

Poised for War: Kosova's Quiet Siege

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It's another lovely afternoon in Santa Barbara. I'm spending the day with a family of Albanian refugees—riding ocean waves, taking in the cool Pacific breezes. And listening to tales of torture and terror—children's memories of their last days in Kosova¹.

Besart, a boy of thirteen, smiles beneath his bandages, his face blown halfway by NATO bombs. His sister Luljeta, with her new haircut and manicure, slumps in a wheelchair, her leg mangled by shrapnel, held together by steel posts. Their older brother Emrush, in his new Levi's and Reeboks, had rescued his younger siblings from their burning tractor. Unable to save their mother and the scores of relatives who died in agony when NATO mistook their exodus from the village for Serbian military convoy, he is silent and brooding. As I listen to their stories, the reality of war sinks in.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the world looks with pity at Kosova, smoldering in ruin. The bloody nationalist conflict that ripped through Serbia has left a trail of torture and death and has sown the seeds of revenge into the next millennium. Thousands are dead, untold numbers are maimed and homeless. As hundreds of thousands of Albanians struggle to rebuild their lives, and as Serbians wander what is left of their homeland in search of refuge, a discussion of the cultural, societal and ethnic nuances of Kosova might seem irrelevant. But the deluge of recent media reports chronicling the war and its aftermath tell us little of who the Kosova people really are and how they perceive the implosion of their world.

Like other contributors to this volume, I worked in Yugoslavia when few foreigners had ventured beyond its sun-drenched Adriatic beaches. People who had never even heard of Bosnia or Kosova before 1990 now debate the moral implications of NATO's bombing and ponder Milosevic's fate in a war crimes tribunal. Hundreds of articles and scores of books chronicle the escalation of violence and the aftermath of savagery. The world has been both fascinated and repulsed by the events in Kosova, before being lulled by CNN into crisis fatigue.

As someone who lived in Kosova for seven years, whose life and work have been transformed by it, I present here a brief overview of prewar Kosova—a quick foray into a complex, deeply entrenched saga. It is a view informed by months and years sitting by the wood stove with old men sadly watching history repeat itself, with teenage boys poised for epic heroism, and with women bracing themselves for the fate of their families.

¹ "Kosova" is the Albanian word for the former Yugoslav Province. Serbians call it "Kosovo."

The Setting

As one travels south through Serbia, lush green rolling hills eventually give way to plains. Further on, something appears on the landscape that immediately strikes the eye: high stone walls surrounding the houses, protecting them from the scrutiny of passers-by. These walls, hiding the lives within from view, tell you that you have entered an Albanian world. As you travel further, there are more telltale signs: women in pastel-colored raincoats with headscarves drawn forward over the forehead, men in white felt skullcaps. These signs: the walls, the scarves, the white hats, are the three most striking visual markers of Albanian ethnic identity. But they signify more than this. They are also guideposts to a cauldron of ethnic enmity and conflict: the struggle between Albanians and Serbs for domination over the region.

The struggle between Serbs and Albanians is over a fertile, mineral-rich, diamond-shaped area of land of 4,000 sq. mi. – about the size of Los Angeles County. Bordered in the north and east by the Republic of Serbia, in the west by Albania, and in the south by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the province is chiseled with dramatic alpine ranges and deep gorges which circumscribe its agricultural heartland.

Over 90% of the Kosova people are ethnic Albanians. The majority is mostly Sunni Moslem, with a smaller number of Shiite sects. About 5% of the population is Catholic. Unlike Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Moslems, whose ethnic identity is inextricably linked to their religion, Albanians are quick to point out that they are *first* Albanians, then Moslems or Catholics. While an increasing number of Moslems fast during Ramadan and Catholics attend church every Sunday, and while the nuances of religious life pervade daily ritual and affect worldview, the first religion of Albanians is Albanianism.

The Albanian language is Indo-European. It is thought the sole surviving relic of ancient Illyrian, itself a direct offshoot of proto-Indo-European. It is replete with borrowings from Latin, Turkish, Slavic and Greek. There are two major Albanian dialect groups: Gheg, spoken in northern Albania, Kosova, Montenegro and western Macedonia; and Tosk, spoken in southern Albania, southern Macedonia and northwestern Greece.

Of a total of over eight million Albanians on the planet, half live in Albania, one-third in Kosova, and the remainder in Macedonia, Montenegro, southern Serbia, Western Europe and North America. In 1961, Albanians made up just over 67% of Kosova's population; today that figure is over 90%, with a smaller number of Serbs and Roma, and scattered settlements of Montenegrins, Bosnians and Croatians. According to the official 1991 census, there were 1,686,661 Albanians in Kosova. Yugoslav government projections expect that figure to rise by almost another million by the year 2001.

The reasons for the increase are both political and demographic. A steady exodus of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosova began in 1966 after the fall of Rankovic, the head of the Yugoslav secret police, who exercised political and social control over Kosova and was responsible for systematic persecution of Albanians. Subsequent to his ousting, Serbian privilege in the region declined. The Serbian exodus accelerated in the 1980s due to their interest in better economic conditions and prospects in Serbia proper, and their vulnerable position as a minority in an Albanian, Moslem land. Many Serbs who left Kosova were from families who had settled there during the agrarian reforms between 1918 and 1940. Their exodus resulted in a further weakening of the Slavic presence in Kosova.

A high birth rate among Albanians also accelerated their demographic predominance. Kosova Albanians have the highest birth and infant mortality rates in Europe. The average age of Albanians is twenty-four. Fifty per-cent of the population is under twenty, making Albanians the youngest ethnic group in Europe. Currently population growth among

Albanians is 17.2 per thousand per year (versus -0.3 in central Serbia). This represents a doubling of the Kosova Albanians' population every thirty years. The average number of children is 4.5 (the highest in Europe); the average household size is 6.5 (compared to 3 in Serbia).

The Cultural Legacy

One cannot paint a sweeping stroke across the Kosova landscape and say: this is Albanian life, this is who the people are and how they live. In cities and towns, the modern coexists in surreal contrast with the traditional. At one extreme is a savvy, modern, educated intellectual class where nuclear families circumvent patriarchal strictures, where young people cultivate international tastes and ideas and don the trappings of the West. At the other extreme is the traditional way of life found in both towns and villages: a patriarchal, religious, conservative world still rooted in the ideology of the corporate extended family.

Specific structural parameters give rise to the traditional cultural order. These components are the residue of ancient customary laws, an amalgam of Catholic and Moslem religious mandates, and economic and ecological parameters. Among Albanians these inherited prescriptions are taken to their logical extreme. Consider exogamy: while canonical law proscribes marriage to anyone related to the seventh degree, Albanians extend this prohibition as far as anyone's memory takes them. Village exogamy is practiced even in villages composed of unrelated tribes (e.g. Berisha, Krasniqi) comprised of agnatic clans.

