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# “The Third War”: 1912–13 Albanian Campaign in the Writings of the Serbian Left

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## Introduction: The Forgotten War

In the Serbian national imagination the Balkan Wars are remembered by the 1912 combats with the Turks and the 1913 battles against the Bulgarians, and Ovče polje and Bregalnica are remembered as the sites that symbolize the greatest battles of the time. It is a lesser known fact that the veterans of the time spoke of three wars, the third being “the Albanian war,” or more precisely the campaign of the Serbian army, which took it from Kosovo and Metohija across the mountains to the Adriatic coast in 1912, and their efforts in crushing the Albanian rebellion and securing the newly established border around Prizren and Đakovica the following year.<sup>1</sup>

This article focuses on the writings of three Serbian writers who took part in these campaigns in Albania from 1912 to 1920—Dimitrije Tucović’s 1913 *Albanska pisma* (*The Albanian Letters*), Kosta Novaković’s war diary *Četiri meseca u srednjoj Albaniji* (*Four Months in Central Albania*), published in part in January 1913 and in a complete form in 1914, and Dragiša Vasić’s *Dva meseca u jugoslovenskom Sibiru* (*Two Months in the Yugoslav Siberia*), which appeared in 1921. In contrast to Serbian officials and the mainstream press of the time, or their patriotically loyal compatriots who praised the Balkan Wars and their achievements, these three writers strongly criticized the Serbian government for its waste of human lives, accused the army of corruption and negligence, and stigmatized what they saw as Serbian imperialism and its devastating consequences on Serbian-Albanian relations. But, perhaps more

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<sup>1</sup> For a balanced overview of the Balkan wars and the Albanian campaign in Serbian historiography, see: Milić Milićević, *Balkanski ratovi* (Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2014), and Milić Milićević, *Rat za more* (Belgrade: Medija centar Odbrana, 2011).

importantly, the stark contrast between the patriotic zealots who welcomed the war in 1912 and the actual testimonies or memories of participants, haunted by the apocalyptic pictures of pillage, atrocities, diseases, hunger, and death, make us acutely aware of the realities of war. This distinction will be exemplified by offering first a glimpse into the atmosphere in Belgrade and Serbia on the eve of the war, spread by dignitaries and the mainstream press, and then offering the picture from the Albanian front as described by Tucović, Novaković, and Vasić.

### The Prelude to War: Symbolic Conquest of Kosovo and the Albanians

Before depicting the mainstream media reporting and public feelings about the Balkan war, it is instructive to remind ourselves briefly of the broader ideological framework surrounding this war. Actually, it was not until the late 19th century that Serbs and Albanians started seeing each other in negative and hostile ways. Serbian sources prior to that period offer nothing but positive impressions of the Albanians—for instance, the first Serbian writer to provide his impressions of the Albanians was Dositej Obradović, who in the mid-18th century had nothing but the best to say about them. Similarly, early Montenegrin histories praise the Albanians as great heroes and allies against the Turks. In the oral tradition, that is, in epic songs, which were basically what mostly illiterate common people cared about, we also find admiration and respect for the Albanians as great heroes, just as in Albanian epic songs we find respect for Serbian heroes. Finally, early ethnographers and travelers emphasize the shared customs of the Serbo-Montenegrins and Albanians, such as great hospitality, *pobratimstvo*, *kumstvo*,<sup>2</sup> and a code of ethics called *čojstvo*, *rz*, or *besa* among them, all of which served to regulate the relations among the members of different, even hostile communities. In short, prior to the 1870s Serbian perceptions of Albanians mostly belonged to what I would label the heroic discourse—the Albanians were seen as fierce, brave highlanders very close or related to Montenegrins, and as their usual allies against the Turks.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> These terms refer to the practice of establishing familial bonds with individuals not related by blood. These bonds are made through a procedure proscribed by traditional customs. Once established, this relation is then perceived as in close kinship affecting entire families and clans. Henceforth, they do not marry among each other.

<sup>3</sup> See Aleksandar Pavlović, “Od junaka do divljaka: Albanci u srpskom herojskom i nacionalnom diskursu od sredine XVIII do početka XX veka,” in *Figura neprijatelja: preosmišljanje srpsko-albanskih odnosa*, ed. Aleksandar Pavlović, Adriana Zaharijević, Rigels Halili and Gazela Pudar Draško (Belgrade: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju/KPZ Beton, 2015), 15–33.

Moreover, Kosovo, Northern Albania, and other territories with significant Albanian populations had not actually been part of the territorial claims and expansion plans advanced by the Serbian nationalists for a long time. It suffices to mention here the often quoted and today heavily misused seminal documents of Serbian nationalism, Vuk Karadžić's 1849 *Srbi svi i svuda* or Ilija Garašanin's *Načertanije* of 1844, to see how these mid-19th century documents are strongly focused on Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, and even Dalmatia and present-day Vojvodina as the lands of the Serbs, but have little to say about Kosovo and Northern Albania, which were the lands apparently totally unknown to the Serbs.<sup>4</sup>

The tables turned with the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875–78, which saw the international recognition of Serbian independence, the formation of the Albanian national movement—the League of Prizren, and the weakening of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans, as well as the rise of Serbian claims over present-day Kosovo and Northern Albania. The Serbs were shocked by the Austrian takeover of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which they considered their land. Serbia was now closed from three sides by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Serbian scholars began to lament the fact that Serbia was contained and thought that in order to survive it needed to breathe, to expand its lungs. This brought a major shift in their perception of the Albanians. The image of a brave highlander from Northern Albania, previously viewed as a relative and ally against the Turks, faded and was replaced by one of a Muslim Albanian from Kosovo, a Turkish ally and torturer of Kosovo Serbs. On the eve of and during the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, this anti-Albanian discourse evolved into full media propaganda, culminating with several blatantly racist “scientific” monographs on the Albanians.<sup>5</sup> Thereby the words used in Serbian discourse to describe the Albanians were no longer “fierce” and “brave,” but instead “rabid,” “savage,” and “blood-thirsty.”<sup>6</sup>

Following this rising hostility towards the Albanians, during this period Kosovo rose to prominence in the Serbian imagination as a mystical site of

<sup>4</sup> See: Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, “Srbi svi i svuda,” *Kovčežić za istoriju, jezik i običaje Srba sva tri zakon* (Beč: Štamparija jermenskoga manastira, 1849), 1–27; Dušan Bataković, “Ilija Garašanin’s *Načertanije*: A Reassessment,” *Balkanica* XXV, no. 1 (1994): 157–83.

