KOSOVO/A CRISIS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the Kosova crisis of 1999 through the lenses of the main analytical perspectives of International Relations as well as of the alternative approaches. This paper aims to evaluate the dimensions of the Kosova crisis, the importance it gained in international relations, and especially questioning its popular depiction as the first war fought on values and principles.

Kosova issue raised crucial questions in academia, research institutions and international community due to its standing at the intersection of hotly debated issues like ethnic violence, identity politics, human rights, sovereignty and international law to name but a few. Some of the research questions which guide this study are as follows: Was the Kosova crisis and the war that followed primary a result of the primordial ethnic hatreds between two main ethnic groups Albanians and Serbs or is such antagonism socially constructed? Were it and the NATO intervention a result of systemic sources like international anarchy, or conducted for humanitarian reasons, or a result of United States hegemony? Or was it as Vaclav Havel proclaimed the first war not been waged in the name of "national interest" but rather in the name of principles and values?

Different theories have different things to say about the Kosova crisis emphasizing different aspects of this complex issue and revealing its multidimensional nature that cannot fully grasped by any single theory. It is argued that Kosova crisis was far from being an isolated matter between two ethnic groups, let alone being just a war fought for values and principles.

Keywords: *Kosova crisis, International Relations Theories, Realism/neorealism, Liberalism/neoliberalism, Alternative Approaches*

Introduction

There is no doubt now that Kosova crisis of 1999 which led to NATO's contested intervention in Kosova represents a watershed in international politics. This is because Kosova issue stands at the intersection of hotly debated issues like ethnic violence, identity politics, human rights, sovereignty and so on. Yet, due to the leading coalition's claims and media representation, has become common sense to

regard Kosovo war as the first war waged not in the name of "national interest" but in the name of "principles and values" as Vaclav Havel famously put it. This "common sense" is especially widespread among the Albanians. Yet, as this paper aims to demonstrate this is a very superficial account of Kosova war, obscuring at its best the causes underlying this conflict and its development. Thus, in order to reveal the causes underlying Kosovo crisis, the factors that shaped its development and understanding the importance it gained in international relations we need to go beyond this common sense.

Kosova crisis represents a fertile ground for International Relations Theories (IRT). Emerging as an academic discipline because of a crisis in relations between European states in the aftermath of the First World War (Halliday, 1996: 318), IR sought to understand the major causes of war in order to prevent it from recurring. Thus, dealing with questions of war and peace become the *raison d'etré* of the new discipline. The Second World War put an end to the liberals' (or idealists) expectations which found the causes of war on the misperception among political leaders and undemocratic practices of authoritarian governments, giving birth to the dominance of Realism in IR. Thus, during the Cold War the focus of IR under the dominance of Realism was confined to questions about war, (military) security and balance of power called also as "high politics", leaving at the margins of the discipline questions about uneven development, structural violence, nationalism etc., which dominated the Third World. Nevertheless, alongside with the developments in international politics after the so called "third debate" in 1980's the focus of the discipline was radically broadened and deepened to include as well alternative approaches which interrogated the traditional assumptions surrounding IR, shifting the focus to questions of knowledge-power relationship, identity, emancipation, gender and so on. Alternative approaches illuminated issues about vertical dimensions (hierarchy under anarchy) of international relations and other knowledge-power relations once neglected by the mainstream IR that focused exclusively on the practices of soldiers and diplomats.

In this study both the mainstream approaches like Realism/neo-realism and Liberalism/neo-liberalism as well as alternative approaches like Critical Theory, post-structuralism, constructivism and feminism, are utilized to view the different aspects of Kosovo crisis. Some of the main research questions which will be scrutinized through the lenses of different IRT are as follows: Was the Kosova war underlined by human values rather than national interest?; Was the Kosova crisis and the war that followed primary a result of the primordial ethnic hatreds between two main ethnic groups Albanians and Serbs, or is such antagonism socially constructed? Were Kosova war and the NATO intervention a result of systemic sources like international anarchy, or conducted for humanitarian reasons, or a result of United States (US) hegemony?

