


Spring 2023

An Assertion of the Rights of the Malësore as Indigenous Peoples in Present-Day Montenegro

Sarina Jaqueline Culaj
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2023

 Part of the [International Relations Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), and the [Public Policy Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Culaj, Sarina Jaqueline, "An Assertion of the Rights of the Malësore as Indigenous Peoples in Present-Day Montenegro" (2023). *Senior Projects Spring 2023*. 109.

https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2023/109

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2023 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

An Assertion of the Rights of the Malësore as Indigenous Peoples in Present-Day Montenegro

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Sarina Culaj

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2023

I would like to dedicate this work to my family and my culture, both of which have filled me
with passion and love

*eshte nje qiell qe na bashkon
e nje diell qe na burrnon
eshte nje gjuhe qe flasim tane
e nje toke qe e thrrasim nane¹*

¹ *There's one sky that unites us
and one sun that emboldens us
There's one language we all speak
and one land we call mother*

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my family, especially my parents and grandparents who immigrated to the United States from Malësia to start a new life. I am grateful that, as a First-Generation American, my family worked tirelessly to instill in me, the importance of my culture. My parents gave me resources that they were never able to have themselves, and I hope that I have been able to make them proud. I am thankful for the opportunity to use my passion for good, helping the Albanians and making their plight known to all.

I would like to thank Bard College, for all the support the school has given to me and for allowing me to do this research. I want to specifically show appreciation to my advisors throughout my time at Bard, Simon Gilhooley and Odile Chilton, as well as my advisor for this project, Frederic Hof, for giving me the guidance I needed. I also want to express my gratitude to Roger Berkowitz and Marina Van Zuylen, two professors that have greatly influenced my academic and personal life.

Finally, I want to send love to the rest of my communities at Bard. My friends, for supporting me through everything. The Bard Men's Soccer Team, for allowing me to be a part of a great group. The Bard Admissions Office, for introducing me to some amazing people. Thank you all for your immense kindness.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: A History of Albanians in the Ottoman Empire.....	4
<i>The Tribes of Northern Albania</i>	
<i>The Ottoman Empire from the 1820s-1878</i>	
<i>The Treaty of San Stefano and The League of Prizren</i>	
<i>The Congress of Berlin and a Continuation of the League of Prizren</i>	
<i>The Malësore Leading up to the Balkan Wars</i>	
Chapter 2: The Balkan Wars and the First World War.....	19
<i>The Period Before the Balkan Wars</i>	
<i>The First Balkan War</i>	
<i>The Second Balkan War and Its Aftermath</i>	
<i>The First World War</i>	
Chapter 3: The Yugoslavian War and the Present-Day.....	30
<i>The Yugoslavian War (1991-2001)</i>	
<i>Contemporary Montenegro and the Malësore</i>	
Chapter 4: Indigenous Rights of the Malësore.....	38
<i>The Orhid Accords</i>	
<i>UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People</i>	
Conclusion.....	43
Bibliography.....	45

S'mungojshin, mandej, asish që, për padije, muslimanin e njehshin Turk dhe katolikun Latin ndërsa orthodoxin, simbas krahinës, e mbajshin Serb në Veri, Grek në Jug. Edhe këtyne uduhej diftue se tjetër ishte besimi e feja e tjetër kombësia apo edhenenshtetësia e se musliman, katolik a orthodox, me gjak e me gjuhëshqiptarë, ishin vëllazën e kishin të njajtin babë Atdhë e të njajtënnanë Shqipni.²

I first approached this paper by asking the overarching question of what could be done about ethnic tensions in Montenegro between the Albanians, Montenegrins, and Serbians in the area. The oppression faced by the Malësore, though not nearly as grave as what they had experienced in the past, is still oppression being done by the same people, against the same people. My first research question looked at formal boundary adjustments, essentially seeing if Malësia could once again be joined with Albania as the country is more stable. However, a formal boundary adjustment does not seem entirely feasible, as it would most likely result in another war. This is when I came across the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It was always normal for me to see the Malësore as what they are – tribal people. Only after my research did I realize that their tribal status and claim over their land meant that they could be protected by this UN Declaration.

Not much research has been done strictly on the Malësore tribes. Though I do not directly quote Edith Durham, a British woman who spent most of the early 20th century in Malësia, I must acknowledge all the work she had done during that time to bring cultural awareness of the

² “There was no shortage of people who, out of ignorance, called Muslim Turk and Catholic Latin, while orthodoxy, according to the province, was Serbian in the North and Greek in the South. Even these people were told that it was different faith and religion, nationality or even citizenship, that they were Muslim, Catholic or Orthodox, with Albanian blood and language, they were brothers, they had the same father, the Fatherland, and the same mother, Albania.” Gjergj Fishta, *Lahuta e Malsisë*

tribes to the rest of the world. The three authors that I will use for historical context are the only ones I found that had spoken strictly about the Malësore tribes. In my discussions about the present day, all of my knowledge comes from my experiences, those of my family, and news articles. When it comes to formal boundary readjustments or creating protections for indigenous Albanians in Montenegro, there is no official work being done. I believe in both of these actions being done.

The historical context given is certainly not a comprehensive one for the entire history of the Balkans. My only focus is the history of the Malësore, and I included all the history I could find on them in this paper. Many of the battles that took place throughout their history have been left out because many of them were the same, as they resulted in almost no change. It should be implied when reading this paper that the Malësore were constantly in battle, fending off outside forces to the best of their ability. A final disclaimer is that I will be using the Albanian spelling for everything, including Kosova, which Serbia and its supporters will spell as *Kosovo*. Though trivial, this spelling holds political weight, as Serbia still does not recognize Kosova as an independent country. Even something as small as one letter is meaningful, as Serbia has only changed Kosova's name to assert some sort of dominance over them.



CHAPTER 1: A HISTORY OF ALBANIANS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact history of the tribes of Northern Albania without looking at their somewhat ancient origins. Throughout the history of Albania, there is a great deal of comingling in the Balkans as borders are fought over and different cultures shift locations. It is generally accepted now “that by the seventh century BC certain tribes sharing a common Illyrian language and culture had settled in the territory now known as Albania.”³ The descendants of Illyrians are both Albanians and Kosovar, as these two groups will recognize themselves to be interchangeable. However, Albania itself has not remained recognizable during the course of its history. For the purpose of this paper, historical Albania will be looked at as it was towards the end of Ottoman rule, after the Berlin Congress of 1878, and the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 leading up to the First World War.

The Ottomans officially began their rule over Albania and Kosova after their victory in Kosova on June 28, 1389. Up until the 1800s, Ottoman rule in Albania⁴ was not oppressive. The issue of religion between Catholics, Orthodox, and Muslims was ever-present, but did not affect the tribes of Northern Albania. Rather than all these territories being part of the singular Ottoman Empire, they functioned as “borderlands”, which created a “multiform and branching image of Ottoman society.”⁵ These territories were autonomous, and they “were not simply frontier zones that separated and distanced local systems estranged from the centre of Ottoman power, but rather *limes* which testified to Istanbul's authority slowly fading away.”⁶

One of these autonomous territories was Albania. Though a unified nation, Albanian people were geographically split into two groups, those who lived north and south of the

³ Vickers 1

⁴ Historical Albania will also include the land of Kosova, but for clarity I will just use Albania.