<sup>5</sup> Svetislav Simić, *Stara Srbija i Arbanasi* (Belgrade: Štamparija “Dositije Obradović,” 1904); Jovan Hadži-Vasiljević, *Stara Srbija i Mačedonija: Sa gledišta geografskog, istorijskog i političkog* (Belgrade: Štamp. D. Dimitrijevića, 1906); Vladan Đorđević, *Arnauti i velike sile* (Belgrade: Štamparija “Dositije Obradović,” 1913). Stojan Protić (Balkanicus), *Albanski problem i Srbija i Austro-Ugarska* (Belgrade: Štamparija “Dositije Obradović,” 1913); Tomo Oraovac, *Arbanaško pitanje i srpsko pravo* (Belgrade: Sv. Radenković i Brat, 1913).

<sup>6</sup> Pavlović, *Od junaka do divljaka*, 27–28; see also contributions of Milan Miljković and Vladan Jovanović in the same volume.

medieval Serbian glory. The first impulses to actually explore the territory where this event took place began after 1850, and there were few first-hand accounts on Kosovo prior to the Congress of Berlin.<sup>7</sup> In the next decades, Serbian newspapers became saturated with a number of travelogues about Kosovo which, as a rule, focused on medieval monuments in Kosovo and Albanian brutality towards the remaining local Serbs. Writers of this period coined the term Old Serbia for these territories, thus directly linking them to Medieval Serbian lands.<sup>8</sup> It was as if the Serbs who went there saw the Kosovo of five centuries ago and disregarded the contemporary one. Simeon Gopčević, Miloš Milojević, Panta Srećković, and other early travelers thus typically related their perceptions and impressions of contemporary Kosovo to medieval times and the Serbian Nemanjić dynasty.<sup>9</sup>

### Pre-War Euphoria and War Propaganda

This Medieval framework through which Kosovo was perceived can be conveniently recognized in the statements that marked the beginning of the Balkan wars. Thus, in the first sentence of his proclamation of the Balkan War in 1912, King Petar describes Kosovo as Old Serbia, cradle of Serbian statehood and the place of old Serbian capitals:

The latest events have placed once again on the agenda a resolution of the fate of the Balkan Peninsula, and with it of the Old Serbia, that glorious but mournful mother of our Kingdom, where the historical roots of the Serbian state ruled by ancient kings and tsars are, where the glorious Nemanjić's seats lie: Ras by Novi Pazar, Prishtina, Skoplje, Prizren.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See: Srđan Atanasovski, "Proizvođenje Stare Srbije: stopama putopisca, tragom folklor," in *Figura neprijatelja: preosmišljavanje srpsko-albanskih odnosa*, ed. Aleksandar Pavlović, Adriana Zaharijević, Rigels Halili and Gazela Pudar Draško. Belgrade: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju/KPZ Beton), 2015, 35–53.

<sup>8</sup> See Bogdan Trifunović, *Memory of Old Serbia and the Shaping of Serbian Identity* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG), 2015.

<sup>9</sup> See: Atanasovski, "Proizvođenje Stare Srbije."

<sup>10</sup> "Najnoviji događaji stavili su opet na dnevni red rešavanje sudbine Balkanskog Poluostrva, pa s tim i sudbinu Stare Srbije, te slavne ali tužne majke naše Kraljevine, gde je istorisko jezgro srpske države starih kraljeva i careva, gde su slavne nemanjićske prestonice: Novopazarski Ras, Priština, Skoplje, Prizren." King Petar's Proclamation of War from October 18 (6 according to the old calendar), 1912. See: *Politika*, October 6, 1912, 2, <http://digitalna.nb.rs/wb/NBS/novine/politika/1912/10/06#page/0/mode/1up>. Accessed July 15, 2016.

These sentiments are even more evident in the sermon of the Serbian Archbishop (and later patriarch) Dimitrije, issued on the same occasion, whose epithets and metaphors such as "magnificent Dečani," "shiny throne of Dušan the mighty," and "our glorious knights" sound as if he is dispatching the soldiers into the quest for the Holy Grail:

We are heading to the glorious Kosovo, magnificent Dečani, beautiful Skoplje, to seek the shiny throne of Dušan the mighty, we go to Prilip. Our glorious knights have already departed. And I, as the chief shepherd and spiritual father of the Serbian land, give them my blessing.<sup>11</sup>

According to the mainstream press, the Serbian public greeted the news of the war with euphoria. An article from *Politika* on September 18, 1912, entitled "National Day" ("Narodni dan") conveniently describes the celebratory mood with which the Serbs received the official information about the mobilization:

As of yesterday, a voice about the full army mobilization act spread across Belgrade. Streets are full with people rushing around... Schools dismissed all classes. [The] national anthem is sung and the famous favourite song: "Petar Karageorgevic, we are with you..." Half an hour later, a huge crowd with the flag in front departed from the Rectorate towards Vasina Street. That was the University youth, which rushed with other citizens to manifest its joy about the mobilization. Around 6000 students, male and female citizens from all layers of the society, walked from the Rectorate through Vasina Street singing: "Hey Slavs," "God of Fraternity," "An Eagle is Singing," and other patriotic songs.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> "Idemo slavnom Kosovu, veličanstvenim Dečanima, divnom Skoplju, da potražimo sjajni presto silnoga Dušana. Idemo Prilipu. Naši su dični vitezovi već otišli. A ja ih sve kao vrhovni pastir i duhovni otac zemlje srpske blagosiljam." "Sermon on the Day of the Declaration of War," Serbian Archbishop Dimitrije, October 1912, *Vesnik srpske crkve*, October–November–December 1912, 982.

