

Contesting Kosovo: British Political Advocacy and the Serb-Albanian Border, 1912-1921

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Submitted in accordance with the requirement for the degree of Master's by Research

University of Leeds, School of History

September, 2025

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that any appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Anne Caldwell and Matthew Frank, for encouraging me down the route of independent research. Their guidance and insight were an invaluable contribution to this project and have shaped me as a historian immeasurably. I also owe thanks to my fellow PGRs, Inès and Jamie, for endless coffee breaks, to my housemates and my family for putting up with me at my most exhausted, and to Dillon, for always listening to my historical tangents with an eager ear, a genuine interest, and a critical perspective. This thesis would not be what it is without their dedicated support.

Abstract

From 1912 to 1921, international conflict and imperial collapse spurred the territorial reconstruction of Southeastern Europe. In Britain, officials and interested observers evaluated Balkan nationalisms and negotiated the delimitation of state boundaries. This dissertation explores discourse surrounding Kosovo, a region which became the focus of opposing Serbian and Albanian irredentism. It does so through the lens of two British political advocacy groups, one which advocated for the inclusion of Kosovo into Albania and one which promoted the Serbian claim. These groups attempted to attract British policymaking support for their espoused nations by publishing literature, organising public meetings, writing to the Foreign Office, and presenting their arguments in the House of Commons. By examining these understudied records, the dissertation makes two central contributions. Firstly, it develops understanding of British-Balkan engagement in the early twentieth century, challenging the assumption in existing historiography that British imaginings of the Balkans were either a product of ‘Balkanist’ prejudice or domestic political insecurities. Secondly, by analysing the degree to which advocacy impacted British diplomacy, it illuminates the extent of British support for the Serbian claim to Kosovo at the start of the twentieth century. Addressing the interplay between political calculation, imperial concerns, and socio-cultural constructions, this dissertation foregrounds the discourses that drive one nation’s acceptance or rejection of another nation’s territorial ambitions.

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List of Abbreviations

AAS — Anglo-Albanian Society

FO — Foreign Office

HC — House of Commons

KDC — Kosovo Day Committee

LSC — University of Leeds Special Collections

MP — Member of Parliament

RAI — Royal Anthropological Institute

SHC — Sommerset Heritage Centre

SRF — Serbian Relief Fund

SSEES — School of Slavonic and East European Studies

SSoGB — Serbian Society of Great Britain

TNA — The National Archives of the United Kingdom

UCL — University College London

UNLA — United Nations Library and Archives

Introduction

In the period of 1912 to 1921, the Balkans underwent a process of drastic territorial reconstruction. New states emerged from the collapse of multinational empires, and existing states seized the opportunity brought by conflict to fulfil nationalist expansionist ambitions. During the Balkan Wars, 1912-1913, the ousting of the Ottoman Empire from its south-east European territories saw the establishment of the first independent Albanian state. By the end of the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had disintegrated, enabling the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929). Responding to this geopolitical upheaval, the Great Powers negotiated imperial decline, evaluated nationalist expansionist claims, and formed committees to delineate the boundaries of this ‘corner of Europe’.¹ Yet, discussions over the territorial configuration of the Balkans were by no means isolated to conference rooms and official commissions.

In Britain, enthused observers from the media, literary circles, academic crowds and MPs inserted themselves into the territorial debates. Many of these observers aligned themselves to a particular nation and formed political advocacy groups to rally the British public and government in favour of that national cause. This phenomenon was particularly prevalent for nationalities connected with the ‘Eastern Question’, with British groups emerging to express support for the Ottoman

¹ Sir Alban Young, British diplomat and minister for Yugoslavia, quoted in 1920 in James Evans, *Great Britain and the Creation of Yugoslavia: Negotiating Balkan Nationality and Identity* (Bloomsbury, 2008), pp. 193-94.

Empire, Russia, the Armenians, and other Ottoman minorities from the late nineteenth century.² By the mid-1910s, the trend had expanded to include a ‘representative’ British advocacy group for most nationalities in Southeastern Europe.³ These individuals saw it as their duty, as informed intellectuals and so-called Balkan ‘experts’, to negotiate the territorial reconstruction of the Balkans between them. Yet, in promoting the overlapping, often mutually exclusive territorial aspirations of neighbouring nations, they often found themselves in opposition. This dissertation focuses on a clash in British political advocacy over one contested region in particular: Kosovo.

It follows the campaigns of two lobby groups — one claimed to represent Albania and advocated for the inclusion of Kosovo into the newly emerging Albanian state; the other campaigned for the establishment of Yugoslavia and promoted the Serbian claim to Kosovo. From the outbreak of the Balkan Wars in 1912, these groups published literature, wrote letters to the press and to the Foreign Office, organised public meetings and pushed their arguments in the House of Commons. The ‘pro-Albanian’ lobby argued that Kosovo was inhabited by an ethnic Albanian majority, and warned that these populations would face violence and repression if placed under Serbian rule. Meanwhile, the ‘pro-Serb’ lobby espoused the idea that Kosovo was Serbia’s historical ‘heartland’, having been part of the medieval Serbian Empire and the site of the 1389 Battle of

² Some examples include the Eastern Question Association (est. 1876), the Anglo-Armenian Association (est. 1890), the Anglo-Russian Society (est. 1892) and the Ottoman Association (est. 1912). For more information, see Michelle Tusan, “‘Crimes against Humanity’: Human Rights, the British Empire, and the Origins of the Response to the Armenian Genocide”, *The American Historical Review*, 119.1 (2014), pp. 47-77 (pp. 54-56), doi:10.1093/ahr/119.1.47; Michelle Tusan, *Smyrna’s Ashes: Humanitarianism, Genocide and the Birth of the Middle East* (University of California Press, 2012), pp. 29-30.

³ London, UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies Archives (SSEES), SEW/5/3/2, Report from the Conference between the Serbian Society of Great Britain, British-Italian League, Anglo-Hellenic Society, Anglo-Roumanian Society, 13 March 1918; The Balkan Committee was associated with Bulgaria and the Anglo-Albanian Society represented Albania.

Kosovo, a central component of Serbian nationalist mythology.⁴ By 1921, all major Kosovar towns had been allocated to Yugoslavia.⁵ As a product of international deliberation, this outcome cannot be attributed to either group. The historical significance of British political advocacy thus lies, not in the extent to which it directly impacted the configuration of the border, but in its contribution to the discourse that surrounded it. Examining their campaigns, and assessing how they were received, this dissertation uses British political advocacy as a window through which to explore Britain's endorsement for Serbian nationalist expansionism between 1912 and 1921. It argues that Britain welcomed Serbian rule in Kosovo because of two interactive considerations: the perception that Kosovo was essential to the Yugoslav state project, and a distaste for Albanian rule that stemmed from anti-Albanian socio-cultural prejudice. In doing so, it illuminates the wider conversations behind one nation's acceptance or rejection of another nation's territorial claims.

Though Kosovo is now an independent state, in the early twentieth century, contestation surrounding the region did not concern the prospect of Kosovar statehood, but rather the opposing Serbian and Albanian expansionist claims. That the question of Kosovar sovereignty was absent from early twentieth-century discourse reflects the fact that Kosovo was not the distinct territorial or national entity known today. Before 1912, the term denoted the Ottoman *vilayet* of Kosovo, an administrative province that extended into Novi Pazar, and parts of modern-day Albania and North Macedonia. After the Ottoman withdrawal, the use of the term evolved. In British political discourse, 'Kosovo' was sometimes used to denote *Kosovo Polje* —

⁴ For a summary of the 'Kosovo myth' in Serbian nationalism from the nineteenth century, see Matvey Lomonosov, "'Ethnic memories' from Above? The Kosovo Myth among the South Slavs and Minimalist Ethnosymbolism', *Nations and Nationalism*, 27.4 (2021), pp. 1111-26, doi:10.1111/nana.12748.

⁵ London, The National Archives of the UK (TNA), FO 93/117/1, Decision of the Conference of Ambassadors at Paris Regarding Albania, Paris, 9 November 1921.

the plain on which the Battle of Kosovo was fought. Other times, British observers avoided the term, instead referring to specific towns, valleys and mountains in that region. Terminology further reflected preference, with those supporting the Albanian claim often using 'Northern Albania', and those supporting the Serbian claim using 'Old Serbia'. The idea that there was a contestation over Kosovo, as a distinct territorial unit, is therefore somewhat misleading; the dispute concerned an ill-defined region which took a different shape depending on the partiality of those describing it. This uncertainty also applied to Albania and Serbia, neither of which possessed stable, universally recognised boundaries during the time-frame concerned. Because of this territorial insecurity, the geographical meaning of these terms was flexible. Indeed, the debate in British political advocacy over Kosovo involved arguments specific to that region, as much as more abstract interpretations of Albanian statehood and South Slavic unification. The modern-day boundaries of the Republic of Kosovo are in themselves a product of negotiation surrounding Serbian, Yugoslav and Albanian nationalism in the early twentieth century.

The distinction between British 'pro-Serb' and 'pro-Albanian' advocacy reflects the lobbies' respective positions on this territorial debate. The pro-Albanian lobby revolved around one central organisation: the Albanian Committee, which was established in 1912, and renamed the Anglo-Albanian Society (AAS) in 1918.⁶ The organisation was founded by Conservative MP, Aubrey Herbert, to promote Albanian welfare, independence, and the formation of ethnic Albanian boundaries.⁷ The pro-Albanian lobby is thus ascribed as such because it endorsed the Albanian claim to Kosovo. However, the individual members of the lobby had a variety of

⁶ Norton Fitzwarren, Somerset Heritage Centre Archives (SHC), DD/DRU/31, The Albanian Committee, London, 1912-1913, 18 February 1913; London, Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI), MS 58/03, Minutes of the Anglo-Albanian Society, 28 February 1918.

⁷ Ibid.

reasons for joining, not all of which were due to a particular commitment to Albania. Some joined as a means to criticise the Liberal government, some to safeguard British imperial concerns, and some to promote Muslim interests.⁸ Even Herbert's initial interest in Albania stemmed from his admiration for the Ottoman Empire, which led him to establish the Ottoman Association in 1912, another lobby group that protested against British Liberal foreign policy during the Balkan Wars.⁹ Though in name and in practice, the pro-Albanian lobby supported the Albanian cause, its members also used its infrastructure to voice other political concerns.

Similarly, the pro-Serb lobby was indeed 'pro-Serb' in that the bulk of its members regarded Kosovo as Serbian. The first advocacy organisation of this kind was the Serbian Relief Fund (SRF), a British charitable agency constructed 'for the express purpose of relieving the Servians [sic]' after the outbreak of the First World War.¹⁰ In 1916, several SRF members formed the Serbian Society of Great Britain (SSoGB), a more overtly political group which advocated for the establishment of Yugoslavia.¹¹ Whilst neither organisation was formed to explicitly lobby for the inclusion of Kosovo into Serbia, both groups disseminated propaganda promoting Serbia's right to expand into the historic 'heartland' of Kosovo. The romanticised nature of this mythology represented a means to attract British public engagement with the Yugoslav ideal, a concept that was at times inaccessible and over-intellectualised. In this way, many 'pro-Serb' lobbyists were perhaps more accurately 'pro-Yugoslav'. For example, Robert William Seton-Watson, British

⁸ Bejtullah D. Destani, and Jason Tomes, *Albania's Greatest Friend: Aubrey Herbert and the Making of Modern Albania, Diaries and Papers 1904–1923* (I. B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 65-66.

⁹ Ross Cameron, 'Representing Albania in the Travel Writing and Political Commentary of Edith Durham and Aubrey Herbert during the Albanian Path to Independence', *European History Quarterly*, 54.4 (2024), pp. 400-23 (p. 417), doi:10.1177/02656914241258906.

¹⁰ SSEES, SEW/7/1/1, Bertram Christian to R.W. Seton-Watson, 16 September 1914.

¹¹ SSEES, SEW/5/3/2, Serbian Society of Great Britain Annual Report, 25 July 1917.

academic and founder of the Serbian Society, publicly endorsed Serbia's claim over Kosovo, yet was privately uneasy about the 'Greater Serbia' project, envisaging a federalist Yugoslavia based on the willing and equal participation the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.¹² The terms 'pro-Serb' and 'pro-Albanian' in this sense present an oversimplified picture of the advocacy networks. However, they are useful labels to distinguish between those who advocated for Albania's claim to Kosovo, and those who supported Serbia's.

As well as being 'political advocates', the individuals involved in these lobby groups were MPs, journalists, authors, academics, and aristocratic patrons. Their professional diversity has resulted in a breadth of source material, from books, pamphlets, articles, letters, and House of Commons debates. As well as consulting the above, I make extensive use of the personal collections of Aubrey Herbert (President of the Albanian Committee) and Robert William Seton-Watson (Honorary Secretary of the SRF, the SSoGB, and editor of the *New Europe* journal).¹³ As the leading figures of these lobby groups, their records contain committee minutes, drafted publications, and private correspondence with other advocates. These sources allow for a rich understanding of the lobbies' output, revealing the process through which various contributions and expertise were converged into a coherent and accessible campaign. Work that is credited under the name of either organisation reflects this collaboration. Therefore, the contribution of other important figures is not automatically lost when focusing on the work of leading advocates and the wider campaigns.

¹² SSEES, SEW/4/2/1, The Policy of Mr Pashitch and the Jugoslav Problem, 4 October 1918.

¹³ Herbert's personal papers are located at the Somerset Heritage Centre, and Seton-Watson's at University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies.

It is the fact that individual variances were merged into one coherent campaign that makes political advocacy a valuable source base for discerning the political contexts and socio-cultural prejudices that shaped British engagement with the Balkans. The distillation of a variety of expertise and ideologies led to the prioritisation of narratives thought to have propaganda value, and the concealment of those not judged to be appropriate or useful. These choices were made with the aim of manipulating a campaign to gel with changing British political priorities and to interact with existing socio-cultural prejudice. This sense of strategic calculation is evident in the discrepancies between the content that they produced for the public, the press and the government, as well as the ways in which their campaigns evolved according to a changing international context. Committee minutes and private correspondence further uncover snippets of strategy, revealing thoughts and opinions that were purposefully excluded from final publications. This process of active curation, driven by the need to direct public and governmental attention to what was a fundamentally marginal foreign issue, reveals the belief systems and political priorities of their British audiences.

Despite the value of political advocacy for discerning the nature of British engagement with the Balkans in the early twentieth century, it has been overlooked in historiography. Though some more biographical works have studied specific individuals covered in this dissertation, none have

analysed their capacity as members within a wider lobby group.¹⁴ Likewise, there has been research into British political engagement with the emergence of the Albanian and Yugoslav states, yet British attitudes toward the issue of Kosovo between these two state projects has been neglected.¹⁵ The bulk of existing literature explores the representation of the Balkans in Western travel writing and literature.¹⁶ This approach was adopted by historians such as Maria Todorova in response to Western journalistic coverage of the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s.¹⁷ For Todorova,

¹⁴ Cameron, 'Representing Albania'; Destani and Tomes, *Albania's Greatest Friend*; Daut Dauti, *Britain, the Albanian Question and the Fall of the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1914* (Bloomsbury, 2023), pp. 121-56; Margaret Fitzherbert, *The Man Who was Greenmantle: A Biography of Aubrey Herbert* (J. Murray, 1983); Marcus Tanner, *Albania's Mountain Queen: Edith Durham and the Balkans* (Bloomsbury, 2014); Nicholas J. Miller, 'R. W. Seton-Watson and Serbia during the Reemergence of Yugoslavism, 1903-1914', *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 15.1-2 (1988), pp. 59-69 <https://www.academia.edu/464739/R_W_Seton_Watson_and_Serbia_during_the_Re_emergence_of_Yugoslavism_1903_1914> [accessed 10 May 2025]; Mark Cornwall, 'R. W. Seton-Watson and Nation-Building Clashes in Late Habsburg Space', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 100.1 (2022), pp. 1-30, doi:10.1353/see.2022.0002; Georgios Giannakopoulos, 'Re-staging the "Eastern Question": Arthur J. Evans and the Search for the Origins of European Civilization in the Balkans', *History of European Ideas*, 46.5 (2020), pp. 601-13, doi:10.1080/01916599.2020.1746081.

¹⁵ For Albania, see Dauti, *Britain*; For Yugoslavia, see Evans, *Great Britain*; Vesna Drapac, *Constructing Yugoslavia: A Transnational History* (Pgrave Macmillan, 2010); Nicola C. Guy has covered the diplomatic history of the construction of the Serb-Albanian border, yet limits her discussion to official records. See Nicola C. Guy, 'Linguistic Boundaries and Geopolitical Interests: The Albanian Boundary Commissions, 1878-1926', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 34.3 (2008), pp. 448-70, doi:10.1016/j.jhg.2007.12.002; Nicola C. Guy, *Ethnic Nationalism, the Great Powers, and the Question of Albanian Independence, 1921-21* (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Durham, 2008) <<http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/1356/1/1356.pdf>> [accessed 20 August 2025]; Nicola C. Guy, *The Birth of Albania: Ethnic Nationalism, the Great Powers of World War I and the Emergence of Albanian Independence* (I.B. Tauris, 2012); Andrew Thomas Park, 'International Commissions, the Birth of Albania, and Sir Edward Grey's Preventative Diplomacy during the Balkan War, 1912-1913', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 31.1 (2020), pp. 22-43, doi:10.1080/09592296.2020.1721056.

¹⁶ Wendy Bracewell, 'Opinion-Makers: The Balkans in Popular Literature', in *British Yugoslav Relations, 1856-1876*, ed. by Petar Kačavenda (Institut za Savremenu Istoriju, 1988), pp. 91-117; John B. Allcock and Antonia Young, *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Traveling in the Balkans* (Bradford University Press, 1991); Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 1994); Maria Todorova, 'The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention', *Slavic Review*, 54.2 (1994), pp. 453-82, doi:10.2307/2501301; Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of Imagination* (Yale University Press, 1998); Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić, *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (MIT Press, 2002); Andrew Hammond, 'The Uses of Balkanism: Representation and Power in British Travel Writing, 1850-1914', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 82.3 (2004), pp. 601-24, doi:10.1353/see.2004.0143; Andrew Hammond, *The Debated Lands: British and American Representations of the Balkans* (University of Wales Press, 2009); Johann George von Hahn and Robert Elsie, *The Discovery of Albania: Travel Writing and Anthropology in the Nineteenth Century Balkans* (Bloomsbury, 2015); Mirela Cufurovic, 'Fully Known yet Wholly Unknowable: Orientalising the Balkans', *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2.1 (2017), pp. 39-58 <https://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/21831638/21334451_Published_article.pdf> [accessed 4 May 2025].