⁵ Maggiolini 208

⁶ Maggiolini 209

Shkumbi River. This geographical split resulted in large cultural differences as well. South of the Shkumbi River were Tosks, and north of the river were Ghegs, which includes Albanians of Kosova. The Ghegs are those who make up the tribes of Northern Albania. Before Ottoman rule, the Ghegs operated on a “tribal clan system” which was then made stronger during Ottoman rule as they transitioned to a “village-based social organization” while still maintaining their tribes.⁷



⁷ Vickers 5

The Tribes of Northern Albania



In Northern Albania, the Ghegs were split into two districts: Shkoder and Kosova. Above the city of Shkoder is the area that will henceforth be referred to as Malësia e Madhe (which directly translates to Great Mountain Land), or Malesia for short. There are seven main tribes in Malesia: Kelmendi, Gruda, Hoti, Kastrati, Shkreli, Triesh, and Koja e Kucit. These tribes are patriarchal, meaning the tribe gets passed down through the father and cannot be passed on through marriage, only blood relations. Each tribe “controlled a specific area, determining who was allowed to own property and reside within the tribal unit...The tribes were strictly exogamous, avoiding intermarriage between units that considered themselves tribally bonded.”⁸

⁸ Maggiolini 213

The tribes had their own rule of law, called the *Kanun*, which dictated both social and political life, and “it defined a precise collective juridical, social and moral conception of order, although with some local variances. Accordingly, the *Kanun* represented the entire complex of principles, institutions and customs...Moreover, the moral and ethical world drawn by the *Kanun* on the basis of honour, word of honour - *besa* - and hospitality defined the horizons around which the entire life of northern Albanians revolved.”⁹ The *Kanun* was more than just written law, it was a moral code by which Albanians lived. The word *besa* itself is all one needs to understand the culture of northern Albanians, the honor of oneself and one’s family is held in the highest regard.

The Ottoman Empire from the 1820s-1878

The Ottoman Empire was far from peaceful, but problems truly started to arise in the 1820s once Istanbul became involved in “developing and transforming the omnipotent state into one of omni-competence that could control and select resources from the peripheries of the empire that had been largely ignored for centuries”, i.e. Albania.¹⁰ The Ottoman Empire felt its power dwindling in the nineteenth century as it saw places like Northern Albania acting entirely independent from the empire. Political and religious pressure began to be applied by every group, to every group. One example of this was through education, especially “within the Orthodox dimension, with Orthodox clergy who fiercely resisted the introduction of the Albanian language addressing its supporters as enemies of the faith.”¹¹ The Albanian language was not taught in books or schools. Albania became the Ottomans’ number one target, as

⁹ Maggiolini 213

¹⁰ Maggiolini 209

¹¹ Maggiolini 212

“Istanbul increasingly perceived an urgent need to implement Ottoman measures for reform and centralization in the Shkoder province.”¹²

The confrontations faced by Albanians throughout the nineteenth century were met by a succession of revolts. Prior to this, there was never a desire by Albania to become autonomous or independent outside of the empire. However, “Albanian leaders...sought to organize common actions for asserting the existence of an autonomous Albanian unit within the empire”¹³ The Ottomans, angered by these consistent rebellions, imposed higher taxes and military pressure, which only led to more backlash. The Ottomans then began imprisoning or deporting Albanians, one example showing a revolt in 1847 which resulted in “thousands of Albanians” being sent to “Asia Minor.”¹⁴

The more the Ottomans infringed on the Albanians, the more the Albanians pushed back. Rather than continue to fight, the Ottomans decided to use their political power to proactively destroy any ideas of an autonomous Albania. In 1865, “the Albanian regions...were split into the three vilayets of Shkoder, Monastir, and Janina...Each had its own governor and garrison, in order, it was hoped, to render any alignment of the Albanians impossible for the foreseeable future.”¹⁵ This is just the beginning of Albania’s partition done unto them by other powers. The Ottoman Empire splitting Albania into regions is what started the area’s modern history of vague geographic borders.

Economically speaking, the Albanians benefitted from remaining under Ottoman control. However, there were other global powers who started to take an interest in the

¹² Maggiolini 216

¹³ Maggiolini 212

¹⁴ Vickers 25

¹⁵ Vickers 26

weakening empire: Russia and Austria-Hungary. Russia's interest in the Balkans was purely to expand Slavism beyond Russia and Serbia, and was anti-European. Austria-Hungary's interest was anti-Slavism and more pro-Europe, so they tried to show "the importance of developing some form of Albanian national consciousness."¹⁶ During the three years from 1875-1878, the Balkans were a disaster as groups became allies to enemies and back to allies. Rebels in Bosnia-Herzegovina "backed by Russia, Serbia and Montenegro demanded autonomy from the Ottoman Empire."¹⁷ As their demands were largely ignored by the empire, Russia, Serbia, and Montenegro declared war in April 1877. These Slavic powers took advantage of this opportunity to invade all of Albania. In January 1878, "Serbian troops invaded the region of northern Kosova, and the Montenegrins advanced towards Shkoder. In February...the Serbian army expelled those Albanians living in the region stretching from Leskovac to Nis, which they annexed to Serbia."¹⁸ To escape war-torn northern Albania, Albanians began retreating into Kosova.

What can be seen as the true beginning of the end of the Ottoman Empire was the infiltration of Russian power into Albanian land. The severe displacement of Albanians out of their homes and into other lands feeds into two major problems: many Albanians are in a land that was not theirs and their initial land and borders are now uncontested. Since so many Albanians had been killed or dispersed elsewhere, they did not have the power nor the ability to claim their own land, leaving it up to those with power to do what they pleased with the land.

¹⁶ Vickers 28

¹⁷ Vickers 28

¹⁸ Vickers 29

The Treaty of San Stefano and The League of Prizren

In March 1878, after a year of invasions into the Ottoman Empire, Russia officially defeated the Ottoman military. Directly following their victory, Russia imposed the San Stefano Treaty onto the Ottoman Empire. The treaty ensured Russia's presence in the Balkans so that it could not be touched by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It also served as a giant step towards the unification of all Slavic lands and peoples through Russia's doling out of Balkan land to Slavic nations – mainly Serbia and Montenegro. “Serbia was allotted a large part of the sanjak of Pristina, Montenegro received the north Albanian regions including Peja (Pec), Ulqin, Hoti, Plava, Gucia and Podgorica.”¹⁹ This annexation of Albanian territory “triggered a widespread reaction” among Albanians from both the north and the south.²⁰

Though there was a collective effort from Albanians across all territories to fight against the loss of their land, most of the strength came from Northern Albania and Kosova who were mainly Catholic, led by “local Albanian leaders, including Prenk Bib Doda of the Mirdite.”²¹ The Catholics of Kosova and the Malësore grew as the center of Albanian resistance as the Muslim Albanians from the area began to side with the Ottomans. The Malësore, literally *mountain people*, “had always shown the most stubborn resistance to outside rule”²², refusing to assimilate to Ottoman rule by escaping to the mountains when the Ottomans first came to the area (which is how they got their name).

In short, Northern Albania became the center of this charge for one main reason – they had the most to lose. This group, called the “Albanian League for the Defence of the Rights of

¹⁹ Vickers 29

²⁰ Maggiolini 216

²¹ Maggiolini 216

²² Vickers 30

the Albanian Nation”²³; or, for short, the *League of Prizren*, emerged from their first meeting in Prizren, Kosova, on June 10, 1878. “The primary purpose of the League was to organize political and military opposition to the dismemberment of Albanian-inhabited territory...to unite the four vilayets of Janina, Monastir, Shkoder and Kosova into one political and administrative unit.”²⁴



The Albanian culture was starting to slip away, as

most Albanians had converted to Islam and the Ottomans simply called them Turks. Southern Albanians, predominately Muslim, had no interest in seeking independence from the Ottoman Empire. As the Malësore were predominately Catholic, they had to fight not only to become autonomous from the Ottoman Empire to assert their culture, but to dispute the redistribution of land to the Slavic nations of Serbia and Montenegro. It was only in the aftermath of the Berlin Congress that the League was able to gather the momentum to respond with political protests and military violence.

