepted this invitation and he was sent to be the part of the cannon no. 1 crew. His second promotion Momčilo Gavrić received not before arriving at the Corfu Island. Colonel Tucović, as his officer Svetislav Ćirić had already recalled, wrote that it was Lieutenant Colonel Jovan Joca Petrović who launched the initiative for promoting the boy to a rank of sergeant.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, officers Ćirić and Tucović agreed on numerous facts. They said that the boy’s arrival to the outfit was not a breath-taking story which included the immediate revenge action against the Austro-Hungarians. More likely, it was a story of compassion and a prosaic and accidental meeting in late 1915, at times when the latest offensive against Serbia sparked another refugee wave. Still, even the two officers did not agree on everything. Tucović situated the meeting in the second half of 1915, while Ćirić believed this happened at the beginning of 1915 or even at the end of 1914. Also, Ćirić explained the boy’s arrival to the unit more as a process than as a single decisive event.

It is worth underlying that Tucović edited his diary during the interwar years hoping to find a publisher. Namely, the episode about Momčilo Gavrić was described in his diary in the form of an anecdote he recalled while spending his days at the Salonika front in 1917. Did he remember in 1917 things from 1914 and 1915? Did things begin to blur in his memory? For example, the colonel said that Gavrić was aged 6 in 1915. However, the boy was already 8 years old in 1914.

Apart from omitting mentioning ‘the bomb attack’ the officers also, mostly, agree about the history of the boy’s promotions. Namely, even though the two officers disagree regarding the exact dates and places where the promotions took place. Ćirić as well as Tucović claimed that the initiative for Gavrić’s promotion from Corporal to Sargent came not from the Field Marshal Mišić but a much more modest figure in history -the commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment Jovan Joca Pavlović.

What other conclusions can be made regarding the above-mentioned sources? Namely, there is no doubt that the Austro-Hungarian army did

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<sup>63</sup> Tucović, *Ratni dnevnik pukovnika Stevana Tucovića*, 130.

<sup>64</sup> Tucović, *Ratni dnevnik pukovnika Stevana Tucovića*, 131.

enter Momčilo's village. The Serbian official gazette published in 1915 the list of civilians which were taken to Habsburg internment.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, there were several people from Momčilo's small village of Trbušnica. One of them even had the same last name as Momčilo which almost certainly meant that they were relatives. This is clear evidence that Habsburg troops did enter his village and that they spent some time there applying harsh and violent measures.

It is also clear that the 'vengeance moment' – with hand grenades – most likely never happened. This is so not only because the two officers do not mention this event. Namely, the Serbian artillery units were never issued hand grenades.<sup>66</sup> Not even the Serbian infantry units did always carry bombs with them. More precisely, hand grenades were issued only to special detachments – to the bomb squads which were established in 1912. It is also highly unlikely that an artillery unit would risk launching a skirmish with enemy's infantry and risking losing its precious cannons.<sup>67</sup>

Could it be that Gavrić, mocked by his surroundings time and again, now finally had the opportunity, not only for self-actualization, but also for manipulation with the Serbian public? Belated attention offered him the opportunity to 'create history' by remodeling his own story. It seems that he added heroic elements such as his presence at the Salonika front at the time of the breakthrough even though he was by that time already in England. Did he introduce 'the story with the hand grenades' following his dreams of vengeance? Did he invent the meeting with the famous field marshal Živojin Mišić? By adding this famous general to the plot the whole story would become contemporized and would perfectly fit into the climate of the late 1980s. Was this a people-pleasing moment?

Momčilo Gavrić's case study shows that oral history varies very much depending from the context and its audience and authors position in society at specific time. Some discrepancies in storytelling were unconsciously made and were the result of share passage of time affecting this way author's memory. This is true as for Gavrić as well as for his superiors, colonel Tucović and second lieutenant Ćirić.

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<sup>65</sup> "Rat sa Austro-Ugarskom 1914. godine. Spiskovi zarobljenih oficira, vojnika i gradjana srpskih u Austro-Ugarskoj" [War with Austro-Hungary of 1914. The Lists of the Imprisoned Officers, Soldiers and Serbian Citizens], Archives of Serbia, MID, PO, 436/13-14.

<sup>66</sup> The bombs were issues to special squads where each soldier carried 10 hand grenades. Branko Bogdanović, *Braća po oružju* (Beograd: Vojni centar / Medija centar Odbrana, 2015), 254-58.

<sup>67</sup> Šarenac, *Top, vojnik i sećanje: Prvi svetski rat i Srbija 1914-2009*, 112-13.

## Conclusion

The appearance of such a large number of testimonies between 1970s and 1990s signaled that Serbia's Great War legacy was far from being properly debated, explored and reflected upon. As Momčilo Gavrić's case shows, the neglect of veterans had long roots dating back to the interwar years and was not exclusively linked to communists' antipathy towards the former Serbian warriors. The 'Salonika's men' desire to speak up and the audience's need to read and hear more, testified about the immense impact the Great War had on Serbia's cultural memory. Nevertheless, there were other aspects of this process of rediscovery. The veterans became 'stars' at the time of Yugoslavia's severe social and political crisis. From the manner in which the veterans' words and appearances were framed they could either support or undermine the dominant socialist paradigm. They did both. It is hard to estimate how conscious the veterans were about their role in the process. As the analysis of Gavrić's archive shows the versions the veterans' accounts at times varied depending from context as well as intended audience. In the euphoric and later on downright flammable atmosphere in socialist Serbia of the 1970s and 1980s, narratives of the 'Salonika men' were not used as a starting point of a debate or of a further inquiry. Instead, emotionally loaded narratives were treated as an uncontested and unadorned history. It was 'past as it truly was'. This only limited the space for a sound and dispassionate thinking about such a sensitive period of Serbia's history. Moreover, it appears that in the Serbian case due to the lack of historiographical monographs about the 1912-1918 period oral history took almost an exclusive role in building Serbia's general public's understanding of the 1912-1918 events. However, as the case study of Momčilo Gavrić shows, oral history by definition implies variations and inconsistencies which makes it difficult to *stand alone* in process of interpreting the past.

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