Especially among rural Albanians, the extended family—including parents, sons and their wives and children, and unmarried daughters—is the rule. In a family of ten to thirty members, wealth, labor, meals and reputation are shared, and formal harmony is the operational mandate. Patriarchal authority, age and gender hierarchies constitute the internal order. Women in extended families are shrouded in *havale*, a symbolic veil over their movement and their behavior—a veil that hides, protects and circumscribes.

Patrilocality is also the rule. On marriage a girl moves in with her husband's family, outside her native village, away from family and friends. She is considered a visitor in her father's home, a foreigner in her husband's. While acknowledged and respected as the pillar of family continuity, cohesion and honor, a traditional Albanian woman cultivates acquiescence as her prime directive. As an outsider in her husband's family, she does not achieve the rights of the men indigenous to the house until she reaches old age.

A person's social position and identity is bestowed on them by their family and social group: the *rreth*—both a unit and a concept of group affiliation dominating Albanian consciousness and holding it in a time-warp. Though this force enables an individual to feel security and belonging, at the same time it is a psychological straitjacket. As it is very difficult for individuals to challenge its edicts to catalyze change, the *rreth* contributes to the persistence of the status quo in Albanian society.

The power of the *rreth* links the rural and urban worlds of traditional and progressive families. The other force linking disparate social groups in Kosova is their identification with a heroic past—part history, part legend—which tells an otherwise marginalized people that they are unique, that they are victims, that they are destined to suffer and survive in this, their explosive corner of the Balkans. It is a history in dispute, which the political tidal wave has cast into profound, fanatical relief.

Historical Cribnotes

The essence of the dispute over Kosova is that both Albanians and Serbs claim historical rights to the province. Though many Slav scholars refute the claim, Albanians believe they are descendants of the ancient Illyrian tribes who, until the fifth century, dominated much of present-day Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, and northern Greece. While it is clear that Albanians have inhabited parts of western and southern Kosova for many centuries, the length of time they have been in other parts of the province is unclear, making historical claims on territory a perpetual source of enmity and dispute.

With its strategic geographical position (as a link to the sea and bridge to Europe) and its fertile lands and mineral resources, Albanian lands were sought after and conquered by a succession of invaders: Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Celts, Slavs, Venetians and, for half a millennium, the Ottoman Turks.

Slavs began arriving in the seventh century. During the Middle Ages the Serbian Empire dominated this part of the Balkans, ruling from its political and religious heartland in Kosova. The Serbian defeat at the hands of the Ottoman Turks in 1389 at Kosova's Field of Blackbirds (Kosova Polje) is at the core of Serbian epic literature and is its quintessential cultural lament. To Serbs, Kosova symbolizes the center of the Serbian medieval kingdom; many of Serbia's most important monuments are located there. It is the principle reason Kosova plays such a crucial emotional role in the identity of contemporary Serbs.

Nearly five centuries of Ottoman rule between 1389 and 1912 left a deep cultural imprint on Albanian life. Although many Albanians remained "closet" Catholics, secretly keeping alive Christian names and customs, the majority chose to adopt Islam and gain the "perks" granted to converts: the right to bear arms, exemption from certain taxes, privileges and power.

Through the centuries fierce clan and regional loyalties and the absence of incentives for unification prevented the emergence of an Albanian nationalist consciousness to unite them against outside rule. Finally, in 1878, Albanians rose against foreign manipulation, demanding autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, a right to the taxes collected, schooling in the Albanian language, and religious freedom. But because Albanians sought autonomy under Istanbul rather than independence, the European powers saw them as an Ottoman tool. It was not until the revolt of the Young Turks in 1908 and the harsh repressive policies of Ottomanism, that Albanians finally began a unified revolt against the Turks.

In 1912 the Ottomans were finally defeated and Albania was proclaimed a Republic. With the withdrawal of the Turks in 1913, the European powers signed the "Treaty of Berlin," creating independent Albania. This new state excluded the ethnic Albanians in Kosova, who then became part of the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Montenegro, and in 1918 part of the "Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes." By this time there was a new united Balkan front against the Ottomans and against an autonomous Albania which would claim precious lands. In 1915 the secret "Treaty of London" granted Italy, Greece and Serbia parts of greater Albania. Serbia and Montenegro divided Kosova and today's western Macedonia between them.

The new Albanian borders, set in 1926, left a half-million Albanians in Yugoslavia. Kosova was now under-populated from decades of war and emigration, and the Yugoslav government encouraged Serbs to colonize the lowlands. Albanians experienced persecution at the hands of the Serbs and committed atrocities in retaliation. In 1941 Mussolini annexed the Albanian areas of Kosova and Macedonia. Under Tito's orders Albanian communists mounted resistance

against Italy. In 1945 most of Kosova was formally annexed by Serbia, and the remainder divided between Macedonia and Montenegro.

The post-World War II years saw numerous swings in the political fortunes of Kosova Albanians. As the war drew to a close, Yugoslav Partisans mounted a campaign against them under the pretext of eliminating remnants of the "enemy." In 1944, Albanians revolted and martial law was declared. After several years of improved treatment, another era of persecution ensued under Rankovic, head of the Yugoslav secret police. In the 1960s a new federalism emerged in Yugoslavia which promised equal rights to minorities and agitated for greater autonomy. Widespread demonstrations in 1968 in Kosova called for an independent university and republican status. This last demand was rejected, but as compensation Tito offered greater autonomy and economic aid to Kosova. The 1974 constitutional amendments made Kosova a "Socialist Autonomous Province" with its own university, the right to fly the Albanian flag, and the equality of Albanian, Serbo-Croatian and Turkish languages. Albanians were elected to positions of authority in the administration and police force. But despite huge investments from northern republics, Kosova remained the poorest region in Yugoslavia, with incomes in 1979 about 30% of the national average. The economic discrepancy between Slovenia in the north and Kosova in the south was comparable to that between Northern Italy and Zaire.

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of tremendous social change in Kosova wrought against a backdrop of poverty, widespread illiteracy, a population explosion and a deepening national economic crisis. As the economic and social gap between Yugoslavia's more prosperous north and poorer south widened, ethnic tensions increased and in 1981 culminated in massive Albanian demonstrations in Kosova. The Serbian government opted for repression rather than reform. It attempted to subdue Kosova with military control, a purge of academics and administrators, and the suppression of all cultural ties to Tirana. Other members of the Yugoslav Federation relinquished the problem to Serbia, deepening the wedge between them. The period was characterized by media propaganda portraying Serbs as the victims of Albanian violence, an image that fueled the fires of fear and resentment.