¹⁷ Todorova, *Imagining*, pp. 4-5, pp. 184-89.

the Western media's promotion of an image of innate Balkan violence was a continuation of a longer tradition of stereotyping established in late Victorian travel writing and literature.¹⁸ Using these sources, her seminal 'Balkanism' thesis drew on Edward Said's *Orientalism*, arguing that the Balkans had been established as the 'European other': a savage and backward region on the periphery of Europe, yet never truly a part of 'European civilisation' owing to the legacy of Ottoman rule.¹⁹ These 'quasi-colonial' processes through which knowledge of the Balkans was formed can be further expanded through an analysis into political advocacy.²⁰ Though travel writing was often interwoven with political partialities, the pro-Serb and pro-Albanian political advocates formulated an output that was more purposefully tailored to diplomatic policy and public opinion.²¹ Analysing this process provides a clearer picture of the prejudices, theories, preconceptions and political contexts of early twentieth-century Britain than a source base comprised solely of travel writing and literature.

The singularity of the source base used by the early proponents of the Balkanism thesis also led to an overemphasis on prejudice and 'othering' as elements in British-Balkan engagement. Travel writing on the Balkans tended to frame the region as an undiscovered curiosity. This naturally resulted in the publication of stories which reinforced the region's supposed alien, distant and backward qualities. The Balkanism thesis has thus been criticised for overemphasising the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁹ Todorova, *Imagining*, p. 12; Todorova, 'The Balkans', pp. 455-56; Maria Todorova, 'The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans', in *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, ed. by L. Carl Brown (Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 45-77; see also Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, 'Orientalist Variations on the Theme "Balkans": Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics', *Slavic Review*, 51.1 (1992), pp. 1-15, doi:10.2307/2500258; Milica Bakić-Hayden, 'Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia', *Slavic Review*, 54.4 (1995), pp. 917-31, doi:10.2307/2501399; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon, 1978).

²⁰ Todorova, *Imagining*, p. 188.

²¹ For the interlink between travel writing and political argument, see Cameron, 'Representing', pp. 401-22.

derogatory aspects of British representations of the Balkans.²² Accordingly, a recent wave of revisionism has sought to impart more nuance into understanding of British intercultural engagement with the Balkans by expanding its source base to include extensive collections of academic work, newspapers, memoirs and war diaries.²³ Historians such as Samuel Foster have challenged the assumption that British perceptions of the Balkans were ‘rooted in cultural prejudice’.²⁴ He argues that representations were shaped by Britain’s own domestic political insecurities, citing developments such as the Workers’ Rights Movements, Suffragism, and the Irish Home Rule crisis.²⁵ His conclusion is a significant contribution to the study of early twentieth-century British representations of the Balkans. Yet, it is misleading insofar as it suggests that images were formed by either one of two factors: politics or prejudice. This is a false binary; British political advocacy is a testament to how both factors could be true at once. The British pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocacy campaigns were steeped in the Balkanist language of civility, Europeanness and barbarism. Yet, at the same time, their campaigns were

²² For an overview of general critiques, see Diana Mishkova, *Beyond Balkanism: The Scholarly Politics of Region Making* (Routledge, 2018), pp. 211-33.

²³ Eugene Michail, *The British and The Balkans: Forming Images of Foreign Lands, 1900-50* (Continuum, 2011); Eugene Michail, ‘Western Attitudes to War in the Balkans and the Shifting Meanings of Violence, 1912-91’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47.2 (2012), pp. 219-39, doi:10.1177/0022009411431714; Eugene Michail, ‘The Balkan Wars in Western Historiography’, in *The Balkan Wars from Contemporary Perception to Historic Memory*, ed. by Katrine Boeckh and Sabine Rutar (Springer International Publishing, 2017), pp. 319-40; Ross Cameron, ‘Reconsidering Perceptions of the Balkan Wars (1912-3) in British War Correspondence’, *The International History Review*, 46.2 (2024), pp. 121-39, doi:10.1080/07075332.2023.2254307; James Perkins, *British Liberalism and the Balkans, c. 1875-1825* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 2014) <[https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/40082/1/PhD thesis J.A. Perkins.pdf](https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/40082/1/PhD%20thesis%20J.A.%20Perkins.pdf)> [accessed 15 March 2025]; James Perkins, ‘The Congo of Europe: The Balkans and Empire in early Twentieth-Century British Political Culture’, *The Historical Journal*, 58.2 (2015), pp. 565-87, doi:10.1017/S0018246X14000260; James Perkins, ‘Peasants and Politics: Re-thinking the British Imaginative Geography of the Balkans at the Time of the First World War’, *European History Quarterly*, 47.1 (2017), pp. 55-77, doi:10.1177/0265691416672146; Samuel Foster, *Yugoslavia in the British Imagination: Peace, War and Peasants Before Tito* (Bloomsbury, 2021); Josip Kešić, ‘Transnationalizing National Characterisation: Meta-Images and the Centre-Periphery Dynamics in Spain and the South Slavic Region’, in *New Perspectives on Imagology*, ed. by Katharina Edtstadler, Sandra Folie, and Gianna Zocco (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 160-78.

²⁴ Foster, *Yugoslavia*, p. 5, pp. 153-56.

²⁵ Ibid.

inherently intertwined with the context of domestic and imperial unrest that Foster places so much emphasis on. The extent to which they were able to insert a peripheral border debate into mainstream political discourse depended on their ability to relate Kosovo to Britain's own socio-cultural and foreign policy interests.

By assessing the arguments and narratives that the advocates used to promote their 'adopted' nations' claim to Kosovo, the interconnection between political context and imaginative constructions of foreign peoples becomes clear.²⁶ Chapter One considers how both lobbies politicised humanitarian crisis in the Balkans, covering the propaganda that they produced during the Balkan Wars, and the first few years of the First World War, 1914-1916. The pro-Albanian lobby sought to expose Serbian violence against Kosovar Albanians as justification for Albanian rule, and the pro-Serb lobby appropriated the history of Kosovo to attract humanitarian aid for Serbia. The chapter demonstrates that, where the success of the pro-Albanian humanitarian campaign was limited by currents of anti-Albanian religious prejudice, the pro-Serb lobby popularised Serbia's claim to Kosovo by allying it to wider British wartime propaganda narratives.

Chapter Two elaborates on the way in which socio-cultural projections manifested themselves in the Serb-Albanian border dispute. It explores how pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocates interpreted civilisational development in Serbia and Albania, employing narratives of racial superiority, artistic achievement and governmental aptitude judged on a Western Europe standard.

Intertwined with the language of coloniality and modernity, these images came with clear political

²⁶ Larry Wolff, 'The Western Representation of Eastern Europe on the Eve of World War I: Mediated Encounters and Intellectual Expertise in Dalmatia, Albania, and Macedonia', *Journal of Modern History*, 86.2 (2014), pp. 381-407 (p. 392), doi:10.1086/675696.

attachments. This chapter demonstrates how British observers judged Serbian and Albanian claims to Kosovo according to their perceptions of the nations' civilisational development. This dynamic was reflected in British political advocacy, and in the Foreign Office's attitudes toward Serbian rule in Kosovo, which policymakers justified on the basis that it would introduce modernity to a primitive region.

The final chapter explores the work of the pro-Serb and pro-Albanian lobbies during the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920). Responsible for the final settlement of the Albanian Question, and for the delineation of a boundary between the proposed Albanian state and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Conference represented the culmination of all that the advocacy groups had worked toward in previous years. The chapter considers the extent to which humanitarian and civilisational concerns manifested in the attitudes of the British delegation toward Kosovo, as well as assessing the arguments that the pro-Serb and pro-Albanian lobbies used to appeal to the changing political context of the postwar order. It highlights their invocation of the principle of nationality, their employment of ethnographic data, and their depiction of the Serb-Albanian border as a question of international security and peace in the Balkans. Tracking these campaigns alongside the records left by the British delegation, it illuminates why Britain upheld the Serbian historical claim to Kosovo despite Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority, and the knowledge that this population would be subjected to continuing repression and violence.

Chapter One

Politicising Humanitarian Crisis

Humanitarian crisis provided the basis for pro-Serb and pro-Albanian British political advocacy. During the Balkan Wars (1912-13), the Serbian army drove into Kosovo and northern Albania, subjecting the ethnic Albanian, predominantly Muslim population to massacre, extra-judicial execution, mutilation, rape and forcible displacement.²⁷ This humanitarian crisis, alongside the concern that Albania might be partitioned entirely between its neighbours, sparked the first British pro-Albanian advocacy campaign, directed by the Albanian Committee.²⁸ Soon after the outbreak of the First World War, a typhus epidemic spread throughout Serbia with devastating human consequences that triggered the formation of the Serbian Relief Fund (SRF).²⁹ Though these organisations contributed to the alleviation of suffering by raising funds and sending provisions, they were not solely interested in the ‘neutral duty of care’.³⁰ Interwoven with political intention, representations of humanitarian crisis were a central device in both lobbies’ campaigns for the inclusion of Kosovo into their ‘pet’ Balkans nations.³¹

²⁷ Richard C. Hall, *The Balkan Wars, 1912-1913: Prelude to the First World War* (Routledge, 2000), p. 154.

²⁸ SHC, DD/DRU/31, The Albanian Committee, London, 1912-1913, 18 February 1913.

²⁹ SSEES, SEW/7/1/1, Bertram Christian to Seton-Watson, 16 September 1914.

³⁰ Jacinta Chiamake Nwaka, ‘From a De-politicization Duty of Care to a Deeply Politicized Phenomenon: Navigating the Tension between Classical and New Humanitarianism’, *Unzik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 22.2 (2022), pp. 38-67 (p. 40), doi:10.4314/ujah.v22i2.2.

³¹ Todorova, *Imagining*, p. 121.

Humanitarian movements in Britain had rarely been solely altruistic. In the 1870s, the ‘Bulgarian atrocities’ dominated public and parliamentary discussions surrounding the ‘Eastern Question’.³² William Gladstone’s crusade against the horrors of Ottoman rule emanated as much from humanitarian concern as Liberal strategy, his reelection in 1880 demonstrating that humanitarianism could be translated to political success.³³ Multiple British advocacy groups likewise emerged in response to the Hamidian Massacres in the 1890s, the atrocities in the Belgian Congo Free State in the early 1900s, and the Ottoman repression of the Macedonians from 1903.³⁴ As was the case with the Anglo-Armenian Association, representations of humanitarian crisis were often interlinked with calls for political autonomy.³⁵ These organisations both contributed to and grew out of a ‘culture of political campaigning and argument’ surrounding notions of Empire, Europe and the British ‘liberal-internationalist worldview’.³⁶

Considering the above examples, recent literature has framed humanitarianism as a political venture, noting the pervasiveness of ‘ideologies, hierarchies and indeed choices about which

³² Edward Newman, ‘Exploring the UK’s Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention’, *International Peacekeeping*, 28.4 (2021), pp. 632-60 (p. 649), doi:10.1080/13533312.2021.1878689.

³³ Michelle Tusan, *Britain and the Armenian Genocide: Humanitarianism and the Politics of Empire from Gladstone to Churchill* (I.B.Tauris, 2017), chap. 1; Eugenio F. Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism, 1876-1906* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 355; Newman, ‘Exploring the UK’s Doctrine’, p. 649.

³⁴ Tusan, *Britain*, chap. 1, chap. 3; Perkins, ‘The Congo’, pp. 567-68.

³⁵ ‘The Armenian Question’, *Bristol Times and Mirror*, 23 November 1894 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000984/18941123/172/0005>> [accessed 24 August 2025]; see also Tusan, *Smyrna’s Ashes*, pp. 123-25.

³⁶ Perkins, ‘The Congo’, p. 567.

“distant others” qualify for concern, and which do not’.³⁷ That there were separate relief funds for different ethno-national groups demonstrates the selectivity of the British charitable disposition. Political subjectivities also grew out of the need to tailor publicity campaigns to the British public, whose prejudices dictated the sort of narratives that humanitarian advocates could draw upon. It was then, impossible for a humanitarian campaign to be both highly successful and wholly apolitical. Yet, most existing literature presents the SRF as purely apolitical and relief-oriented.³⁸ Likewise, while historians have acknowledged the political contribution of the Albanian Committee to the emergence of the Albanian state, there has been little exploration into humanitarianism as an aspect of this political advocacy, and its centrality within discussions over the formation of the Serb-Albanian border.³⁹

This chapter explores the intersection between political advocacy, humanitarian campaigning and socio-political subjectivities, showing how pro-Albanian and pro-Serb British advocates politicised the humanitarian crises in northern Albanian and Serbia as a tool to convey the Albanian and Serbian claim over Kosovo to Britain. It assesses their employment of atrocity propaganda, narratives of religious suffering, and depictions of barbarism, analysing the extent to which these persuasive devices induced support from the British public, the press, and

³⁷ Emily Baughan, and Brownwen Everill, ‘Empire and Humanitarianism: A Preface’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40.5 (2012), pp. 727-28 (p. 727), doi:10.1080/03086534.2012.730826; Peter Stamatov, *The Origins of Global Humanitarianism: Religion, Empires and Advocacy* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 10; Emily Baughan, *Saving the Children: Humanitarianism, Internationalism, and Empire* (University of California Press, 2022), pp. 2-3; Elisabeth Hope Murray, and Amy Grubb, ‘British Government Officials in the Ottoman Empire and Evolving Humanitarianism after the Balkan Wars and the First World War’, *The Historical Journal*, no vol. (2024), pp. 1-22 (pp. 3-5), doi:10.1017/S0018246X24000384.

³⁸ Foster, p. 78; Drapac, *Constructing*, p. 78; Slobodan G. Markovich, ‘Anglo-Serbian Cultural Relations during the Great War and its Aftermath: Learning of the Other through War Efforts’, *Belgrade English Language and Literature Studies*, no vol. (2020), pp. 365-83 (pp. 368-69), doi:10.18485/bells90.2020.2.ch28.

³⁹ Cameron, ‘Representing’, pp. 416-17; Destani, and Tomes; Dauti, pp. 137-45.

policymakers. In doing so, it reveals that pro-Albanian humanitarian appeals against the allocation of Kosovo to Serbia were eclipsed by the pro-Serb wartime campaign, which successfully politicised an image of existential Serbian martyrdom.

Conveying the Facts: Atrocity Propaganda and Patriotic Mobilisation

Pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocates formulated emotional appeals to evoke British sympathy for their ‘adopted’ Balkan peoples.⁴⁰ These appeals were in part informative, relaying the reality of humanitarian crisis. But they also had to be compelling. In the early twentieth century, the emergence of ‘new journalism’ saw increasing coverage of sex, crime and scandal in the British press.⁴¹ Humanitarian campaigning responded to the media’s demand for sensational depictions of horror, and a public appetite for such images.⁴² The pro-Albanian lobby utilised ‘atrocity propaganda’: the publication of egregious violence and suffering to persuade an audience of a particular issue, idea or cause.⁴³ The pro-Serb lobby mobilised public opinion in support of the humanitarian crisis in Serbia by formulating propaganda which played upon wartime patriotic opinion. In both cases, the use of the word ‘propaganda’ does not mean the advocates misrepresented humanitarian crisis. Atrocity reports could be accurate, yet still publicised to

⁴⁰ Wolff, ‘The Western’, p. 392.

⁴¹ Foster, *Yugoslavia*, p. 25.

⁴² Ivan Ilčev, ‘The 1913 Carnegie Commission of Inquiry: Background Fact-Finding and International Relations’ in *Philanthropy, Conflict Management and International Law: The 1914 Carnegie Report on the Balkan Wars of 1912/13*, ed. by Dietmar Müller and Stefan Troebst (Central European University Press, 2022), pp. 187-206 (p. 189).

⁴³ Sarah Banet-Weiser, ‘“Destroy this Mad Brute”: Propaganda and Sexual Violence’, in *Media and Propaganda in an Age of Disinformation*, ed. by Nelson Ribeiro and Barbie Zelizer (Routledge, 2025), pp. 142-59 (p. 142); Y. Doğan Çetinkaya, ‘Atrocity Propaganda and the Nationalization of the Masses in the Ottoman Empire during the Balkan Wars (1912-13)’, *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 46.4 (2014), pp. 759-78 (p. 760), doi:10.1017/S0020743814001056.

‘influence an audience’; not all were ‘deliberate lies’.⁴⁴ This section explores how pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocates conveyed the facts of humanitarian crisis, using depictions of atrocity and epidemic to promote their respective visions for the Serb-Albanian border.

At the start of the Balkan Wars, the pro-Albanian lobby assumed that British disregard for Albanian suffering was merely due to ignorance, hypothesising that they could evoke support by exposing the reality of the atrocities to the press and the FO. As Edith Durham (British anthropologist and pro-Albanian advocate) recounted to Herbert, this strategy had been successfully employed a decade earlier by the Balkan Committee, a British lobby group which campaigned against Ottoman repression in Macedonia.⁴⁵ Claiming the organisation had made £30,000 ‘by the telling of atrocities’, she concluded that ‘a similar sum could probably now be raised [for the Albanians] if the truth were told’.⁴⁶ This reflected a presumption that so long as Britain was made fully aware of conditions in Kosovo, sympathy would naturally follow, regardless of the victims’ ethnicity and religion. Emulating the model of the Balkan Committee, the Albanian Committee thus aimed ‘to give publicity as far as they could to these horrible doings’.⁴⁷

In depicting the humanitarian crisis in northern Albania, the Albanian Committee prioritised gut-wrenching reports of mutilation and ‘cold-blooded slaughter’.⁴⁸ Whilst the atrocities were not fabricated, the Committee controlled how the stories were told, using language purposefully

⁴⁴ Četinkaya, ‘Illustrated Atrocity’, p. 468; David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain: The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale* (Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 6.

⁴⁵ Perkins, ‘The Congo’, pp. 567-69.

⁴⁶ SHC, DD/DRU/47, Durham to Herbert, 26 May 1914.

⁴⁷ SHC, DD/DRU/31, Report of the First Meeting of the Committee, 17 December 1912.