<sup>12</sup> "Još juče na podne pukao je kroz Beograd glas da je potpisan ukaz o mobilizaciji celokupne naše vojske. Po ulicama na sve strane zavlada je velika užurbanost... U školama prestao svaki rad. Peva se narodna himna i poznata omiljena pesma 'Mi smo s tobom, Petre Karadordeviću...' Posle pola časa ogromna masa sveta, sa zastavom na čelu, krete se od Univerziteta Vasinom ulicom. To je bila Univerzitetaska omladina, koja je, sa ostalim građanima, pohitala da prva manifestuje svoju radost što je objavljena mobilizacija. Oko 6000 studenata, građanki i građana svih redova, krenulo se od Univerziteta Vasinom ulicom pevajući: 'Oj Sloveni,' 'Bože bratimstva,' 'Or'o klikće' i druge patriotske pesme." *Politika*, September 17, 1912, 2. For an account of the celebratory media approach of the time, see: *Dnevnik naših pobeda (The Diary of our Victories)* (Belgrade: Nova Štamparija Save Radenkovića, 1913) and

Throughout the war, *Politika* continued with such reporting in its regular column “Belgrade For War” (“Beograd za rat”), spreading the news about the enthusiasm of Serbian conscripts and people, as did other mainstream newspapers at the time.

Other publications followed suit, most notably being *Ilustrovana ratna kronika* and *Balkanski rat u slici i reči*, both published in 1912 and 1913 specifically in celebration of the Balkan wars.<sup>13</sup> As Ivana Ženarju argues, the cult of Kosovo and medieval glory as cornerstones of Serbian nationalism permeated the textual and visual contents of *Balkanski rat* both in words and photos, especially in the material pertaining to the Serbian army operations in Prizren, the former seat of the Emperor Dušan the Mighty. “In addition, it was believed that liberating the old seat of the Serbian Empire somewhat means to restore the Empire itself.”<sup>14</sup> A photo accompanying this article (see below), entitled *Sa bedema Dušanovog grada*, depicts an anonymous Serbian soldier in the moment of tranquil contemplation, overlooking the town from the fortress above.<sup>15</sup>




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Silvija Đurić, ed., *Dnevnik pobeda: Srbija u balkanskim ratovima 1912–1913* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 1988), with articles from the front lines celebrating the victorious 1912 campaign.

<sup>13</sup> The Belgrade *Ilustrovana ratna kronika* was issued twice weekly, on Thursdays and Sundays (with certain breaks). The editor-in-chief and owner was Sv. M. Grebenac. The magazine ran from October 1912 until March 10, 1913. The Novi Sad *Ilustrovana ratna kronika* was issued once a week and often printed articles already published in other Belgrade magazines. It was printed in Novi Sad and its editor-in-chief was Kamenko Subotić; it ran from October 18, 1912 until October 3, 1913. See: Milan Miljković, “Prilog analizi medijskih predstava o Albancima u srpskoj štampi 1912–1913,” in *Figura neprijatelja: preosmišljavanje srpsko-albanskih odnosa*, ed. Aleksandar Pavlović, Adriana Zaharijević, Rigels Halili, and Gazela Pudar Draško (Belgrade: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju/KPZ Beton), 57.

<sup>14</sup> Ivana Ženarju, “Balkanski rat u slici i reči: Kosovski osvetnici,” *Baština* 32 (2012): 339–57, 341.

<sup>15</sup> “Sa bedema Dušanovog grada,” *Balkanski rat u slici i reči*, 10 February 1913, 4, 1, 55.

That the abovementioned examples are not just isolated cases of the war-mongering and anti-Albanian propaganda is described in detail in Milan Miljković's article, "Prilog analizi medijskih predstava o Albancima u srpskoj štampi 1912–13," which provides a summary picture of the Serbian media reporting during the Balkan wars:

Based on the frequency of dominant motifs and narratives on Albanians (as soldiers, enemies, and European "savages"), as well as on the perception of a coherently and consistently negative reporting in several major news outlets in Serbia, it can be concluded that the mainstream Serbian press has in the period from October 1912 to April 1913 created the image of Albanian people as a model of an extra-civilizational space, wild and unapproachable. This is a space within which the cultural rules of European states do not exist and the law of guns, violence, and crime is prevalent, whilst the mentality of Albanian population is described with adjectives such as "savage," "animal-like," "irrational," and "instinctual."<sup>16</sup>

As a counter discourse to this mainstream approach, Miljković draws attention to the critical writings of Serbian leftist intellectuals and newspapers, *Radničke novine* and *Borba* in particular. It is such writings, published by Tucović and Novaković, supplemented by Vasić's Albanian memoirs in *Republika* magazine, which will be examined in some detail in the remainder of this article.

### "The Albanian Letters"

The writings of the Yugoslav left stand in stark contrast to the aforementioned narratives. Instead of *Politika's* nationalist pro-war euphoria, the leftist outlet *Radnička misao* stigmatized this war campaign as an imperialist enterprise of the Serbian bourgeoisie that would cause a rift between the Serbs and Albanians, and advocated for a different political project of a Balkan federation based on equality of all Balkan nations. Dimitrije Tucović, the ideologue of the social-democrats, frequently advocated for the establishment of such a federation: "social democracy advances the idea of economic and political union of all Balkan nations, on the basis of fullest democracy and social equality and in the form of a federal republic."<sup>17</sup> In late September of 1913,

<sup>16</sup> Miljković, "Prilog analizi," 69.