1989-1995: A Quiet Siege

In the late 1980s the Serb-Albanian struggle reached a climax as Slobodan Milosevic, soon-to-be President of Serbia, played the Kosova card in his rise to power. In a rousing speech at a huge 1989 commemoration of the 600th anniversary of the battle of Kosova, an event of mythic proportions in the Serbian worldview, he turned the eyes of the Serbs to their medieval heartland and fueled the fires of nationalism by calling for a return to Serbian hegemony over Kosova.

This ideological campaign climaxed in March of 1989 when a new constitution ended fifteen years of Kosova's nominal autonomy within the Republic of Serbia. The legislation placed effective control of Kosova's police, judiciary, economy and political life in the hands of the Serbian government that instituted massive firings and intimidation of the Albanian majority. The move ushered in a period of political upheaval, civil rights abuses and ethnic violence in the province. Kosova seethed with quiet rage.

To Serbs, this was a much overdue effort to stem the tide of intolerable "Albanian chauvinism and irredentism." They were also pursuing what they saw as their "manifest destiny:" control over what they considered Serbia's rightful territory paralleling the claims of the Serb Republic carved out of Bosnian territory.

Albanians, shocked by the move, saw it as an illegal regression to pre-1974 statutes. They immediately began to demonstrate and strike, and mounted a campaign for independence from Serbia. Refusing to abide by Serbian rule, but

lacking guns or any assurance of outside support for their independence campaign, in 1990 Albanians began a program of "passive resistance" against Serbia. They boycotted the Serbian state and constructed a parallel government and social system complete with taxes, ministries, independent media, trade unions, health, and school systems. The campaign began with the formation of the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK) on December 28, 1989, headed by Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, leader of Kosova's writer's association and an outspoken anti-Communist. This was soon followed by the creation of several other parties which formed a coalition, the Council of Political Parties, also led by Rugova. Their common goal was Kosova's independence from Serbia.

On June 26th, 1990, a "Special Emergency Law" was passed by the Serbian legislature to restrain the Albanian move toward independence. The Law gave Serbia the legal basis for widespread firings and the installation of martial law. On July 2nd the Albanians' Assembly responded to the Special Emergency Law by proclaiming Kosova to be an equal and independent unit within Yugoslavia. On July 5th the Serbian Assembly suspended the Kosova Assembly and other organs of the Kosova government. It took control of over sixty Kosova enterprises, including hospitals and energy plants. It suspended Kosova's Constitutional Court that was considering a challenge to the 1989 constitutional Amendments due to the questionable circumstances in which the Amendments were passed. On September 3rd Albanians staged a twenty-four hour strike.

The Serbian government responded by firing thousands of participants including judges, police and other government officials and also dismissed from state service merchants who had honored the strike. On September 7th, 1990, 111 delegates of the suspended Kosova Assembly dissolved the parliament and drafted a new constitution that declared Kosova a Republic.

The remainder of the body disbanded and went into hiding. Later that month the Serbian government nullified the proclamation. All of the Assembly delegates and six members of the Kosova Government were apprehended for the July 2nd and September 7th activities. Many Albanians were arrested and charged with "counter-revolutionary activity." This charge was later changed to "endangering the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia" (Article 136 of the Yugoslav Penal Code) which carried a sentence of fifteen years.

Albanian leaders continued to agitate for independence despite Serbia's denial of Kosova's autonomy. In 1991, Albanians held a referendum in which 87% of the populace participated. 99.87% voted to declare Kosova an independent republic. In October 1991 the "parallel government" was formed. By the time the Serbian police began rounding up its leaders, most had already fled the country, establishing themselves as representatives of the government in exile. May 24, 1992 marked the first elections of the Albanian parallel government and Rugova was unanimously chosen as the new "President of Kosova." Serbia did not recognize the elections and prevented the deputies from holding the first meeting of the Albanian Assembly. While Rugova functions as President and routinely visits world leaders with his entourage of cabinet members and ministers, the "Republic of Kosova" is not officially recognized by any foreign government except Albania.

Life in the 1990s: Unemployment

Kosova has consistently had the highest unemployment rate in former Yugoslavia. In the 1970s the unemployment rate in Slovenia was 2.4%, in Kosova 36.3%. According to official estimates, in 1988 the unemployment rate in Kosova was 55%. In June 1990, Serbia adopted the "Law on Labor in Special Circumstances" in Kosova resulting in the systematic

elimination of an estimated 120,000 Albanians from public sector jobs. Out of two million Albanians in Kosova, only an estimated 60,000 were still formally employed.

The first wave of dismissals occurred in July 1990 when Serb police occupied the radio and television stations in Prishtina, cutting off all Albanian language broadcasts in order to censure what the Serbian government considered an enterprise in the service of Albanian nationalism. The 1,350 journalists who refused to sign loyalty oaths to the Serbian state were fired. The only daily newspaper, *Rilindja*, was soon shut down. On September 3rd, 1990 Albanians staged a general three-day strike and some 28,000 workers who participated were fired. The owners of private businesses that closed during the strike faced imprisonment or a fine of \$750. Many workers left their jobs in support of co-workers. In vain, President Rugova called on them to remain at work.

The manner in which subsequent dismissals took place and the rationale behind them took many forms. While some Albanians lost their jobs when they refused to sign loyalty oaths, others were fired for negligible infractions of work rules that would have been ignored before 1990. A university professor might be cited for being out of the office at a certain time and return the next day to find he or she had been fired and could not enter the building. Thousands were dismissed on trumped-up charges of misconduct. A history professor with a minimal knowledge of English was asked to proctor the oral examinations of English students. She declined and received a dismissal notice on the basis of non-compliance. Physicians were told to write prescriptions in Cyrillic (which many Albanians cannot read) and in some cases even to speak to Albanian patients in Serbian. Most refused and were fired, some after suffering harsh treatment during physical expulsion from their hospital or clinic. Serbs considered this a fair request to make: Albanians live in Serbia and should speak Serbian.

Many Albanians were fired on the grounds of "technological surplus," i.e. an excess of personnel. While Albanians see this as a cover for Serbian aims, it must be understood that corrupt management practices had indeed resulted in decades of excessive, redundant hiring practices throughout Yugoslavia. Many Serbs were also fired for this reason. The war in Bosnia and the sanctions imposed against Serbia devastated the economy also causing thousands of Serbs to be laid off.

But the onslaught against the Albanian work force was ubiquitous and calculated. Some dismissals were brutal, most illegal. Many Albanians brought their cases to court. Some appeals were decided in favor of the plaintiffs who were reinstated and compensated; others were prevented from returning to their jobs by managing boards. Some trials were held outside of Kosova. Here, plaintiffs were not informed about proceedings, and negative judgments were made as a matter of course. The majority of plaintiffs never received replies to their petitions.