⁴⁸ SHC, DD/DRU/31, The Albanian Committee, London, 1912-13, 18 February 1913.

chosen to maximise the horror of a particular act. For example, annotating one extract describing how a Muslim prisoner had ‘tarried, overcome by hunger and exhaustion’, Herbert replaced the word ‘tarried’ with ‘collapsed’.⁴⁹ This word choice implies a conscious attempt to illustrate atrocities in the most vivid way possible. Similarly, in her correspondence with the FO, Durham emphasised the use of facial mutilation. Stationed as a relief worker in northern Albania during the Balkan Wars, she produced multiple reports of Serbian bands severing and ‘collecting’ the noses and lips of Kosovar Albanians.⁵⁰ Images of mutilation had been used before in humanitarian advocacy, most notably in the Congo Reform Association’s campaign against the Congo Free State in the early 1900s.⁵¹ The success of this campaign in provoking British outrage in the previous decade may have informed an understanding in the pro-Albanian lobby that the more graphic the details, the more likely they were to evoke British sympathy.⁵²

Atrocity propaganda exposed individual suffering, but it could also be used to illustrate violence on a national level. In pro-Albanian advocacy, mutilation was an allegory for the territorial dismemberment of the Albanian nation. Calling for the unification of Kosovo with the newly emerging Albanian state, Herbert warned that ‘by mutilating Albania’, it would be impossible to obtain ‘that one thing that everybody most desires — that is, equilibrium and stability in the Balkans’.⁵³ Further marrying individual atrocity to national injustice, Durham depicted atrocities

⁴⁹ SHC, DD/DRU/4/10, Memorandum Draft, undated.

⁵⁰ Leeds, University of Leeds Special Collections (LSC), FO 371/1782, Lord E.B. Cromer to William Tyrell, 10 March 1913.

⁵¹ Robert Burroughs, *African Testimony in the Movement for Congo Reform: The Burden of Proof* (Taylor and Francis, 2018), p. 5.

⁵² LSC, FO 371/1782, Cromer to Tyrell, 10 March 1913.

⁵³ London, House of Commons Hansard Archives, HC Debate, 8 May 1913 <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1913-05-08/debates/b4f38c5f-2d10-40e9-939a-da90e80690b7/AlbaniaAndMontenegro>> [accessed 28 May 2025].

in Kosovo as a ‘race extermination’.⁵⁴ This accusation reflected the ‘demographic objectives’ that the Balkan League pursued in the lands they wished to acquire.⁵⁵ The atrocities were not then, purely a humanitarian issue, but one that demanded a political response to ensure the survival of Kosovar Albanians as a distinct group. Reports of systematic rape further conveyed this concern. One Albanian Committee pamphlet detailed an instance where ‘lust was joined to murder’ and ‘hundreds of unfortunate Moslem women’ were ‘dragged out of the houses’.⁵⁶ This almost voyeuristic depiction of rape fulfilled a public appetite for lurid imagery, whilst serving as a symbol of an assault upon ‘the body of the nation’.⁵⁷ Serbian forces were undoubtedly guilty of such crimes. Yet, the frequency of depictions of rape in Albanian Committee publications, and the explicit way in which the acts were described, demonstrates an understanding that gendered violence might more effectively convey the vulnerability of the Albanian nation in the face of Serbian territorial rapacity. Depictions of atrocity were thus curated as persuasive political devices. For the purpose of emphasising the right of Albania to Kosovo — the right to be formed as a whole, healthy body — both allegorical and graphic propaganda was deemed essential.

The pro-Albanian lobby used atrocity propaganda to demonstrate that humanitarian violations were taking place in Kosovo. Having assumed that political support would automatically follow from this knowledge, pro-Albanian humanitarian campaigning was thus constrained by the amount of publicity given to the atrocities reports. During the First World War, the pro-Serb lobby more easily convinced the British public of the existence of humanitarian crisis in Serbia

⁵⁴ LSC, FO 371/1785, Durham to H. Nevinson, 10 February 1913.

⁵⁵ Mark Biondich, ‘The Balkan Wars: Violence and Nation-Building in the Balkans, 1912–13’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 18.4 (2016), pp. 389-404 (p. 398), doi:10.1080/14623528.2016.1226019.

⁵⁶ SHC, DD/DRU/4/10, The Balkan Atrocities: A Turkish Appeal to the Women and Men of Great Britain, A British Response and Demand for an International Commission of Investigation, April 1913.

⁵⁷ Banet-Weiser, ‘Destroy’, p. 148.

because Britain and Serbia were allied; Serbian affairs were immediately more relevant to a British audience than Albanian affairs had been two years prior. The SRF exploited this context by integrating the story of humanitarian crisis in Serbia into the mainstream British propaganda narrative. In SRF publications, Serbia was ‘the Belgium of the East’.⁵⁸ This comparison positioned support for Serbia as a patriotic endeavour by stirring associations with the ‘rape of Belgium’, an image used by the media to ‘garner support for the war’.⁵⁹ The depiction of disease and starvation served a similar purpose. At one SRF meeting in 1915, committee members drew the audience’s attention to the ‘thousands of Serbians dying from typhus’.⁶⁰ Urging the ‘sympathy of all of the English people’, the SRF called for donations to aid those ‘stricken’ by ‘the dragon of Prussian militarism’.⁶¹ By focusing on epidemic, the SRF thus played on British charitable sensibilities, affirming Britain’s own self-ascribed ‘innate moral superiority’ to encourage public mobilisation in favour of Serbia.⁶² As summarised in one SRF publication, ‘there is a moral obligation to Serbia that every Briton should do something to fulfil’.⁶³ Grafting representations of Serbia’s humanitarian crisis onto the broader ‘state-sponsored nationwide projection of positive images for the allies’, the SRF provided the Serbian cause with a universal point of reference.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Spirit of the Serb* (Nisbet & co., 1915), p. 5.

⁵⁹ Leanne Greene, ‘Advertising Belgium: Picturing Belgium in First World War Publicity’, *Media, War and Conflict*, 7.3 (2014), pp. 309-25 (p. 316, p. 309), doi:10.1177/1750635214557534; David Welch, *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion: From World War I to Wikileaks* (I.B. Tauris, 2014), chap. 2.

⁶⁰ ‘Serbian Relief Fund: Meeting in Coventry: The Mayor and the Supply of Munitions’, *Kenilworth Advisor*, 3 October 1915 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003066/19150403/119/0007>> [accessed 30 March 2025].

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Foster, *Yugoslavia*, p. 76.

⁶³ Serbian Relief Fund, *Serbia’s Cup of Sorrow* (SRF, 1916), p. 14.

⁶⁴ Michail, *The British*, p. 86.

For this reason, SRF propaganda was highly successful in attracting aid, relief workers and the general public to the Serbian cause. By May 1915, the Fund had received the modern-day equivalent of nine-million pounds, forming seven different sub-committees to manage an increasing workload.⁶⁵ It also worked closely with the Scottish Women's Hospitals: a voluntary female medical force which stationed relief workers in France, Belgium and Serbia.⁶⁶ The SRF therefore constituted a larger humanitarian infrastructure than the Albanian Committee, allowing it access to those across the British class system. Wealthy patrons were targeted through 'high society' dinners, whilst 'Flag Days', street celebrations, and town hall meetings encouraged the involvement of the broader public.⁶⁷ Though humanitarian patriotism might have been the primary factor that drew people to SRF campaigning, the propaganda initiatives themselves were interwoven with political messaging, much of which championed Serbian expansionism. On 28 June 1916, the SRF organised a nationwide celebration for the Serbian national holiday of Vidovdan, which they called 'Kossovo [sic] Day' (see Fig. 1). In the following week, the Kossovo Day Committee (KDC) distributed hundreds of thousands of pamphlets, and organised events, speeches, Church sermons, and school lectures across the country, commemorating the 1389 Battle of Kosovo.⁶⁸ As a celebration organised with the aim of encouraging patriotic mobilisation in favour of Serbia, it was, according to Seton-Watson, 'extraordinarily

⁶⁵ SSEES, SEW/7/7, Meeting of the Executive Committee of the SRF, 5 May 1915; SSEES, SEW/7/7, Meeting of the Executive Committee of the SRF, 18 February 1915.

⁶⁶ Monica Krippner, 'The Work of British Medical Women in Serbia During the First World War', in *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travelling in the Balkans*, ed. by John B. Allcock and Antonia Young (Berghahn Books, 2000), pp. 71-89 (pp. 73-74).

⁶⁷ SSEES, SEW/7/7, Meeting of the Executive Committee of the SRF, 23 June 1915; SSEES, SEW/5/3/2, Annual Report of the Serbian Society of Great Britain, 25 July 1917.

⁶⁸ SSEES, SEW/5/3/1, Seton-Watson to Nicolas Velimirević, 16 June 1916; Kossovo Day Committee, *Kossovo Day (1389-1916): Report and two Lectures* (KDC, 1916).

— JUNE 28th. —

1389 **KOSSOVO DAY** **1916**

IS THE
SERBIAN NATIONAL DAY



Bernard Partridge

Reproduced by special permission of the Proprietors of "Punch."

HEROIC SERBIA

AT the battle of Kossovo in 1389 Christianity and freedom were overwhelmed in the Balkans, but the Serbs have each year since then kept the day in stern determination to be free once more. They drove back the Turks, they twice drove back the Austrians. To-day Serbia, exiled but not disheartened, asks us to join in the celebration of her National Day, as a pledge of the Allies' Victory and Anglo-Serbian Friendship.

KOSSOVO DAY COMMITTEE, 50 PARLIAMENT STREET, S.W.
Chairman: Dr. Elsie Inglis.

Joint Hon. Secs.: Rev. H. J. Fynes-Clinton & Mr. R. W. Seton-Watson. *Hon. Treas.:* Mr. F. C. Lindo.

Fig. 1. Advertisement poster for 'Kossovo Day', 28 June 1916.

satisfactory'.⁶⁹ Yet, its success in achieving this aim was built on a romanticised mythology that simultaneously popularised Serbia's territorial claim to Kosovo in the British public sphere. Successful in attracting a cross-political, cross-class support base, these supposedly humanitarian endeavours thus facilitated the consumption of political narratives that framed Kosovo as Serbian 'heartland'.

In contrast, pro-Albanian atrocity propaganda attracted minimal financial and ideological support for the Kosovar Albanians during their campaign several years earlier. Though some appeals were published in the local British press, editors tended to extract the sensationalist value from atrocity reports, discarding the political connotations. One article, for instance, proclaimed that Kosovar Albanian children were 'being literally carved to pieces with bayonets', yet omitted mention of the demographic objectives behind such acts.⁷⁰ The recognition of atrocities was of little political consequence unless it came with the understanding that violence would continue so long as Kosovo remained under Serbian control. In this way, it was a strategic miscalculation that the more graphic the atrocity propaganda, the more likely it was to invoke sympathy. The response of the FO was no more encouraging. Whitehall dismissed British Consular reports from Monastir and Üsküb (Skopje) on the basis that the Kosovar Albanians were prone to exaggeration.⁷¹ The Vice-Consul for Monastir, C. A. Greig, for example, urged in 1913 that if Serb rule were to continue in Kosovo, the Muslim inhabitants could expect 'periodical massacres, certain

⁶⁹ Letter from Seton-Watson to Milenko Vesnić, 17 July 1916, in R.W. Seton-Watson and Hugh Seton-Watson, *R.W. Seton-Watson and the Yugoslavs: Correspondence 1906-1941*, vol. 2 (British Academy, 1976), pp. 270-71.

⁷⁰ 'Atrocities in Albania: Massacres of Moslems', *Stowmarket Weekly Post*, 2 January 1913 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0004784/19130102/123/0006?browse=False>> [accessed 20 March 2025].

⁷¹ See for example, TNA, FO 371/2099, Walter Peckham to Dayrell Crackanthorpe, 4 April 1914.

exploitation, and final ruin'.⁷² Yet, to Sir Eyre Crowe (future Permanent Under-Secretary) Grieg was merely getting 'carried away with his feelings'.⁷³ Responding to a suggestion that Greig's atrocity reports might be published in a Blue Book, Crowe minuted:

I would like to stop this kind of thing. I do not think Mr. Greig has any status for receiving sworn affidavits from Servian [sic] subjects respecting alleged misdeeds of Servian [sic] officials. Natives of these countries are notoriously unreliable witnesses [...] Some of the particulars are exceedingly improbable.⁷⁴

For high-level policymakers like Crowe, the fact that the atrocities were 'improbable' spoke not to the inhumane conduct of the Serbian armed forces, but to the disreputability of the Kosovar Albanian victims themselves. This reaction was fuelled by stereotypes of Balkan Muslim untrustworthiness emanating from Liberal Orientalist attitudes toward the Ottomans.⁷⁵ Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey's refusal to publish the Consular reports and sanction an official commission of investigation meant the pro-Albanian lobby had no official source of information to refute the conception that atrocities were not a symptom of innate Balkan disorder, but an element in a deliberate campaign of extermination. Following Grey's line that the atrocities were committed by 'irregular bands and not by troops', the majority of the British government

⁷² TNA, FO 371/1748, Greig to Crackanthorpe, 14 November 1913.

⁷³ TNA, FO 371/1748, Crackanthorpe to Grey, 9 December 1913.

⁷⁴ TNA, FO 371/2099, Crackanthorpe to Grey, 11 May 1914.

⁷⁵ Dauti, pp. 7-60; For the perseverance of anti-Albanian Muslim stereotypes into the 1990s, see Isa Blumi, 'The Commodification of Otherness and the Ethnic Unit in the Balkans: How to Think about Albanians', *East European Politics and Society*, 12.3 (1998), pp. 527-69, doi:10.1177/0888325498012003006.

accepted that the atrocities were just another ‘feature of the unhappy condition of affairs in the Balkans’.⁷⁶

Owing in part to the preconception that Balkan Muslims were prone to ‘exaggeration’, the FO took no concrete action to prevent the massacre of Kosovar Albanian civilians.⁷⁷ As Herbert identified, ‘the public lump the Balkan peoples together indiscriminately as a filthy set of butchers, and care not who is the victim or the murderer in the shambles’.⁷⁸ The pro-Serb lobby was able to navigate this trope because the atrocities against Serbian civilians during the First World War were not committed by another Balkan nation, but by Britain’s same enemy.⁷⁹ By focusing on the epidemic and by exploiting comparisons with Belgium, the SRF framed the act of supporting Serbia as a patriotic endeavour. Harnessing the wartime context to their advantage, the pro-Serb lobby invoked a level of public mobilisation that transcended political divides and socio-economic classes. This foundation of wide support allowed the pro-Serb lobby to disseminate the argument that Kosovo was rightfully Serbian.

Beyond Humanitarian Crisis: Religious Persecution and Prejudice

Depictions of atrocity and epidemic formed only one part of pro-Serb and pro-Albanian humanitarian appeals. The British press and public had a finite patience for continuous depictions

⁷⁶ Hansard, HC Debate, 13 February, 1913 <<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1913/feb/13/war-in-balkans>> [accessed 19 March 2025]; Hansard, HC Debate, 8 May, 1913 <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1913-05-08/debates/b4f38c5f-2d10-40e9-939a-da90e80690b7/AlbaniaAndMontenegro>> [accessed 19 March 2025].

⁷⁷ TNA, FO 371/1748, Crackanthorpe to Grey, 8 December 1913.

⁷⁸ SHC, DD/DRU/35, Memorandum by Herbert, undated.

⁷⁹ Michail, ‘Western Attitudes’, p. 225.

of atrocity, especially in an international context of widespread violence.⁸⁰ As the Chairman of the SRF (Bertram Christian) noted, the press was ‘easily offended by repetition’.⁸¹ Whilst conveying the facts of a humanitarian crisis was important to compel charitable donations, these representations could not, then, generate a profound and enduring feeling of co-sympathy. In many ways, the more subjective arguments and fictitious framings made for better persuasive devices than the facts themselves. Those which employed religious symbolism and approached the issue of religious prejudice proved particularly compelling and provided a means for both lobbies to promote their espoused nations’ claim to Kosovo.

The SRF appealed to British society by portraying the Serbian humanitarian crisis as a religious epic. While representations of the epidemic encouraged patriotic mobilisation, the crisis itself was temporary. Imbuing Serbian suffering with more metaphysical significance, biblical analogies encouraged a more sustainable form of support. The ‘Great Retreat’ was particularly symbolic of the existential victimhood that SRF publicists wished to convey. In the winter of 1915-1916, the Central Powers occupied Serbia. The Serbian army, along with 200,000 civilian refugees, fled through the Albanian mountains to find refuge on the Adriatic Coast, resulting in an estimated 240,000 casualties.⁸² The SRF framed the Great Retreat as a sacrifice made in the name of Christianity. Referring to it as ‘Golgotha’, several British authors drew comparisons between the persecution of Serbia and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.⁸³ R.D.G Laffan, for example, recounted

⁸⁰ Karen Halttunen, ‘Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture’, *The American Historical Review*, 100.2 (1995), pp. 303-34 (p. 330), doi:10.2307/2169001.

⁸¹ SSEES, SEW/7/1/1, Christian to Seton-Watson, 1 March 1915.

⁸² Alex Tomić, *The Legacy of Serbia’s Great War: Politics and Remembrance* (Berghahn Books, 2024), p. 52.

⁸³ R.D.G Laffan, *The Guardians of the Gate: Historical Lectures on the Serbs* (Clarendon Press, 1918), p. 228; Alice Askew and Claude Askew, *The Stricken Land: Serbia as we Saw it* (Everleigh Nash Company, 1916), p. ix.

that the ‘darkness of Golgotha enshrouded the Balkan mountains’ as the Serbs passed through Albania, describing a ‘spectre of a cross on which was crucified a living nation’.⁸⁴ This biblical analogy harmonised with British propaganda that painted the First World War as a ‘holy war’ and ‘transcendental struggle against evil’.⁸⁵ The depiction of a British ally as a martyr ‘dying for Christianity’ thereby further motivated patriotic mobilisation in support of Serbia.⁸⁶ Thus, whilst representations of disease and starvation compelled charitable donations, religious symbolism presented Serbian suffering as a permanent and intrinsic state of being, demanding Britain commit to the Serbian nation on a deeper level.