²³ Maggiolini 216

²⁴ Vickers 30

The Congress of Berlin and a Continuation of the League of Prizren

Witnessing this slow fall of the Ottoman Empire, the European Powers of Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Italy began to grow worried about the “Eastern Question.” These Powers were specifically worried about the San Stefano Treaty that was imposed by Russia, so they “compelled Russia to submit to a new peace settlement at the Congress of Berlin, which was presided over by Bismarck, in June 1878.”²⁵ Russia and Serbia, unwilling to give up the Albanian land acquired by their original treaty, “began a public-relations campaign in the West that asserted Serbian historical claims to ‘Southern Serbia’ (Kosova and northern Albania).”²⁶ In order to feed into this campaign, Albanians themselves were divided through rhetoric pushed by Russia and the Ottomans. The Malësore were seen as rough, uncivilized people because of their tribal nature. Southern Albanians were seen as the elite and more civilized, especially raised up on this pedestal because of their close relationship with the Ottomans. Russia and Serbia were able to make their claim to Albanian territory to the West and to the Ottomans by identifying the Malësore “exclusively as members of the Latin (Catholic), Rum/Serb millets (i.e., Orthodox Christians).”²⁷

As previously mentioned, the desire of the League of Prizren was to unify the southern vilayets with mainly Shkoder and Kosova. While discussions were taking place during the Berlin Congress among the Powers, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire, the demands of the League were entirely ignored. Their land was being discussed without them, and all their autonomy was being stripped away. As Bismarck famously declared during the Berlin Congress – “there is no

²⁵ Vickers 33

²⁶ Blumi 239

²⁷ Blumi 240

Albanian nationality.”²⁸ Originally, after the month-long Congress, most of the Albanian land was placed under the control of the Porte, except for Gucia and Plava, which remained part of Montenegro. The end of the Berlin Congress was just the beginning. The League, seeing that they continued to be ignored, began taking military action against the Ottoman Empire and the Porte. In January of 1879, the League appeared before the Porte with five demands: “the unification of all the Albanian provinces into a single vilayet; the setting up of a national assembly to govern the vilayet; that all the officials of the vilayet should be able to speak Albanian; that teaching should be in the Albanian language; and that some of the income of the vilayet should be used for public spending in the vilayet itself.”²⁹ Of course, all of these demands were not given any consideration.

Being unable to reason with the Porte or the Ottomans, the League assembled “an army of thousands of Albanian volunteers on the Montenegrin frontier”³⁰, a battle that was quickly won by the Albanians. Finally receiving attention from the European Powers, they “insisted that the Porte give up the Albanian-claimed areas of Plava, Podgorica, Gucia and Ulcinj”³¹ in February 1879 and further demanded from the Ottomans an imposition of some rule of law. However, the Ottomans had no real military force to compete against the armies of thousands of Albanians, so they arrived at a stalemate for the remainder of 1879. In January 1880, “the Porte suggested...it should surrender the Catholic Albanian regions of Hoti and Gruda while still allowing the persistent Montenegrin claim to Ulcinj.”³² This led to more fighting by the Malësore until April of the same year when the Powers stepped in once more to create their own borders.

²⁸ Vickers 34

²⁹ Vickers 34

³⁰ Vickers 34

³¹ Vickers 35

³² Vickers 35

They suggested that land northeast of Lake Shkoder, Hoti and Gruda, should be given to Montenegro, while Plava, Gucia, and Ulcinj remain under the Ottoman Empire. Of course, without any consultation with the Albanians, fighting began yet again as all those in power failed to listen to a single demand made by the Malësore and the League. On April 22, when “the Ottoman army withdrew from the Albanian areas to allow occupation [of Ulcinj] by the Montenegrins, the forces of the League took possession of them.”³³ The Powers tried to ameliorate this situation by declaring in June that Ulcinj would be given to Montenegro, rather than Hoti and Gruda. Albanians were unwilling to give up Ulcinj, and remained in constant battle until the League’s defeat in November 1880.

The Malësore Leading up to the Balkan Wars

It is important to remember throughout the duration of the 1870s, the Malësore, different from the League of Prizren, never made an ethnonational argument. Their reason for battling was never a claim of Albanian nationalism. Instead, their demands were simply “to be left alone.”³⁴ Of course, there were many ways in which the Malësore went about asking to be left alone. The most unfeasible option, based on past experiences, was true Albanian independence. What they realized “was possible was autonomy within the Ottoman state”³⁵, which is why the Malësore were mostly absent from battle once Hoti and Gruda were returned to them.

The final decade of the nineteenth century was one that was somewhat calm, but what would end up paving the way for the Balkan Wars. The Malësore were able to become autonomous within the Ottoman Empire mainly because “the late–19th-century powers lacked

³³ Vickers 35

³⁴ Blumi 244

³⁵ Blumi 245

the necessary military advantages to enforce their boundaries.”³⁶ Since the European Powers had such a difficult time imposing any specific boundaries in Malësore territory, the land dividing them and Montenegro was largely undefined. For the remainder of the 1800s, this worked for the Malësore as they (literally) walked the line between their land and that of Montenegro. Some examples of this include the “winter-pasture lands...now flowing over territories awarded to an independent Montenegro” and “the Ottoman Empire and Montenegro [pursuing] a program of state centralization in the...militarily sensitive border regions.”³⁷

As the decade continued, Montenegro took this opportunity of the Malësore regions being border communities to begin their Slavic agenda. “Montenegro lacked the coercive capacities to enact what may have been the general strategy of Serbia (and Russia) at the time: ‘the purification of Slavic lands.’”³⁸ Instead, they took a slow approach, which involved strengthening their relationship with Serbia and Russia to enlarge their own military and ensuring that their economic relationship with the border communities and proper Malësore communities was strong. Montenegro was able to “cultivate a relationship with communities in the Malësore” because they seemingly let them do what they wanted – “the Malësore continued to cross ‘illegally’ into Montenegrin territory with their flocks”; or, for example, when Nicholas (the ruler of Montenegro) would pay “handsome amounts of money to a number of local leaders and [supply] them with modern rifles” in exchange for their loyalty.³⁹ While this was happening, Montenegro “began to monitor these territories more closely, impose customs officials in the

³⁶ Blumi 245

³⁷ Blumi 245

³⁸ Blumi 245-6

³⁹ Blumi 246-7

villages, and garrison troops along the frontiers” so that “what had been a quiet boundary region for the first few years, became the center of colonization and forced expulsion.”⁴⁰

The Malësore were not entirely taken by surprise, as the Montenegrins were strategic in their “mobilization of the very boundaries that separated the two states straddling the Malësore” but the Malësore continued to resist “Ottoman taxation and conscription, as well as Montenegrin forced expulsions, conversions, and colonization of their traditional pasture lands.”⁴¹ Just as the Malësore were being manipulated by the Montenegrins and Ottomans, the Malësore were able to return the favor. On the question of religion, the Malësore were able to “milk the Ottoman state and its rivals”, like the European Powers, of their resources “by tapping into the bureaucratic spirit of the period and the incumbent fears of rival state penetration.”⁴² In other words, the Malësore used both Catholic and Muslim nations to promote schools and places of worship, therefore developing infrastructure on their land, without having to fund it themselves.