In general, Albanians saw the dismissals as part of a larger strategy of "ethnic cleansing." Serbs saw the move as "ideological and political differentiation" intended to purge the system of dangerous elements. Many Serbs believe that Albanians walked off the job in protest to their state or were incompetent and were justly dismissed. In either case, the massive firings had catastrophic effects on Albanian lives, catapulting many families into poverty and wreaking havoc on civil life. Professional people—engineers, actors, professors—tried to make ends meet by selling cigarettes and vegetables on the marketplace and doing hard labor. University graduates drove taxis, ran corner dry-good stores, import consumer goods from Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania and Turkey. A small minority profited handsomely in black market enterprises during the period of sanctions against Serbia, smuggling in fuel, cigarettes and consumer goods. Some, talented at capitalist ventures and with experience and savings from abroad made small fortunes in new

businesses and elegant restaurants and bars. Many Albanians, while in principle supporting separation from the Serbian state, were in business ventures with Serbian suppliers and distributors and serve a Serbian clientele.

Most Albanian families survive on savings, profits from modest businesses, and remittances from family members living abroad. But savings and remittances are running out. The last waves of asylum seekers wait jobless in European countries that plan to gradually expel them. The vast majority of Albanians, their savings now spent, live month to month, joining the ranks of some fifty-seven thousand families surviving on relief. There is no unemployment insurance for those fired from their jobs. To receive welfare, applicants must show proof their children attend state schools. Schools in the Albanian parallel system do not qualify. In a system where only working people and their families receive social benefits, many have lost their right to pensions, loans and health care.

Health Crisis in Kosova: For Every Two Graves, One is an Infant's

The dismissal of most Albanian doctors and nurses since 1990 has had a devastating effect on health care. Diarrheal diseases, tuberculosis, hemorrhagic fever, scabies and lice are epidemic. There have been outbreaks of abdominal typhoid and hepatitis B. During the past ten years, one in four people in Kosova had some form of infectious disease. In 1993 alone 221 children died from infectious disease and around 350 people from dysentery or malnutrition. Between 1983 and 1990 a universal vaccination program had eradicated polio in Kosova. The elimination of Albanian vaccination teams and the reluctance of Albanians to send their children to Serbs for inoculations resulted in twenty-four cases of polio in the early 1990s.

The crisis in 1990 spawned an alternative health care system known as "Mother Theresa," to aid families whose breadwinner was out of work. Hundreds of volunteer doctors and nurses care for the sick in some eighty clinics supplied by international relief organizations. With the dearth of medicine and supplies at state-run institutions due to sanctions and empty state coffers, the Albanian clinics are often better equipped and Serbs also take advantage of their services.

The breakdown of socialism's hold on the economy concurrent with the mass firings gave rise to the privatization of medical care as unemployed Albanian doctors open clinics in their homes. Patients who can afford their services benefit from better care than they received at state hospitals and Albanian doctors make up to three times the salary of their state-employed counterparts. But the clinics are not equipped for surgery or serious complications and are too expensive for many.

Childbirth now strikes fear in the hearts of Albanian women. In 1990 forty-two Albanian obstetricians left or were fired from their jobs. Albanian mothers were left with the choice of going to a Serbian doctor at the state hospital or paying \$100 for a private Albanian doctor. Many women are afraid they will be mistreated at the hands of Serbian doctors. But, unable to pay for private care, many Albanian women give birth at home, resulting in a sharp rise in infant mortality and death among women in childbirth.

Crisis in the Schools

The educational system in Kosova serving some 350,000 children was devastated by the 1990 crackdown. But the crisis actually began in the late 1980s when Belgrade introduced new curricula for humanities courses with strictly Serbian, Communist Party-approved contents. Teachers who did not accept the new texts were faced with dismissal. From the Serbian point of view the move was necessary to still the tide of "Albanian irredentism" and "anti-state propaganda." In

1990 a completely new curriculum was proposed for all schools. Albanian literary figures were replaced with Serbian ones; Serbian history replaced Albanian. Albanian school directors and teachers rejected the plan and were collectively fired for insubordination. There were many instances of brutality against teachers, parents and students who protested. In 1990, Serbian parents, in fear of Albanians who the press portrayed as dangerous irredentists, demanded segregation in the schools.

Today most Albanian primary school children still attend classes in state school buildings but are isolated from Serbs, either by occupying different floors or sections of the building, or by attending in different shifts (e.g. Serbs in the morning, Albanians in the afternoon). Given the large numbers of Albanian children, in many schools the afternoon shifts last only three hours each and sometimes extend well into the evening. Small children set out for school in the dark of night or rise before dawn to make their classes.

In many schools the physical conditions are equally abysmal for Serbian and Albanian children. The only difference is that while Serbian teacher salaries, educational materials and wood for winter stoves is paid for by the state, Albanians are supported by their compatriots abroad. In mass schools Albanians do suffer inferior physical conditions—the electricity may be turned off before they arrive or they may lack access to water or bathrooms.

While most primary school children still use state buildings, most high schools and all college buildings are off limits to Albanians. When the students were first expelled, Albanian families responded by starting classes in the basements and garages of their homes, a desperate effort that soon evolved into a full-fledged parallel education system. Conditions in the home schools are primitive. Heat is usually inadequate and students sit on the floor or on rough-hewn benches and read textbooks ragged with use. University classes have been hardest hit. There are no laboratories, no technical equipment, no facilities for practical training. With no state support, professors' salaries are paid by student fees of \$100 per year.

The international community has made several unsuccessful attempts to reconcile the educational impasse—each promising in vain to reintegrate Albanians into the state system, each leaving the population more hopeless. In 1996, an "education accord" was agreed to under the mediation of an Italian Catholic charity that would have allowed Albanian children to return to the state-operated schools on a normal basis. The Serbian government has yet to live up to this or any other agreement.

International Intervention

In the months and years following the purges, the brutality, and the implosion of Albanian society, the international community seized upon the plight of the Albanians. Other nations, each with its own agenda, spent considerable time and people power decrying the atrocities. However, all maintained policies of non-intervention. Expressions of polite outrage and haphazard forays into mediation were meted out via twenty-four hour diplomatic expeditions into the dark and wild belly of southern Serbia.