Pro-Serb publicists further used these religious comparisons to induce political support for the formation of Yugoslavia, framed by some as a holy endeavour. For Laffan, a supporter of the SSoGB, Serbia was ‘dying’ on the cross, but ‘her spirit was alive’, destined to emerge liberated.⁸⁷ Once freed, he argued, Serbia had the divine right to fulfil ‘their aspiration for the unity and independence of the South Slavs’.⁸⁸ Kosovo was central to this vision of Yugoslav resurrection. During the retreat, Serbia crossed *Kosovo Polje*, the site of the 1389 Battle of Kosovo. British publicists imagined the ‘pitiful story’ as a modern-day reenactment of the medieval Battle.⁸⁹ Claude and Alice Askew, who were travelling in Serbia with a British hospital unit, noted that ‘it

⁸⁴ Laffan, *The Guardians*, p. 223.

⁸⁵ Stefan Goebel, ‘Britain’s “Last Crusade”: From War Propaganda to War Commemoration, c.1914-1930’, in *Justifying War: Propaganda, Politics and the Modern Age*, ed. by David Welch and Jo Fox (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 159-76 (p. 160).

⁸⁶ SSEES, SEW/7/1/5, Velimirević to Seton-Watson, 26 March 1916.

⁸⁷ Laffan, p. 228.

⁸⁸ Stephen P. Duggan, review of R.D.G. Laffan, *The Guardians of the Gate: Historical Lectures on the Serbs* (1918), *The American Historical Review*, 24.1 (1918), pp. 93-94 (p. 93) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/1835403>> [accessed 2 August 2025].

⁸⁹ ‘Servian Refugees’ Plight: A Terrible Story’, *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 December 1915 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000603/19160122/001/0001>> [accessed 23 March 2025].

was upon the plain of Kossovo [sic], at no great distance from the spot where Tsar Lazar perished, that King Peter, in agony of spirit, saw his army fall back'.⁹⁰ The Askews situated Kosovo at the core of this biblical epic: a symbol as spiritually crucial to the Serbian nation as Golgotha to Christianity. As summarised by one KDC publication, Serbian suffering would now be 'tragically associated for ever [sic] with the name of Kossovo [sic]'.⁹¹ Only by reclaiming that land could Serbia vindicate the historic Ottoman occupation and the present Austrian invasion, enabling the resurrection of the medieval Serbian Empire in the form of a South Slavic state. By using religious symbolism, the pro-Serb lobby thus fused political support for Serbian expansionism with a humanitarian campaign that was ostensibly philanthropic.

Shared Christian faith enabled the pro-Serb lobby to utilise this religious dimension to the benefit of their quasi-humanitarian propaganda. The pro-Albanian lobby, however, had to navigate the religious prejudice that came with a resurgence of Gladstonian Liberalism in the British socio-political climate of the early 1910s.⁹² As Herbert identified, during the Balkan Wars, 'the Serbs and Bulgars had the liberal inheritance of Gladstone's speeches', but the Albanian Committee was swimming against the socio-political tide in advocating for a predominantly Muslim nation.⁹³ British imaginings of the 'Ottomans as a barbarian, uncivilised "Other"' had been established in the travel writing and literature produced from the mid-nineteenth century.⁹⁴ Associations between the Albanians and the Ottomans — most obviously demonstrated by the widespread use

⁹⁰ Askew and Askew, *The Stricken Land*, p. 200.

⁹¹ Kossovo Day Committee, *Kossovo Day*, p. 19.

⁹² Perkins, *British Liberalism*, p. 170

⁹³ Aubrey Herbert, *Ben Kendim: A Record of Eastern Travel*, ed. by Desmond MacCarthy, 2nd edn (Hutchinson & Co., 1925), p. 215.

⁹⁴ James Pettifer, review of Davide Rodogno, *Against massacre: Humanitarian interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914* (2011), *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 63.4 (2012), pp. 842–43 (p. 842), doi:10.1017/S0022046912001480; Todorova, *Imagining*, p. 19.

of ‘Turk’ in place of ‘Albanian’ — therefore hindered pro-Albanian attempts to garner British sympathy for the Kosovar Albanians.⁹⁵ As Justin McCarthy contends, this Orientalist discourse incurred a ‘lack of concern for Muslim lives’.⁹⁶ As discussed, this indifference manifested in official responses to atrocity reports. However, it cannot be assumed that prejudice affected all attitudes equally, nor that it went unacknowledged at the time. The pro-Albanian lobby was highly attuned to the impact that British socio-cultural prejudice had on foreign policy toward Albania, and used the existence of anti-Muslim attitudes to their advantage. Assessing the ways in which lobbyists responded to preexisting constructions of Balkan peoples reveals nuances that have been overlooked by proponents of the Balkanism thesis, contradicting the overgeneralised and derogatory light in which Western depictions of the Balkans have been painted.

The Albanian Committee played on the existence of religious prejudice to translate Kosovar Albanian suffering to a broader political commentary on British Liberalism. In doing so, they converted a localised and distant crisis into an immediate domestic political issue. Members of the Albanian Committee, most of whom were Conservatives, noted the impact of religious prejudice on the fate of Muslim populations. C. F. Ryder for example explained that:

In these days to be a Moslem [sic] is to be a political Pariah, and those Christians whose cold-blooded slaughter of Albanian prisoners and outrages on Albanian women would have ordinarily filled Europe with horror are regarded very leniently just now because their victims were Mohammedans.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Herbert, *Ben*, p. 237.

⁹⁶ Justin McCarthy, *The British and the Turks: A History of Animosity, 1893-23* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p. 276.

⁹⁷ SHC, DD/DRU/31, C.F. Ryder, ‘Albania for the Albanians’, 18 February, 1913.

By exposing this double standard, the pro-Albanian lobby painted the Albanians as victims of not only atrocity, but also religious intolerance within Christian Europe. As Walter Guinness (Albanian Committee member and Conservative MP) reminded Parliament, the FO had released Blue Books on the Ottoman persecution of Armenian, Bulgarian and Macedonian Christians; Grey's refusal to publish reports concerning Kosovar Albanians could thus only be explained by anti-Muslim prejudice.⁹⁸ This accusation undermined the credibility of the Liberal humanitarian doctrine, pressuring the government to take diplomatic action against atrocities in Kosovo, and bolstering the Albanian Committee's own prestige in British party politics. As one Committee member strategised, by exposing the Liberal government's inaction, the lobby might 'rouse a torrent of feeling which will sweep these hypocrites from power'.⁹⁹ Following this suggestion, other members explained to Parliament that British inaction had 'inflamed the passions' of the Indian Muslims, having caused the 'serious Mahomedan riots in India' in 1913.¹⁰⁰ Concerns over anti-colonial uprisings in India had shaped British depictions of other humanitarian crises involving Muslim actors; reports concerning Ottoman conduct during the Armenian Genocide (1915-1916), for example, were designed to avoid 'alienating Muslim subjects'.¹⁰¹ For the pro-Albanian lobby, the existence of anti-Muslim prejudice was a powerful tool to insert the massacres in Kosovo into mainstream political discourse. It provided a persuasive device to motivate the Liberal government to act, if not out of care for the Albanians, then for the preservation of their own reputation and 'for the maintenance of the Empire' itself.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Hansard, HC Debate, 21 January 1913 <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1913-01-21/debates/eb6fefe3-f141-4266-bb67-7dd7ff0226d4/WarInBalkans>> [accessed 19 March 2025].

⁹⁹ SHC, DD/DRU/4/10, unsigned member of Albanian Committee to Herbert, 15 April 1913.

¹⁰⁰ Hansard, HC Debate, 12 August 1913 <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1913-08-12/debates/f12d7658-1c69-4087-9c94-79017e1560b8/WarInBalkansStatementBySirEdwardGrey>> [accessed 19 March 2025].

¹⁰¹ Tusan, *Smyrna's*, p. 124.

¹⁰² SHC, DD/DRU/31, Report of the First Meeting of the Committee, 17 December 1912.

The Albanian Committee's allegations of religious prejudice did have some impact on British policy regarding Serbian atrocities in Kosovo. Grey, for example, assured pro-Albanian lobbyists that he was 'as ready' to 'prevent abuses [...] in the case of Moslems [sic] as of Christians'.¹⁰³ Indeed, in December 1913, he instructed the British Chargé d'Affairs in Belgrade to communicate 'the indignation of His Majesty's Government that acts of the kind described should be possible in Servia [sic]'.¹⁰⁴ The fact that the FO did take some form of diplomatic action against the Serbian government, where in private most officials treated the atrocity reports as fabrications, suggests that Grey was eager to maintain a reputation of impartiality to the House, the electorate and to Muslim subjects. Though his statement of disapproval was too vague and noncommittal to have had any impact on Serbian policy, it demonstrates that the Albanian Committee was able to intertwine religious prejudice with domestic politics, providing atrocities in Kosovo with political relevance in the context of strained Christian-Muslim relations across the British Empire.

Both the pro-Serb and the pro-Albanian lobby capitalised on pre-existing socio-cultural prejudice and British domestic politics to convince their audience of the wider significance of the humanitarian crises. The SRF used religious allegories and a mythologised version of Serbian history to tether the humanitarian crisis to Serbia's claim over Kosovo. The Conservative MPs of the Albanian Committee likewise highlighted Kosovo's Muslim majority to relate the massacres to broader political concerns over Liberal hypocrisy and imperial unrest. Though atrocity

¹⁰³ Hansard, HC Debate, 10 April 1913 <<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1913/apr/10/war-in-balkans>> [accessed 25 March 2025].

¹⁰⁴ TNA, FO 371/1748, Grey to Crackanhorpe, 27 December 1913.

propaganda might have presented as wholly apolitical and altruistic, these persuasive devices drove the representation of humanitarian crisis in a more political direction.

Constructions of the Perpetrator: Cementing Binaries of Good and Evil

The impact of these devices rested on the advocates' ability to concoct an image of victimhood as much as the extent to which they could convince an audience of the barbarism of the perpetrating group. The pro-Serb and pro-Albanian humanitarian campaigns engaged with a 'victim-victimizer dichotomy'.¹⁰⁵ Atrocity propaganda, skewed histories of suffering, and images of religious persecution fulfilled one element within an 'ontology of victimhood'.¹⁰⁶ However, for the pro-Albanian lobby, these devices were only effective insofar as they were accompanied by the understanding that Serbia was capable of sanctioning such policies. For the pro-Serb lobby, the idea that Serbia's intrinsic victimhood entitled it to reclaim Kosovo equally depended on the construction of a malevolent 'other': the Central Powers and the Albanians. This imaginative binary between victim and villain meant that knowledge of both Serbian and Albanian suffering could not coexist in imaginative interpretations of the region. As the pro-Serb lobby cemented an image of Serbian victimhood during the First World War, the pro-Albanian lobby found it increasingly difficult to expose the horror of Serbia's conduct in Kosovo.

During the Balkan Wars, the Albanian Committee propagated images of atrocity to evoke British sympathy for Kosovar Albanian victims. Pro-Albanian advocates tied this humanitarian appeal to

¹⁰⁵ Maya Kahanoff, Itamar Lurie, and Shafiq Masalha, 'Moving Beyond the Victim-Victimizer Dichotomy: Reflecting on Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue' in *Victimhood Discourse in Contemporary Israel*, ed. by Illan Pereg (Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 177-204 (p. 177).

¹⁰⁶ Ruth Amir, 'The Politics of Victimhood: A Vision of an Apocalypse' in *Victimhood Discourse in Contemporary Israel*, ed. by Illan Pereg (Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 153-76 (p. 153).

Albania's territorial claim to Kosovo by accusing Belgrade of pursuing a 'deliberate policy' of massacre in that region.¹⁰⁷ This accusation undermined the Serbian claim by demonstrating that Serbia could not be entrusted to administer regions with an ethnic Albanian majority. However, as the Albanian Committee sensed, Serbia's Christian reputation had given it impunity in the minds of the Liberal government, making this allegation more difficult to prove. The tendency to see Balkan Christians as innately innocent grew out of popular framings of the Balkan Wars as a 'Cross versus Crescent' conflict, wherein the Balkan League were Christian liberators and the Muslim Turks were barbaric villains.¹⁰⁸ Pro-Albanian advocates disputed this framing by criticising Serbia's ability to 'shelter under the cross'.¹⁰⁹ In her acclaimed book, *The Struggle for Scutari*, Durham argued that it was not the Porte, but 'the Orthodox Church, with her Jewish pogroms in Russia and her Balkan exploits' that held 'the world's record for religious savagery'.¹¹⁰ According to the pro-Albanian lobby, there was then a wider injustice wherein religious prejudice had afforded Serbia a 'cloak of religion'.¹¹¹ Thus, Serbian soldiers were free to commit barbarisms — such as murdering 'a woman in child to decide bets on the baby's sex' — without any political consequences.¹¹²

The outbreak of the Second Balkan War and the 'fratricidal' turn of the Balkan League to some extent aided the pro-Albanians' attempts to establish Serbian barbarism. British perceptions of Balkan people during this period were flexible; any assumption of Balkan Christian virtue was by

¹⁰⁷ SHC, DD/DRU/31, The Albanian Committee, London, 1912-13, 18 February 1913.

¹⁰⁸ Dauti, p. 130, p. 160.

¹⁰⁹ SHC, DD/DRU/4/10, unsigned member of Albanian Committee to Herbert, 15 April 1913.

¹¹⁰ Edith Durham, *The Struggle for Scutari (Turk, Slav and Albanian)* (Edward Arnold, 1914), p. 303.

¹¹¹ SHC, DD/DRU/31, Report of the First Meeting of the Committee, 17 December 1912.

¹¹² Herbert, p. 254.

no means cemented. The Ottoman withdrawal meant that the narrative of a Cross versus Crescent conflict could no longer be applied as it had been during the First Balkan War. Therefore, as reports of inter-League aggression trickled in, the Balkan allies came to be identified in Britain less in terms of their Christianity, more by their essential ‘Balkanness’, a label that came with violent and unsavoury connotations.¹¹³ As one local newspaper confirmed in August 1913, Serbia’s ‘shocking butcherings’ in northern Albania were a ‘spectacle calculated to disgust the civilised world’.¹¹⁴ Assumptions of Balkan Christian innocence were further challenged by the publication of the Carnegie Endowment’s inquiry into Balkan League’s conduct during the war.¹¹⁵ Detailing systematic atrocities against minority populations in annexed territories, the report contributed to a ‘dramatic shift’ in the characterisation of the Balkan allies, from Christian liberators to arbiters of savage violence.¹¹⁶ These developments may have thereby increased British receptivity to pro-Albanian publications of Serbian barbarity.

However, their impact on the case for the inclusion of Kosovo into Albania was minimal. The Second Balkan War was too short-lived (having lasted less than two months) to have wholly dismantled the reputation of the Balkan allies as Christian liberators.¹¹⁷ Likewise, whilst the Carnegie Report did make previously unknown evidence of League misconduct available to the

¹¹³ Michail, *The British*, p. 84; Mark Mazower, *The Balkans* (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2000), pp. 12-13.

¹¹⁴ ‘A Truce in the Balkans’, *Leicester Chronicle*, 2 August 1913 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000173/19130802/264/0012>> [accessed 1 April 2025].

¹¹⁵ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Carnegie Endowment, 1914); Ilčev, ‘The 1913’, p. 203.

¹¹⁶ Michail, *The British*, p. 84.

¹¹⁷ Cameron, ‘Reconsidering’, p. 122.

British public, it was only published in July 1914.¹¹⁸ It may have temporarily reinforced the ‘Balkanist trope’ and corroborated allegations of Serbian atrocities, but for the Albanian Committee, which had been operating for almost two years at that point, it came too late.¹¹⁹ The outbreak of the First World War merely one month after the publication of the report eclipsed the significance of its findings; comparing the reported atrocities to the devastating human cost of the First World War, Seton-Watson could easily revise them as having been ‘magnified tenfold’.¹²⁰ Therefore, whilst the Carnegie Report and the Second Balkan War may have briefly altered British perceptions of the Serbian war campaign, the thrust that these developments gave to the pro-Albanian campaign was momentary.

British interpretations of Balkan people shifted according to a precarious, ever-changing international context. This process was not wholly organic; British lobbyists strove to become agents of image production, and harnessed political developments in favour of their espoused nation. As the First World War began, the pro-Serb lobby revived the image of Serbian biblical martyrdom with ease, demonstrating the ephemerality of any progress that the Albanian Committee made in previous years to deconstruct it. Their ability to do so challenges the argument that the Second Balkan War conclusively cemented perceptions of Balkan barbarism in Britain.¹²¹ The pro-Serb lobby successfully juxtaposed Serbian victimhood with a far greater evil: Germany. Pro-Serb publicists portrayed Germany and Austria as ‘traitors to their Christianity’ to

¹¹⁸ Michail, ‘The Balkan Wars’, p. 325; Samuel Foster, ‘Re-imagining Arcadia: The South Slavic Balkans in the Changing Ideal of Western Europe, 1885-1914’, in *Europe and the East: Historical Ideas of Eastern and Southeast Europe, 1789-1989*, ed. by Mark Hewitson and Jan Vermeiran (Taylor and Francis, 2023), pp. 210-32 (p. 225).

¹¹⁹ Michail, ‘Western Attitudes’, p. 225.

¹²⁰ R.W. Seton Watson, *The Rise of Nationality in the Balkans* (Constable & Co., 1917), pp. 277-8, quoted in Michail, *The British*, p. 87.

¹²¹ Todorova, *Imagining*, p. 19.

create a point of contrast with Serbian suffering.¹²² For G. K. Chesterton, a member of the KDC, the Austrians were ‘Judas Iscariot’ and the Germans, Christendom’s ‘most insolent enemy’ of all.¹²³ In ascribing the Central Powers these biblical roles, the pro-Serb lobby rekindled notions of Christian innocence and integrated their propaganda into wider British patriotic wartime narratives of the German ‘Huns’ as a scourge upon the civilised world.¹²⁴ Through depicting the perpetrators, pro-Serb publicists were thus able to graft the Serbian national cause onto ‘Britain’s moral crusade’ against barbarism.¹²⁵ Though the Albanian Committee had attempted to establish the Serbian atrocities as ‘a barbarity which [was] exceptional even in the Balkans’, once the First World War began, Serbian actions were ultimately minimised by the SRF’s construction of Germany as the ‘disgrace of Europe and her culture’, as well as Christianity itself.¹²⁶ This image of unimaginable evil fuelled the argument that a strong, enlarged Serbia would be necessary to prevent *Drang nach Osten* and the Germanic schemes of ‘worldwide domination’.¹²⁷

In pro-Serb publications, it was not only Germany responsible for Serbian suffering, but also the Ottoman Empire and the Albanians themselves. Images of Ottoman and Albanian barbarism negated knowledge of Albanian suffering, damaging the pro-Albanian lobby’s emphasis on the

¹²² SSEES, SEW/5/3, A Nation’s Celebration of Supreme Sacrifice: The Serbian Kossovo Day, undated.

