Islamophobia Never Rests in the Balkans: Muslim Communities and the Legacy of Exclusionary Nationalisms and Ethnic Expulsions

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Abstract

A long history of anti-Muslim prejudice has marked the Balkans. From Pope Urban's call to take the Holy Land back from the "Turks," to the writings of Martin Luther seeking repentance for Christian sins by undergoing Muslim persecution, to anti-Ottoman invectives by Catholic writers in the sixteenth century, Islamophobia has been a dominant narrative. But Islamophobic Orientalism may be a preferred framework for examining anti-Muslim prejudice since the intersectionality of race and religion, combined with region, offers a more comprehensive explanatory narrative. Over la longue durée *["the long term"], the crumbing of Islamic structures in the late nineteenth century, the horrors of World War II on the peninsula, and the outbreak of the Balkan wars in the 1990s—with genocide charges invoked as the definitive sanction—sapped the Muslim presence. The refugee crisis affecting the Balkans contributed further to producing internally-displaced persons and others seeking protection abroad. Albanian writer Ismail Kadare serves as source conveying the exclusionary character of nationalism, prejudice, and stereotyping for a region abounding in provincial, ethnic, and religious intermingling.*

Introduction

Are Muslim communities in the Balkans the longstanding targets of Islamophobic politics pursued by countries across the region? In the view of some Western analysts, ancient ethnic hatreds in the region, together with centuries-long Orientalistic Othering, have represented the principal causes of multiple and repeated ethnic cleansing projects in Southeastern Europe. If that is the case, can we speak of a double-edged historical determinism in the region comprising an Islamophobic Orientalism? That is, it involves both picking out the worst attributes of eastern societies *and* selecting the vilest characteristics of Islam in order to create a repugnant amalgamate for the smug and complacent West. Cultural and religious racisms become fused into one, leaving Muslims in the Balkans no

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room for maneuver compared to Muslim communities elsewhere. Islamophobic Orientalism is at once situational and anti-Muslim. If Muslims and Arabs of the Orient are framed as "aberrant, undeveloped, inferior" by Edward Said,[1] those in the Balkans having a foot in Europe are regarded as particularly treacherous—"far-away locals" branded as inimical to "Western" culture and religion.

In this article, my objectives are to examine the European understanding of Islam seen through the prism of Balkan politics. Over *la longue durée* ("the long term"), how Ottomans and Turks living in the region are framed is critical. How has the frame of Islamophobic Orientalism shaped the way that Europeans have imagined the Balkans? Have historical cases of ethno-religious cleansing of Muslims from 1830 on been incorporated into this imaginary? Is there room in the Balkans narrative for a history of Muslim suffering, or has it been squeezed out by victimhood of non-Muslim communities?

An enlarged definition of Islamophobia acknowledges "a range of interpretation of what Islamophobia is—from a descriptive term for hatred directed against Islam to a denunciatory catchword directed against those who express legitimate criticism of Islam."[2] I use Islamophobic Orientalism as a way of underscoring Western antipathy towards cultural-religious markers of Islam *in situ*.[3] In a sense, then, I focus on the intersectionality of race, religion, and region.

Instituting Islamophobic Structures

Early Christian Church fathers such as John Chrysostom (347–407) preached sermons that attacked Jews and pagans. Islam was first assailed already in the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (570–632), especially after the Muslim Arab conquest of Palestine in the seventh century. Domination over the Holy Land pitted Christianity and Islam directly against each other. The conflict was capped in a two-centuries-long Christian Crusade against Muslim forces from 1095 to 1291. In the Crusade, Jews and Orthodox Christians served as incidental targets too.[4]

But it became the "base and bastard Turks" who were to be cast as the greatest nemesis of Christianity. One of the earliest, most offensive of all anti-Muslim invectives originating in Europe identified the Turks as Christendom's worst foe. This was found in the address delivered by Pope Urban II at Clermont-Ferrand in 1095 launching the first Crusade:

> You have heard what we cannot recount without deep sorrow how, with great hurt and dire sufferings our Christian brothers, members in Christ, are scourged, oppressed, and injured in Jerusalem, in Antioch, and the other cities of the East … . Holy men do not possess those cities; nay, base and bastard Turks hold sway over our brothers.[5]

So, Pope Urban exhorted: "Under Jesus Christ, our Leader, may you struggle for your Jerusalem, in Christian battle line … that you may assail and drive out the execrable Turks."[6]

The Pope's real message was that Muslims had taken control of Christianity's holy cities. Since the Turks lived near these regions and were converting to the faith that Arab tribes had introduced in the region, "bastard Turks" became a proxy term for Muslims.

If Islamic expansion into southeastern Europe rather than the Holy Land was a concern to Christian legions, then Turks indeed constituted a Muslim vanguard and Urban II's condemnation was in retrospect farsighted. Four centuries after Pope Urban, fear of

the Turk emerged in the early 1500s when Ottoman armies captured Mohać in Hungary, Belgrade, and other territories in the Balkan peninsula.

In 1518 Martin Luther assailed the Turk as the scourge of God who was sent to punish Christians for their sins. Christendom should suffer the consequences, Luther accepted, so as to seek redemption and atone. As Ottoman armies laid siege to Vienna in 1529, then abandoned it, Luther came to agree with Desiderius Erasmus' treatise (written just before the Diet of Augsburg in 1530) which linked Christian repentance with the exhortation to fight the Turks. Erasmus asserted:

> How many defeats have the Christian peoples suffered at the hands of this race of barbarians, whose very origin is obscure? What atrocities have they not committed against us? For how many cities, how many islands, how many provinces have they snatched away from the domain of Christ? … Now there can be no doubt that the Turks have won an immense empire less by their own merits than by our sins.[7]

Slav Narratives

The absence of central authority on the Balkan peninsula made the struggle against the Turks complicated. Like today, they were inseparable from the diverse populations living in the Balkans. The outcome was that they could not be cleansed from the region the way that the anti-Islamic crusade on the Iberian Peninsula had expelled the Muslim community.