Arriving in Prishtina, Americans, Germans, Swedes, and other well-meaning outsiders are drawn into the Albanian embrace of seductive hospitality like bees to sweet nectar. Their admonitions against Serbian "special measures" seep like honey into Albanian hearts and minds. Down a few side streets, past the gypsy beggars and dazzling new pizza parlors, through the pot-holed, muddy field by the soccer stadium, they swarm to the seat of Albanian "government." This is a tiny bungalow-turned-ideological axis that hums with whispered dialectics between intellectuals-turned-

politicians, and purrs with political discourse subsequently blast into the international arena via the Internet. Within the inner sanctum, the diplomats are passionately embraced by President Rugova over Coke and Turkish coffee. After mountains of mutual admiration and contrived optimism, they're on to the next stop—the home of a torture victim, a parallel school in a nearby basement, a garage-turned-health clinic—feeling very wanted, slightly duped, and helpless to think of a solution.

It's different with the Serbs. Though defiantly perched in imposing gray administration buildings on Main Street a few blocks away, they are much harder to find. Understandably, they are loathe to receive Westerners, especially Americans, who, they believe have uniformly scapegoated, maligned, misunderstood, and demonized the Serbian nation throughout the Bosnian scourge and now in Kosova. Meetings with Serbian officials may require weeks of advance notice, and are often canceled arbitrarily. After all, it's their town, their country, and foiling diplomatic visits is a delectable power play. The discourse between outsider and power holder is reductionist, and routine. Foreigners decry the treatment of Albanians on moral and legal grounds. Serbs frame the Albanians as terrorists who merit swift, harsh retaliatory gestures and preventative "measures." At best it is an impasse.

The diplomatic forays, though highly visible and existentially charged, are but a transparent veneer on a deeper international presence which includes foreign relief agencies and private teams of idealistic conflict mediators, educational advisors, feminist activists, human rights advocates and journalists. Entry to Kosova isn't easy; obtaining a visa can be an arduous task--it's a whimsical flexing of power for Serbian embassy officials and border guards. Getting permission to stay in the province is a bureaucratic labyrinth.

The private teams who manage to gain entrance do their best to apprehend the Kosovar mind, to penetrate Serbian and Albanian social networks, and to enlighten die-hard nationalists. Gravitating toward receptive subjects, they can always find local enthusiasts for their messages. Facilitators create forums for Western-style communication training: role-playing, active listening, brainstorming. All these new ideas are embraced easily, as long as the subjects are young and bright with eyes to the West, eager to stretch their imaginations beyond the mental straitjacket of Balkanism. Sit down to cigarettes and strong brandy with dyed-in-the-wool nationalists on either side, and the game doesn't even begin, or else it begins on the bloody ground of the Field of Blackbirds, 1389, and never really leaves.

The most pervasive, invasive force of international intervention is the armada of international relief agencies, which, to greater or lesser extent, also have a subliminal agenda to influence the Kosova mind. In 1990 it was the Red Cross, Mercy Corps, *Medicins Sans Frontier* and UNHCR, joined later by Doctors of the World, Oxfam, International Rescue Committee, Catholic Relief Services, the Soros Open Society Foundation, and Handicap International. Since the bombing of Albanian villages in spring and summer 1998, and subsequent displacement of some 300,000 Albanians, the number of foreign agencies has swelled to forty. They bring medicine and medical training, wheelchairs and birthing clinics, food, clothes, water pumps, seeds and farm tools, computers, English classes, debate clubs, encounter groups. They bring astronomical salaries to cadre of unemployed young locals lucky enough to have excelled in English or French or to be the landlord's son or daughter.

And they bring ideas. Each agency walks a tightrope: appeasing the government by delivering enough aid, money or infrastructure support to be tolerated, while weaving ideological threads into the fabric of care and relief. They stealthily expose some of the society's most well-guarded contrivances.

What does their presence mean to the Kosovar? For Albanians they offer solace, the hope of rescue, a mind-meld with the world beyond the Balkans. But there is a darker side. The impassioned camaraderie cajoles Albanians into an insidious sense of false security and fuels belief in the promise of independence. It is an ideological bastion that bears no political bite.

The Serbs are, by turns, suspicious, resentful, and, on the whole, unimpressed. They perceive the foreigners' attraction to the Albanian cause as misguided, repugnant, insipid. Their relation to the West is also different. Fewer in number, with many very poor and living in villages lacking basic resources, the Kosova Serbs have had jobs, their nation has been in charge, most have stayed home. The outer limits of Serbia enclose them in what is vaguely perceived as the vanquished empire. With the exception of the few who have been educated abroad and a slice of urban youth, their imagination, if it took them beyond their garden walls, took them to the bright lights of Beograd, not New York. This is changing. There is desperation now. Many see no need to educate their sons or attempt to have a decent life in what is left of Yugoslavia. They would get out if they could. But they don't embrace the West. They tolerate it.

Kosova Albanians are linked to the West by decades of massive labor migration. Since poverty and oppression after World War II pushed entire communities to the edge of existence, Albanians have survived on remittances from family members abroad. The older generation of migrants slept eight to a room and lived on beans and bread in Zurich, Munich, or Vienna, saving all they had to send back. They stayed for twenty or thirty years. But their honor and their identity, stayed home. It still does. Some 450,000 Albanians now live abroad: the new generation of migrants left first to escape the Bosnian front and massive unemployment in Kosova, then to deliver young families from all-out war in Kosova. This time, they've brought their wives; they're raising children in Geneva, Paris and Stockholm. They may not return. But their souls are in Kosova, as are their relatives whose fascination with the West only deepens.

In the county of Vitina, western Kosova, the black night is pierced with the twinkle of distant lights from the mountain encampment of UNPROFOR on the Macedonian border. Serbian villagers look there, to the south, and are uneasy, hoping that Milosevic will keep the foreign troops there—outside sacred borders, out of their internal affairs. For Albanians, the lights are a beacon. They hope for rescue.

Walk Down a Village Road...

Follow the international aid worker into the trenches and you will see Kosova's cruelty and pain, primitive luxury and rough-hewn delicacy—its chaotic harmony and political minefields—etched in profound relief. To the outsider, Kosova is exotic, appalling, and compelling. It is a mild rendition of the Middle East, a cultural island where logic stops and passion takes over. Western feminists come to sit with village families and are appalled by mute, servile brides in satin dresses and gold rings pouring endless glasses of sugar-tea to the companies of men. Journalists relish in village hospitality, returning home to hold discourse over cocktails on the brutal nature of the nationalist mind and the horrors of oppression.

As program manager for Oxfam and International Rescue Committee between 1994 and 1997, I headed a team of foreigners and locals, Albanians and Serbs, whose task was, ostensibly, to improve sanitation conditions in schools and provide health education for village women in two adjacent counties of western Kosova. More, it was to resuscitate waning vestiges of community spirit, to ignite sparks of civil society, to propose projects which would enjoin cooperation between Serbs and Albanians.