Because the main purpose of this paper is not dealing with IRT *per se* but utilizing them to better understand the complex aspects of Kosovo crisis, we will only briefly mention when necessary the main tenets and assumptions of IRT and focusing on

what they have to say about Kosova crisis. It is impossible to do justice to all the theoretical approaches in IR in this paper, since all of them are also divided among proponents. Similarly it is beyond the scope of this paper to address in a detailed way and chronologically the historical roots of the Kosova question. This is already done elsewhere. Among the vast literature dealing with Kosova question we can mention (Malcolm, 1999; Mertus, 1999; IICK, 2000; Judah, 2008) and (Booth, 2001) for the human rights dimension of the Kosova crisis.

Mainstream Approaches and Kosova Crisis

a) *The timeless wisdom of Realism/neo-realism and systemic sources of Kosova Crisis*

According to neo-realism what really matters in international politics is not international law, institutions and norms but the distribution of power in the system among the great powers which defines also the structure of international system. Thus the first thing we have to do in analyzing any issue from realist and neo-realist lenses is to begin by viewing the structure of international system at a given time, because it this structure which defines the behavior of states. The unipolarity of US that emerged after the end of the Cold War is central to understand the development of the Kosovo crisis. Neo-realists like Mearsheimer expected conflict to break out in Europe after the end of bipolarity which he saw as the main cause of peace and stability in Europe (Mearsheimer, 1990: 14). While Mearsheimer's assumption was proven false in Western Europe it flourished in the Balkans.

Neo-realism focuses on systemic sources of Kosova war. Yugoslavia itself was a creation of great power politics in nineteenth century and so it was its dissolution at the beginning of unipolar era. International anarchy (the absence of a central authority) neo-realists argue is not only the cause of international war but also of the civil war as well, because when state authority is weakened domestic politics resemble the international ones (Adams, 2006: 18), giving birth to a "security dilemma" between ethnic groups. Without a great power ally to protect Yugoslavia's interests it gradually slipped into a civil war. Furthermore, the end of the Cold War put an end also to the ideological and financial support of "Communist" governments. On the other hand, Serbs possessing the monopoly of military force naturally tried to turn the balance on their side forcing Kosovar Albanians to obey new rules created for the centralization of power at the hands of Beograd and rescue what remained of ex-Yugoslavia (Serbia plus Montenegro). The massive refugee crisis that resulted from the forced expulsion of Kosovar Albanians especially toward neighbor countries like Macedonia whose ethnic composition was very fragile, jeopardized the stability of the entire region, and this was in contrast to US interests for stability while it was consolidating its role as the sole hegemon. Even though being legitimate NATO's intervention was considered illegal from the point of existing international law because it acted without the authorization of Security Council (IICK, 2000: 4). Furthermore, the prohibition of the use of force by the UN Charter excludes any conception of humanitarian intervention. Yet this

did not prevent it from occurring because what is decisive in international relations, where force is the final arbiter, is the relative power and interests of great powers. The Kosovo intervention demonstrated the global hegemony of US.

b) Liberalism/neo-liberalism and institutions

British Prime Minister Tony Blair famously declared the Kosova conflict to be a war "fought not for territory but for values". This moral rhetoric is well suited to a liberal view of international relations which generally presupposes that cooperation under anarchy although difficult is possible and relations among states can develop progressively once common values and institutions are built. It is not necessary to say that these common values have at their heart liberal ideas concerning individual autonomy, commerce, market capitalism and universal rationality. Liberal democratic states, the argument goes on, would be more peaceful in relations with one another, but it doesn't mean that these liberal democratic states would be less war prone in relations with authoritarian and undemocratic states.

Moreover this argument may serve also as a kind of justification for intervening on behalf of human rights and other fundamental liberal ideas. Furthermore, the "end of history" thesis provides the democratic peace theory with the necessary ideological justification for intervening on behalf of liberal values as the ultimate destination which all states will reach. Thus while liberalism can explain peaceful relations between states it also can explain why liberal states can be war-like in certain cases.