> For the Slavs living in the Balkans in the sixteenth century Ottoman military successes abroad and conversions to Islam in their midst maintained the anti-Turkish obsession at high levels, kindled by the fear of extinction, and by the urge to repress the uncertainty about which faith may be truer to God's truth. At this time the indigenous converts to Islam became identified with the Turks, and rejected alongside them … . They had 'turned Turk,' and would accordingly be resisted and banished at the time of the Christian liberation from Islam [in the next century]. The anti-Turkish obsession thus became anti-Islamic, or anti-Muslim.[8]

The issue of borderlands—how close neighbors became representations of rival identities—had come to the fore. The logic was that Muslims belonged to Turkey, and Turkey in turn to Asia. Logic stated that Slavs who converted to Islam had in effect become Asian. Even today a European consensus regards "Islam as the reincarnation of an old figure: the 'interior enemy.'"[9]

Slav Muslims faced ethno-religious exclusion due to conflating religious denomination and ethnicity. This transformed them, in the eyes of Christian neighbours they had abandoned, from indigenous Slavs to ethnic aliens, and even quasi-Turks. This perception was reinforced by the Slav Muslim association with Islamic Ottoman theocracy, perceived as oppressive, exploitative, discriminatory, and thus intolerable. Christian struggles for liberation from Turkish rule therefore justified their eradication, as sort of ethno-religious quislings, and this attitude survives into our days.[10] Anti-Ottomanism became a formative, defining feature of pan-Slavism. The "anti-Turkish obsession targeted all Muslims of the region: Turks, Albanians, Greeks, Slavs or Romanians converted to Islam, demanding their expulsion to where Islam and Muslims supposedly belong—in Asia."[11]

Croatian national poets in particular captured fear of the Turk in their works. Around 1500, Marko Marulić wrote *Molitva suprotiva Turkom* ("Prayer against the Turks"). Considered the most patriotic poem of the Croatian Renaissance, it was less a prayer than an appeal to European statesmen for help to combat the Turks. Over a century later the subject matter for Croatian writers remained the same. Ivan Gundulić completed his virulently anti-Turk poem *Osman* in 1626. These narratives made clear how Turkophobia had evolved into Orientalism, and Orientalism into Islamophobia.

A Narrative of Kosovo

Jump forward to 2000 and an essay published about Kosovo—for centuries an Albanian enclave in Serbia. In his writings Paris-based Albanian writer Ismail Kadare mixes eccentric and orthodox views of Balkan history but Kosovo stands in as a reference point for the general study of empires, conquests, identities, and phobias of the region. The author was convinced that in the distant past the Balkans accommodated an extraordinary mix of peoples and cultures: "There were times when the peninsula seemed truly large, with enough space for everyone: for different languages and faiths, for a dozen peoples, states, kingdoms, and principalities—even for three empires."[12]

But on the Plains of Kosovo in 1389, "Torrents of Christian and Turkish blood mingled more forcefully than they would have in a thousand years of intermarriage."[13] Kadare imagines Sultan Murad I, victor at Kosovo, lamenting that the ethno-religious communities in the Balkans continued to attack each other for the 700 years following the battle. "During my worst hours I am seized by the suspicion that maybe my blood [on the fields] is the origin of all this horror."[14]

The author recognized the internecine history of the Balkan peoples. It went well beyond the battle on the Plains of Kosovo:

> the princes in the big tent laughed at the songs, for the princes had come together to fight the Turks while the minstrels were still singing songs against one another, the Serbs cursing the Albanians and the Albanians the Serbs. And all the while, across the plain, the Turks were gathering to destroy them both the following day![15]

Eleven peoples inhabited the Balkan peninsula. The very name carried a stigma: "they would have to carry this new name, fossilized and ponderous, on their backs like a curse as they stumbled like a tortoise in its shell."[16] Europe was not much different but not fatally cursed: "Twenty-odd empires, a hundred different peoples. Some jammed against each other, others far apart. Which was Europe's true mass—constricted or distended?"[17] This was a pertinent question when the European Union was overwhelmed by a series of crises in the mid-2010s.

Explaining the Balkans in Late Antiquity

No ethno-religious community holds a monopoly on victimhood. In the Balkans, Kadare spun a powerful pre-Ottoman narrative of suffering by Albanians, who claim to be the principal indigenous nation of the region. Running through his novels is the theme of a small national community besieged by outside forces and threatened by ethnic expulsion from traditional homelands. Extermination and extinction of peoples are plausible too. It is a theme not unknown in the Balkans today.

The part played by Slavs and Turks as Albanians' historic Other is deftly scrutinized in Kadare's writings. He understands Albanian identity as primordial, rooted in history, ethnicity and culture. There can hardly be an identity in Europe that seems less like a *transnational* European identity than Albania's traditional one, founded on long-established oaths, codes, blood feuds, and ancient rituals impervious to modern times.