As an anthropologist speaking Serbian and Albanian whose task in the 1980s had been to observe, decipher, record, but not affect, I knew something of the life, the thoughts, the Kosova slant on experiencing and constructing reality. As humanitarian aid workers, my team and I set out to infiltrate the local ethos. We sought to support the traditions of honor, respect and solidarity (even though laced with a venomous weight of history). But we also sought to challenge aspects of village life which dealt unnecessary hardship and suffering to its victims in recent years. Such hardships included diarrhea epidemics among children when formula was substituted for breast-feeding or garbage simmering in disease-infested streams in the absence of trash trucks. There was also an outbreak of polio that resulted when people refused contaminated vaccines. Other hardships comprised the plight of the disabled muted for want of a wheelchair, a pair of pajamas, or the prospect of dignity. Equally wrenching were the vision of Albanian girls spending their adolescence at home over needlepoint and tatting, in fear that an education without future employment would leave them without a husband.

Walk with me into Germovo, an ethnically mixed settlement in the county of Vitina. To most it appears to be just another Third World Balkan village. It could be Afghanistan or Nicaragua, except that it is Europe. Mud, pot holes, water buffalo, horse carts and Mercedes. Endemic Balkan nephropathy, a fatal kidney disease that strikes young adults, is rare in the world outside this county, but is rampant here.

It is easy to tell who is who. The two-story, cinder-block facade decorated with palms and dolphins and the requisite satellite dish, the wrought-iron balcony built with Deutsche-marks sent by a brother in Frankfurt, flashes of scarved women in long skirts or Turkish pantaloons, green-eyed children, white skull-caps on high-cheekbones carved into sunburnt faces mark Albanian turf. A white washed adobe house, a cackling yard of pigs, dark eyes, women in knee-length skirts and men sporting partisan caps (and, now, machine guns) define that of Serbia.

A new orthodox chapel, paid for by the government, nears completion; an old minaret pokes up tiredly from the Albanian quarter. The school was built in 1950. Its yard has long been given over to pigs, geese and goats; county officials have been trying unsuccessfully to enforce an ordinance against the neighbor's livestock for twenty years. Serbian children study in one room; Albanians in four others, in two shifts—the demographic microcosm. Two directors, in a school the size of a baseball diamond, have had no contact with each other for eight years. The piles of wood used for heat are kept separately. For the Serbians, wood, teachers' salaries, school maintenance, and scant materials are supplied by the government. Albanians, boycotting an educational system that subverted their culture, pay for these when they can, with donations from migrants. They have no educational materials and the mere semblance of a blackboard. The well water, rife with nitrites from fecal matter, is used for washing floors. An unfinished concrete shell is testimony to an attempt to build a new outhouse, aborted after a fight broke out over who was to finish it. Inside the classrooms the ceiling is pitched precariously above children's head-ready to collapse.

It took a month to rebuild the school. It took a year to convince the community it was possible, and worth the trouble. In the end, Albanians did the carpentry and dug the septic pit; Serbs drilled the well. The funds were collected (squeezed) from villagers by their respective leaders and matched by a grant from a group of Dutch lawyers. But with epidemic unemployment, inter-ethnic relations on a razor's edge, and war on the horizon as UNPROFOR's lights twinkle in the distance, the locals were hard-pressed to entertain notions of self-help.

A quick tour of Germovo's neighboring villages, show examples of Kosova's political, infrastructural and psychological quagmires played out in endless variation. Each village has its own angle on desperation. Down the road from Germovo, east toward the Serbian border, we pass Zhiti. The local bus, emblazoned with a huge poster of Milosevic across its

windshield, delivers Albanian and Serbian farmers who recede, unspeaking, into the respective quarters of their village. Zhiti boasts a new primary school, which only Serbian children are allowed to use. Local Serbs explain that the large number of unruly Albanian children would certainly damage the property. Albanian children, who outnumber Serbs, are therefore relegated to multiple shifts in an unfinished storeroom off someone's house. The official policy that all primary school children-parallel system or not-are allowed to use state buildings, is a facade.

Past Zhiti, up a steep, potholed road, all but impassable in the winter, lies the small Albanian village of Ballance, its tiny white schoolhouse adorning the peak of a hill just above the mosque. A few months before the schoolhouse was in ruins; another crumbling post-war adobe. The villagers had gathered funds to renovate, but were afraid that once they began work the county would stop the project, leaving them with no school at all. Oxfam came to build latrines, to bring drinking water, and, in the process, gave the villagers the support to embark on their project. Within a month a new school had been built.

Venturing past Ballance, into the next valley, the Albanian Catholic village of Stublla boasts primary and secondary schools in good condition and a small regiment of clergy and nuns educated in Italy. The village was so poor that early on most men took to migration. Now, two-story, finely wrought homes are the rule. Beautiful homes, no work. Every boy hopes to leave the village, to settle abroad. No girls attend high school. Instead, they bide their time, calculating how to land a husband whose prospects are abroad. To counter this trend, we band together: foreign aid workers, school teachers and community leaders. We visit families one by one. We meet with fathers, uncles, mothers, or the girls themselves, examining together a contradiction: they cry for independence, and say they will die for it, but aren't willing to go to school, to give Kosova the cadres for the future.

The tiny village of Binc is the home of Serbs, Albanians and Croatians (the latter, descendants of medieval mining communities). A roadside spigot-the village water source-has been broken for months; it seems too daunting a project for this mixed community. Oxfam was invited to build a latrine and water source for the dilapidated school. Albanians agree to take part in the project. The Serbs call a village meeting. Fifteen men gather in the candle-lit schoolhouse on an October night. One is drunk, the others get rowdy, no consensus is reached, and my engineer and I are advised to leave or someone may get hurt. Before consensus is reached on how the project is to be undertaken and who is to dig the septic pit, early snows come and the project is aborted. A month later an Albanian man is killed in the village bakery. The community is paralyzed.

Further east, up another green valley, lies the Albanian-Serbian village of Cernica. The state-run health clinic serving this large village is open to all, but the building is in shambles. Its water source is contaminated and piles of toxic garbage from the clinic accumulate nearby. 120 Serbian students attend Cernica's primary school in the morning. To separate the two populations, the 700 Albanian children are packed into four short afternoon sessions that extend into the evening. Girls from small neighboring mountain villages can no longer attend school; afternoon classes mean they would have to make the hour walk home through darkness. As any rapprochement from either the Serbian or Albanian director of the school is looked down upon as treasonous by their respective compatriots, they have hardly spoken since 1990. Tosa, the Serbian director and a sports enthusiast, is proud of the basketball court and modern locker room he has built. He apologizes about denying access to the Albanian children, but, after all, they would surely ruin the facility.

International Rescue Committee helps bring fresh water to Cernica's clinic, create a garbage collection program, construct a leach field for the school's putrid outhouse, begin a women's health education program, a men's discussion group, and English classes. The Soros foundation provides computer and science equipment for a new lab-to be shared

by Serbs and Albanians. These few improvements and new ideas, are unable to stop villagers from seething with enmity.