US as the paragon of the liberal states, lead the NATO intervention against Serbia, a non-liberal state with a record of gross human rights violations since the Bosnian conflict. In the case of Kosova, "liberal peace" arguments become a justification for humanitarian intervention. US acted according to liberalism's expectations when choosing to rely on a multilateral intervention through NATO escaping the perils of unilateralism.

The method chosen by NATO to bring Milosevic to terms, namely the air strikes, was chosen as the most appropriate method for a liberal public that while on the one hand wanted the ending of human rights violations and atrocities committed by the Serbian government, on the other hand was not ready to accept risks to soldier's lives. Moreover NATO's intervention is in itself a development which demonstrates the importance of institutions, because NATO had changed its Cold War mission from collective defense to a new mission of spreading Western values. Thus NATO become a tool of consolidating Western-liberal principles and norms in Central and Eastern Europe, where NATO's new strategic concept and credibility of the institution itself was jeopardized by the crisis in Kosova (Kay, 2006: 64).

Alternative Approaches and Kosova Crisis

    a) Critical Theory and the exposure of hypocrisy: whose security?
Critical theorists[1] encompass a large variety of scholars from radical tradition of thought having their roots in Western Marxism and ranging from neo-Gramscian school of International Political Economy with Robert Cox as its leading proponent to Frankfurt School inspired Critical Theorists like Jurgen Habermas, Andrew Linklater etc. At the heart of Critical Theory lays the critique directed to the established (hegemonic) order taken as given by mainstream theories and the search for emancipation instead of order as the real producer of security. Critical Theory aims to evaluate the possibilities for changing the human wrongs that dominate world politics. Critical perspectives also broaden the conception of power to include both international and interpersonal power and what is more important it explores how this power has come about and become naturalized.

With the exception of Habermas who saw the NATO's intervention as a chance to establish stronger international norms, Critical theorists have been critic of NATO's so called "humanitarian" intervention. They opposed intervention not because it aimed to prevent the ongoing human rights violations but because of the exposure of hypocrisy by the leading states. They asked that how can NATO claim it acted on behalf of human rights protection when similar or worse atrocities are happening around the world in front of the eyes of NATO's leading states and NATO or UN is doing nothing to prevent it from occurring. For example a stronger argument existed in Bosnia from 1992 to 1995 for intervening, yet UN and international society failed to act. Critical theorists by asking "whose security?" argue that the military strategy employed by NATO namely the air combat campaign, served primarily the security of NATO's troops while leaving Kosovar Albanians open to intensifying Serbian atrocities. As Wheeler (2000: 284) puts it "by ruling out the ground option, NATO governments demonstrated that their commitment to defending the human rights of Kosovars did not extend to accepting the risks to soldiers' lives of deploying ground forces." It is well known now that a vast refugee crisis begun right after the bombing campaign as a result of massive expulsion of Kosovar Albanians by Serb forces. Additionally, NATO's bombing altitude also resulted in unnecessary civilian casualties among the Serbian as well as Kosovar Albanians. This they argue throws shadow to claims of humanitarian concerns by the leading coalition. Moreover US strongly argued that Kosova was a *sui generis* case not to be repeated, impeding so the emergence of humanitarian intervention as a new norm.

Another variant of critical theory puts emphasis on the politic economy aspect of the crisis. From this point of view Kosovo Crisis is part of a larger crisis related with neoliberal globalization and its effect on Yugoslavia. More accurately it was about the rivalry between US and Europe over the shape of the post-Cold War

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1 It must not be confused with the term "critical" which refers to all the post-positivist approaches like post-structuralism, feminism, post-colonialism of whom Critical Theory is only one of them.

global capitalist order. As Cafruny puts it (2006: 209) "As a result of this campaign the United States realized a set of interlocking objectives, including the incorporation of a recalcitrant semipheripheral region within the neoliberal and Atlanticist international division of labor; the consolidation of US economic and military on the European continent; and the extension of US influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, an arena of increasingly fierce competition among states and multinational corporations over access to oil and gas deposits and transportation routes." In this case Cafruny continues "Kosovo represented a crucial interest for the Unites States because of its potential to destabilize a region that served as a gateway to oil and pipeline routes linking Western Europe to the Black Sea and the Caspian basin." (Cafruny, 2006: 210).