Arguably the most nationalistic of his novels is *The File on H.*, first published in Albania in 1981 in the last years of Enver Hoxha's paranoid dictatorship. In it Kadare amplified the anti-Slav, anti-Serb campaign that permeated Hoxha's rabid national communism. Kadare dismissed nationalism's "absurd and morbid passions," but he inveighed against the Slavs who had invaded the Balkan peninsula—late in the sixth century! Islam had not even begun its conquest of Italy and Spain—because it did not yet exist. This passage about the Slav invasion 1,500 years ago foreshadows Europe's anguish today when confronting the migration influx:

> It seemed the Slav tide would never stop; unlike the Roman invasion, the conquest was achieved without armies, flags, or treaties. It must have been an unending straggle of women and children moving forward to the muddled sounds of yelling and squalling, a cohort obeying no orders, leaving no milestones or monuments, more like a natural disaster than a military invasion … . All of a sudden they were in the midst of a Slavic sea: a gray, unending, anonymous Eurasian mass that could easily destroy all the treasures of a land where art had flourished more than anywhere else on earth.[18]

Many of Kadare's books highlight how ancient a culture Albania is, having its roots in the Illyrian civilization of classical antiquity. "Barbarian Slav" invasions threatened Albanian culture:

> For more than a thousand years, Albanians and Slavs had been in ceaseless conflict in this area. They had quarreled over everything–over land, over boundaries, over pastures and watering holes–and it would have been entirely unsurprising had they also disputed the ownership of local rainbows.[19]

Ethnographies of Conflict

The File on H. ("H" is for Homer) follows the work of two foreign scholars studying the Greek bard. Slav chauvinists attack the foreign scholars because "Any mention of the Illyrian origins of the Albanians, in particular, arouses in them barbaric and murderous jealousy."[20] Set in the most inaccessible backward parts of Europe of the 1980s, the story seems surreal until we realize that Kadare's purpose is to capture the historic and irrational paranoias and hatreds of the region. The novel tells of how Serb-Albanian hostility was so intractable that "no dialogue was possible between two peoples whose names derived, on the one hand, from the word for 'snake' and, on the other, from the word meaning 'eagle'."[21]

Kadare's obsessions are those of an ethnographer. He believes in the capacity of a local self-regulating culture to perpetuate itself and maintain its hold on all aspects of public and private life. In *Doruntine*, a simple story of medieval folklore set around the twelfth century, he describes the power struggle in the Balkans between different religions: "The struggle between Catholicism and Orthodoxy since time immemorial had greatly weakened religion in the Albanian principalities." The miraculous resurrection of the novel's chief protagonist could trigger a religious war because it was a reminder of

Christ's resurrection.[22] Local culture had to triumph and the way to do this was to proclaim the power of the *bessa*—a social contract among Albanians cemented by promises kept and honesty uncompromised. The authority of the bessa, Kadare tells us, transcends religious authority.[23]

The diversity of world views in the Balkans is striking. According to one analyst, cultural traditionalists, orthodox Muslims, and Bektashi mystics participate in the Albanian marketplace of ideas. "Islam and religious ideology are by no means abstract concepts, but represent different social groups competing to extend their influence over political authority."[24]

Projecting the Turkish Threat

Another allegorical Kadare novel set in medieval times is *The Three-Arched Bridge*. Published in Albania in 1978, it too is a paean to Albanian culture as it faces external threat —this time from the Turks and not the Slavs. In 1377 the country of Arberia, or Shqipëria—"a community of eagles" as it had recently been called—received a new neighbor. The Ottoman Empire had replaced the Greeks on the country's eastern frontier. This spoiled the historic symmetry of the area because the Arberians constituted the oldest peoples in the Balkans along with the ancient Greeks. For Kadare, the Ottomans were parvenus as surely as the Slavs had been: "The Slavs, who have recently become so embittered, as often happens with newcomers, arrived from the steppes of the east no more than three or four centuries ago."[25] But the Ottomans were particularly extraordinary:

> The new imperial neighbor inspired awe in the Albanians … . Since the Ottoman state became our neighbor, I do not look at the moon as before, especially when it is a crescent. No empire has so far chosen a more masterful symbol for its flag. When Byzantium chose the eagle, this was indeed superior to the Roman wolf, but now the new empire has chosen an emblem that rises far higher in the skies than any bird.[26]

The Turks had coined the term Balkans to depict the region they were in the process of conquering. Parts of the local population could not resist the pressure of assimilation. Ottoman emissaries had been "buying up the great western highway that … was now called the Road of the Balkans, after the name the Turks have recently given to the entire peninsula, which comes from the word mountain."[27] Kadare emphasized that the Turks were appearing everywhere:

> Sometimes they turn up as political or commercial envoys, sometimes as trade missions, sometimes as wandering groups of musicians, adherents of religious sects, military units, or solitary eccentrics … There is something deceitful in their smiles and courtesy. It is no accident that their silken garments, turbans, breeches, and robes have no straight lines, corners, hems, or seams. Their whole costume is insubstantial, and cut so that it changes its shape continually … But after all, how can straightforwardness be expected from a people who hide their very origins: their women?[28]

Kadare's narrative in *The Three-Arched Bridge* chronicles the construction of a bridge spanning a river whose name in Turkish means wicked waters. What are the intentions of the bridge builders and who is behind them? Is the bridge meant to breach or to confine? Is it supposed to bring cultures together or keep them apart? Is it designed to

facilitate Turkish expansion? The Turkish Great Royal Commination had required a curse to be placed on the bridge—a curse on Europe.[29]

When a skirmish takes place on the bridge and a Turk is killed, the Albanian narrator explains the makings of Orientalism: "We had seen their Asiatic costume. We had heard their music. Now we were seeing their blood … the only thing they had in common with us."[30] Soon after "I saw Ottoman hordes flattening the world and creating in its place the land of Islam. I saw the fires and the ash and the scorched remains of men and their chronicles."[31]

Ottoman hordes were responsible for gouging out the eyes of an entire Bulgarian army, sending the blinded soldiers stumbling home.[32] The Turks' language, their music —"hashish dissolved in the air in the form of song"—their garments—"among such diaphanous folds it is hard to tell whether a hand is holding a knife or a flower"—all seem sinister and deeply threatening. All bad news emanates from the east as Byzantium crumbles and carts loaded with barrels of pitch move down the western highway. "As soon as tar begins to move fast along the highways, you know that blood will flow after it."