¹²³ G.K. Chesterton, ‘The Thing Called a Nation: The Spiritual Issue of the War’, in *The Lay of Kossovo: Serbia’s Past and Present (1389-1917)*, ed. by Frederick William Harvey (KDC, 1917), pp. 32-35 (pp. 34-35).

¹²⁴ ‘Serbia Doomed’, *Strabane Weekly News*, 4 December 1915 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003130/19151204/072/0004>> [accessed 2 April 2025]; Welch, *Propaganda*, chap. 2.

¹²⁵ Catrionna Pennel, “‘Why We Are At War’: Justifying War in Britain, 1914’, in *Justifying War: Propaganda, Politics and the Modern Age*, ed. by David Welch and Jo Fox (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 95-108 (p. 100).

¹²⁶ Hansard, HC Debate, 8 May 1913 <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1913-05-08/debates/b4f38c5f-2d10-40e9-939a-da90e80690b7/AlbaniaAndMontenegro>> [accessed 1 April 2025]; Kossovo Day Committee, p. 9.

¹²⁷ ‘Serbia Doomed’.

necessity of Albanian rule in Kosovo to prevent further bloodshed. During the First World War, the Armenian Genocide ushered an increasing prevalence of anti-Turkish propaganda.¹²⁸ Seton-Watson capitalised on ‘The Turk Must Go Campaign’ by reminding readers that the Serbs had also been victim to the Porte’s policies of ‘extermination’ and ‘human blood tax’ during the Ottoman occupation.¹²⁹ This narrative damaged the reputation of the Albanians, whom British Liberals continued to see indistinguishable from the Turks.¹³⁰ Yet, pro-Serb publications also condemned Kosovar Albanians directly. Pro-Serb publicists presented the suffering of the Serbian nation during the Great Retreat as having been exacerbated by Albanian locals, who were reported to have attacked civilian refugees on their journey through Kosovo. As Laffan noted, the ‘Arnauts did not need German encouragement in order to begin at once a pitiless hunt for Serbian victims’.¹³¹ Reprisals likely did take place. However, by framing them as a frenzy of wanton violence, rather than a reaction to Serbia’s own policy of extermination two years earlier, pro-Serb publicists painted Kosovo as a primitive land of ‘marauding bands’.¹³² This framing entirely contradicted the image of Albanian victimhood that was promoted by the Albanian Committee before the First World War. Kosovo hence became known, not as the location of egregious Serbian atrocities during the Balkan Wars, but as the site at which Serbia fell victim to the evils of the Central Powers and the barbarism of local Albanians. In this way, the pro-Serb wartime campaign discredited the argument that Kosovo should be included into Albania on humanitarian grounds.

¹²⁸ Justin Fantauzzo, ‘Ending Ottoman Misrule: British Soldiers, Liberal Imperialism, and the First World War in Palestine’, *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 6.1 (2015), pp. 17-32 (pp. 23-24), doi:10.1080/21520844.2015.1026244.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23; SSEES, SEW/7/2/1, R.W. Seton-Watson, *Serbia’s War of Liberation*, 1915.

¹³⁰ Herbert, p. 237.

¹³¹ Laffan, p. 222.

¹³² L.F. Waring, *Serbia* (Williams & Norgate, 1917), p. 210.

After the First World War, the impact of this propaganda became clear as the AAS began to publish reports of renewed atrocities in Kosovo. These reports were met with less media receptivity than those produced by the Albanian Committee before the War. As Durham assessed in 1918, *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* had become ‘a waste of time to send to’.¹³³ Likewise, though she believed that the *Manchester Guardian* was ‘certain to publish’ her appeals, the sympathy of an editor did not guarantee that the paper’s readership would agree with an article’s content.¹³⁴ Some readers were so outraged at the suggestion that ‘gallant little Serbia’ was committing atrocities in Kosovo that they launched their own counter-appeals.¹³⁵ For example, British author and historian, Henry Baerlein, retorted that ‘it would have been well if the Anglo-Albanian Society had reminded the public that all who fly in those parts are not angels’.¹³⁶ He reminded readers that during the Great Retreat, ‘1000 to 1500 [Serbs] were cut off and murdered by savage Albanians’, yet the Albanians remain ‘highly praised by their champion, Miss Edith Durham’.¹³⁷ Baerlein’s chiding reaction illustrates the damage that images of Albanian savagery during the Great Retreat incurred on the AAS’s postwar campaign to convince Britain of the Serbian propensity for violence. Pro-Albanian humanitarian campaigning had no place amongst the image of Serbian victimhood and Albanian barbarity that pro-Serb publicists curated during the First World War. As Durham concluded in 1922, sending appeals to the press now ‘entailed so much controversy’ that it was no longer worth it.¹³⁸

¹³³ SHC, DD/DRU/47, Durham to Herbert, 23 January 1918.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Seton-Watson, *The Spirit*, p. 6.

¹³⁶ Henry Baerlein, *A Difficult Frontier: Yugoslavs and Albanians* (Leonard Parsons, 1922), pp. 61-62.

¹³⁷ Henry Baerlein, *The Birth of Yugoslavia, Volume I* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1922), p. 259.

¹³⁸ SHC, DD/DRU/47, Durham to Herbert, 14 June 1922.

The Foreign Office was similarly unwilling to accept AAS appeals and continued to frame atrocity reports as gross exaggerations. In May 1919, Durham alerted the FO to Serbian conduct in Kosovo, likening it ‘to that of the Turks towards the Armenians’ during the War (atrocities which Britain had condemned as ‘crimes “against humanity and civilisation”’).¹³⁹ The FO dismissed this, and subsequent reports, as being ‘highly coloured’, ‘partially melodrama’ and ‘ancient history’, a stale call-back to prewar reports that were ‘equally circumstantial’.¹⁴⁰ It was perhaps inconceivable that Serbia, as the martyr of European civilisation, could be relegated to such barbaric lows. Constructions of Ottoman, German and Albanian barbarity during the war therefore relativised Serbian atrocities in Kosovo, both old and new. As Laffan summarised, ‘before Germanic atrocities the dark deeds of Balkan history pale’.¹⁴¹ Owing to pro-Serb humanitarian propaganda, the pro-Albanian lobby struggled to advocate against Serbian rule in Kosovo to a Britain both too fatigued to listen, and overall unwilling to challenge such deeply entrenched constructions of Serbian martyrdom.

Conclusion

Humanitarian crisis provided British observers with a window to project their visions for the Serb-Albanian border. On one level, pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocates publicised imagery of atrocity, victimhood and barbarism out of the sincere desire to alleviate the suffering of the

¹³⁹ TNA, FO 608/29, Durham to Lord George Curzon, 14 May 1919; Tusan, *Britain*, chap. 5.

¹⁴⁰ TNA, FO 608/29, Durham to Lord Curzon, 14 May 1919; TNA, FO 608/47, Serbian Territorization on the Albanian Front, 18 April 1919.

¹⁴¹ Laffan, p. 28.

peoples they claimed to represent. However, these images also served as a persuasive device to insert the question of territorial configuration into British political and cultural discourse.

For the pro-Albanian lobby, the allocation of Kosovo to Albania was in itself a solution to humanitarian crisis. Charitable donations were desirable, but they were an impermanent fix to an issue which demanded a more durable political response; massacre, displacement and repression, as pro-Albanian lobbyists correctly predicted, would continue so long as Kosovo remained part of Serbia. The extent to which the pro-Albanian advocacy campaign convinced Britain of the need to restructure the Serb-Albanian border to reflect this humanitarian dimension was limited. Most damaging perhaps was the existence of widespread religious prejudice which saw Muslims as innately dishonest and unworthy victims. For the majority of the FO, reports of atrocities in Kosovo merely confirmed this stereotype. Though an exposé of a Liberal anti-Muslim bias had certain value in pressuring the government to act on behalf of persecuted Muslim Albanians, the negative impact of religious prejudice on pro-Albanian advocacy far outweighed this advantage.

In 1942, Edith Durham reflected on Seton-Watson's work during the First World War. She accused him of having 'persistently whitewashed' Serbian crimes against Albanians, and having advertised Serbia 'as innocent and heroic' to 'encourage the idea of a Great Serbia'.¹⁴² This assertion has much merit. As Britain entered a state of total war, the pro-Serb lobby integrated images of the Serbian humanitarian crisis into wider patriotic propaganda. Successfully responding to this wartime context, the SRF drove images of Serbian suffering, holy sacrifice and innocence. This propaganda played on British charitable sensibilities, attracting a wide support-

¹⁴² LSC, MS 405, Durham to Sir Edward Boyle, 12 July 1942.

base for a humanitarian campaign that was highly political in nature. Appeals were interwoven with arguments advertising South Slavic unification, and often appropriated Kosovo mythology as a symbol of Serbian martyrdom. Humanitarian campaigning thus forged connections between the Serbian war effort and the necessity of Serbian rule in Kosovo. At the end of the War the pro-Albanian lobby attempted to revive humanitarian concerns over the treatment of Albanians in Kosovo. Pro-Serb wartime propaganda, however, had cemented Kosovo as a key component of the first Yugoslav state.

Chapter Two

Interpreting Civilisational Development

Contestation over the formation of the Serb-Albanian border, as understood in British politics, was characterised by stereotypes surrounding Albanian, Serbian and Balkan people. These judgements were often formed according to the assumption that some people, cultures and regions possessed a higher level of ‘civilizational development’ than others.¹⁴³ Conflict and humanitarian crisis brought the question of relative modernity in Serbia and Albania to the forefront of British political engagement with the Balkans; reports of atrocity, barbarism and narratives of Christian sacrifice were loaded with distinctions between the ‘civilised’ and the ‘uncivilised’. Yet, violence and victimhood were not the only imaginative devices that British political advocates used to demonstrate civilisational development in their ‘adopted’ Balkan nations.¹⁴⁴ Conceptions of racial development, cultural achievement, and governmental aptitude were as prevalent in pro-Serb and pro-Albanian publications. The prejudices that both lobbies displayed in this way were not benign ‘products of their time’, but crucial to discussions surrounding territory, sovereignty and the configuration of the Serb-Albanian border.¹⁴⁵

The interconnection in British politics between civilisational development and foreign territorial ambitions stemmed from Empire. Existing historiography has explored the concept of

¹⁴³ Jennifer Pitts, ‘Ideas of Empire: Civilization, Race, and Global Hierarchy’, in *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, ed. by Warren Breckman and Peter E. Gordon, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 447-69 (p. 467).

¹⁴⁴ Wolff, ‘The Western’, p. 392.

¹⁴⁵ Jeremy W. Crampton, ‘The Cartographic Calculation of Space: Race Mapping and the Balkans at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919’, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7.5 (2006), pp. 731-52 (p. 734), doi:10.1080/14649360600974733.

‘civilisation’ as part of an ‘ideology of human development’ within early twentieth-century British imperial discourse.¹⁴⁶ Measures such as Christianity, as well as more secular concepts of ‘economic and technological progress’, ‘self-discipline, civility and respect for rule of law’ came with political connotations for the group concerned.¹⁴⁷ While those who did not possess such qualities were deemed incapable of self-governance, those who did possess them were entrusted to full political independence, and morally obliged to impart paternalistic guidance onto the former ‘uncivilised’ population. In the British context, this belief system most obviously manifested itself in colonial rule, and the rhetoric of a ‘civilising mission’.¹⁴⁸

Given that the ‘presupposition of a hierarchy of civilisational development’ was so widely accepted in early twentieth-century Britain, the fact that pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocates engaged with this framework is unsurprising.¹⁴⁹ Yet, the ways in which empire manifested in British political engagement with continental border debates is under-explored. Though imagological works have highlighted the ‘quasi-colonial’ frameworks through which British observers formed images of the Balkans, these studies concern travel writing and literature, rather than political discourse.¹⁵⁰ James Perkins addressed this gap through an exploration into the

¹⁴⁶ Sam Brewitt-Taylor, “‘Christian Civilisation’”, “‘Modern Secularisation’”, and the Revolutionary Re-Imagination of British Modernity’, *Contemporary British History*, 34.4 (2020), pp. 603-628 (p. 606), doi:10.1080/13619462.2020.1780124; Mark Mazower, ‘An International Civilization? Empire, Internationalism and the Crisis of the Mid-Twentieth Century’, *International Affairs*, 82.3 (2006), pp. 553-66 (pp. 554-60), doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.2006.00551.x; Pitts, ‘Ideas’; Peter J. Cain, ‘Character, “Ordered Liberty”, and the Mission to Civilise: British Moral Justification of Empire, 1870–1914’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40.4 (2012), pp. 557-78, doi:10.1080/03086534.2012.724239.

¹⁴⁷ Brewitt-Taylor, “‘Christian Civilisation’”, p. 607.

¹⁴⁸ Dauti, p. 50.

¹⁴⁹ Pitts, p. 447, p. 467.

¹⁵⁰ Todorova, *Imagining*, p. 15; Todorova, ‘The Balkans’, pp. 455-56; Todorova, ‘The Ottoman Legacy’; Bakić-Hayden, ‘Nesting Orientalisms’, p. 917; Catherine Baker, *Race and the Yugoslav Region: Postsocialist, Post-Conflict, Postcolonial?* (Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 6; Wolff, *Inventing*, p. 9; Cufurovic, ‘Fully Known’, pp. 40-41.

Balkan Committee.¹⁵¹ Coupling ‘political engagement with the Balkans’ with ‘empire and imperialism’, Perkins highlights how concepts of civilisational hierarchy pervaded the Committee's humanitarian work.¹⁵² This chapter expands on the connection between empire and political advocacy by exploring the centrality of civilisational development in British discussions over the construction of the Serb-Albanian border. It demonstrates how judgements of comparative modernity in Serbia and Albania drove a preference for Serbia's claim to Kosovo, alongside the perception that Albanians were unsuited to administer themselves in that region.

The first two sections of the chapter offer a more thorough investigation into preexisting British socio-cultural stereotypes about Albania, Serbia and the Balkans, considering how pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocates negotiated such stereotypes in their efforts to promote the territorial ambitions of their respective ‘adopted’ nations.¹⁵³ The final section explores the ways in which these judgements flowed in and out of British policymaking circles, demonstrating that officials accepted Serbian sovereignty in Kosovo as a desirable precondition for regional progression. The chapter thus foregrounds the tangible impact of imaginative constructions on discussions surrounding contested territory, highlighting the interconnection between socio-cultural prejudice and foreign policy in early twentieth-century Britain.

¹⁵¹ Perkins, *British Liberalism*, pp. 105-3; Perkins, ‘The Congo’ p. 566.

¹⁵² Perkins, ‘The Congo’, p. 566.

¹⁵³ Wolff, ‘The Western’, p. 392.

‘A Valuable Element in Europe’: Representations of Albanian Modernity¹⁵⁴

In May 1913, Herbert gave a speech to the House of Commons on the territorial dismemberment of Albania. Condemning the fact that Albania had been ‘despoiled’ of its market towns in Kosovo, he explained that, ‘there is one reason which is often given to show why this is not the injustice we believe it is. It is that the Albanians are a wild people and are centuries behind our time’.¹⁵⁵ In doing so, Herbert summarised the centrality of conceptions of civilisational development to early twentieth-century British debates surrounding territorial configuration. Alongside the labels of ‘primitive’ and ‘wild’ came an assigned incapacity for self-governance, and an invitation for a more ‘civilised’ outsider to apply a firm ruling hand.¹⁵⁶ The pro-Albanian lobby navigated this supposition by communicating a counter-image of Albania as intrinsically Western European. This civilisational qualification demonstrated that Albania was ‘ready’ for statehood, but it also had direct bearing on the question of Kosovo, which was on the one hand envisaged by pro-Albanian advocates as an essential part of this state project, and on the other, claimed by Serbia on the basis of a ‘civilising mission’.

Most British representations of Albania before the 1910s framed ‘the Albanian’ as wholly estranged from Western European civilisation, and Kosovo as ‘the wildest and most savage country in the East’.¹⁵⁷ This qualification had been established in travel writing and literature

¹⁵⁴ SHC, DD/DRU/31, The Albanian Committee, London, 1912-1913, 18 February 1913.

¹⁵⁵ Hansard, HC Debate, 8 May 1913 <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1913-05-08/debates/b4f38c5f-2d10-40e9-939a-da90e80690b7/AlbaniaAndMontenegro>> [accessed 28 May 2025].

¹⁵⁶ Pitts, p. 467.

¹⁵⁷ William le Queux, *An Observer in the Near East* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1907), p. 41, p. 86; Cameron, ‘Representing’ p. 410.

from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁵⁸ During this period, travelogues became interlinked with the ‘new science of anthropology’, which increasingly identified populations as ‘species with distinctive systems and characteristics’.¹⁵⁹ This fascination with human ‘types’, each possessing immutable physical and cultural attributes, foregrounded conceptions of ‘race’ in British knowledge of Albanian civilisational development. Resulting from the reputation of anthropology as a legitimate scientific discipline, these racial stereotypes became an ‘objective’ measure to calculate a population’s capacity for self-rule.¹⁶⁰ Publications such as the 1867 book, *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe*, constructed Albania as ‘a land of primitives and brigands’, playing on Orientalist stereotypes and emphasising Albania’s ‘Eastern’ character as the grounds for its ascribed backwardness.¹⁶¹ These stereotypes remained entrenched in British popular discourse into the 1910s. As the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* confirmed to readers, Albania was in a state of ‘remote antiquity’, its inhabitants characterised by ‘ignorance and predatory propensities’.¹⁶² This perception underscored a reservation toward Albanian statehood in British official circles. As one official asserted in 1912, ‘the Albanians, like the Poles, only in a greater degree, seem to lack some quality necessary for the making of a state’.¹⁶³ Acknowledging the interrelation between these stereotypes and the political future of

¹⁵⁸ Dauti, pp. 11-26.