b) Post-structuralism, discourse and the deconstruction of myths

The dissolution of Yugoslavia has attracted the attention of post-structuralist writers like David Cambell who was among the first to deconstruct the myths surrounding Bosnia conflict. For post-structuralists there is not anything such as an objective enemy or threat, let alone being primordial and ahistorical. Post-structuralists share this point also with constructivists and critical theorists as well. Indeed they argue these are constructions that depend on interpretation. For example a certain issue becomes a threat to the "self" only when constructed and interpreted as such and this does not happen automatically. This is why we must focus on discourse which is the ambient where the "regimes of truth" are constructed. According to post-structuralists the "truth"s can exist only within certain regimes/conditions ideologically laden. And it is within these "truth" claims that power is exercised. From this perspective both Serbs and Albanians "truth" claims over Kosova must be considered prudently.

Thus from a post-structuralist perspective the so called primordial enmity that existed among Serbs and Albanians in Kosova is a myth serving at its best the nationalist discourse from both sides. As Buzan and Herring (1998: 186) put it, "Ethnic conflict is a strategic myth in the sense that it is not ethnic groups that are fighting each other, but sections of ethnic groups led by those who claim to speak on behalf of the supposed whole. These ethnic groups are not actually fixed, completely separate groups of people - their separateness is created and moulded through representational practices." Thus for post-structuralists these myths and symbols and the whole discourse that naturalizes them as the "truth" itself must be taken seriously. At this point post-structuralists try to deconstruct these "truths" revealing that they are ideologically laden and serving to justify the enmity between two sides as well as the intervention on behalf of one "truth".

c) Constructivism: identity and interests as socially constructed

Central to constructivism is the study of identity formation and how social interaction produces social identities. In contrast to neo-realists constructivists like Alexander Wendt see the structure of international system as primarily ideational and not just material. Moreover they argue that what gives to material objects their meaning are the ideas we have about them. In the same vein, constructivists argue

that interests so central to states are not something given prior to interaction but socially constructed and a product of them. Thus it is identity which defines the interests, but identity is not static but amenable to change. Even central concepts taken for granted by Realism like anarchy and security dilemma are what we make of them and thus amenable to change. Constructivists like post-structuralist argue against the idea of the primordial enmity between Serbs and Albanians which was popular at the beginning of the dissolution of Yugoslavia also serving as a justification for Conservative British government not to intervene in Bosnia.

In the case of Kosova the security of Yugoslavian state was based on the insecurity of a part of its citizens, Kosovar Albanians. Yet the antagonism between two main ethnic groups Serbs and Albanians in Kosova was far from being primordial and natural as it was commonly referred by the media. While Realists focus on the security dilemma as an objective threat, constructivists see it as constructed via media manipulation and other means. "Serb nationalists created rather than responded to a "natural" security dilemma in relation to Kosovor Albanians." (Baylis/Smith, 2005: Case Study: The 1999 Kosovo Crisis). At this point constructivists stress the failure of Tito's *Yugoslavism* and the triumph of nationalism as precursors to state failure. Unlike the Yugoslav idea, the nationalist ideas on all sides reached a critical mass removing the foundations for the state of Yugoslavia, showing how ideas shape politics (Hoffmann, 2006: 136).

d)   Feminism: nationalism, rape and war
Feminist scholars of IR are not a monolithic group and important differences can be found among liberal, critical/Marxist, post-modern and post-colonial feminists. Feminist theory focuses on the socially constructed role of "gender" in world politics (Smith/Owens, 2005: 280). International Relations traditionally considered as an arena of power and man have constantly marginalized and overlooked the insecurities and several problems surrounding women especially when dealing with security. This is obvious especially in the case of Bosnia and Kosova crisis when several atrocities happened against girls and women. Thus a feminist perspective, by giving importance to personal narratives, tries to bring into our attention what has been traditionally invisible or eclipsed by "high politics": insecurities of women in conflict and after.