The Three-Arched Bridge comprises a gloomy symbolism when compared to Bosnian Nobel literature laureate Ivo Andrić's *Bridge on the Drina*.[33] Kadare's metaphor of the bridge is also different from the image of bridges found on Euro-coinage. Like transnationalism, bridges threaten ancient cultures.

Legends and Legacies of Invasions and Expulsions

There is no mistaking it: Islamophobia does not sleep in the Balkans. Bridge building in the region is less common than erection—physical and symbolic—of borders. Islamophobic Orientalism has been expressed in many different forms: land grabs, assimilation, ethnic cleansing, near-genocidal acts, population expulsions. In an insightful overview of the Muslim fact in the Balkans in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Kerem Öktem concentrated on the

> … gradual "De-Islamization" since the nineteenth century, which has shaped the institutions as well as the sensibilities of Muslims in the Balkans. Forced migration has continued since the early nineteenth century alongside Ottoman withdrawal from its former European possessions. Episodes of flight and ethnic cleansing peaked during key ruptures and historical turning points, from the independence of Greece in the 1830s and that of the Bulgarian principality in 1878, to the Balkan Wars of 1912–14 and the Greco-Turkish War and the Lausanne Exchange of Populations in the 1920s. Every emerging Christian state in the Balkans eventually coerced at least part of their Muslim populations to flee the country. These early wars and population exchanges resulted in around 1.5 million Muslims being evicted or forced to flee, almost exclusively to Turkey.

Though the Balkan Wars in particular were pivotal, it did not end there.[34] "The migratory waves of different communities continued unabated after World War II and during the Yugoslav and Communist eras. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims of different ethnolinguistic affiliations migrated to Turkey, whether by choice or by force."[35]

The first successful union of the south Slav peoples only came in the midst of these demographic upheavals in the aftermath of the 1912–13 Balkan wars and its extension, World War I. In the vacuum created by the collapse of the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, a kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was established. In 1929 its name

was changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, signaling that Balkan Muslims were all but excluded from it. Eventually falling under a Serb-dominated royal dictatorship, Yugoslavia became the scene of some of the worst atrocities and partisan fighting during World War II.

Yet Serbs, fighting World War II on the side of Western powers, identified themselves as the paramount victims of Nazi occupation and of Ustaša bloodletting. This was an ultranationalist, hyper-Roman Catholic, fascist organization that had already become active in 1929 and opposed Serb domination. It struggled for a Greater Croatia made up of racially pure Croatians which required the extermination of Orthodox Serbs, Jews, and Romani. Oddly, they claimed that Catholicism and Islam were the twin faiths of the Croatian nation; Muslim Bosniaks supposedly helped preserve the pure blood of Croatians.

Invoking Genocides

The narrative highlighting the "Serb Genocide" of World War II, perpetrated by Croatians and their Muslim allies, estimates about 350,000 Serb deaths of the about 600,000 war-related deaths within Yugoslavia's borders between 1941 and 1945. The Yad Vashem center in Jerusalem claims higher figures: more than 500,000 Serbs were murdered in Croatia, 250,000 were expelled, and another 200,000 were forced to convert to Catholicism.[36] In the Serb narrative, Bosnian Muslims per capita killed more Serbs than did Croatians. As many as 100,000 may have been killed in "sadistic ways," at the notorious Jasenovac camp, according to Yad Vashem.

Inevitably the scale of the massacre of Serbs has been contested by contemporary Croatian and Bosniak historians who question these high figures and, in turn, give estimates of Croatian and Bosniak wartime victims. The numbers of Croatian deaths are said to number approximately 85,000 and of Bosniaks 75,000. An infamous atrocity committed in February 1943 involved Serb Chetniks who massacred close to 20,000 Bosniak Muslims in the Podrinje area near Srebrenica.

These victim numbers (or approximations) are more than a part of Balkan history. They serve as instruments today of engendering ethno-religious conflicts in the region. In contrast to Germany's admission of World War II guilt, the main state actors in the Balkans remain largely unapologetic for atrocities committed three-quarters of a century ago. Past warfare not only has shaped today's Balkan state system; it resides in the historical memory of contemporaries. In a more palpable way than elsewhere in Europe, Self and Other represent the logic underpinning reciprocal perceptions of Balkan populations to this day.

Socialist Peace?

Disagreement continues on whether a hiatus in ethnic rivalry occurred during the socialist interlude. In 1945, the communist insurgency led by Marshal Josip Broz Tito captured power in the Balkans and established the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. No serious ethnic violence was to occur until 1991–1992 but nationalist historians in the various republics emphasize that ruthless authoritarian rule squashed potential bloodletting—perhaps not a failed policy approach after all.