¹⁵⁹ Philippa Levine, ‘Anthropology, Colonialism, and Eugenics’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Eugenics*, ed. by Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 43-61 (pp. 44-45).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 44; Kavita Philip, ‘Race, Class and the Imperial Politics of Ethnography in India, Ireland and London, 1850-1910’, *Irish Studies Review*, 10.3 (2002), pp. 289-302 (p. 289), doi:10.1080/0967088022000040266.

¹⁶¹ Mariaconcetta Costantini, ‘Women Travellers to Albania in the Long Nineteenth Century’, *Victorian Popular Fictions*, 2.1 (2020), pp. 1-23 (p. 7) <<https://doi.org/10.46911/HINN2405>> [accessed 2 August 2025]; G. Muir Mackenzie, A. P. Ibry, *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe* (Bell and Daldy, 1867).

¹⁶² *The Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*, 11th edn., vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press), p. 484.

¹⁶³ TNA, FO 424/236, Peckham to Ralph Paget, 25 November 1912 in Robert Elsie, and Bejtullah D. Destani, *Kosovo: A Documentary History: From the Balkan Wars to World War II* (Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 99.

Albania, the pro-Albanian lobby thus promoted Albania's capacity for 'civilised life' as the central term 'upon which sovereignty — full or partial — might be bestowed'.¹⁶⁴ And crucially, as defined by pro-Albanian advocates, 'full' sovereignty was that which saw Kosovo included within Albania's state boundaries.

At the core of their representations was the idea that the Albanians were racially European, being both 'white' and 'non-Eastern'.¹⁶⁵ Drafting an *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry on Albania, Herbert explained that 'the women are some of the most beautiful in Europe and the men very tall and handsome'.¹⁶⁶ The women, he continued in his memoirs, were 'madonnas', resembling Renaissance masterworks and embodying the epitome of Western European beauty standards.¹⁶⁷ Herbert's use of classical artwork as an illustrative comparison suggests an attempt to imbue the Albanian with 'an immutable classical ideal' which informed British notions of racial superiority.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, in employing the Virgin Mary as a Christian point of reference, Herbert disassociated the Albanian from the racialised Muslim 'Turk'.¹⁶⁹ As one pro-Albanian advocate confirmed in 1919, the Albanians 'are not alien, they are not Eastern':¹⁷⁰ an assertion

¹⁶⁴ Mazower, 'An International', p. 557.

¹⁶⁵ Adam Kuper, 'Civilization, Culture and Race: Anthropology in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Cambridge History of Modern European Thought*, ed. by Warren Breckman and Peter E. Gordon, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 398-421 (p. 399); Richard McMahon, 'Anthropological Race Psychology 1820-1945: A Common European System of Ethnic Identity Narratives', *Nations and Nationalism*, 15.4 (2009), pp. 575-96 (p. 577), doi:10.1111/j.1469-8129.2009.00393.x; Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ SHC, DD/DRU/31, Herbert, 'Albania', undated draft for *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry.

¹⁶⁷ Herbert, p. 158.

¹⁶⁸ Todorova, *Imagining*, p. 123.

¹⁶⁹ Steve Garner, and Saher Selod, 'The Racialization of Muslims: Empirical Studies of Islamophobia', *Critical Sociology*, 4.1 (2015), pp. 9-19 (p. 11), doi:10.1177/0896920514531606; Dogan Gürpınar, 'The Rise and Fall of Turcophilism in Nineteenth-Century British Discourses: Visions of the Turk, "Young" and "Old"', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 39.3 (2012), pp. 347-72 (p. 360), doi:10.1080/13530194.2012.726487.

¹⁷⁰ TNA, FO 608/28, Memorandum by C. Telford Erikson, 19 February 1919.

that became more critical to pro-Albanian advocacy after the Armenian genocide, and the heightened anti-Ottoman disdain in Britain that resulted from it.¹⁷¹ Though Herbert himself remained a staunch ‘Turcophil’ until his death in 1923, the focus in pro-Albanian advocacy on the Christian Europeanness of Albanian physiognomy suggests that they acknowledged the benefits that this racial designation would bring to the Albanian cause, as well as the political consequences that could stem from conflation between the Albanian and the Turk in the Liberal climate of 1910s Britain.¹⁷² Prejudice did not just exist passively, manifesting through subliminal Balkanism — contemporaries recognised it, and pro-Albanian advocates actively sought to understand its roots in order to minimise its impact on British policy toward Albania.

For Herbert, Albania’s ‘whiteness’ guaranteed its territorial integrity against Serbian, Montenegrin and Greek incursions. These states justified expansion into Albanian majority lands on the basis that they would bring order, culture and civilisation to a primitive people.¹⁷³ Responding to this rhetoric, Herbert told the press in 1917 that ‘one white race should never in the future against its will, be put under the domination of another white race’.¹⁷⁴ This assertion supported Albanian independence in the face of Serbian expansionism into Kosovo. Furthermore, by upholding ‘whiteness’ as the condition upon which freedom from imperial rule rested, Herbert reassured Whitehall that his criticism of Balkan expansionism had no bearing on his attitudes toward the British Empire. As he explained to the War Cabinet, whilst the Serbian colonial project in Kosovo was unjustifiable, ‘the races whom we govern are not white races and are

¹⁷¹ See for example, Arnold Toynbee, *The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1917).

¹⁷² Herbert, p. 334; Destani and Tomes, p. 64, p. 265. It also exemplifies the intersection between Christian chauvinism and scientific racism in early twentieth-century determinations of civilisational development.

¹⁷³ Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 293.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from Herbert to *Dielli*, 16 May 1917, in Destani and Tomes, p. 216.

incapable of self-government'.¹⁷⁵ In emphasising 'whiteness' as a qualifier for self-rule in an intra-European context, as in a wider imperial context, Herbert reaffirmed the racial basis, and thus moral legitimacy of the British Empire. This focus on race thereby represented a means to disassociate the case for Albanian independence from anti-colonial movements across the empire, encouraging British support for a cause that was, at its core, anti-imperial.

However, if according to Herbert the Albanians were 'white', their physiognomy was not sufficient proof. Within British categorisations of 'whiteness' were distinctions between 'the more and the less white'.¹⁷⁶ Among those on the 'lesser' end, Eastern Europeans, Jews and Muslims were deemed inferior to Western Europeans not only in appearance but also in culture.¹⁷⁷ In pro-Albanian publications, the Albanians thus shared a number of cultural characteristics with Western Europe, racialised as a product of innate cognitive ability. As the AAS told the FO in 1919, the Albanians 'have all the qualities necessary for the formation of a civilised society', including a 'love of liberty', 'a sense of duty, loyalty, industry, intelligence and a taste for the fine arts'.¹⁷⁸ For Herbert, these qualities emanated from ancient racial lineage.¹⁷⁹ The Albanians were 'equal in antiquity to the Greeks', having descended from the ancient Illyrians, a people who had already 'reached a considerable pitch of civilisation'.¹⁸⁰ Purported links between Alexander the Great and Albania reinforced this classical romanticism, positioning

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Herbert to War Cabinet, 19 January 1917, in Destani and Tomes, p. 210.

¹⁷⁶ Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2007), chap. 4.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ TNA, FO 608/29, AAS to Eric Drummond, 1 February 1919.

¹⁷⁹ SHC, DD/DRU/31, The Albanian Committee, London, 1912-13.

¹⁸⁰ SHC, DD/DRU/31, Draft by Herbert entitled 'The People', undated; SHC, DD/DRU/31, 'The Albanian Question', pamphlet by M. Konitza, 1918.

Albania alongside Greece as the ‘leaders of civilisation in the Ancient World’.¹⁸¹ These narratives were also used by Britons who advocated for Armenian self-rule. As one Liberal explained, ‘the Armenoid type we now realise was one of the most potent civilisers of Europe’.¹⁸² This cross-lobby fascination with ancient civilisation reflected anthropology’s roots in classics and biblical studies, as well as the educational background of the advocates themselves, many of whom had received classical training at public school and Oxbridge. Both factors contributed to the racial prestige attached to the ‘Greek physical ideal’ in British imperial discourse.¹⁸³ By attaching Albanian history to Ancient Greece, the pro-Albanian lobby thus imbued the Albanians with a cultural-racial pedigree, negating stereotypes of Albanian ‘Eastern’ primitiveness.

Representations of classical culture also mitigated stereotypes specific to Kosovo. British travel writers and anthropologists often depicted Kosovo as more backward than central Albania, attributing this distinction to the region’s mountainous geography, and the tribal organisation of its inhabitants.¹⁸⁴ The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, for example, accepted that the southern Albanian Tosks — who did not have a tribal system — were semi-intelligent. However, it characterised the Ghegs, who lived in tribes across northern Albania and Kosovo, as ‘fierce and lawless’.¹⁸⁵ Because of this rural element, Kosovo, more so than Albania proper, was particularly vulnerable to the argument that modernity could only be introduced through foreign occupation.

¹⁸¹ Toynbee, *The Murderous*, p. 8; For British perceptions of Ancient Greece and civilisation, see Michail, *The British*, p. 119.

¹⁸² H.H. Johnston *The “Clean-Fighting” Turk: Yesterday, To-Day, and To-Morrow* (Spottiswoode, Ballantyne, & Co., Ltd., 1918), p. 5.

¹⁸³ Mark Bradley, ‘Introduction: Approaches to Classics and Imperialism’, in *Classics and Imperialism in the British Empire*, ed. by Mark Bradley (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-26 (p. 24); Cain, ‘Character’, p. 559.

¹⁸⁴ For links between rurality and ascribed primitiveness, see E.C.H. Keskitalo, *Frontier Thinking and Human-Nature Relations: We Were Never Western* (Taylor and Francis, 2024), pp. 49-60.

¹⁸⁵ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn., vol. 1, p. 484.

In this case, it was not the general interpretation of ‘the Balkans’ as a monolithic backwater that informed policy, but stereotypes that were specific to a particular Balkan nation, and within that, those which concerned one regional subgroup. As Ralph Paget (British Minister to Serbia) reported in 1912, ‘the Northern Albanians are an unruly turbulent lot [...] all are considered unfit for self-government’.¹⁸⁶ This assumption also emanated from the prevalence of ‘blood-feud’, a component of the northern Albanian tribal law code which permitted honour killing.¹⁸⁷ As the Historical Section of the Foreign Office (formed in 1918 to provide historical context to Paris Peace Conference proceedings) explained, blood-feud was a ‘pestilence’ that ‘rages among the Albanian mountains’.¹⁸⁸ Summarising the impact of tribal stereotypes on the contestation over Kosovo, the Albanian Committee asserted that ‘the most is made of this fact and we are told that a strong hand is needed’.¹⁸⁹ These stereotypes thus corroborated the image of savage reprisals during the Great Retreat, and fed Serbian expansionist rhetoric which presented Kosovar Albanians as ‘utterly incapable of governing themselves’.¹⁹⁰

In response, the pro-Albanian lobby omitted the existence of the tribal system, promoting an interpretation of Kosovo tailored in accordance with Western European standards of government.¹⁹¹ When writing to the Foreign Office, Durham emphasised the existence of nationwide governmental infrastructure in Kosovo. For example, in July 1913, she reported ‘a

¹⁸⁶ TNA, FO 800/76, Paget to Grey, 22 November 1912.

¹⁸⁷ Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (Macmillan, 1998), p. 20.

¹⁸⁸ Historical Section, *Handbooks Prepared Under the Direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office*, no. 17, *Albania*, ed. by G. W. Protheroe (H.M. Stationary Office, 1920), p. 14; See also E.J. Dillon, ‘Albanian Characteristics’, *The Contemporary Review* (1911), in Bejtullah D. Destani, *Albania: To Be or Not to Be?* (Austin Macauley Publishers, 2023).

¹⁸⁹ SHC, DD/DRU/31, C. F. Ryder, ‘Albania for the Albanians’, 10 May 1913.

¹⁹⁰ Banac, p. 293.

¹⁹¹ Cameron, ‘Representing’, p. 410.

temporary government in each town', all of which reported to central control in Vlorë.¹⁹² Everyone had 'paid their taxes' and there was a 'gendarmerie' that facilitated 'extraordinary order and peace'.¹⁹³ These facts and omissions buttressed the idea, as summarised by the Honorary Secretary of the AAS, that the Albanians were 'perfectly capable of doing all that any other independent small European state can do'.¹⁹⁴ However, Durham's earlier anthropological work did feature blood-feud and the tribal system quite heavily. In her 1909 book, *High Albania*, she revered blood-feud as an intricate set of laws which the Albanians observed with 'fidelity'.¹⁹⁵ Herbert was similarly attracted to the hierarchical nature of the northern Albanian tribes due to his 'impeccably aristocratic background'.¹⁹⁶ Typical of Durham and Herbert's 'Conservative ethos', it was their admiration for the Albanian tribal system, in its romantic antiquity, that drew them to Albania in the first place.¹⁹⁷ That they both concealed their appreciation for Albanian rural tradition from their political advocacy demonstrates the political connotations attached to ideas of 'wilderness', as opposed to 'progress, order and justice', in determining who could be entrusted to self-governance.¹⁹⁸ Both advocates understood that if Kosovo was imagined as lacking such qualities, Serbian rule could be legitimated as a necessary step for regional progression.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹² TNA, FO 800/76, Durham to Count de Salis, 14 July 1913.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Emphasis in original. SHC, DD/DRU/4/10, J.C. Paget to Herbert, 9 May 1913.

¹⁹⁵ Malcolm, *Kosovo*, p. 20; Durham, *High Albania*, p. 66; Cameron, 'Representing', p. 410.

¹⁹⁶ Destani and Tomes, p. xvi.

¹⁹⁷ Gürpınar, 'The Rise and Fall', p. 366.

¹⁹⁸ Keskitalo, *Frontier Thinking*, p. 58; Casper Sylvest, *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880-1930: Making Progress?* (Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 7.

¹⁹⁹ TNA, FO 608/29, General G. F. Phillips to Director of Military Intelligence, 31 December 1918.

British pro-Albanian publications characterised ‘the Albanian’ as white, culturally advanced, European, and orderly. Intended to separate knowledge of Albania from the Ottoman Empire, the choice to model Albania on the modern Western European state encapsulates early twentieth-century popular understandings of Western European superiority. Stressing the proximity of Albania to this standard was an important way to underline the capacity of the Albanians for statehood. This argument was particularly pertinent for Kosovo, which, owing to its ‘remote’ rurality, was ascribed a lower level of civilisation than central Albania. The pro-Albanian lobby thus engaged with a civilisational framework to provide the Albanian claim to Kosovo with a sense of relevance in a British imperial context, and to combat rhetoric surrounding a ‘civilising mission’ emanating from Serbia itself.

Between Balkan and European: Serbia and ‘the Task of Civilization’²⁰⁰

The ways in which the pro-Serb lobby justified Serbian territorial expansion bore striking similarity to the civilisational narratives employed by those advocating for Albanian statehood. Seton-Watson, like Herbert, identified a civilisational hierarchy composed of the ‘Peoples of Europe’, and the ‘semi-civilised parts of the world, where infant communities exist, who are incapable of governing themselves’.²⁰¹ Resembling a ‘traditional moralising Briton who wished to radiate civilization among those less fortunate’, Seton-Watson believed the former had an obligation to govern the latter ‘semi-civilised or uncivilised races’.²⁰² The pro-Serb lobby conveyed Serbia’s membership amongst the ‘Peoples of Europe’ through constructions of Serbian

²⁰⁰ Seton-Watson, *The Spirit*, p. 20.

²⁰¹ SSEES, SEW/2/2/1, *The New Europe Society: Declaration of Aims, 1917*; SSEES, SEW/2/2/1, *Draft Charter of the New Europe Society, 1917*.

²⁰² *Ibid.*; Miller, ‘R. W. Seton-Watson’ p. 59.

democracy and ‘high culture’.²⁰³ These more secular images, alongside the more overtly religious humanitarian propaganda, co-informed an impression of Serbian modernity on ‘full equality with Western Europe’.²⁰⁴ The primary purpose of this representation was to reassure Britain that Serbia could be entrusted as ‘a Southern Slav Piedmont’ — responsible for unifying the South Slavs and bringing modernity to the Balkans.²⁰⁵ Its success in guiding British perceptions of Serbia, from ‘Eastern’ to ‘Western’, validated Serbian expansionism into Kosovo as a solution to the perceived primitiveness of the Albanians.

The pro-Serb lobby’s attempts to prove Serbia’s ‘Europeanness’ depended on the extent to which they could extract Serbia from preexisting derogatory stereotypes about the Balkans. Todorova and others argue that the Balkans had been constructed as a ‘European other’, relegated to the periphery of Europe by a history of Ottoman cultural influence.²⁰⁶ Though the Balkanism thesis has been criticised for painting British imaginings of the Balkans in an overly derogatory light, Serbia was treated as ‘underdeveloped’ in British discourse before the Balkan Wars.²⁰⁷ Before undergoing a sudden change of heart during his trip to Serbia in 1913, even Seton-Watson framed Serbia’s ‘Eastern’ culture as antithetical to ‘progress and modern development’.²⁰⁸ This was characteristic of a wider trend in pre-Balkan Wars British-Serbian relations. Reacting to the 1903 regicide of King Alexander and Queen Draga, the *Pall Mall Gazette* responded, ‘Are the Servians

²⁰³ SSEES, SEW/2/2/1, The New Europe Society: Declaration of Aims, 1917.

²⁰⁴ Harold Temperley, *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris* (Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 119.

²⁰⁵ SSEES, SEW/7/2/1, Seton-Watson, *Serbia’s War of Liberation*, 1915; SSEES, SEW/5/5, G.M. Trevelyan, ‘The Truth about Serbia: One Aim of British Policy’, undated.

²⁰⁶ Todorova, *Imagining*, p. 12; Todorova, ‘The Ottoman Legacy’, pp. 45-77; Bakić-Hayden, ‘Nesting’, p. 917.

²⁰⁷ Mishkova, *Beyond*, pp. 211-33; Foster, *Yugoslavia*, p. 5; Michail, *The British*, p. 139; Perkins, *British Liberalism*, p. 19; Cameron, ‘Representing’, p. 400.

²⁰⁸ R. W. Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question and the Hapsburg Monarchy* (Constable & co., 1911), p. 337.