Such snapshots from Vitina and Gjilan counties bear witness to some ways each Kosova village manifests the ruin, recalcitrance and apathy brought on by decades of economic and political corruption and oppression. Each is a political and social time bomb aching to ignite.

International Implications of the Kosova Conflict—Relations with A Martyred Motherland

The international community is acutely aware of the wider implications of full-scale war in Kosova. Albanians in Macedonia (who make up roughly a third of its population) could join the fight, bringing in the country of Macedonia, which would likely pull in Greece, at odds with Macedonia over national identity. Turkey would likely enter the arena, with its interest in preserving trade routes through Yugoslavia, its desire to defend its Moslem brothers, and its traditional enmity with Greece—thus pitting two NATO allies against each other. A widening of the conflict might very well position Russia, Serbia's traditional ally, against Europe and the U.S. who support Albanians on the basis of human rights. The twentieth century would close as it begun, with a Balkan crisis dividing nations and condemning Europe to a future of instability and nationalist enmity.

The violence in Kosova increasingly begs the question: Where does Albania stand? What is Albania prepared to do in the event of full-scale war? Is the underlying plan of the Kosova Albanians to unite with the "motherland?" What is the mutual perception of Albanians on either side of the border? The answer is: ambivalence on both sides. On one hand, Albanians are guided by feelings of brotherhood that transcend historical division. Orthodox, Catholic or Moslem, speaking Gheg or Tosk, living in Albania or Kosova, on an Adriatic island or in a Bronx slum, the Albanians' most celebrated and powerful self-image and foothold in reality is the experience of themselves as part of a larger Albanian nation. This nation is bound by blood, by ancient history and by what, to its members, is an utterly unique set of cultural laws. It is a profound and enduring sentiment.

But it is not enough, at this junction in history, to dictate unification. During postwar decades the mental landscapes on each side of the border evolved under completely different political and social constraints. Between 1945 and 1991, Enver Hoxha succeeded in creating the most xenophobic, mutilated, deprived state in the western hemisphere—a cruel concoction of primitive Stalinism taken to its logical conclusion. In 1968 when Khrushchev became too revisionist, and Albania's only remaining ally was China, Hoxha sealed off his nation from the rest of the world and threw away the key. He forged an obedient proletariat, an educated urban population, and the semblance of a "modern" state from the wreckage of an Ottoman backwash.

Under Tito, Yugoslav Albanians towed a softer Socialist line, suffering brutal repression in the post-war decades under Rankovic, struggling for recognition in Yugoslavia, but through it all remaining part of the outside world, traveling back and forth from Europe as migrant laborers, bringing back cars, Western culture, and ideas.

During the Hoxha regime the Kosovar grew to know and idealize an extremely distorted version of "the motherland." Through radio and television, cultural exchanges and books, the regime manufactured and exported an imaginary version of Albania that the Kosovar hungrily consumed and built their dreams upon. Visitors to Albania were shown carefully sanitized portraits of the country: happy women in skirts and blouses delivered from the shackles of tradition to the factory floor, terraced vineyards which had been barren mountainsides, mosques turned into basketball courts. The

Kosovar, a fourth-class citizenry adrift in a Slavic sea, were glued to TV Tirana as their compatriots staged spectacular folklore exhibitions, swam in a mythical Olympic swimming pool, ruled their own land. The Kosovar believed. They dreamed of unification. The motherland was where Albanians ruled the day, where the culture was pure and unadulterated, where everyone was equal and where, "if you have a watch, I have a watch. "

The problem of course, is that no one had a watch. Neither had they the right to own a radio, or access to the world outside, or a day or an hour of freedom.

Kosova's enchantment with Albania disintegrated in 1992 when the Hoxha regime collapsed. Rushing across the border to visit long-lost relatives, capitalize on their compatriots' business naivete, or finish medical school closed to them in Kosova, they saw the country as it really was, for the first time. They returned to Kosova to testify about the tortured, starving, gasping landscape they once idealized.

Much to their amazement, except among family, intellectual idealists and politicians, the Kosovar did not receive the heroes' welcomes they envisioned when they first reached Albania. When the people of that country emerged from collective incarceration--shell-shocked and desperate, reeling from the collision of liberation and destitution--they looked around and wondered where the Kosovar had been for forty-five years while they were held hostage under Hoxha's Dark Ages. Images of brutality and repression in Kosova, a regular feature in Tirana homes by 1992, were barely tolerated. "Look at those cars, the new homes, the clothes. Now they are tortured by the Serbs. Where were they when we were being tortured by our own government?"

The religion of Albanians is, still, Albanianism. But Albanians on both sides of the border know that the other is fighting for its own survival. Although most Kosova Albanians dream of a greater Albanian state in the future (an impossible idea to Serbs), this is not part of their present political objective. First survival, then unification. Unification, then the reinvention of an Albanian ethos.

1998: The Conflict Ignites

During the 1990s a small number of Albanians began to organize a clandestine paramilitary organization known as the Kosova Liberation Army. As the violent encounters between Serbs and Albanians increased, Albanians who once espoused passive resistance were radicalized and the ranks of the secret KLA grew. Most members were young men adrift in a desperate society with no future before them and a dream of independence flaming their patriotism.

With an increase in killings and atrocities of Serbs, Serbian police and military units prepared for an assault to put down "terrorist" activities. In March 1998, Serbian troops attacked the villages of suspected KLA leaders in the Drenica region of central Kosova, killing over seventy people in two weeks of bloodshed, igniting the powder keg, and bringing international attention to the region. In the following months nearly 300,000 people were driven from their homes in the crackdown by Serbian forces. Dozens of villages have been burned. Armed with weapons smuggled in from Albania and Macedonia, the KLA fighters responded to the attacks by waging rag-tag guerrilla warfare against the Serbs. Serbs defend the bombings and murders as an attempt to counteract terrorist activities. KLA claim that their attacks against Serbs are in retaliation for atrocities committed by Serbs.

Interpreting An Epic Predicament: Serbian and Albanian Views

Serbs and Albanians explain both the roots of the conflict and the present aggression in diametrically opposed ways. These incongruent ideologies are manifest in the way each group envisions the boundaries of its world. Serbs see

Kosova as a small enclave within a Greater Serbia stretching from the borders of Hungary in the north to Macedonia in the south, from Romania to the Adriatic. They see the Albanians as barbarian intruders, late comers, a backward minority in the Serbian homeland, and, as the fastest growing population in Europe, a serious threat to their hegemony over what remains of Yugoslavia.