Over this period preemptive conflict resolution policies helped the Yugoslav federal state overcome two crises of nationalism. One involved Bosnia-Hercegovina which was assigned the status of a Socialist Republic with a caveat. It had to apply an "ethnic

key" (in Bosnian, *nacionalni ključ*) under which ethnic balance in the political represen-tation of its principal groups (Serbs, Croatians, and Bosniaks) had to be applied. The second concerned the 1971 Croatian Spring which resulted in a new federal constitution being enacted in 1974 granting all republics more autonomy. The constitution also expanded the powers of two autonomous provinces within Serbia: Kosovo, having an Albanian majority, and Vojvodina, which had a significant Magyar minority. What upset many Serbs, especially sizable Serb minorities living in Bosnia and Croatia, was that no autonomy was carved out for them. This issue became central to the Balkan con-flicts in the 1990s.

When democratic revolutions broke out across Eastern Europe in 1989, the upheaval in Yugoslavia took the form of nationalist competition between the constituent republics. As one observer contended,

> The troubles caused throughout the Balkans and Southeastern Europe at the beginning of the 1990s … . have not resulted from external threats but from the anxieties caused by the existence of national or ethnic minorities in countries where other communities are dominant. In each of these countries, the minority is perceived as a threat to the integrity of the host nation, producing a hostility which reinforces the insecurity of the minority.[37]

Serbs were the group that formed a majority in Yugoslavia and the largest minority in most of the non-Serb republics. Their traditional rallying cry echoed again: "Serbia will either be united or it will perish." Today neither has happened.

Engineering Yugoslavia's Disintegration

At the start of the 1990s, then, the interplay between three factors—a weakened, disinte-grating state, nationalist re-awakenings and rebellions, and external state actors—pro-duced destructive results. As communist systems crumbled all over Europe and in many other parts of the world, generally without violence and armed conflict, in the 1990s it was the Balkans that became the exception. Dismantling Yugoslavia step by step was a strategy undertaken by Western post-bipolar Realpolitik. The West had been confronted by a Balkans dilemma: how to manage Yugoslavia's breakup without allowing the pieces to fall in such a way that Serbia, Russia's close ally, would benefit. Muslim majority creations, in Bosnia-Hercegovina and Kosovo, were established in order to prevent Greater Serbia from existing.

Disagreements between the West and Russia about Yugoslavia's post-communist future were largely a carryover from nonaligned Yugoslavia's buffer status in the cold war when it had been a battleground in the clash between Soviet communist and Western liberal ideologies. Ethnic conflicts in the Balkans were nothing new, but neither was great power rivalry. Indeed, for centuries nationalism in the region has been inextricably linked to shifting balances of power and spheres of influence. But the alleged unique brutality of Balkan wars in the 1990s needs to be put into context—as Gertjan Dijkink elaborates: "raping, looting and aimless games with death have always accompanied war. An explanation of this requires the psychology of war rather than the political or cultural analysis of the ethnic groups of former Yugoslavia."[38]

Under its nationalist leader Slobodan Milosevic, Serbia applied ethnic cleansing as a way of achieving the Greater Serbia goal. He created a "sultanistic" system in which "The personalized nature of politics with an oligarchic power-clique clustering around

Milosevic was replicated in areas such as the Republika Srpska where local hierarchical elites flourished."[39]

Dramatis Personae *in the Balkan Wars*

Milosevic presided over nearly a decade of war that varied from low intensity conflict to all-out war. He was one of three nationalist Balkan leaders locked into a vicious spiral. But in October 2000 a popular revolution put an end to his eleven-year rule. It was also to serve as a model for triggering political change in the former Soviet republics: Georgia in 2003 (the so-called Rose revolution); Ukraine in 2004 (the Orange revolution); and the Maidan in Kyiv in 2013.

Ultranationalist Croatian president Franjo Tudjman had died a year earlier than Milosevic, in 1999. Milosevic's overthrow came just two weeks before a Bosnian nationalist, Alija Izetbegovic (President of the Bosnian Muslim part of Bosnia-Herzegovina) left office after nine years in power. He had been wartime leader of a nation that had suffered most in the Balkan conflicts. His Islamist policies, even if moderate, were now out of step with the liberal norms being promoted by the European Union in the postwar Balkans: ethnic reconciliation, inclusionary approaches to citizenship, multiethnic harmony.

Outside factors also contributed to taming politicized religious identities. Ayhan Kaya noted how issues such as the EU's "enlargement fatigue, Christian heritage, problems of migration and terrorism, and the ambiguity of Turkey's accession put pressure on Muslim believers in the Balkans in general to position themselves along the indigenous side of 'European Islam.'"[40] The Europeanization of Turkey also weakened the rigidity of Muslim religious identity in the Balkans. The syncretic nature of Alevi-Bektashi communities in particular increased the likelihood that they could forge transnational Islamic identities bridging regional divides.[41]

The then U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmerman captured the dynamics of the conflict in this balanced way:

> The breakup of Yugoslavia is a classic example of nationalism from the top down—a manipulated nationalism in a region where peace has historically prevailed more than war and in which a quarter of the population were in mixed marriages. The manipulators condoned and even provoked local ethnic violence in order to engender animosities that could then be magnified by the press, leading to further violence.[42]

Fears and Third-Party Intervention

Deep-seated xenophobia allegedly fixated in the Balkans provided the narrative for other analyses. A Serb political sociologist underscored the reciprocal fears of peoples who were traumatized by their version of World War II history: "The vicious cycle of self-fulfilling ethnic prophecies created a highly irrational dynamic in the Yugoslav body politic, reinforcing national self-identifications until the outbreak of the war made the process practically irreversible."[43] Another Balkans observer put it more grandly: "Socialist Yugoslavia was always a Tower of Babel whose builders not only spoke different languages, but talked past each other. In many ways, the diverse peoples of socialist Yugoslavia failed to comprehend each other's cultures."[44]

The stance taken by international state actors on Yugoslavia's breakup was crucial in determining the sequence of events that followed. Moreover, there was the felt need by

parties to the conflict to ethnically cleanse the areas they claimed as their own. In 1991, four republics of Yugoslavia asked the then European Community (EC) to recognize their independence. Croatia and Slovenia were granted such recognition, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia were told to get their houses in order first. Izetbegovic realized that unilaterally proclaiming Bosnia's independence could precipitate war, but the alternative was to do nothing and risk Serb domination. In a referendum on Bosnian independence in February 1992, 64% of Muslims and Croats voted in favor of a Bosnian state; the vast majority of the 1.3 million Serbs in Bosnia boycotted the poll.