Perhaps without realizing it, the Malësore began to use what can be defined as *identity politics* in order to further assert their autonomy from the Ottomans and Montenegro. At first, they were doing this to satisfy their own interests. But, as boundaries between Montenegro and Malësia became firmly established through the *economies of boundaries*, which are “residual economic niches in any society that adapt to the shifting channels, networks, and markets that develop once new realities emerge”, identity politics for the Malësore became something more than just means to an end.⁴³ The re-emergence of pressure being put on the Malësore, though in a very different way than what they experienced in the 1870s, created a need for identity politics

⁴⁰ Blumi 246

⁴¹ Blumi 247

⁴² Blumi 248

⁴³ Blumi 249

that meant more than just being able to do what they wanted. The manipulative nature of Montenegrins during this time fortified the Malësore identity as Albanian, and therefore, anti-Slavic.



CHAPTER 2: THE BALKAN WARS AND FIRST WORLD WAR

The Balkan Wars are broken up into two wars, the First Balkan War officially began in October 1912 and ended in May 1913. The Second Balkan War official dates are much shorter, from June 1913 to early autumn 1913. However, to say that the Balkan Wars ever ended would be false, as there was still serious fighting, especially in Albania, until the very second that the First World War started. Of course, fighting in the Balkans persisted with the same ferocity until the end of the War. For Albanians and the entirety of the Balkans, there really was no difference between the Balkan Wars and World War I.

The Period Before the Balkan Wars

The few years before the Balkan Wars for Albanians were defined mainly by the Young Turk Movement. Though there were many aspects of this movement, its original reason for emerging was to oppose Sultan Abdul Hamid, the last ruler of the Ottoman Empire, reigning from 1876-1909. The Young Turks can be seen as the first official Albanian nationalist movement of this period, as both Catholic and Muslim Albanians came together to promote Albanian interests. In July 1908, a military coup was staged by the Young Turks in order to overthrow the Sultan. With the Young Turks in power, “elections for the new parliament were followed by the adoption of a constitution which ended the absolutist regime.”⁴⁴ Some promises that the Young Turks made which promoted Albanian nationalism were “possession of their arms”, “schools which taught in their own language”, and the approval of an Albanian alphabet, both in Latin and in Arabic.⁴⁵

For a short period of time, these promises were enjoyed by Albanians everywhere. Problems quickly arose surrounding funding of infrastructure and the question of religion. With

⁴⁴ Vickers 54

⁴⁵ Vickers 55

funding, many Albanians saw the Constitution almost as a living being – ‘the Constitution said it would build these places, so it should be able to do it without our help.’ They were not willing to pay taxes to build schools, for example, because they believed that the Constitution would do it. Muslim Albanians were not inclined to be nationalistic for many reasons. In schools, “they were reluctant to adopt a script that was not that of the Koran” and “they recognized only Turkish as the official state language.”⁴⁶ Additionally, “nationalist ideas were condemned...an individual’s Islamic beliefs were considered to be of far greater importance than his feelings of Albanian nationalism.”⁴⁷ By the end of 1908, the Young Turks had separated from the Albanians as the Young Turks were interested in carrying out an Ottoman identity, not an Albanian one. Albanians continued their own agenda, no longer a part of the Young Turks, advocating for “a greater decentralization within the empire and autonomy for their national regions.”⁴⁸

Now on their own, the Albanians still had two other key actors with whom to concern themselves: Russia (to create a greater Serbia) and Austria-Hungary. In late 1908, Austria specifically “reassured the northern Albanians that she had no intention of annexing Albanian-inhabited land” as they had, in October 1908, annexed all of Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴⁹ Count Goluchowski, the Austrian foreign minister, was interested in protecting the Balkans against all Russian interference, and he believed that Serbia and Montenegro must be kept apart, and that “a large Albanian state must be created.”⁵⁰

Albanian nationalism grew rapidly in Northern Albania and in Kosova as Serbian influence decreased. Albanians turned their attention to opposing the Young Turks, who by 1909

⁴⁶ Vickers 56

⁴⁷ Vickers 56

⁴⁸ Vickers 57

⁴⁹ Vickers 57

⁵⁰ Vickers 57-8

had turned into a regime “to enforce a uniform Turkification.”⁵¹ Albanians were once again being oppressed by the Ottoman Empire, but this time their identity was attempted to be entirely wiped out. Angered by the betrayal of the Young Turks, Northern Albanians and Kosovars began to openly revolt against the new regime. This was the peak of Albanian nationalism, as Catholics and Muslims alike began to see the importance of an Albanian nation.

From 1909 until the start of the First Balkan War in 1912, the Albanian people went through a series of revolts and rebellions against the Ottomans. One instance of a battle was in Pristina in March 1910, which looked similar to many of the battles that took place in Albanian territories from 1909 through the Balkan Wars. Albanians were revolting against severe taxes imposed against them by Istanbul. “The Porte replied by sending twenty thousand men...to Kosova to stamp out the rebellion and disarm the people” by burning down villages which led thousands of Kosovars to take refuge in Montenegro.⁵² A year later, in March 1911, the Malësore and Kosovar refugees “staged a general insurrection...[which] began in the mountains north of Shkoder” and continued along the Montenegrin-Albanian border.⁵³ As was fitting for the nature of Montenegrin rule, King Nicholas helped the Albanians in this battle, as it meant that “the Albanians would naturally be weakened by the continued fighting and thus be more willing to collaborate with Montenegro in its inevitable conflict with the Porte.”⁵⁴

By the early summer of 1911, Albanians were granted a few months of peace. Austria-Hungary asserted its dominance over the Porte as the self-proclaimed “protector of the Catholic Albanians.”⁵⁵ Sultan Mehmet V, who was afraid of further Austrian intervention,

⁵¹ Vickers 59

⁵² Vickers 63

⁵³ Vickers 63

⁵⁴ Vickers 64

⁵⁵ Vickers 64

“announced on 12 June 1911 that the Sultan himself was to visit Kosova, where he would grant a general amnesty to the Albanian insurgents.”⁵⁶ This allowed Albanian-language schools to be opened in the Ottoman Empire. King Nicholas, no longer needing the Albanians, sent them out of Montenegro and back to their burnt-down villages. Though Albanian nationalism was still as strong, it took place separately, as northern, central, and southern Albanians were not truly banded together and there was no singular Albanian movement.

Everything changed once Italy declared war on the Porte in September 1911. Seeing the weakness of the Ottoman Empire and with no faith in its return, the Porte turned to Albania for support. With this potential alliance was the possibility of the creation of a greater, autonomous Albania, which of course was everyone’s greatest fear. To curb this, Serbia and Montenegro attempted to create an alliance with Albania, offering them weapons and funds as encouragement to take advantage of the weakening Empire, rather than supporting the Porte. Albanians, having just been at war with the Ottomans, decided to side with the Balkan states and abandoned the Porte.

In March 1912, the Balkan states (which did not include Albania) formed the Balkan League, “whose principal objective was the ejection of the Ottomans from Europe.”⁵⁷ Their first accord was “Serbia’s annexation of Kosova and northern Albania.”⁵⁸ Some other intentions of the Balkan League included Serbia’s desire to finally have access to the Adriatic Sea, halting the further influence of Austria-Hungary in the Balkans, and ensuring that an autonomous Albania would not be created. By the summer of 1912, Serbia could see that the Albanian movement everywhere, from Kosova and Northern to Southern Albania, was becoming stronger. Albanians

⁵⁶ Vickers 64

⁵⁷ Vickers 66

⁵⁸ Vickers 66

were leaving the Ottoman army and joining the rebel group. They were finally able to get wide-scale attention when 30,000 rebels occupied Skopje, paralyzing the Ottoman administration.⁵⁹

Almost every nation was at a stalemate after this occupation. “The government in Istanbul was forced to resign in favour of Mouktar Pasha...who opposed the radical Turkification policies.”⁶⁰ It was at this point that the Albanians had a choice to make. The new Ottoman regime made promises to the Albanians that if they ceased their rebellion, there would be free elections and Albanians could be ruled by those who spoke Albanian. Albanians were also inclined to trust the Ottomans out of fear that the Balkan states would completely occupy Albanian lands. Even Austria-Hungary, the unwavering supporter of Albania, saw safety in Albania siding with the Ottomans. Albania saw that the Balkan states would most likely emerge victorious, but would that victory result in the division of Albanian land?