<sup>17</sup> "Nasuprot šurovanju naših potenata sa sa stranim dvorovima i agentima imperijalističke buržoazije, socijalna demokratija propagira misao privrednoga i političkoga grupisanja svih



Tucović wrote to Dragiša Lapčević, his friend and editor of *Radničke novine*, and expressed his views that recent actions against the Albanians were not conducted to protect the border but with the idea of waging a third war: “If you agree with me, we need to launch the fiercest campaign against the government which is not protecting the border, as it lies to the world, but is entering the third war.”<sup>18</sup> Lapčević accepted his views, and *Radničke novine* opened a column called “The Third War,” exclusively dedicated to the conflicts on the newly established Serbian-Albanian border in the mountains above Prizren and Đakovica.

Prior to the publication of his seminal book *Srbija i Arbanija: jedan prilog kritici zavojevačke politike srpske buržoazije* (1914), Tucović’s views on the Albanian question and excerpts from his war diary were published in *Borba* in November 1913.<sup>19</sup> In a nutshell, his views expressed in the column “From the Albanian Letters” (“Iz albanskih pisama”) could be summarized as follows: Tucović supported the war of the Balkan peoples against the Ottoman rule, which he saw as violent and retrograde. However, he bitterly criticized later moves of the Serbian government, especially the Serbian-Bulgarian war (“it would be easier for me to be shot dead at the Ovče polje than to be a participant in such a war”)<sup>20</sup> and the Albanian campaign, and his writings are a blend of solidarity towards his fellow soldiers and compatriots and sensitivity for the sufferings of the innocent Albanian civilians:

I cannot forget the impression that the sky, red from the flames of the first burned down village, made upon me. During the first weeks of the war we had no night, for we moved, camped and fought following the lights from the burning Albanian villages. The fires from burning villages were the only signal for some Serbian troops of how far the others have reached... This barbarian policy of the Serbian government and the Supreme Command cost the Serbian people the lives of many of its soldiers. With the fall of Kumanovo, an entire world of Albanian pop-

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balkanskih naroda, na osnovi najpunije demokratije i socijalne jednakosti i u okviru federacije republika” (*Radničke novine* 209, September 6, 1912). See: Dimitrije Tucović, *Sabrana dela*, vol. 7, ed. Mladen Vukomanović (Belgrade: Rad, 1980), 31. All quotations from *Radničke novine* are given according to this edition.

<sup>18</sup> “Ako se složite sa mnom, potrebno bi bilo povesti najoštriju kampanju protiv vlade koja ne brani granicu, kao što svet laže, već ulazi u treći rat.” Tucović, *Sabrana dela*, 134.

<sup>19</sup> See: Tucović, *Sabrana dela*, 84–86, 171–211.

<sup>20</sup> “Da mi je lakše da budem streljan na Ovčem polju nego biti učesnik u jednom takvom ratu.” Tucović, *Sabrana dela*, 106.

ulation, pushed by the Serbian army advancing from the North, ended up in Skoplje seeking refuge, but most of them found death instead.<sup>21</sup>

## The Ljuma (Lumë) Massacre

In early November of 1913, Tucović published an article in *Radničke novine* exposing the crimes committed by the Serbian troops in Ljuma (alb. Lumë) in Albania. He described this massacre as a “terrible barbarism” (“strahovito divljaštvo”), and claimed that the official statement describing the army’s actions as self-defence was a lie:

When Serbian troops destroyed that village, there were no men in it. Reserve officers who got the order to burn down the village and slaughter everyone they find in it, protested in vain by saying “But, everyone?” and repeatedly reporting to their superior that there is no one but women and children in the village.

In two hours, the village has been annihilated with scenes that are hard to describe. Platoons toppled women with baby in their arms; children that were accidentally spared of the bullets were screaming and lying next to the bodies of their murdered mothers: slender bodies of beautiful highland females were rotting like worms on the ground; terrified women went into labor. In two hours, 500 souls were extirpated.

The onslaught ended when one of the officers made an energetic protest, admitting that when the “wild” Albanians capture our soldiers, they disarm them and let them go, while our “cultivated” XX century army kills their children! But, it was too late. What has been done afterwards was to be expected: the corpses were assembled in the houses, and the houses set to flame, in order to disguise the traces of this crime.

This is the truth about this terrible barbarism, of which the government and the National Assembly should now speak about.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> “Ja ne mogu da zaboravim utisak koji je na mene činilo crvenilo neba od prvog paljenja sela. Prvih nedelja rata sa Turcima mi noći nismo imali, jer smo se kretali, logorovali i tukli prema svetlosti arnautskih sela koja su gorela. Vatre zapaljenih sela bile su jedini signal kojim su pojedine kolone srpske vojske javljale jedna drugoj dokle su stigle... Ovu varvarsku politiku srpske vlade i Vrhovne komande platio je srpski narod životima mnogih svojih vojnika. Sa padom Kumanova slegao se u Skoplje ceo onaj svet arnautskoga stanovništva koje je srpska vojska, nadirujući sa severa, gurala pred sobom i koje je tu, tražeći utočišta, velikim delom našlo—smrt.” Tucović, *Sabrana del*, 162.