Days after the referendum, but before Bosnian independence was officially proclaimed, Bosnian Serb ultranationalist Radovan Karadžić announced the creation of a Serb republic, Republika Srpska, that laid claim to more than 70% of Bosnia's territory. A Bosnian Serb army, partly under the command of the Serb-led Yugoslav national army, was formed. A Bosnian Serb parliament and government, located in the outskirts of Sarajevo (in Pale), was set up. In response, on 6 April 1992 the EC and the U.S. recognized Bosnia-Herzegovina as an independent state.

Some observers claim this was the date after which war in former Yugoslavia was inevitable. Tellingly, Western recognition of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence that took place six years later, in February 2008, proved to be a justification used by Russia to annex Crimea in 2014. It appears then that Western recognition of the independence of two Muslim majority states in the Balkans led to dire consequences for the shaky international system of the Balkans.

Was it Genocide?

After the West's recognition of Bosnia's independence, Serb paramilitary units were ordered to commit systematic atrocities against Muslims in Bosnia not witnessed in Europe since World War II. The selective use of barbarism was often chosen to destroy the very identity of the victims. As Pfaff wrote, "This was the rationale for the systematic rape of Muslim women: doing so desecrated and 'ruined' them."[45]

By 1993 the existence of special rape camps in Bosnia had become widely known. Although all groups involved in the conflict committed atrocities, a majority of the mass rapes in the camps was committed by Serb paramilitary forces against Bosnian Muslim and Catholic Croatian women. The purposes of the mass rapes included ethnic cleansing: to terrorize an ethnic group and induce its members to flee from a given area, thereby leaving the area in the possession of the attackers.[46] Bosnian Muslims were under siege and had limited opportunity to engage in such acts.

A genocidal dimension matching the provisions of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide was discernable: deliberate extermination of an ethnic group or nation made up of Muslims and Croatians in Bosnia-Herzegovina.[47] Muslim and Croatian women were repeatedly raped by their Serb captors "to impregnate as many women as possible with 'Chetnik' babies."[48] Many Muslim women from the rape camps further reported how "some women were held captive for a period of weeks to ensure that they did not abort the child they had conceived in rape."[49]

Another preferred strategy of Serb forces fighting in Bosnia in the 1990s was to blockade Muslim-held towns, set up heavy artillery on hills overlooking them, and shell the trapped population randomly. Sarajevo, the capital, did not fall to the Serbs when they resorted to this strategy but the 1,425-day-long siege of the city resulted in about 14,000 deaths.

The United Nations had designated Srebrenica and other Bosnian towns as safe havens but they were anything but safe. Srebrenica had been protected by a small, poorly trained Dutch contingent. In July 2005, the Bosnian Serb army decided to call the UN's bluff and overran the town. Mass executions of its civilian population followed. Some 8,000 Muslim men were executed and unknown numbers of women were brutalized.[50] Video footage released for the tenth anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre provided graphic proof of Serb atrocities—a shock to many average Serbs who had been living in denial. By this stage in the war, 200,000 people, mainly Muslims, had lost their lives.

Only in July 2019 did the Dutch Supreme Court acknowledge that, for example, its Dutch peace-keeping contingent had been liable for only 10% of the 350 Bosnian deaths suffered. This was estimated to be the probability that its soldiers could have prevented specific killings.[51] The question who was responsible for the thousands of other Muslim deaths was left unanswered. With the Srebrenica massacre and the humiliation this brought on the UN, the West was finally ready to act.

Hamza Karčić, in his introduction to the Special Issue of *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs,* marking the 20th anniversary of the capture of UN safe area of Srebrenica in July 1995 and the massacre that followed, described the collection of papers as scholarly contributions to the study of genocide. In bringing together works on understudied aspects of this period in Bosnian and European history the papers addressed the massacre and the sources of the killings, the turns in the war and their aftermath.[52]

In this Special Issue, Aida A. Hozić eloquently observed what had been the overall result even twenty years after the war:

> And yet, vestiges of war are everywhere: in empty and destroyed houses that have never been resettled, in marked and unmarked fields full of landmines, in the knowledge that unopened graves and thousands of missing bodies must be hidden somewhere, in memories (and forgetting) of survivors, in politics frozen by a peace agreement which has institutionalized ethno-territorial divisions and continues to reward the nationalists who started the war.[53]

Another conflict had been brewing in the Serb-controlled Balkans back in the mid-1990s. Once again Muslim communities were the targets.

Kosovo Resurfacing

About the same time of the Srebrenica massacre, a power grab by Serbs had begun in Kosovo, one of two provinces (the other was Vojvodina) within Serbia. Milosevic eliminated its autonomous status and began to suppress Albanian cultural institutions (the province was 90% ethnically Albanian). In 1991 Albanian legislators proclaimed an independent Republic of Kosovo following a hastily organized plebiscite in the province. Only neighboring Albania initially recognized the new state and its government.