The First Balkan War

Albania, in the end, did not have to make a choice as on October 8, 1912, “Montenegro suddenly opened hostilities with the Porte by attacking Albania.”⁶¹ This officially declared the beginning of the Balkan War, as Serbia, Bulgaria, and Greece quickly followed in Montenegro’s footsteps. With only the crumbling Ottoman army at the Albanians’ side, the Balkan states were easily able to infiltrate Albanian territory. Ismail Kemal, an Albanian intellectual and former official in the Ottoman administration, “traveled to Vienna and Budapest in search of diplomatic support from Austria-Hungary, and to plead for the national rights of the Albanian people and

⁵⁹ Vickers 66-7

⁶⁰ Vickers 67

⁶¹ Vickers

their country.”⁶² Kemal returned to Albania and arrived in Vlore on November 26 for the Congress of Vlore on November 28, 1912. Fearing Serbian and Russian access to the Balkans, Austria-Hungary declared that “only the creation of an independent Albania could now secure the Habsburg interests in the area”, namely not allowing Serbia to access the Adriatic.⁶³ On this day, Albania was proclaimed to be an independent state (the date that is still celebrated by Albanians across the world as Independence Day).

While this conference was happening, a little further north, in Durres, the Serbian army was arriving at the port. The actions committed by the Serbians throughout the remainder of the war were barbaric and evil. The Serbian army “executed the orders” for “a merciless extermination – “there were...barbaric cremations in which hundreds of Albanian women and children were burnt alive.”⁶⁴ In a newspaper article published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in March 1913, they write that “at the beginning of the war, the Serbian authorities told us quite openly: ‘We are going to exterminate the Albanians.’”⁶⁵ Both Serbia and Greece began to attack the Albanian coastline, so Austria and Italy stepped in and demanded that they both retreat. Serbia and Montenegro listened, and “agreed to an armistice with the Porte” in December 1912, but Greece refused, furthering the collapse of the newly independent Albania.⁶⁶

To no surprise, Britain decided to step in at the Conference of Ambassadors in London in December 1912 to solve the problem of Albania. Arguably the worst division by a European power, the British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, decided that “northern and western Albania went to Serbia and Montenegro, while Greece received the large southern region of

⁶² Vickers 68

⁶³ Vickers 68

⁶⁴ Vickers 68-9

⁶⁵ *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 14 March, 1913, 1-2. Translated from the German by Robert Elsie

⁶⁶ Vickers 69

Chameria, leaving the Albanian state reduced to the central regions together with the town of Shkoder and its surrounding territory.”⁶⁷ The new state of Albania was reduced to Shkoder, meaning that more than half of the population of Albania now belonged to other states. Britain, really having no care for the existence of Albania entirely, almost ceded Shkoder to Russia until Austria stepped in.

Though Shkoder was supposed to belong to Albania, the Montenegrin army that had occupied Shkoder refused to leave. The next six months after the Conference of Ambassadors continued to be a disaster for northern Albania and Shkoder, as Serbians continued to burn down Albanian villages and murder Albanian people as a method of ethnic cleansing now that they ruled over the land. In May 1913, Austria-Hungary stepped in and declared that if Montenegro did not pull out of Shkoder, they would march their own army into the city. The Powers offered King Nicholas six million francs if they agreed to leave Shkoder. On May 15, “the city passed to the British Royal Navy” and the First Balkan War came to a conclusion.⁶⁸

The Second Balkan War and Its Aftermath

Directly following the First Balkan War was the London Conference, in which the Treaty of London was signed on May 30, 1913. Four days before this treaty was signed, the Malësore tribes of Hoti, Gruda, Kelmendi, Shkreli, and Kastrati threatened that their land must not be given to Montenegro and must remain Albanian. The Powers, unconcerned, created their own version of Albania, larger than the one created by Britain in the prior year, but still did not restore all Albanian land to Albania. Peja, Gjakova, Pizren, and Diber, mostly towns in Kosova, were all given to Serbia, and Greece was awarded Chameria in the south. However, Albania, what was

⁶⁷ Vickers 70

⁶⁸ Vickers 73

left of it, was a fully autonomous state, free from Ottoman rule. The Second Balkan War only lasted a few months and was strictly concerned with land arguments between Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Macedonia. But it further shows the nature of Serbia as power-hungry, as they would stop at nothing to acquire more land.

The period of time between the end of the Second Balkan War and the beginning of the First World War was a time of serious confusion for Albania. Though the Powers had agreed on Albanian boundaries through the Treaty of London, there was no military fortification of these boundaries. This meant that anyone, namely Serbia, was able to invade Albania without any repercussions. Though Serbia had legally been awarded four Northern Albanian towns, they occupied all of Northern Albania, forcing the Northern Albanian tribes to fight back. Without any outside intervention, Serbia was able to lay siege to Albania, attempting to create a pro-Serbian government. The Great Powers stepped in and declared Prince William of Wied, a German, to be the ruler of Albania. His rule lasted from February 1914 to September 1914, only about six months. After his leave, the Young Turks were able to take over Albania, until the war started.⁶⁹

The First World War

The First World War was triggered by the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife by a Serbian in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, as Austria declared war on Serbia a month after the assassination. For Albania, World War I was a time for other powers to begin claiming Albanian territory, as the Albanians were left weak and without much leadership. This allowed Serbia to easily take over most of central Albania during the beginning of the war.

⁶⁹ I add in these points without spending too much time on them to show the chaos of Albania in the years leading up to World War I. The details of the different rulers takes away from the important narrative of the Malësore tribes, but explains why Albania was left in such a fragile state.

On April 26, 1915, the secret Pact of London was revealed, a pact agreed upon by Western allies. The Pact essentially broke apart Albania, which “agreed to divide up Albania between Greece and Italy, leaving a small autonomous state in the central regions...Italy was granted possession of Sazan island and the port of Vlore, and was awarded a mandate over central Albania.”⁷⁰ There was also a part of the Pact that would allow Serbia and Montenegro to divide northern Albania amongst themselves. This pact created an Albanian state that was no longer independent. Montenegro was easily able to invade Shkoder, as Albanians were exhausted and starving. Austria came to the Albanians’ rescue and was able to force Serbians to retreat entirely from northern and central Albanian by the end of 1916.

At the end of the war, the Paris Peace Conference was held from 1919-1920 as a means to officially end the war and officially set peace treaties between the warring nations. During the Conference, Albanians once again argued for a unified Albania to be created – both Albanians from the south and Albanians in the north who were currently occupied by Serbia and Montenegro. A new nation was created, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which would be called Yugoslavia after 1912. Yugoslavia “contained almost half a million Albanians”, from Northern Albania and Kosova.⁷¹ Yugoslavia largely ignored the Albanians’ desire to be part of a greater Albania because of the fear they had that Albania would become too big and strong enough to be an enemy of Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav-Albanian border “discussions” did not stop there. In 1920, arguments arose between the Yugoslavians and the Italians, who still ruled over much of central Albania. The Powers of Italy, Britain, and France decided that Italy would control parts of Croatia as well as

⁷⁰ Vickers 87

⁷¹ Vickers 93

central Albania. Yugoslavia “would be given much of northern Albania, including Kosova and the Drin valley.”⁷² All Malësore and Kosovars were now under the control of this unified Slavic nation. In July 1921, Kosovar drafted a petition to the League of Nations, asking to be reunified with Albania. In the petition, they stated that “since 1918, throughout the vilayet of Kosova, 12,371 people had been killed and 22,000 imprisoned.”⁷³ Once again, their attempts were futile, as Serbia was greatly supported by Britain and France in the period after the war.