<sup>22</sup> “Kada su srpske trupe to selo uništile, u njemu ljudi nije bilo. Rezervni oficiri koji su dobili naređenje da selo zapale i sve što u njemu zateču stave pod nož, uzaman su se opirali, uzaman su ponavljali reči “zar sve?”, uzaman su po nekoliko puta izveštavali komandata da u

In his later writings, Tucović continued this harsh critique of the government's policy, emphasizing its devastating consequences and the misery it brought to both Serbian soldiers and the Albanian population. Consistent with his democratic and ethical principles, Tucović complements these scenes with gloomy descriptions of the brutal Serbian rule in Kosovo, Peć, Đakovica, and Prizren, and exposes the crimes of the Montenegrin army as the most brutal in the entire war.<sup>23</sup> Overall, Tucović was a consistent socialist, who describes this war as driven by Serbian imperialism, which somehow aspires to match the imperialism practiced by Austria and other Great Powers, which he equally criticizes. He saw the profiteers from this war as capitalists and corrupt bureaucrats, and the territorial expansion as being achieved by the sacrifice of thousands and thousands of Serbian peasants. "War bears its class character not only by the reasons that cause it, but also by its internal logic and action," he writes in his Albanian letters.<sup>24</sup>

In addition, Tucović recognized the sufferings and legitimate interests of the Albanian people, half of whose population remained in the expanded Serbian state after the Balkan wars rather than the newly formed Albanian state. This Marxist analysis permeates his work and even figures as the explanation for the aforementioned conflicts between the Albanians and Serbs at the mountainous tops of the new frontier: "The main cause of all the hardships that we suffer today and that we will suffer in the future lies in the fact that we came to a *foreign* land."<sup>25</sup> In contrast to a faceless bureaucratic tone of government reports claiming it necessary to secure the border, Tucović acknowledges that Đakovica and the surrounding areas were entirely populated by Albanians, and provides a lively picture of the basic existential and economic necessity of the Albanian highlanders to disregard the newly established

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selu nema nikoga više osim žena i dece... Za dva sata selo je bilo potamanjeno uz scene koje je teško reći. Plotuni su poobarali žene koje su držale odojčad u naručju; pokraj mrtvih matera drala su se njihova dečica koja su slučajno bila pošteđena kuršuma: tela, kao jela vitka, lepih gorštakinja rila su se kao crvi na ledini; žene su se poradale od straha. Za dva sata potamanjeno je na 500 duša. Klanje je obustavljeno kada je jedan deo oficira uložio energičan protest, priznajući: da "divlji" Arnauti naše zarobljene vojnike razoružaju pa puste, a naša "kulturna" vojska XX veka ubija njihovu decu! ali, dockan. Učinjeno je samo ono što se još moglo učiniti: Leševi su potrpani u kuće a kuće zapaljene—da bi se ovom zločinu prikrio trag. To je istina o ovom strahovitom divljaštvu, o kome sada imaju reč vlada i Narodna skupština." Tucović, *Sabrana dela*, 159.

<sup>23</sup> See: "Crnogorski bes" ("The Montenegrin Rage"), in Tucović, *Sabrana dela*, 194–97.

<sup>24</sup> "Rat nosi klasni karakter ne samo po uzrocima koji ga izazivaju već i po svojoj unutrašnjoj logici i radnji." Tucović, *Sabrana dela*, 201.

<sup>25</sup> "Osnovni uzrok svih nezgoda od kojih danas patimo i od kojih ćemo ubuduće mnogo patiti leži u tome što smo ušli u tuđu zemlju." Tucović, *Sabrana dela*, 203.

border in order to preserve vital access to the markets of Peć, Prizren, and Đakovica. What is more, Tucović believes that the change of policy towards them and the recognition of their legitimate elementary rights and interests would, in fact, secure peace in this region: "Our border with the Albanians should not be protected by our regiments on the mountains, but by better and culturally advanced policy towards the Albanians."<sup>26</sup>

### **"We Are to Albanians What the Turks Were to Us": Four Months in Central Albania**

Several years younger than Tucović, Kosta Novaković looked up to him and by and large shared his views on Serbian politics and nationalism. At the age of 26, he took part in the Albanian campaign of 1912 and 1913 as a junior army officer. His war diary, *Četiri meseca u srednjoj Albaniji (Four Months in Central Albania)*, published in the leftist newspaper *Borba*, provides a valuable first-hand account of an utter disregard for the lives of the poorly equipped and exhausted Serbian soldiers, civilian casualties, pillaging, and corruption that accompanied this war.<sup>27</sup>

It is perhaps instructive to compare Novaković's memoirs with their mainstream counterparts, written in a celebratory mood by distinguished army officers and dignitaries. As a typical example of these writings, it suffices to mention the memoirs of Dragoljub Dinić, who was the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Albanian Regiment during the Balkan Wars. As in the case of the abovementioned examples of press reporting, Dinić also evokes these glorious days of Serbian military history: "After avenging Kosovo and entering the Imperial Prizren... both officers and soldiers were under the fresh impressions of these glorious victories... They were all enthusiastic and proud... and our glorious falcons, led by Providence and Karageorge's Star, have just folded their wings around Prizren when a messenger came with the news: 'Let's to the sea, to Adria!'"<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> "Granicu prema Arbanasima ne treba da čuvaju naši pukovi na Paštriku, Šenjitu i drugim planinama, nego bolja i kulturnija politika prema Arbanasima." Tucović, *Sabrana dela*, 145.

<sup>27</sup> Kosta Novaković, "Četiri meseca u srednjoj Albaniji," *Borba: polumesečni časopis socijalne demokratije* (1914): 1–7.

<sup>28</sup> "Posle osvećenog Kosova, a po ulasku u carski Prizren... i oficiri i vojnici behu pod najsvežijim utiscima slavni pobjeda... Svi behu oduševljeni i behu ponosni... I naši dični sokoli vođeni Providenjem i Karađorđevom Zvezdom, tek behu spustili krila oko Prizrena, kad dođe glasnik s većću: 'Hajd na more, na Adriju!'" Dragoljub M. Dinić, "Prvi put kroz Albaniju: Sa Šumadijskim Albanskim Odredom, 1912., Prizren-Drač," quoted in *Srbija i*

Novaković's descriptions of this campaign differ prominently from the glorifying and patriotic descriptions of the official press and politicians. At variance with Dinić's memoirs, his recollections provide a gloomy picture of terrible conditions, poor morale, of officers and soldiers using gambling or bribery to avoid going "to the sea":