As Milosevic tightened his rule in Kosovo, killings of ethnic Albanians (or Kosovars) became commonplace. By 1996, a shadowy resistance organization, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), had emerged. Disowned by the mainstream Albanian leadership in Pristina, the KLA staged bombings and attacks on Serb policemen, local officials, and Serb refugees. In 1998, when Kosovars went to the polls to elect a president and parliament for the province, Serb police torched several Kosovar villages putting the province on the brink of war. That same month, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1160 condemning excessive force by the Serb police force against civilians in Kosovo.

After Milosevic's refusal to agree to a negotiated peace agreement in Paris in March 1999, Yugoslav Serb armed units launched a full-scale offensive in Kosovo, driving thousands of ethnic Albanians out of their villages; many were executed. NATO responded with air strikes on military targets in Yugoslavia but the Yugoslav army offensive continued, leading to the flight of hundreds of thousands of Albanians to neighboring Albania and Macedonia. The UN High Commissioner on Refugees estimated that over half a million Kosovars had fled to other countries shortly after NATO bombing started.

In May 1999 Milosevic finally capitulated and agreed to withdraw his troops from Kosovo. The UN Security Council ratified the peace agreement: its Resolution 1244 included assertions

> reaffirming the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the other States of the region … . Reaffirming the call in previous resolutions for substantial autonomy and meaningful self-administration for Kosovo.[54]

A few months later the first large-scale protests calling for the overthrow of Milosevic were held in Yugoslav cities. Some of the protesters were from among the estimated 150,000 Serbian refugees that the UN refugee agency reported had flooded into Serbia from Kosovo. Serbia was already burdened by the influx of 500,000 refugees fleeing earlier conflicts in Bosnia, Croatia, and Slovenia. Only about 100,000 Serbs were left in Kosovo, and few of these could move around safely in the face of ethnic Albanian paramilitary groups. While not on the scale of Syrian war refugees making their way to Europe for protection beginning in 2015, ex-Yugoslav populations migrating across Balkans' states but also to other parts of Europe and to Turkey represented a massive refugee group.

Deep Structures of Conflict

How fundamental was the centuries-old Christian-Muslim schism to the recent conflict over Bosnia and Kosovo? Approached on a more general level, one authority on religion and politics suggested:

> An unmistakable pattern exists among the cases of post-communist separatist conflict of Muslims and Christians pitted against each other. In the most well-known cases it has been Muslim groups seeking independence from a majority Christian state, such as Bosnia, Kosovo, and Chechnya, but in the two cases from the post-communist world where Christian minorities have existed within Muslim territories—Republika Srpska and Nagorno-Karabakh—they, too, have sought separatism, and the result has been just as bloody.[55]

But on a micro level, Turkophobia may have shaped the deep skepticism about Kosovo acting as an independent state. As a Kosovar scholar put it, "Islam in Kosovo is: 'Turkish-style Islam … The Islam here is the Islam that the Turks have brought in."[56]

Not just fears of stirring up religious war but plain hypocrisy may also explain the West's prevarication on Yugoslavia. The universal values that were said to be lacking in the Balkans, such as national self-determination, were of no more than instrumental interest to the West. Exiled Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić captured the dissembling in these words:

> They claimed that Yugoslavia was a gigantic lie. The Great Manipulators and their well-equipped teams began to take the gigantic lie apart … . They threw

ideological formulae out of the dictionary ("brotherhood and unity," "socialism," "titoism," etc.) and took down the old symbols (hammer and sickle, red star, Yugoslav flag, national anthem, and Tito's busts). The Great Manipulators and their teams created a new dictionary of ideological formulae: "democracy," "national sovereignty," "europeanization," etc. The Great Manipulators had taken apart the old system and built a new one of identical parts.[57]

Humanitarian Crises

Ethnic cleansing in the Balkans of the 1990s comprised the politics of violent purification. An estimated 6.5% of the population played a direct role in violence. The geography of genocide in Bosnia included ethnic divides that led to forced displacements, internment camps, and summary killings. Besieging and bombardment was the method used by Serb forces in Sarajevo. But even "safe" Muslim areas under UN control were sites of indiscriminate bombing, mass deportations and executions.

As in most cases of warfare, atrocities were committed where Bosnian Muslims may have had opportunities to exact revenge. In these rare cases, they were transformed from victims to perpetrators, consistent with the way vicious partisan wars are fought, such as in Yugoslavia in World War II. The razing and cleansing of Serb villages like Kravica (near Srebrenica) in 1993 was an example, though evidence may have pointed to its dual use as both village and Serb military outpost. The commander of the Dutch battalion ("Dutchbat") assigned to protect Srebrenica testified before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia that both parties to the conflict violated the "safe area" agreement.

Iron Laws of Ethnic Conflict

This raises the question whether there are inevitable iron laws governing the conduct of violent ethnic conflicts. Let me identify conflict mechanisms which exemplify how two ethnic communities become locked in fighting. When violent ethnic conflicts break out, the tendency of a central government is to use overwhelming force against the insurgents, particularly if the insurgents are well networked abroad and seek outside military support.[58] In using overwhelming force against insurgent groups whose members can be concealed among and draw support from the civilian population, state security forces often inflict enormous hardship and suffering on the people inhabiting the regions of the country where insurgency is taking place.[59] This is what occurred when Bosniaks declared independence in 1992.

If ethnic insurgents are well organized and supplied, they may respond to the government's counterinsurgency operations by demonstrating their own military capabilities. They may carry out spectacular attacks on the security forces or launch violence against the civilian population. Because adversaries in ethnic conflicts see the conflict as a zero-sum game, ethnic insurgents are more likely to regard civilians belonging to enemy groups as expendable. Hence insurgents frequently and deliberately employ destructive methods such as ethnic cleansing, forced expulsion, and genocide.