Throughout the history of Albania and the Malësore, from the Ottoman Empire to the First World War, the one thing they always tried to fight for was autonomy. Except for the few pockets of peace that Albania could enjoy for a short time, they were never able to experience real independence. This is largely due to the intervention of the Western Powers, who knew almost nothing about Balkan affairs but were easily swayed by the rhetoric of Russia and Serbia, who created a somewhat fabricated history that claimed Albanian land as theirs. For the following fifty years, the Slavic agenda finally won. Albanian people were partitioned, and many were separated from their own families based on the borders drawn by Yugoslavia. Albania fell to communism after the Second World War, completely closed off from its neighbors. Those fifty years in Yugoslavia were far from peaceful. Living conditions in the Albanian villages were poor, and the Malësore and Kosovar constantly rebelled against their new leaders. The Serbians continued their ethnic cleansing of Albanians – “forcing the Albanians to alter their names by adding Serbian suffixes such as -vic, -vc, or -c. They were denied the right to use the Albanian language for official matters.”⁷⁴ Though they were constantly defeated, Albanian nationalism in Yugoslavia never slowed down, which paved the way for the Yugoslavian Wars in the 1990s.

⁷² Vickers 96

⁷³ Vickers 96

⁷⁴ Vickers 128



CHAPTER 3: THE YUGOSLAVIAN WAR AND THE PRESENT-DAY

The decade leading up to the Yugoslavian War was a time of great political unrest. The President of Yugoslavia, Josip Tito, died on May 4, 1980, which can be seen as the beginning of the downfall of Yugoslavia. The many problems of the nation were well-hidden by Tito during his presidency; but, after his death, civilians became aware of the massive debt he had accrued. Each territory in Yugoslavia was then left to themselves to figure out how to pay off this debt. Ethnic tensions began to be made public as well, as the Albanians in Yugoslavia still wanted to join Albania. At this time, Albania was still a communist country, under the rule of Enver Hoxha, suffering from even greater poverty than the Albanians in Yugoslavia. In the years leading up to Hoxha's death on April 11, 1985, Serbia was successful in severing ties between Albanians in Yugoslavia and the Albanian nation. With Hoxha gone, Albania could then make more of an effort to support their people stuck in Yugoslavia. However, damage control needed to be done on their own nation – “Hoxha's regime not only impoverished the economy; it all but destroyed the intellectual life of the country, and far from healing the north-south divisions it actually widened the gulf between the Gheg and Tosk regions.”⁷⁵

Yugoslavia (wrongly) feared the creation of a “Greater Albania”, assuming that any statement the newly-freed Albania made in support of Albanians in Yugoslavia was an attempt to undermine Yugoslavia. On the contrary, “unification with Kosova would not have been in Tirana's interest, and would certainly have destabilized Albania.”⁷⁶ Based on the state of Albania at the time, they were in no position to try and create a unified Albania. Approaching the 1990s, relations between Albania and Yugoslavia quickly grew worse as the Serbians enacted more laws to oppress Albanians. “In July 1990, the Serbian government had gone as far as amending their

⁷⁵ Vickers 209

⁷⁶ Vickers 212

republic's constitution so as to remove the legal basis for Kosova's autonomy."⁷⁷ There was almost no proof of the existence of Albanians in Yugoslavia at this point.

The Yugoslavian War (1991-2001)

The seven territories that made up Yugoslavia were Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosova, Slovenia, and Macedonia. The Yugoslavian War is the name given to the series of conflicts that took place within this decade that officially ended the existence of Yugoslavia as each territory slowly declared independence. Slovenia and Croatia began this chain of events as they announced their independence from Yugoslavia on June 25, 1991.⁷⁸ The wars that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina were the worst of the entire Yugoslavian Wars. The Bosnian War lasted for three years, 1992-1995 after a majority of Bosnians voted for independence. A fight broke out between Bosnians, Bosnian-Serbs, and Bosnian-Croatians, which resulted in a death total of over 100,000 people. Serbians committed terrible acts during these three years: systematic rape of Bosnian women and the largest execution of the whole war – 8,000 Bosnian men and boys. The Serbian government does not officially recognize this genocide. This war ended in 1995, largely due to intervention by the U.S. The U.S. greatly helped create the Dayton Agreement, which ended the genocide of the Bosnians by the Serbians.⁷⁹

The final war was mostly centered around the area's ethnic Albanian population. The war in Kosova lasted a year, from 1998-1999, as Albanians attempted to gain independence from Yugoslavia. At this point, Kosova was not considered its own territory. Rather, it was a municipality of Serbia. Kosova was fighting two battles – separation from Yugoslavia and

⁷⁷ Vickers 215-6

⁷⁸ ("The Conflicts", n.d.)

⁷⁹ (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 1995)

autonomy from Serbia. Though there had been many battles taking place between the Kosovars and the Serbians for years prior, the official war began in 1998 when Serbians began the ethnic cleansing of Kosovars. The US stepped in again with NATO-led air strikes against the Serbian military in March 1999. The conflicts ended with a peace treaty between NATO and Yugoslavia; however, problems persisted because of Kosova's desire to be an independent country. Kosova finally gained its independence in February 2008.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ceased to exist after countries began to leave the Republic in 1991. A new territory was created, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), which consisted of just Serbia and Montenegro. This new republic was mainly controlled by Serbia and was the source of pro-Serbian rhetoric throughout the Yugoslavian War. Albanians were the second largest ethnicity of the FRY, making up 16.5% of the population.⁸⁰ The FRY eventually dissolved and was turned into a union in 2003, the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.⁸¹ Eventually, Serbia and Montenegro came to a peaceful agreement as Montenegro declared independence in June 2006.

Unfortunately at this point, there is essentially no literature on the experience of the Malësore during and after the Yugoslavian War. The remainder of the discussion surrounding the Malësore in the present day will be based on first- and second-hand accounts. Because of Albania's instability, they were unable to fight for any creation of a unified Albania. Most of that work came from the Kosovars, who still had to fight their own battle of separation from Serbia. The Malësore remained under the jurisdiction of Montenegro, where they remain to this day. Most likely nothing was done to the Malësore by the Montenegrins because they finally got what

⁸⁰ Kovačević, Miladin and other (1993). *Statistical Yearbook of Yugoslavia 1993* (PDF). Beograd.

⁸¹ ("The Conflicts", n.d.)

they wanted – they were being left alone. They stayed on the mountains or on the flat land nearby on their farms, never really interacting with the Montenegrins. They were able to go to school, though they were taught only in Serbian and only spoke Albanian at home. The years after the war for the Malësore were not a concern, not until recent years.