On October 25, 1912, just before St Demetrious' Day, the entire Šumadija division gathered in Prizren... Men were walking barefooted on the mounting snow and were lying wet as they were in a half-ruined Turkish barracks, pressing against each other in order to warm up a bit... Exhausted from dysentery, which didn't spare a single soldier out of two and a half thousand of them in total, pale as ghosts we departed to conquer Albania and to water our horses on the Shiny Sea... I cannot forgive our Chief of Staff and our government for this adventure of theirs that cost us so many lives; I cannot forgive the medics for sending this mass of sick, exhausted people with rheumatism, tuberculosis, to leave their bones in Albania.<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, the eventual arrival at the Adriatic coast turned out to be anything but the utopia of the century-long national dream of the Serbian sea. The Albanian coastal town of Lješ (alb. Lezhë), instead of being the peak of Serbian glory and its egress to the Adriatic Sea and the Mediterranean, became a Serbian graveyard that swallowed up over 1000 men, Novaković claims: "For long, there were no medicines, cloths, beds, buildings, service staff, and only a few doctors; both typhus and cholera exhausted men from Užice, Šabac, and Valjevo. And so in just six months this small town had more inhabitants underground than above the ground."<sup>30</sup>

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*Albanci*, pregled politike Srbije prema Albancima od 1878 do 1914. godine, Časopis za kritiko znanosti, Ljubljana, April 1989: No. 126 (izredna številka), volume I, 135.

<sup>29</sup> "Pred Mitrovdan, 25. oktobra 1912., bila je sakupljena cela Šumadijska Divizija u Prizrenu... Ljudi bez obuće gazili su po odjugovelom snegu i onako mokri legali u staru, polurazrušenu tursku kasarnu, pribijali se jedan uz drugog da se malo zagreju... Iscrpljeni od srdobolje... koja nije pošteđela ni jednog vojnika od dve i po hiljade, bleđi kao aveti krenuli smo se da osvajamo Albaniju i da napojimo konje na Sinjem Moru... Ne mogu oprostiti Vrhovnoj Komandi i našoj vladi za tu njinu avanturu koja nas stade toliko života; ne mogu oprostiti lekarima koji masu bolesnih: reumatičnih, tuberkuloznih, iznemoglih uputiše da ostave svoje kosti u Albaniji." Novaković, *Četiri meseca*, 26–27.

<sup>30</sup> "Dugo vremena nije imalo nikakvih lekova, rublja, kreveta, zgrada, posluge, a malo lekara; i tifus i kolera kosili su iznurene Užičane, Šapčane i Valjevce. I tako ta mala varoš dobila je samo za pola godine onoliko stanovnika pod zemljom koliko ih ima nad zemljom." Novaković, *Četiri meseca*, 113.

Novaković also bitterly criticizes the army's rule in Albania after the campaign for its corruption and cruelty, which relied on death sentences and the gallows as the first and vital element of their governance of the Albanians. No one considered how such behaviour towards the population would affect their views of the army, and thereby the Serbian people in general, Novaković argues.<sup>31</sup> The result of the entire campaign was, not surprisingly, general enmity towards the Serbian army and people in general. Thus, Novaković bitterly concludes his diaries from the Albanian campaign with an impression that the Serbian army created "a general hard-headed resistance and hostility towards Serbia," and draws a parallel between the Turks and the Serbs: "We are to the Albanians what the Turks were to us."<sup>32</sup> In the same spirit as Tucović, Novaković asks why the Serbian government did not assist the Albanians in creating their own state and promoting friendship among the two nations, instead of making enemies of them. He calls for shift in official policy and opts for reconciliatory measures.

## Two Months in the Yugoslav Siberia

Today Dragiša Vasić is best known as an ideologue of the Chetnik movement who was summarily executed by the Yugoslav communists in 1945, therefore, his inclusion here with the Serbian leftist writers might seem odd. However, we should remind ourselves that in the second decade of the 20th century Vasić wrote for the newspapers, *Progress* and *Republika*, and that his views at the time were highly critical of the current regime and thereby often coincided with the view promoted by the social-democrats. Marko Ristić, then Belgrade's intellectual guru, conveniently described *Republika* at the time of Vasić's co-editorship as "ideologically confused, but socially progressive and politically aggressive."<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to Tucović, whose writings were all about class struggle and international (primarily Austrian and Serbian) imperialism, Dragiša Vasić's memoirs, first published serially in *Republika* magazine in 1920 and then as

<sup>31</sup> Novaković, *Četiri meseca*, 197 et passim.

<sup>32</sup> "Jednodušan otpor i neprijateljstvo prema Srbiji... Mi smo ono Arnautima, što su nama bili Turci." Novaković, *Četiri meseca*, 236–37.

<sup>33</sup> "Socijalno progresivan i politički zaista borben (iako naravno ideološki zbrkan.)" See: Nikola Milovanović, *Dragiša Vasić: od građanskog buntovnika do kontrarevolucionara* (Belgrade: Nova knjiga, 1986), 181.

a book the following year, are less engaged with international affairs.<sup>34</sup> In his writings, Vasić primarily exposes the over-pervasive corruption, which was widespread in the country in general, but even more visible at the front. In his view, he himself was sent to the border to settle a mutiny as a punishment for his critical writing against the minister of the army, and many of his correspondents had also been sent to the border as a retaliatory measure; a number of other episodes describe the corruption in the army, including that of his conversation with a Turkish merchant from Prizren, who openly states that “your authorities have been corrupted, much more than any other that were here,”<sup>35</sup> etc.