The complex humanitarian emergency these dynamics generate requires a major effort by the international community to provide relief, sanctuary, and protection to unarmed civilians.[60] Two key problems emerge for international peacekeeping and relief agencies. First, the upheavals accompanying ethnic conflict force people to flee their homes; some

resettle elsewhere within the country where conditions are safer, thus turning themselves into internally displaced persons (IDPs). But many cross the national boundaries to take refuge in other countries, thus becoming refugees.

The Special Status of IDPs

The situation of most IDPs and refugees is precarious: if they do not quickly receive adequate food, clothing, shelter, and medicines, most may die. The intractable nature of ethnic conflict also means that humanitarian relief agencies that care for IDPs and refugees must do so for an extended period, which can prove to be an insurmountable challenge.

Large-scale internal displacement of the civilian population is a consequence of ethnic conflict. The displacement of populations within a state inevitably threatens their livelihood and well-being. The international community and humanitarian organizations launch large-scale relief operations precisely to alleviate suffering and persecution. Displaced population groups that cross an international boundary to escape from the war zone become refugees. A massive influx of refugees fleeing their own state for fear of persecution or as part of a state's and/or insurgent group's efforts to create ethnically homogeneous territorial enclaves may impose "a large economic and political burden upon the receiving country."[61] In the Balkans, a new independent state, Bosnia-Hercegovina, could not cope with this burden.

The major problem facing the international community, therefore, is the humanitarian crises generated by refugee flows. Receiving states may try to seal their borders—from Bosniaks and Kosovars seeking refugee status in Europe, or from Syrians, Iraqis, and Afghanis wherever they can transit to a safer country. But more often receiving states accept refugees but put them in inhospitable camps or tent cities, for example, Rohingya in Myanmar fleeing to Bangladesh. Such harsh policies are undertaken to discourage others from fleeing their homeland.[62]

Europe did not seal its borders to Balkan refugees in the 1990s. But for five years Europe did not open its doors to Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict that initially broke out in 2011. Today only some European doors are open to refugees, and many are now closed permanently to them. Paradoxically, Germany has adopted the policy of opening its door for war refugees from the Middle East but simultaneously slamming it shut for remaining asylum seekers from the Balkans.

A constant threat in many ethnic wars is the use of sexual violence against women. Rape has always been used as a weapon of war. The disturbing feature of organized sexual violence in the post–cold war era's ethnic wars is their potentially genocidal nature; short of mass executions, there may not be a more effective way of killing off an entire people than perpetrating violence against females. We have seen how the specter of mass rape of genocidal intent came to light during the 1990s wars in the Balkans.

The Distinctiveness of the Balkans

The history of Ottoman and Muslim communities in the Balkans is specific because of the nature of exclusionary nationalisms, ethnic expulsions, and internecine conflicts. The Balkans form a distinct part of the world where ethnicities and religions intersect. It is impossible to speak of a clash of different civilizations here since by definition many civilizations have overlapped over the centuries. Evidence can be the high rate of

intermarriage, including Bosniaks, when Yugoslavia still existed, though it has been disputed by some Western demographers.[63] The Occidentophobic term used by Western critics to make sense of the Balkans is the curse of "ancient hatreds." The unique configuration of regions, religions, and ethnicities is said to instill a "tinderbox," an incendiary spark specific to the Balkans. As Kadare insightfully observed, foreshadowing the intersectionality of the region, "the peninsula seemed truly large, with enough space for everyone: for different languages and faiths, for a dozen peoples, states, kingdoms, and principalities—even for three empires."

Islamophobic Orientalism emerges from this same "combustible mix" but targets only Muslims for chaos and violence in and around the region. My abbreviated overview, relying on selected data that focuses on Muslim victimhood, persecution, and suffering, asserts that Muslim communities too once contributed to the governing elite in Ottoman times but they became more precarious in the last century. And their shaky status extends to the present times.

Conclusion: Return of the Nation

We come back to Ismail Kadare and the backlash to the EU's liberal normative politics. It is a phenomenon that is sweeping across much of Europe, not just in the Balkans, in the second decade of the twenty-first century. After the fall of communism Albania had been returning to its ancient pre-Islamic code of laws.[64] The Kanun was a set of traditional Albanian laws passed down through generations orally. Not only do they codify every aspect of one's life in the highlands, they precisely describe how family feuds should be conducted and blood spilt in revenge killings. Reports were published of revenge killings in the mountains. The appearance of "sworn virgins"—women dressed as men with rifles on their shoulder wandering across the hills—had reappeared.[65] In one novel Kadare's character bawls: "Vendettas are back! The terrible law of the Kanun has been restored!"[66]

Kadare takes perverse pride in the notoriety and backwardness of the Kanun and the way it has been a thorn in the side of the European Union and the Council of Europe —and Euro-Islam movements too. He relates a scene in which a Western European delegation from the Council of Europe is taken to the northern Albanian plateau to learn about the ancient code. A revenge killing was about a single shot, a speaker proclaimed to applause from the local crowd. By contrast, "The Kanun does not allow the use of knives, axes, fire, or stone." But the one-shot tradition was now under threat. Was the EU responsible? Not for Kadare, who blames it on sixth-century Slav in-migration. "The Kalashnikov [automatic] rifle, like everything that comes from the Slav, undermines the Kanun" and is its "number-one enemy."[67]

In a word, then, ethnic stereotyping never sleeps in the Balkans.

NOTES

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