Contemporary Montenegro and the Malësore

Before getting into Malësore oppression, a general understanding of the Montenegrin government is needed. Montenegro is a parliamentary republic, having both a president, who acts as the head of state, and a prime minister, who is the leader of the parliament. The current Prime Minister is Dritan Abazović, an ethnic Albanian and Muslim from Ulcinj, who was elected on April 28, 2022. The current president is Milo Đukanović, who has been the president since 2018, was also the president from 1998 to 2002, and the prime minister from 2012 to 2016. The Parliament of Montenegro is made up of 81 members, of which 2 of those members are currently Albanian. In total, Albanians make up around 5% of the country's population.⁸² The election of Abazović is revolutionary, especially when compared to the previous prime minister, Zdravko Krivokapić. During his rule, there were three coalitions that ruled parliament: ZBCG, DCG, and URA. ZBCG is a “pro-Serbian, pro-Russian, anti-NATO, and Eurosceptic” party. DCG has attempted to make itself seem pro-European, but the party leader at the time, Aleksa Becic, is someone who has supported the union of Serbia and Montenegro. URA is described as a “civic, green, and pro-European party” that will work to keep the other two parties in check. These three coalitions had only agreed on two things: the recognition of Kosova and not leaving NATO.

⁸² (“Population: demographic situation, languages and religions | Eurydice” 2021)

Though they had managed to reach these agreements, it was clear that Montenegro was inching towards becoming a pro-Serbian country.

Currently, the three major coalitions that form the majority of Parliament are ZBCG, MjNN, and CnB. ZBCG has remained the same conservative party, whereas the latter two are both left-leaning, pro-European parties. MjNN has even welcomed the Albanian minority into their party, but both MjNN and CnB have dedicated themselves to fighting against corruption and the increasingly polarized society. It is clear that Abazović, while not openly declaring his support of his Albanian community, is attempting to minimize what were rapidly growing tensions in the years before his election. On April 15, 2023, Abazović went to Pristina, Kosova, to meet with President Vjosa Osmani Sadriu, in which they openly declared their countries' support of one another. "President Osmani emphasized that the Brussels Agreement treats Kosovo and Serbia as equal parties in the context of interstate relations, although she emphasized that Serbia is continuing with obstructions regarding the implementation of the agreement."⁸³ In addition, "Both sides stated that the Albanian community in Montenegro and the Montenegrin community in Kosova are powerful connecting bridges between the two countries."⁸⁴ To side with Kosova as a Montenegrin leader is to indirectly go against Serbia. Without saying it in many words, Abazović is placing himself in a position that distances himself, and therefore Montenegro, from Serbia – something that will ensure the safety of the Malësore but will anger Serbia.

Malësia is made up of municipalities, the Tuzi municipality being the largest one. The mayor of Tuzi, Albanian Nick Gjeshaj, uses his platform to talk about the oppression that the

⁸³ "President of Kosovo Osmani meets with acting PM of Montenegro, Dritan Abazović," *European Interest*, April 19, 2023

⁸⁴ "President of Kosovo Osmani meets with acting PM of Montenegro, Dritan Abazović"

Albanian minority faces. In an article from *Balkan Insight*, Gjeloshaj says that he has informed partners, such as the U.S. State Department, about government discrimination against Albanians. Gjeloshaj cites the fact that the “state budget didn’t include any investments in Tuzi” which he says “shows that this government is working in an organised manner for the collapse of the municipality of Tuzi as the ultimate goal.”⁸⁵ Sadly, Mayor Gjeloshaj is not exaggerating. This budget was approved by 42 MPs in Parliament, and not a single cent was allocated to the municipality of Tuzi.⁸⁶

In recent years, the Montenegrin government had made it clear that they do not care about Albanian lives. In an article from *Malesia.org* titled and translated as “Krivokapic: I would never give my consent for the recognition of Kosovo”, Krivokapic says that he no longer wants to recognize Kosova as an independent country, and states that if he was in power when this decision was made in 2008, he never would have recognized it.⁸⁷ The former Prime Minister goes on to say, about Montenegro, that “Serbia is a country with which we are connected by history and tradition.”⁸⁸ This statement itself blatantly erases the identity of the Albanian community, who are only connected to Serbia through the violence that Serbia has committed against the Albanian people.

The clearest pro-Serbian act that Montenegro has committed is the recent surge of power of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), recently fortified in the summer of 2022. In Montenegro, there is a Law on Freedom of Religion, which makes Montenegro a secular country. Serbians and Montenegrins are Orthodox, while Albanians are either Muslim or

⁸⁵ (Kajosevic 2021)

⁸⁶ (Koseva 2021)

⁸⁷ (“Krivokapic: Kurrë nuk do të jepja pëlqimin tim për njohjen e Kosovës” 2021)

⁸⁸ (“Krivokapic: Kurrë nuk do të jepja pëlqimin tim për njohjen e Kosovës” 2021)

Catholic. The new government wants to get rid of this law to make it easier for the SOC to claim political power. Under this law, every religion is required to be registered with the government. Out of all the religions present in the country, the SOC is the only one not registered. This is because the Church largely operates as a political institution – working in close ties with the Serbian government out of Belgrade. They have already asserted dominance in both Bosnia and Kosova, which has resulted in governmental control of both of those countries.⁸⁹ Behind closed doors, Abazović made a deal with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which “regulates relations between the Serbian Orthodox church, the largest in Montenegro, including its ownership of real estate, and the state.”⁹⁰ It is still unknown why, after all his work to distance his government from Serbia, Abazović decided to strengthen Montenegro’s relationship with Serbia. Many are unhappy with his actions and have voted to try and push him out.

The experiences of the Malësore with their government have proved to be problematic time and time again. Even the first Albanian Prime Minister proved to be just another Serbian pawn. It is clear that something more is needed in order to secure the rights of the Malësore in their own land. Though in the past European intervention proved to be detrimental to Albanians, there is now a better understanding of Balkan affairs. In addition, the West, which is completely anti-Russia, would do a lot to stop Slavic influence in Europe. The intervention of global powers, through the United Nations, is needed if the Malësore ever want to be autonomous.

⁸⁹ (Ruge and Vukovic 2020)

⁹⁰ Përparim Leka, “Montenegro’s problematic relationship with the Serbian Orthodox church,” *Emerging Europe*, August 31, 2022



CHAPTER 4: INDIGENOUS RIGHTS OF THE MALËSORE

The Orhid Accords

I will use the United Nations 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to show that, through the history of Albanians and the current treatment of the Malësore, the land on which they live, which is ruled by Montenegro, is Albanian land; and, that the Malësore should have full protections on their land by the country that rules them. Before detailing this declaration, I would like to introduce the Orhid Accords, passed in North Macedonia in 2001 to secure their independence after the war. This set of agreements also protects the large minority of Albanians that live in North Macedonia, usually hovering anywhere between twenty to thirty percent. The agreements are not perfect, as there is still plenty of prejudice against Albanians in North Macedonia to this day. But this prejudice is more cultural, as Albanians have official government protections as detailed in the Accord. Under Article 78.2, it states that in the Committee for Inter-Community Relations, there must be “seven members each from the ranks of the Macedonians and Albanians within the Assembly”⁹¹ The Albanian language is an official language of North Macedonia; and, under Annex C.6.1, “The parties invite the international community, including the OSCE, to increase its assistance for projects in the area of media in order to further strengthen radio, TV and print media, including Albanian language and multiethnic media”⁹²

UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

The agreements in North Macedonia is a small example of what can be done to protect minority rights in a country. The United Nations defines indigenous people as “those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their

⁹¹ Orhid Accords. art. 78. sec. 2

⁹² Orhid Accords. Annex C.6.1

territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them.”⁹³ Cobo, the leader of this definition, goes on to define the grounds of historical continuity, including living under tribal rule and language, two things that are unique to the tribes of Malësia. In the Declaration, Articles 3 and 4 state that “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development...Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.”⁹⁴ Article 8.2 states that “States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for: (a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities; (b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources; (c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights; (d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration; (e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.”⁹⁵

In total, there are forty-six articles in the Declaration that detail all the protections to which indigenous peoples have a right. These three articles that have been pulled out are some of the most important ones that would work to assert the Malësore as indigenous people. Already satisfying the requirements of being indigenous people, the events that the Malësore have undergone further prove their identity as indigenous to the land currently occupied by

⁹³ Jose R. Martinez Cobo, “on the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations”

⁹⁴ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, art. 3-4, (2007)

⁹⁵ UN Decl. art. 8.2

Montenegro. First, looking at Articles 3 and 4, the Malësore have a right to self-determination. This means that underneath the Montenegrin government, Albanians should be offered their own protections. This would look like legally protected land, either under Montenegro or an outside power. The current Albanian towns are allowed to elect their own mayor, but how could they have any autonomy without a federal budget? I assert that the government of Montenegro should set aside an official budget for the municipalities of Malësia so that they will be able to self-govern. Additionally, the article mentions being able to freely pursue economic, social, and cultural developments. Without any official funding, there is no way for the Malësore leaders to pursue any of these interests.