Rape has accompanied war throughout its history and has been largely considered as an inescapable by-product of war. Historically rape in war is seen as an "injury to the male estate and not to the women herself", because traditionally women are seen as mere objects of male possession (Kennedy-Pipe/Stanley, 2001: 68). Yet the ideology of nationalism gave mass rape a new dimension. Because nationalism often describes the nation as female, the women's identity became associated with national and cultural survival. Thus, "the rape of women of a certain nation or ethnic group can be a symbolic rape of the body of that community" (Kennedy-Pipe/Stanley, 2001: 69), so mass-rape becomes an important part of ethnic cleansing. Yet it was not until the Bosnian conflict, where around of 20.000 women, most of them Muslim, were subjected to sexual violence that the issue of rape was

taken seriously by the Hague Tribunal and considered as a "war crime" and not just as a "spoil of war". Yet again it was the rape for a political purpose or as a form of ethnic cleansing that was considered as a "war crime" and not any kind of opportunistic rape (Kennedy-Pipe/Stanley, 2001: 73-76).

There were striking similarities of women experiences in Bosnia and what happened in Kosovo after May 1998 when Serbs begun a major military offensive in Western Kosovo where as a start more than 90.000 Kosovar Albanians were displaced to neighbor countries. The rape as a policy of war in the case of Kosovo was justified also by the dehumanization of Kosovar Albanians through the Serbian press. As Mertus puts it, "Slurs against Kosovo Albanians shifted…, a sexualized imagery of Albanian men and women was adopted. In the mainstream Serbian and Yugoslav presses, Albanian men were declared to be rapists… Albanian women were portrayed as mere baby factories… Accused in the past of being culturally inferior, Albanians increasingly were depicted as genetically inferior." (Mertus, 1999: 8). In this case the British government even declared the systematic rape of Kosovar Albanian women by Serb forces as one of the justifications for the military intervention (Kennedy-Pipe/Stanley, 2001: 78-79). Yet it is striking the fact that the rape of Kosovar Albanian women was not confined only with them committed by the Serbian forces. Kosovar Albanian women were also subject to rape by their "own menfolk on their return from the front line. Post-war incidents were reported as well. For example "in the case of Grize refugee camp in Albania was reported that a small of number of women had been forced out of the camps at night to act as prostitutes." (Kennedy-Pipe/Stanley, 2001: 80). Even though the greatest atrocities were committed by Serbian forces there are evidences that rapes were committed on all sides.

Conclusion

By no means was this paper an exhaustive survey of the possible ways IRT might help us think about the Kosova crisis. Nor it was it exhausting regarding the scope of theories chosen to view the subject. Yet applying different perspectives to the same issue helped us revealing many aspects of the Kosova crisis which otherwise would remain hide or overlooked. While mainstream approaches focus on states, international organizations and other non-state actors, alternative approaches focus on individuals, gender, discourse, symbols, identity and hegemony. Thus while mainstream theories look at the practices of soldiers and diplomats for explaining the Kosovo crisis, critical perspectives in the broad definition of the term shift attention to the experiences of the disadvantages (victims, refugees) or whose voice is not heard and to the social construction of identities. Given the diversity of questions and answers raised by different IRT it is obvious that Kosova crisis was far from being a matter resulting from primordial hatreds between two ethnic groups. Nor it was a war fought on pure humanitarian concerns as is commonly referred to. Kosova crisis reflected a myriad of questions concerning the effects of unipolarity, the meaning of sovereignty and relevance of existing international

norms in front of human rights violations, the hypocrisy of great powers, the rivalry on global economy, the role of discourse and ideas in shaping politics etc. At the end, we want to conclude with a citation from Ken Booth arguing that: "…'Kosovo' is not simply a Balkan or even a European matter; it is of global significance. At the start of a century that will see a further shrinking of time and space, and simultaneously the predictable overloading of all human environmental systems, Kosovo tells us critical things about the practice of international politics, and asks us fundamental questions about global issues." (Booth, 2001: Preface)

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