[sic] — is any of the Balkan race — a civilized people? [...] one must answer, unhesitatingly, no'.²⁰⁹ Though outrage over the regicide soon dissipated, conceptions of Serbia on the sidelines of European civilisation persisted. As the 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* confirmed, Serbia was nearing a 'modern European state', but its government remained 'in many respect primitive'.²¹⁰ Resting 'on the distinction between Europe's symbolic centre and its peripheries', this Balkanist prejudice impeded pro-Serb attempts to convey civilisational development in Serbia.²¹¹ The pro-Serb lobby thus championed Serbia as a regional exception, contrasting with the Albanians who were, in Seton-Watson's words, 'an alien and barbarous race'.²¹²

The pro-Serb lobby emphasised liberal democracy and cultural enlightenment to convey Serbian modernity. Though the image in SRF propaganda of Serbian Christian martyrdom did tether Serbia to the Western European ideal, the employment of these more secular qualities suggests that, as judged in British political discourse, Christianity (and especially Eastern Orthodox Christianity) was not necessarily synonymous with civilisational progression.²¹³ For example, G.M. Trevelyan (British historian and member of the SSoGB) painted Serbia as 'the French of the Balkans' and 'an extremely democratic people, more so than the English'.²¹⁴ This targeted emphasis on democracy implies that stereotypes surrounding Serbian duplicity and authoritarianism had persisted into the First World War, despite Serbia's newfound role as the

²⁰⁹ Miller, p. 60.

²¹⁰ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information*, 11th edn., vol. 24 (Cambridge University Press, 1911), pp. 687-92.

²¹¹ Kešić, 'Transnationalizing', p. 168; Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, 'Orientalist Variations', p. 4.

²¹² R. W. Seton-Watson, 'New Phases of the Balkan Question', *The Contemporary Review*, 104 (1913), pp. 322-30 (p. 327), no doi.

²¹³ See Evans, pp. 56-58.

²¹⁴ SSEES, SEW/5/5, G.M. Trevelyan, 'The Truth about Serbia: One Aim of British Policy', undated.

victim of Germanic barbarism. Challenging these stereotypes, Seton-Watson attempted to revise evidence of Serbian corruption and conspiracy. In a pamphlet written for the SRF, he explained that the 1903 regicide was a ‘drastic operation on a festering sore’.²¹⁵ The procedure, he elaborated, had since enabled Serbia to flourish ‘in politics, in thought, and in education’, eliminating the last remnants of Serbia’s ‘Eastern’ character.²¹⁶ This focus on Serbia’s ‘peasant democracy’, alongside gendered portrayals of ‘perfect gentlemen’ and ‘valid manhood’, distanced Serbia from its Ottoman past, aligning it instead with core ‘Western European’ values and ‘moral virtue’.²¹⁷

Depictions of Serbian art and literature reinforced this link.²¹⁸ That judgements surrounding artistic achievements featured so heavily in both pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocacy demonstrates the centrality of ‘high culture’ in contemporary discussions surrounding statehood, self-governance and territorial expansion.²¹⁹ At the centre of the pro-Serb campaign to communicate Serbian cultural development was the ‘Southern Slav’ sculptor, Ivan Meštrović. In the summer of 1915, the Meštrović Committee (a subgroup of the SRF) held an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum for Meštrović’s ‘Kosovo Cycle’ sculptures (see Fig. 2), which depicted a series of folkloric ballads about the 1389 Battle of Kosovo.²²⁰ For its organisers, the

²¹⁵ SSEES, SEW/7/2/1, Seton-Watson, *Serbia’s War of Liberation*, 1915.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ SEW/5/3/1, Letter from the SSoGB Executive Committee to Lloyd George, 25 June 1917; Seton-Watson, *The Spirit*, p. 16; Foster, ‘Re-imagining’, p. 226.

²¹⁸ For connections between the Enlightenment and the emergence of concept of a European community, see Bo Stråth, ‘Insiders and Outsiders: Borders in Nineteenth-Century Europe’, in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. by Stefan Berger (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 1-10 (p. 4).

²¹⁹ Marcel van der Haak, ‘High Culture Unravelling: A Historical and Empirical Analysis of Contrasting Logics of Cultural Hierarchy’, *Human Figurations*, 7.1 (2018), no page no. <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0007.108>> [accessed 20 August 2025].

²²⁰ SSEES, SEW/7/2/3, Correspondence re Meštrović Exhibition (1915-1917); SEW/7/2/4, Press cuttings re Meštrović Exhibitions (1915-1916;1930).



Fig. 2. Photograph of the Meštrović Sculpture Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1915

exhibition represented a means to convey ‘the cultural possibilities of the Yugoslavs’ to the British public.²²¹ The artwork of Meštrović (who was Croatian) demonstrated Yugoslav unity and married Serbian artistic culture to that of Croatia, which Seton-Watson saw as the ‘more culturally progressive’, owing to the influence of ‘the West, of Rome, of Vienna’.²²² The Meštrović Committee further communicated Serbian ‘Europeanness’ to attendees through

²²¹ SSEES, SEW/2/1/3, Seton-Watson, ‘Yugoslavia in the Making’, typescript which appeared in Serbo-Croatian journal, *Nova Europa*, undated.

²²² Stjepan Matković, ‘Ivo Pilar and Robert William Seton-Watson: Two Political Viewpoints on the Southern Slav Question’, *Croatian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2.2 (2006), pp. 17-42 (p. 33) <<https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/100257>> [accessed 7 June 2025]; R. W. Seton-Watson, ‘Yugoslavia and Croatia’, *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 8.2 (1929), pp. 117-133 (p. 119), doi:10.2307/3015126; Miller, pp. 61-62.

comparisons between Meštrović's sculpture and Western European art. For instance, the exhibition brochure, curated by Seton-Watson, noted a 'curious general resemblance' between Meštrović and Auguste Rodin: acclaimed contemporary French sculptor who even lent his name to the Committee.²²³ The fact that Meštrović came from a peasant background further allowed for his 'genius' to be framed as a reflection of innate cognitive capacity, indicative not of elite education, but of the natural qualities of his 'race'.²²⁴ Evidence of modernity could then be found in the entire Southern Slav nation, not solely the sculptures of one individual.

British attendees were eager to see the exhibition as evidence of a distinctly *Serbian* modernity, rather than a *Yugoslav* one. This response was reflective of the public's familiarity with their Serbian ally, as opposed to the more obscure, more intellectualised, concept of Yugoslavism (the Meštrović exhibition ran concurrently with other highly successful SRF campaigns, and benefitted from the profile given to Serbia by humanitarian propaganda). This context explains the overwhelmingly positive response to the exhibition. Its success in encouraging British enthusiasm for Serbian 'high culture' and civilisational advancement is, however, more surprising. Todorova argues that Balkan folklore and rural tradition were associated in the West with 'superstitious cultures unmarked by Western Enlightenment'.²²⁵ Yet, the British response to Meštrović's work, which depicted Serbian folklore, did not resemble such denigrations. *Country Life*, for example, asserted that Meštrović's folkloric sculptures proved Serbia's 'spiritual kinship

²²³ SSEES, SEW/7/2/4, Meštrović Committee, *Exhibition of the Works of Ivan Meštrović* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1915).

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Todorova, *Imagining*, pp. 11-13; Bakić-Hayden, and Hayden, 'Orientalist Variations', p. 4.

with Western Europe’, being ‘representations of English character by a Serbian sculptor’.²²⁶ Far from being condescending, reviewers commended Meštrović as on par with the best Western European culture had to offer. For the *Evening News*, his work ‘might have been wrought by a Greek sculpture of the Golden period’.²²⁷ This language echoed the pro-Albanian lobby’s emphasis on Renaissance art as a racial benchmark and demonstrated the centrality of ancient Graeco-Roman culture to the early twentieth-century British ‘ideology of modernity’.²²⁸ These positive comments thus confirmed the success of the exhibition in marrying Serbia to that model. Reflecting on his success, Seton-Watson boasted:

No more perfect a piece of propaganda could be imagined, for the plain facts of Meštrović’s career made a romantic appeal, and his sculpture — with its glorification of Kosovo and Marko and the heroes of Serb and Croat tradition — enabled even the most ignorant to draw the right deductions, without our having to force them down the public’s throat.²²⁹

Like the 1916 Kossovo Day celebrations, Seton-Watson identified the romantic nature of the Kosovo mythology as the primary appeal of the Meštrović exhibition, and the source of its success. Though it provided pro-Serb propaganda with a sense of intrigue and accessibility, it did not correspond to cultural denigration. Rather, these cultural images buttressed the idea that

²²⁶ Charles Marriot, ‘The International Society’, *Country Life*, 13 November 1915 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/9900007/19151113/087/0048?browse=true>> [accessed 30 May 2025].

²²⁷ ‘A Giant Among Sculptures: Ivan Meštrović, Serbian Shepherd’, *Evening News*, 25 June 1915 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003286/19150625/039/0002>> [accessed 30 May 2025].

²²⁸ Brewitt-Taylor, p. 604; Bradley, ‘Introduction’, pp. 23-24.

²²⁹ SSEES, SEW/2/1/3, ‘Yugoslavia in the Making’, undated.

Serbia was fighting ‘to preserve the legacy of the European Enlightenment’: a condition that they would later be obligated to impart upon Kosovo.²³⁰

The pro-Serb lobby coupled images of Serbian cultural enlightenment with denigratory depictions of the history of Ottoman Rule. Blaming any evidence of Serbian ‘underdevelopment’ on Ottoman cultural ‘deadening’, this narrative reinforced Serbian innate civilisational progression and allied the pro-Serb advocacy campaign to wider British political criticisms of the Ottoman Empire.²³¹ As British author, L.F. Waring explained, before the Ottoman invasion, Serbian ‘civilisation compared well with that of Western Europe’, their literature being ‘much the same standard of contemporary England’.²³² However, when the Ottomans invaded, they ushered in an era of cultural ‘stultification’; as Seton-Watson explained, ‘the grass does not grow under the Turkish hoof’.²³³ This framing stitched pro-Serb discourses onto wider anti-Ottoman Liberal trends. For example, Arnold Toynbee (an associate of Seton-Watson who co-authored a Blue Book on the Armenian Genocide in 1915) summarised that, ‘where Ottoman rule has spread, civilisation has perished’.²³⁴ By using the history of Ottoman occupation to sever imaginative ties between modern Serbia and the ‘Orient’, pro-Serb advocates thus integrated the case for Serbian expansionism into wider British political discourse. Furthermore, the focus on the Ottoman invasion as a cultural watershed foregrounded the 1389 Battle of Kosovo as a core point in the Serbian national canon. The territorial requisition of Kosovo in this way symbolised Serbia’s re-entrance into Western European civilisation.

²³⁰ Foster, *Yugoslavia*, p. 75.

²³¹ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn., vol. 24, p. 697.

²³² Waring, p. 149.

²³³ SSEES, SEW/7/2/1, Seton-Watson, *Serbia’s War of Liberation*, 1915; Waring, p. 148.

²³⁴ Toynbee, *The Murderous*, p. 17, p. 11.

In their depiction of Serbian politics and culture, the pro-Serb lobby endorsed the idea that some people were innately civilised, and some were not. Seton-Watson promoted depictions of Serbian democratic values and contemporary cultural advancements to demonstrate that Serbia had shed itself of the degenerative effects of the Ottoman occupation. Whilst Albania's 'Muslim element' provided Albania with a more stubborn reputation of racial inferiority, this framing served to extract Serbia from British imaginings of the Balkans as semi-Eastern and 'periphery'.²³⁵ This interaction between ideas of relative Serbian European modernity, as established in pro-Serb advocacy, and Albanian primitiveness, which remained stubbornly entrenched, underscored British official attitudes to Serbian rule in Kosovo.

'The Pacification of Albania': British Official Framings of Serbian Rule in Kosovo²³⁶

Perceptions of civilisational development in the Balkans shaped British policy toward the configuration of the Serb-Albanian border. Pro-Serb and pro-Albanian British advocates understood this dynamic, constructing racialised images, narratives of cultural enlightenment and pictures of modernity that supported the territorial ambitions of their affiliated nations. British official framings of Serbian rule in Kosovo further illuminate the political connotations attached to calculations of civilisational development, as well as the varying impact that these political advocacy campaigns made in policymaking circles.

Pro-Albanian advocacy failed to dismantle perceptions of Albanian backwardness. Reflecting in 1913 on the reception in Britain to his work with the Albanian Committee, Herbert lamented that

²³⁵ Kešić, p. 163, p. 168.

²³⁶ TNA, FO 424/236, Peckham to Ralph Paget, 25 November 1912.

‘the Liberals thought the Albanians were all Turks and the Conservatives thought they were disturbers of the peace like the Irish’.²³⁷ Whether emanating from racial connotations between Albania and the Ottoman Empire or denigrative associations between the Albanian and the Irish colonial subject, British officials were unconvinced that the Albanians were capable of self-governance.²³⁸ This remained the case throughout the 1910s and during the Paris Peace Conference. In April 1919, the British delegation settled on a project for an Italian mandate over Albania. Though the plan was abandoned a year later, its conception demonstrated the strength of these stereotypes in policymaking circles. Sir Eyre Crowe (Assistant Under-Secretary at the Paris Peace Conference and later head of the British Delegation) for example, minuted that:

It has been the mistake of all our pro-Albanians to close their eyes to the fact that ‘Albania’ is a confluence of tribes all divided by ancient feuds and vendettas amongst themselves, all equally unscrupulous in the pursuit of these feuds and quite incapable of government. If there is to be an Albanian State it must be under the protectorate of a European Power.²³⁹

Perceptions of Albanian tribal wildness, blood-feud and savagery thus informed Britain’s aversion to Albanian self-government. Nicola C. Guy has argued that British endorsement for the Italian mandate was rooted in geopolitical strategy.²⁴⁰ However, Crowe’s language suggests that the delegation favoured Italian rule, not as a strategic calculation, but under the impression that the Albanians lacked the civilisational development necessary for full independence. Mirroring

²³⁷ Herbert, p. 237.

²³⁸ The notable exception was Lord Robert Cecil, one of the founders of the League of Nations, who was instrumental in encouraging the instatement of Albania into the League. See Destani and Tomes, pp. 324-26.

²³⁹ TNA, FO 608/47, Claims of Essad Pasha to Represent Albania, 9 April 1919.

²⁴⁰ Guy, *Ethnic Nationalism*, pp. 268-82.

Crowe's attitude, the Historical Section summarised in 1920 that the Albanians were 'the most primitive people of Europe'.²⁴¹ This acceptance of Albanian backwardness motivated British officials to favour Serbian rule in Kosovo over Albanian. Crowe continued that if Italy were to receive a mandate, it should be required to 'relinquish to Greece and Serbia those territories in the south and in the north east'.²⁴² The British insistence upon the need for foreign administration in Albania and Kosovo, either in the form of an Italian mandate or Serbian expansion, therefore revealed the impact of stereotypes surrounding tribalism and rurality on a group's claims to sovereignty.

The image of Kosovo as being particularly primitive also explains why, during the Peace Conference, its inhabitants were disqualified from voicing their own political preferences through public vote. Plebiscites were used to settle several boundary disputes; in contested regions such as Upper Silesia and the Polish Corridor, inhabitants were compelled to vote for the state which they would rather be a part of.²⁴³ Herbert requested in March 1919 that the dispute over the Serb-Albanian border be settled on this same basis. However, Allen Leeper, a member of the British delegation, dismissed the proposal, responding that in Kosovo, 'the plebiscite is quite unworkable and would lead to chaos'.²⁴⁴ Leeper's concern that a plebiscite would spur conflict and disorder suggests that he considered the population of Kosovo ineligible due to the same stereotypes that informed the plan for an Italian mandate: that Albania was a land of 'ancient feuds and

²⁴¹ Historical Section, *Albania*, p. 54.

²⁴² TNA, FO 608/47, Claims of Essad Pasha to Represent Albania, 9 April 1919.

²⁴³ For a comprehensive study of the twelve plebiscites, see Sarah Wambaugh, *Plebiscites since the World War: With a Collection of Official Documents* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1933).

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Volker Prott, 'Plebiscites and the Difficult Transition to Peace after the First World War', in *Post-World War One Plebiscites and their Legacies: Exploring the Right of Self-Determination*, ed. by Sergiusz Bober (Central European University Press, 2024), pp. 35-53 (p. 46).

vendettas’, incapable of modern democracy and unprepared for the privilege of self-governance.²⁴⁵ As Brendan Karch explains, the plebiscites were applied only to contested regions along the borders of Germany and Austria, or in other words, those seen as “developed” enough to serve as an experimental zone for new democratic nation-state politics’.²⁴⁶ As is further discussed in the following chapter, this civilisational requirement precluded Kosovo from the principle of self-determination. The ‘consent of the governed’ was only desirable so long as those concerned were actually capable of offering said consent.²⁴⁷ ‘Primitives and brigands’, it seemed, did not qualify.²⁴⁸

British policymakers favoured Serbian rule in Kosovo under the impression that the Serbs would introduce modernity to a civilisational backwater. Yet, further this perception also contributed to an indifference within the Foreign Office toward how this ‘civilising mission’ was to be executed. In the summer of 1913, Belgrade announced a series of decrees which placed Kosovo under military rule, restricting gatherings of groups over five, and legalising extra-judicial murder.²⁴⁹ The head of the British Legation at Belgrade, Dayrell Crackanthorpe, reflected on this development, informing Grey that:

Account must be taken of the relatively backward condition of the population of the new provinces as compared with that of the old, and that it would be a highly dangerous

²⁴⁵ TNA, FO 608/47, Claims of Essad Pasha to Represent Albania, 9 April 1919.

²⁴⁶ Brendan Karch, ‘Plebiscites and Postwar Legitimacy’, in *Beyond Versailles: Sovereignty, Legitimacy and the Formation of New Politics after the Great War*, ed. by Marcus McPayk and Roberta Pergner (Indiana University Press, 2019), pp. 16-37 (p. 17, p. 21).

²⁴⁷ David Lloyd George, quoted in Wambaugh, *Plebiscites*, p. 10.

²⁴⁸ Costantini, ‘Women Travellers’, p. 7.