The biggest concern is the denial of the Serbian government of any sort of genocide or modern-day oppression against the Albanian people. Though it is widely accepted across the world that Serbia did, in fact, commit these atrocities during the early twentieth century and during the Yugoslavian War, Serbia officially does not recognize this genocide. As a result, many pro-Serbian officials in Montenegro will believe the same. However, by using Article 8.2 and looking at the history of the Malësore, one could easily see that the current state of the Malësore in Montenegro is simply a continuation of Slavic oppression against Albanians. Through over a century of genocide, there is no way to know the vast amount of Albanian culture that Serbia was able to erase. Now that Montenegro owns this Albanian land, they are able to further suppress the culture of the Malësore, who were able to remain on their own land, but have no real ownership of it. Of course, the cessation of Malësia to Albania would help to unify Albania so that the Malësore would have autonomy over their land; but, Montenegro and Serbia would certainly declare war.

Currently, Montenegro is a candidate to join the European Union. Negotiations began in 2012, so there is no telling when the country would officially become a member. In order to secure Malësore indigenous rights, it is imperative for Montenegro to join the European Union. This way, there would be minimal influence on Montenegro by Serbia, as Europe would push its own interests onto the country (which certainly is never to side with Russia). If Montenegro were to become a member of the EU, Western powers would be able to see that they no longer had an interest in Serbia, and might be inclined to help the Malësore. With the help of the EU, UN, and other international actors, an accord might be reached to secure the rights of the Malësore.

The most important protection for the Malësore is ensuring that they can act autonomously on their own land. This includes being allocated a federal budget, quotas in government for Albanian representation, and the right to not be ethnically discriminated against. By using the UN Declaration, I believe an agreement could be created that would offer these protections to the Malësore on the basis of their indigenous status.

Conclusion

The fight for Malësore rights has just begun. I am grateful to have started my own research on this topic, as I anticipate more literature will be released in the coming years now that Albanians have gotten more attention in the media. I fully support government protection of the Malësore in Montenegro, and I also believe that it is something that is more than feasible. Currently, tensions between the Balkan nations are relatively low. As always, there are border problems, especially between Serbia, Kosova, and Albania, usually involving the injury of an Albanian by Serbian border control. Albanians in Albania and Malësia have been disillusioned by the centuries of fighting and defending of their land. Albania is still attempting to recover economically from communism and has no expressed interest in creating a Greater Albania. In fact, any mention of Greater Albania is usually taboo, for no reason other than the fact that the European Powers, along with Russia and Serbia, made it that way. These powers created a false narrative of a Greater Albania, something that, after exploring the history of the Balkans, was never truly desired by Albanians across the board, until their humanity was seriously infringed upon.

The fear of a Greater Albania solely comes from the old rhetoric of old powers, who did not want Albania to have control of the entire Adriatic Sea. This self-interest has nothing to do with Albania. It has been instilled around the world for centuries that a unified Albania would be bad. However, Albanians are native to that land, they have been there for hundreds of centuries. For the last few hundred years, Albanians have been forced to live under rulers who do not only not have their interests in mind, but actively worked to ethnically cleanse Albanians from their

own land. I hope that one day, Albanians from all of the Balkans will be able to live in a unified land where they can freely be Albanian.

Bibliography

- Benakis, Theodoros. "President of Kosovo Osmani Meets with Acting PM of Montenegro, Dritan Abazović." *European Interest*, April 19, 2023.
<https://www.europeaninterest.eu/article/president-of-kosovo-osmani-meets-with-acting-p-m-of-montenegro-dritan-abazovic/>.
- Blumi, Isa. "Contesting the Edges of the Ottoman Empire: Rethinking Ethnic and Sectarian Boundaries in the Malësore, 1878-1912." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 2 (2003): 237–56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3879619>.
- Kajosevic, Samir. 2021. "Montenegro Discriminates Against Albanians, Mayor Tells Country's Allies." *Balkan Insight*.
<https://balkaninsight.com/2021/05/19/montenegro-discriminates-against-albanians-mayor-tells-countrys-allies/>.
- Kovačević, Miladin and other (1993). *Statistical Yearbook of Yugoslavia 1993 (PDF)*. Beograd.
- Koseva, Denitsa. 2021. "Montenegro's parliament finally approves budget for 2021." *bne IntelliNews*.
<https://intellinews.com/montenegro-s-parliament-finally-approves-budget-for-2021-213501/>.
- Koseva, Denitsa. 2021. "Weekend of protests looms in Montenegro over inauguration of Serbian Orthodox cleric." *bne IntelliNews*.
<https://www.intellinews.com/weekend-of-protests-looms-in-montenegro-over-inauguration-of-serbian-orthodox-cleric-219024/>.

“Krivokapic: Kurrë nuk do të jepja pëlqimin tim për njohjen e Kosovës.” 2021.

MALESIA.ORG.

<http://www.malesia.org/2021/03/07/krivokapic-kurre-nuk-do-te-jepja-pelqimin-tim-per-nj-ohjen-e-kosoves/>.

Leka, Përparim. “Montenegro's Problematic Relationship with the Serb Orthodox Church.”

Emerging Europe, September 1, 2022.

<https://emerging-europe.com/news/montenegros-problematic-relationship-with-the-serb-orthodox-church/>.

MAGGIOLINI, PAOLO. “Understanding Life in the Ottoman–Montenegrin Borderlands of Northern Albania during the Tanzimat Era: Catholic Mirdite Tribes, Missionaries and Ottoman Officials.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 50, no. 2 (2014): 208–32.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24585840>.

National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities, *The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Framework Agreement Signed in Ohrid, 13 August 2001*, 13 August 2001

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. 1995. “Dayton Peace Agreement.” OSCE.

<https://www.osce.org/bih/126173>.

“Population: demographic situation, languages and religions | Eurydice.” 2021.

eacea.ec.europa.eu.

https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-51_en.

Ruge, Majde, and Sinisa Vukovic. 2020. “What Montenegro's future government means for the Western Balkans.” European Council on Foreign Relations.

https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_what_montenegros_future_government_means_for_the_western_balkans/.

“The Conflicts.” n.d. International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

<https://www.icty.org/en/about/what-former-yugoslavia/conflicts>.

UN Commission on Human Rights, *Study of the problem of discrimination against indigenous populations.*, 11 March 1986, E/CN.4/RES/1986/35

UN General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* :
resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2 October 2007, A/RES/61/295

Vickers, Miranda. *Albanians: A Modern History*. IBTauris, 1995.