In contrast, the world of the Kosova Albanians is defined by the immediate borders of the province. They identify with an Illyrian past that places them in the region at the dawn of history, and they see Kosova as an Albanian world--in culture, religion, ethos, and in sheer numbers. By virtue of this cultural integrity and following the example of the other former Yugoslav Republics, they consider themselves to be a nation with the right to self-determination, the right to break from Belgrade's grasp.

To Serbs, the political take-over of 1989 represented a just response to what they see as Albanian nationalism and separatism. The constitutional changes did not destroy Kosova's autonomy, but were intended to protect Yugoslavia from irredentist forces. Serbs believe that Albanians are disenfranchised from public institutions and social benefits because they chose to boycott the Serbian state; that they have brought on their own social calamity. The "special measures" which brought about massive firings were introduced to prevent a further worsening of the situation. To Albanians, the events were part of Belgrade's plan, already well developed in the 1930s, to take control over the region.

Each group blames their desperate condition on the other. Albanians believe that Belgrade systematically expropriated their mineral wealth and stole from Kosova's coffers at every turn. Serbs maintain that the investments which poured into Kosova in the 1970s and 1980s (almost half of all available Serbian national resources) was misappropriated, mismanaged, and systematically pocketed by Albanians. They believe that the Albanians owe their chronic economic malaise to their own over-population, ineptitude, laziness and corruption, and their current woes to international sanctions, which have crippled Serbia as a whole.

Demographics are key to the contrasting perceptions of reality. Serbs believe that the Slavic presence in Kosova has dwindled for two reasons. First, because Albanian terrorism and abuse forced Serbs to head north. Second, because of Albanian pro-natalism, Islamic fervor and cultural backwardness that has resulted in the highest birthrate in Europe. Albanians see the exodus of Serbs and Montenegrins from Kosova as a response to the greater appeal of life in the north. As for large families, most Albanians actually want only three or four children. But their desire for sons and the logistical impediments to birth control cause them often to exceed this number. Most deny that their high birth rate reflects a political agenda.

Cultural stereotypes have much to do with the ideological gap between Serbs and Albanians. Albanians were infamous throughout former Yugoslavia for their "exotic" blend of moral conservatism and cultural fanaticism. To outsiders, the archetypal Albanian man is a sword-wielding, warrior martyr for whom clan loyalties define the social world and blood revenge functions as law. The stereotypical woman is a figure from the past secluded behind oriental veils. The majority of Serbs believe that Albanians are "dangerous subversives" seeking to take possession of Kosova and create a Greater Albania. Most are also in denial about the brutality wielded against the Albanian population. They generally recognize that Albanians have suffered some discrimination during the political overhaul, but believe that the Albanians brought on their own hardship. They believe Albanian joblessness and inadequate schooling and medical care is a result of the Albanian boycott of the Serbian state. The key questions are: what is each side willing to settle for, and what is each willing to do to achieve its political objectives.

Serbs seek to maintain control over Kosova. But while reluctant to give up what they have believe is the "cradle of their ethnicity," they are weary of the conflict. In some ways the Albanians were faring better than Serbs, especially in access to goods and assistance. (Albanians were already engaged in private businesses before the collapse of socialism and their political movement inspired a highly developed network of assistance and unprecedented spirit of mutual aid.) It is also clear that the international community supports the Albanians. The Serbs believe the world has been duped by anti-Serb propaganda, but nonetheless feel the heat of international recrimination. While some Serbs are ready to fight to keep Kosova, others are tired of the malaise, and would accept a return to 1974 statutes.

Many in the Belgrade opposition believe that Milosevic is waging a campaign to maintain his sovereignty in Kosova in the wake of the Bosnian tragedy and his failure to create the Greater Serbian state he championed. The aggression in Kosova is not about preserving the "cradle of Serbian culture." It is about saving face, about defending a precarious political career with an anachronistic, contrived nationalist crusade. As a Beograd Serbian taxi-driver put it: "When we fought in Bosnia, we were fighting for Serbia. If we fight in Kosova, it will be for Milosevic's throne, and I wouldn't give a hair on my head for that." While there is much apathy about the Kosova cause among Serbs in Serbia proper, those in Kosova reluctantly believe that they are defending their homeland against the Albanian secessionists and protecting their wives and children against terrorists.

Most Albanians are still willing to lay down their lives for independence. They believe this is their last chance to wrench themselves away from Serbia. If they fail to gain independence now, they will forever be entrenched within a state they cannot abide. They believe that no matter what legal structures or civil rights are secured, they will NEVER be accorded equal status within Serbia. It might have been different under a Yugoslav Federation, but not under a lone republic masking itself as Yugoslavia.

Many Serbs and Albanians ache for peaceful resolution to the conflict, even if that compromises epic dreams. They want proper schools for their children. They want a future. They are mired in hate fatigue. But while some popular sentiment supports reconciliation, the two sides have not been able to agree on the terms of a political dialogue. Serbs say they will discuss any of the problems in Kosova except the question of Albanian independence from Serbia. On this there can be no debate. For Serbs, Kosova is, and will always be, part of Serbia. To the Albanians this is an unacceptable premise for dialogue. They insist that a possible independent status be addressed and that representatives from the international community take part. Serbs maintain that Kosova is an internal problem, and as such does not warrant outside intervention. Albanians feel that without international intervention, their cause is lost.

Since 1990 the cultural landscape in Kosova has been assaulted, tortured, impoverished. As villages smolder and snipers rip through the countryside, Serbs and Albanians lay in wait, intoxicated by the promise of sovereignty which laces every thought. Each side had contrived a reality to accommodate its collective passion; both realities resemble dreams. As children die and communities are laid waste, the dreams are becoming bloody nightmares. A Kosovar Albanian now resident in the Bronx perhaps sums the situation up most succinctly:

A friend tells me he may have seen my elderly parents fleeing among the thousands of Albania-bound refugees on a CNN report. There's no way to find out. In the villages under siege, the phone lines are cut, water has become a luxury and the voices of children are silent. I was born and raised there. I recognize the remains of the houses that were leveled. While my family and the rest of the village have left their homes and headed in unknown directions, my two brothers have armed themselves and are trying to defend the village with the rest of the men there who have stayed behind. What should I

call them? "Freedom fighters"? Or desperate people who have been pushed against the wall and are defending homes where our ancestors lived for centuries. The Serbs, Russians, Greeks, French and members of our State Department call them terrorists. But they don't know my brothers. If they are terrorists, so are the heroes who liberated this great country two centuries ago. One man could make a world of difference. His name is Bill Clinton. He has been telling us that he won't allow another Bosnia. If Clinton were watching the footage of bombed-out villages and refugees freezing in mountain hideouts, he would realize that Kosova is already Bosnia (Isuf Hajrizi, Illyria Newspaper, Summer 1998).