Vasić does not purport to offer a comprehensive account of the Albanian issue in general and Tucović is certainly more effective in providing a bigger picture and questioning the wider political, ideological framework of the Albanian question and Serbian-Albanian relations. Nevertheless, Vasić is quite effective in describing the chaos, enormous difficulties and sufferings of ordinary soldiers exposed to almost unbelievable hardships in the Albanian mountains, which he describes somewhat hyperbolically as the demonic Yugoslav Siberia where the regime sends its opponents:

The Bicane village, the center of almost every Albanian plot on our territory... is situated in the footsteps of the horrible Galič, and the unspeakable wildness of his surroundings simply terrifies a stranger, born in the plains and unaccustomed to mountainous regions. Titanic and dark rifts and cracks in the branches of this colossal mountain, as if caused by an earthquake, huge cut off mountains, endless ravines in which some invisible force roars and rebels, force that has been overcome with endless hardships and now threatens to get out of hands—all that inferno, all that, alongside with eagles as the masters of this wilderness, chills the blood in the veins of a mild man, who revolts against the cruelty of everything here and is inclined to find meaning in a blissful mildness of a character and harmony.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Dragiša Vasić, *Dva meseca u jugoslovenskom Sibiru* [Two months in the Yugoslav Siberia] (1921; Belgrade: Skver, 2005). See also Vasić's comprehensive biography: Milovanović, *Dragiša Vasić*, 180 et passim.

<sup>35</sup> “Vaše su vlasti pokvarene i to mnogo više nego ma koje druge koje su ovde bile.” Vasić, *Dva meseca*, 68.

<sup>36</sup> “Selo Bicane, centar skoro svih arnautskih zavera na našoj teritoriji... se nalazi u podnožju strašnoga Galiča, a neiskazana divljina njegove okoline prosto užasava stranca nenaviknutog na brdse predele, čoveka rođenog u ravnici. Gorostasni i mračni useci i pukotine u ograncima ovog planinskog kolosa, kao zemljotresom prepuknute, presečene ogromne planine, bezdan-

Wild nature goes hand in hand with wild human nature and actions that he experiences. Thus, Vasić readily admits the brutality of the Serbian forces, but also describes the Albanian locals with a mix of admiration and hostility as treacherous and wild like mountain goats:

The villages that we went through were deserted, as our troops first destroyed them with the artillery and then burned them down few days ago, with just few chimneys smoking and thus indicating the presence of live people inside them. And this entire road is mighty hazardous, for some rebel can aim at you from any of the mountain heights over the cliffs that you are moving beneath, a rebel that is waiting to return to his scorched household to see if the valuables he has buried are still there, or simply to see it or to kill out of vengeance the one whose house remained intact.<sup>37</sup>

Still, arguably the most convincing parts of his memoirs are his reminiscences and comparisons between the early days of the Balkan wars and his present perils. Namely, even though his memoir *Stricto sensu* describes his stay in Prizren and the Albanian mountains in 1920, this stay was just the last one of several in the area that he experienced from 1912 onwards. In these reminiscences, Vasić's writings reveal a disillusioned and bitter narrator who mourns the tragedy of soldiers who perished and continue to perish in this wilderness, without an apparent cause: "An entire world in which I lived until very recently, and which was so beautiful, had died out. Only eight years ago, I entered this town, young, inspired, full of faith, with my regiment that is today reduced to a bloody flag and a few of us who suffer terribly that we are not what those who are gone were."<sup>38</sup>

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ske uvale u kojima kao da večito huji i ljuti se neka nevidljiva snaga koja je dole s najvećom mukom savladana pa preti da se otme—sav taj pakao, sve to, sa orlovima vladarima ove divljine, ledi krv u žilama pitomog čoveka, koji se revoltira protivu surovosti svega i koji bi hteo smisao života u divnoj blagosti naravi i harmoniji." Vasić, *Dva meseca*, 32.

<sup>37</sup> "Sela kroz koja smo prolazili bila su pusta, jer su pre neki dan bila popaljena od naših trupa, pošto su najpre srušena artiljerijom, i samo se poneke kuće pušile, po čemu se videlo da u njima još ima živih duša. A ceo ovaj put rizičan je dozlaboga, jer vas sa visokih čuka nad klisurama kojima se krećete uvek može uzeti na nišan kakav kačak, što neprestano vrebda da se vrati na dvoje izgorelo ognjište da bi se uverio da li je na mestu ono što je zakopao, ili samo da ga vidi ili se osveti onome što mu je kuća ostala čitava." Vasić, *Dva meseca*, 35.

<sup>38</sup> "Ceo jedan svet u kome sam živeo tako skoro i koji je bio tako lep, izumro je. Samo pre osam godina, mlad, oduševljen, pun vere, ušao sam prvi put u ovu varoš sa pukom, od koga je danas ostala zaostala samo krvava zastava i nekoliko nas da grozno patimo što nismo bili ono što su oni kojih nema." Vasić, *Dva meseca*, 21.



Consequently, in the concluding pages, the narrator cannot resist describing this entire Albanian campaign as bringing anything but suffering, corruption and disgrace:

And while I ponder, lying in my camp bed under my tent, about this miserable Albania, that has always been and will be for long our graveyard and our disgrace, that Albania, in which I faced death all around me for three times now, and whose tribes we are dividing in order to conquer, our cold Siberia, which is at the same time the promised land for corrupted clerks, who return from it filthy rich and in which every Spring our beautiful soldiers and officers die, our young martyrs, unaware guardians of thieves and deceived protectors of criminals.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

By focusing on the Albanian campaign of 1912 and 1913 and the region of Prizren and the Albanian border, this article has presented two opposing types of discourse employed in Serbia during the Balkan wars: the mainstream one with its celebratory mood, and the critical one that stigmatized this war as imperial and described the sufferings it brought. In addition, I have argued that this period also saw the establishment of strong Serbian-Albanian hostility, but that this enmity was never uniform and firm. Already during the Balkan Wars, and throughout the mid-war period, a number of Serbian leftist intellectuals criticized the official policy towards the Albanians as imperial, and advocated for a Balkan confederation based on full equality and solidarity. I have also provided, in some detail, an analysis of the war reports, memoirs, and diaries of three distinguished intellectuals of the time: Dimitrije Tucović, Kosta Novaković and Dragiša Vasić. Their descriptions of the 1912 and 1913 Albanian campaign and its aftermath were distinctly different from the picture promoted by the mainstream media. In contrast to the glorious revenge of Kosovo and the restoration of Serbian glory depicted by influential public figures and newspapers, these three authors described destruction, pillaging, violence, crimes, and death as the results of this campaign. Moreover, contrary to *Politika* and other mainstream media outlets, they stigmatized this war campaign as an imperialist enterprise of the Serbian bourgeoisie

<sup>39</sup> “I ispružen na poljskom krevetu pod šatorom razmišljam o toj nesretnoj Arbaniji, koja je uvek bila i koja će još zadugo ostati naša grobnica i naša sramota, ta Arbanija, u kojoj sam tri puta gledao strašna umiranja i čija plemena zavađamo da bismo vladali, naš hladni Sibir, koji znači obetovanoj zemlji za korumpirane činovnike, što se otud vraćaju prebogati i u kome svakog proleća ginu naši divni vojnici i oficiri, naši mladi mučenici, nesvesni zaštitinici pljačkaša i obmanuti branioci zločinaca.” Vasić, *Dva meseca*, 87.

and advocated for a different political project of a Balkan federation based on equality of all Balkan nations. While the feasibility of such a project in the context of the situation in the Balkans at the time and the mood of the European powers can easily be termed dubious, it is more important to point to the blending of salient pacifism and humanism on one side, and that of patriotism and national solidarity on the other, displayed by these three authors. In the accounts published in *Politika*, the Balkan war theater was presented as a stage in which medieval grievances were to be settled and where Serbian soldiers were the knights fighting for the glory of medieval Kosovo. Conversely, these three intellectuals in their reporting offered a disturbing picture of wars and conflicts in which pillaging, civilian casualties, summary executions, and injustices of every sort were a common occurrence. Yet, in addition to their anti-war and pro-Balkan position, it is also the literary merit of their diaries and memoirs of the Albanian campaign that deserve acknowledgement.

In conclusion, three prophetic quotes seem to me a convenient closure to this story. The first one, written by Dimitrije Tucović in 1914 but equally current today, is a disturbing reminder of an entire century being wasted on Serbian-Albanian conflicts and hostility: "It has become very risky nowadays to preach the necessity of joint work with the Albanians. In the fatal game to justify a wrong policy, the bourgeois press created the entire tower of tendentious and false opinions, and Serbian imperial politics with its barbarian methods must have filled the Albanians with a profound hatred towards us."<sup>40</sup>

The second one is a gloomy description of Prizren from the last pages of Dragiša Vasić's memoirs. In contrast to the depiction of Prizren as Emperor Dušan's seat, the glorious medieval seat and the shiny throne of the Nemanjićs, the last pages of his book reveal the tragedy of the common soldiers and the cost in human lives incurred in this town, thereby deliberately depriving it of its medieval aura:

Our last days were too gloomy, for our entire service was reduced to delegating soldiers for funerals of their comrades who had died in the hospital. And dying was almost a daily occurrence; so often a trumpet played the sounds of a funeral march both in the morning and afternoon, and new crosses filled the army cemetery. Sometimes we didn't even know the names of the dead soldiers, and we buried them with the simple inscription "Serbian soldier" on the cross. They were those poor, already half-dead fellows coming to Prizren from their regiments, who would spend the night at inns or in the courtyards, for they knew not

<sup>40</sup> Dimitrije Tucović, *Srbija i Arbanija: jedan prilog kritici zavojevačke politike srpske buržoazij* (Belgrade: Nova štamparija Save Radenkovića i brata), 116.

where to go, until the illness overpowered them and they passed out; then they would be taken to the town's hospital, where their names would sometimes be identified out of the papers found in their pockets; in case they had none, they were buried as unknown.<sup>41</sup>

The final quotation is taken from Kosta Novaković. In 1917, on the island of Korfu. Thus after surviving the battles of 1914 and the 1915 Albanian goli-gotha, Novaković wrote about his comrade Tucović, who perished in the battles in 1914, the following: "One poor understanding of patriotism puts the fatherland above all: above right and wrong, above morality, above honesty and which even approves crimes to the members of that fatherland. Tucović was not that kind of a patriot."<sup>42</sup> It is in the name of such patriotism that places the value of ordinary human lives above territorial gains that the pages of these three intellectuals, and of this article, have been written.

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<sup>41</sup> "Poslednji nam dani behu vrlo sumorni, jer se sva naša služba sastojala u određivanju vojnika za sprovod njihovih drugova što su umirali u bolnici. A umiralo se skoro svakoga dana, pa često odjekivahu Prizrenom trubni zvuci žalosnog marša i pre i posle podne i sve nove i nove kstače nicahu na vojničkom groblju. Ponekad ne znadasm o ni imena umrlih vojnika i sahranjivasmo ih sa prostim natpisom na krstači 'srpski vojnik'. To behu oni među jadnicima što iz raznih jedinica dolažanu polumrtvi s položaja u Prizren, noćivahu po hanovima, jer ne znadahu gde će, ili pod strejama, sve dok ih bolest ne obori toliko da se onesveste; kad ih odvođe u građansku bolnicu gde umiru i gde, iz artija što se kod njih nađu, ponekad saznanju njihova imena, ili ih, ako ovog nemaju, sahranjuju kao nepoznate." Vasić, *Dva meseca u jugoslovenskom Sibiru*, 92.

<sup>42</sup> "Ima jedno rđavo shvatanje patriotizma koje stavlja otadžbinu iznad svega: iznad prava i krivice, iznad morala, iznad poštenja i koje odobrava i zločine predstavnicima te otadžbine. Takav patriota Tucović nije bio." See: Andrija Stojković, "Kosta Novaković o Dimitriju Tucoviću" (Čačak: n. p., 1973), 94–95.