²⁴⁹ Malcolm, p. 257.

experiment to apply to the former the very liberal principles of the existing Servian [sic] Constitution.²⁵⁰

Notions of Kosovar Albanian unruliness thus relativised and excused constitutional repression. As Crowe minuted below, this programme was ‘sound’, corresponding to what ‘every other state has done in similar circumstances’, including of course, Britain itself.²⁵¹ The Foreign Office concluded that repressive measures would be necessary until the Albanians were judged ‘ripe’ enough to participate in political life.²⁵² This infantilising judgement reflected wider British imperial framings of their own colonial subjects ‘as both childlike and mentally unstable’, and therefore needing strict paternal administration.²⁵³ As the Earl of Cromer, former Consul-General of Egypt (1883-1907), explained, ‘no rational person would wish to advocate the premature creation of ultra-liberal institutions in backward countries’.²⁵⁴ Though not all officials saw Serbia as wholly ‘civilised’, most viewed the actors on either side of the Kosovo dispute through an imperial lens: the Kosovar Albanians being ‘wild children’ or a ‘subject race’, and the Serbs, as the *comparatively* advanced party, being colonial administrator.²⁵⁵ This imagined intra-Balkan hierarchy was essential to British attitudes toward the future of Kosovo, and challenge the assumption that all Balkan people were greeted with equal amounts of disdain and condescension.

²⁵⁰ TNA, FO 371/1748, Crackanthorpe to Grey, 18 November 1913.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Matthew Thomson, “‘Savage Civilisation’: Race, Culture and Mind in Britain, 1898-1939”, in *Race, Science and Medicine, 1700-1960*, ed. by Waltraud Ernst and Benard Harris (Taylor and Francis, 2002), pp. 235-58 (p. 242).

²⁵⁴ Earl of Cromer, *Political and Literary Essays, 1908-1913* (MacMillan and Co., 1913), pp. 25-26.

²⁵⁵ TNA, FO 371/1748, Crackanthorpe to Grey, 18 November 1913; Baerlein, *A Difficult Frontier*, p. 58.

The idea of Serbian modernity, as relative to Albania, further contributes to an understanding of why pro-Albanian humanitarian advocacy against the massacre of Kosovar Albanians failed to resonate with British officials. For some, Kosovar Albanian unruliness represented such a challenge for Belgrade that massacre was the only solution. For example, in 1912, Walter Peckham, British Vice-Consul of Üsküb (Skopje), offered his thoughts on the dilemma posed by Kosovo's underdevelopment. He summarised that 'the Gheg [...] has always resisted both conquest and civilisation'.²⁵⁶ The process of introducing modernity to Kosovo, he explained, would thus 'only be possible at the expense of a disproportionate amount of blood and treasure'.²⁵⁷ Calculating that the Albanians were 'not worth' these resources, he concluded that 'as will someday happen with the Kurds in Anatolia, the State which undertakes the pacification of Albania may find that the only way is to cut the Gordian knot and exterminate the Albanians'.²⁵⁸ This shocking statement revealed a level of sympathy, not for the Kosovar Albanians (who during the Balkan Wars were indeed victim to Serbian policies of extermination), but for Belgrade, as the party now tasked with 'pacifying' them. In this way, massacre could be pinned on the Kosovar Albanians themselves, whose stubborn rejection of modernity necessitated the use of violence for the task of 'transforming "wilderness" into "civilisation"'.²⁵⁹

As the pro-Albanian lobby attempted to draw FO attention to renewed massacre in Kosovo after the First World War, the idea that Serbia was entitled to use violence by virtue of their 'civilising mission' persisted. Harold Temperley (member of the British Delegation, historian, and Serbia

²⁵⁶ TNA, FO 424/236, Peckham to Ralph Paget, 25 November 1912.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Keskitalo, p. 58.

enthusiast)²⁶⁰ echoed Peckham in April 1919, minuting that ‘the only real security in a country like Albania is to have a police, who will strike at once and nip risings in the bud and not worry too much about justification’.²⁶¹ Though in his published history of the Paris Peace Conference, Temperley claimed that Belgrade had ‘promised’ its Albanian ‘subjects the same civilian and political rights as belonged to their Serbian subjects of other religions’, in private, he was thus ready to excuse violence as a legitimate means to encourage civilisational development.²⁶² As the following chapter discusses, this justification for violent policies against minorities also emanated from a commitment to the nation-state. The notion that the Kosovar Albanian population was an obstacle to both national security, and modernisation was one that the pro-Albanian lobby failed to dismantle, and that Serbian propaganda successfully reinforced.

Conclusion

Qualifications of civilisational development shaped British attitudes toward the formation of the Serb-Albanian border. Distinctions between the ‘primitive’ and the ‘modern’ drove an understanding that some people were incapable of self-government, whilst others had the right and obligation to radiate civilisation onto the ‘underdeveloped’. British political advocates deployed this understanding in their campaigns to promote Serbian and Albanian sovereignty in Kosovo. Both campaigns modelled their interpretations of civilisational development in these countries on Western Europe. The pro-Albanian lobby placed particular emphasis on Albanian

²⁶⁰ G.P. Gooch, ‘Temperley, Harold, 1879-1939’, in *Proceedings of the British Academy, 1939*, ed. by British Academy, vol. 25 (British Academy, 1939), pp. 354-93 (p. 363, p. 365) <<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/5202/25p355.pdf>> [accessed 5 June 2025].

²⁶¹ TNA, FO 608/29, Proposed Settlement of Albania, 28 April 1919.

²⁶² Harold Temperley, *History of Serbia* (G. Bell and Sons LTD., 1919), p. 119.

‘whiteness’ and orderliness as a way to dispel stereotypes of Albania as ‘Eastern’, unruly, and tribal. Seton-Watson and his colleagues painted Serbia as culturally Western European to mitigate the derogative connotations of ‘Balkanness’, which derived from a disdain for the Ottoman Empire. This presupposition of Western European superiority reflected the advocates’ own conceptualisations of modernity, as well as those of their wider British audience, towards whom their campaigns were tailored.

The fixation on civilisational development as a precondition for self-rule and as rationale for expansion was echoed in British official discourse on Kosovo. Despite the pro-Albanian lobby’s attempts to prove otherwise, British officials continuously framed Kosovo as a region of primitive savages, wholly incapable of self-governance. This stubborn framing fed into British pro-Serb advocacy, which had imbued Serbia with the qualities of a ‘modern European state’, contributing to an endorsement in the FO for Serbian expansion in Kosovo as a force for civilisation. Prejudice thus drove not only an indifference toward massacre and constitutional oppression in Kosovo, but also an acceptance that these measures were a necessary step to build modernity. These more abstract conceptions of civilisational development and imperial roles impacted British policy on the Serb-Albanian border as much as geopolitical strategy, informing the perceived drawbacks of Albanian rule, and the proposed benefits of a Serbian administration.

Chapter Three

Lobbying the Paris Peace Conference

Imaginative interpretations of Balkan peoples shaped British attitudes toward Serbian and Albanian territorial claims. From underscoring an indifference to violence in Kosovo, to rendering distinctions between Albanian backwardness and Serbian civilisational advancement, prejudice was apparent at every level of political argument and policymaking. During the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920), stereotypes continued to saturate British political advocacy and official British correspondence. The perceived disadvantages of Albanian rule in Kosovo, and potential benefits of Serbian administration were negotiated in conversation with an increased attention to the principle of national self-determination, ethnographical makeup, and the question that lay at the heart of the peacemaking process: the prevention of further conflict.

From 1919, Allied representatives negotiated the construction of a ‘New Europe’ out of the collapse of the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman Empires.²⁶³ By creating territorial boundaries that corresponded to national composition, peacemakers hoped to satisfy national demands to statehood, and to eliminate the perceived threat of national minorities as a source of inter-state conflict.²⁶⁴ Yet, the question of contested territories — those which were claimed by two or more bordering nationalities and were often inhabited by an intermixture of ethnic groups — risked compromising the ‘ideal of a homogenous nation-state’ and the mission

²⁶³ Mark Levene, ‘Nationalism and Its Alternatives in the International Arena: The Jewish Question at Paris, 1919’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28.3 (1993), pp. 511-13 (p. 514), doi:10.1177/002200949302800306; Tomáš Masaryk, *The New Europe (The Slav Standpoint)* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1918).

²⁶⁴ Levene, ‘Nationalism’, p. 514; C. A. Macartney, *National States and National Minorities* (Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 194-95; Philip Ther, *The Dark Side of Nation-States: Ethnic Cleansing in Modern Europe* (Bergen Books, 2014), p. 33-35.

to ensure lasting peace.²⁶⁵ Tasked with settling these boundary conflicts, the Conference represented a crucial opening for British political advocates who hoped to have a final say in the determination of the Serb-Albanian border.

Lacking knowledge about the regions whose future they were negotiating, British policymakers were also more open to the input of nonofficial voices than ever before.²⁶⁶ By obtaining ‘objective’ expertise pertaining to the racial, linguistic and religious makeup of contested regions, Allied delegations could ascertain their national character without needing to consult the local populations concerned. Many pro-Serb and pro-Albanian lobbyists hoped to fulfil this advisory role, and so promoted their allied nations’ claim over Kosovo using an arsenal of ethnographic statistics, cartography, historical evidence and geopolitical projections. These tools and narratives were constructed to appeal to the demands of the British delegation for ethnographic and political context, and thus illuminate the considerations that informed decision-making at the Conference.

²⁶⁵ Ther, *The Dark Side*, p. 35.

²⁶⁶ Michail, *The British*, p. 41-46; Perkins, *British Liberalism*, p. 195; Tomáš Irish, ‘Scholarly Identities in War and Peace: The Paris Peace Conference and the Mobilization of Intellect’, *Journal of Global History*, 11.3 (2016), pp. 365-86 (p. 381), doi:10.1017/S174002281600019X; Evans, pp. 115-18.

Multiple works have elaborated on this dynamic by documenting the role of lobbyists and experts at Paris.²⁶⁷ Yet, none have explored the ways in which British lobbyists engaged with and influenced deliberations surrounding the contested region of Kosovo. Likewise, though previous works have analysed official records concerning Albanian statehood and the delimitation of the Serb-Albanian border, unrecorded conversations and concealed prejudices cannot be discerned without considering the wider political context in which these processes took place.²⁶⁸ This chapter contributes to wider historiographical understanding of a transnational lobbying culture during the Conference, and provides context to the Allied delegates' ultimate decision to uphold the Serbian historical claim over the Albanian ethnographic claim.

The first section follows the ways in which both advocacy groups interacted with, and collaborated on the principle of nationality to further their respective groups' national claims. The following section considers how these claims clashed on the issue of Kosovo, analysing the debate between pro-Serb and pro-Albanian voices over the region's true ethnic makeup. The last section explores the desire to construct a territorial division that would promote regional stability, and the ways in which British political advocates shaped their arguments in accordance with this geopolitical priority. The ultimate construction of the Serb-Albanian border was borne out of a

²⁶⁷ On experts see: Irish, 'Scholarly', pp. 365-86; Tomáš Irish, 'The Paris Peace Conference and Cultural Reparations after the First World War', *The English Historical Review*, 137.589 (2022), pp. 1693-1724, doi:10.1093/ehr/cead004; Daniel Foliard, *Dislocating the Orient: British Maps and the Making of the Middle East, 1854-1921* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 3; Crampton, pp. 731-32; Georgios Giannkopoulos, 'A World Safe for Empires? A. J. Toynbee and the Internationalization of Self-determination in the East (1912-1922)', *Global Intellectual History*, 6.4 (2021), pp. 484-505, doi:10.1080/23801883.2018.1527185; Maciej Górny, *Drawing Fatherlands: Geographers and Border in Interwar Europe* (Brill, 2022); On Jewish lobbying see: Levene, 'Nationalism', pp. 513-26; Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others: The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878-1938* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 133-295; On anti-colonial nationalist lobbying see: Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Albert Wu, and Steven W. Sawyer, *The Making of a World Order: Global Historical Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles* (Routledge, 2024).

²⁶⁸ Guy, 'Linguistic Boundaries', pp. 448-70; Guy, *Ethnic Nationalism*; Guy, *The Birth of Albania*.

series of compromises, choices and influences that involved political calculation as much as inherent prejudice.²⁶⁹ By exploring this intersection, the chapter illustrates why Conference delegates justified the allocation of Kosovo to Yugoslavia, and the contribution of British political advocacy to the decision-making process. British support for Yugoslav rule in Kosovo demonstrated the success of pro-Serb advocates in establishing an association between Serbia and its historical ‘heartland’, as well as the pro-Albanian lobby’s inability to challenge the preconceptions that dissuaded British policymakers from supporting a united Albania.

The Principle of Nationality: Cross-Lobby Collaboration and Allegations of Hypocrisy

The ‘principle of nationality’, conceived as being the right ‘which all men have to group themselves according to their affinities and preferences’, was proclaimed by the Allies as the guiding basis for the reconstruction of Europe after the First World War.²⁷⁰ British pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocates participated in a transnational atmosphere of dissent surrounding the ‘uneven’ implementation of self-determination at the Conference by stressing that the Yugoslav borders and the Albanian Question be negotiated according to this principle. Their common interest in establishing self-determination in the Balkans drove a period of collaboration between them.²⁷¹ Yet, this rhetorical partnership proved fragile, and was undermined by the contestation over Kosovo, which demonstrated that the principle of nationality could not be realised without compromise and disappointment.

²⁶⁹ Wambaugh, p. ix; Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking: 1919* (Constable, 1937), p. 130.

²⁷⁰ Albert Phauphilet, ‘A Corrective to the Principle of Nationality’, *The New Europe: A Weekly Review of Foreign Politics* (11 September 1919).

²⁷¹ SSEES, SEW/5/3/3, Resolution of a joint body representing the Balkan Committee, the SSoGB and the AAS, 25 February 1920; SHC, DD/DRU 47, Durham to Herbert, 31 October 1919.

On the 28 February, 1918, Herbert dissolved the Albanian Committee and established the Anglo-Albanian Society.²⁷² Its formation symbolised a renewed commitment to the Albanian national cause and its changing position within a geopolitical context transformed by the First World War. Though Albanian statehood had been guaranteed by the Great Powers in 1913, the secret Treaty of London (1915) had agreed to partition Albania between Italy, Serbia, and Greece in exchange for Italy's entrance into the War. The Treaty, which Herbert viewed as a 'flagrant violation of all our promises about the rights of nations', was leaked to the *Manchester Guardian* on 17 January 1918, just over a month before Herbert established the AAS.²⁷³ The Society thus emerged in preparation for the fact that when the War ended, and peace negotiations began, the prospect of an Albanian state — and one with its 'proper ethnographical limits' — would be more precarious than ever.²⁷⁴ This concern was realised as Allied delegates began to discuss an Italian mandate over central Albania, and the allocation of the north and south to Yugoslavia and Greece.

To demand that Albanian sovereignty be respected, the AAS attempted to demonstrate that Albania was one nation, and thus entitled like any other European nation, to 'have a separate state of its own'.²⁷⁵ Depictions of national feeling in Albania complemented concurrent images of Albanian modernity. Allied delegates saw 'national indifference' as synonymous with 'backwardness', and so the image of a united Albanian nation challenged the belief that the Albanians possessed a low level of civilisational development, and were incapable of self-governance.²⁷⁶ In a letter to one British delegate, Durham and Herbert summarised that the

²⁷² RAI, MS 58/03, Minutes of the AAS, 28 February 1918.

²⁷³ Herbert quoted in Destani and Tomes, pp. 229-30.

²⁷⁴ SHC, DD/DRU 31, Morton F. Eden, 'Albania: Its Discontents and their Origin', 1 April 1920.

²⁷⁵ L. Oppenheim, *The League of Nations and its Problems: Three Lectures* (Longmans, Green and Co., 1919), p. 13.

²⁷⁶ Prott, p. 44.

Albanian's 'strong national consciousness, that of being Albanian by race, language, customs and feeling, distinguish him entirely from the neighbouring races'.²⁷⁷ In doing so, they drew on contemporary definitions of nationhood, provided the grounds for Albanian statehood and established that, despite any regional divisions, the 'Gheg and Tosk [were] essentially one nation'.²⁷⁸ As Herbert explained, Kosovar towns such as Peć stood 'in the same relationship to Albania as Yorkshire does to England' and it would be absurd to separate two places which shared such a strong national bond.²⁷⁹ This argument promoted the idea that the Albanian state most authentic to the nationality principle was one that included Kosovo within its boundaries.

The AAS reinforced this picture of Albanian national unity by collaborating with Albanian politicians. Durham and Herbert worked closely with Mehmed Konitza, the President of the diasporic advocacy organisation, the Pan-Albanian Federation of America (Vatra).²⁸⁰ In a pamphlet co-written with the AAS, Konitza explained that Albania was 'the only country in Europe where religion has produced no dissensions among its inhabitants'.²⁸¹ This sense of national unity, regardless of religious difference, validated the territorial integration of Kosovo, which was inhabited by a large amount of Catholic Albanian tribes, with central Albania, which was mainly Muslim.²⁸² Herbert thus collaborated with Albanian organisations when their voices was deemed strategically valuable; this was as much an exercise in limitation as it was

²⁷⁷ TNA, FO 608/29, AAS to Eric Drummond, 1 February 1919.

²⁷⁸ TNA, FO 608/29, Memorandum by Major Barnes, 'Proposed Settlement of Albania', 25 April 1919.

²⁷⁹ This comparison also had economic undercurrents. Just as Yorkshire was an industrial centre, Peć and Dibra were important market towns and Herbert considered them necessary for Albania's economic development. Hansard, HC Debate, 8 May, 1913 <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1913-05-08/debates/b4f38c5f-2d10-40e9-939a-da90e80690b7/AlbaniaAndMontenegro>> [accessed 19 March 2025].

²⁸⁰ SHC, DD/DRU 31, Pamphlet by Konitza, 'The Albanian Question', 1918.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Edith Durham, 'High Albania and its Customs in 1908', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 40 (1910), pp. 453-72 (p. 466), doi:10.2307/2843266.

amplification. That he welcomed their involvement in publications regarding national feeling suggests that he thought the Albanians might be able to convey Albanian political/national maturity more effectively than their British co-supporters. In this case, collaboration brought a certain authenticity to AAS campaigning, reinforcing the idea that Albanians possessed as much national feeling and ambition as any other emerging successor state.

However, the British delegation remained unconvinced that the Albanians constituted one homogeneous national body, rejecting interference from both the British pro-Albanian lobby and the Albanian themselves, who were denied official representation at the Conference. For example, replying to one AAS memorandum, Temperley asserted that the Albanians had little ‘strong national feeling about places except, perhaps, Koritza [Korçë]’.²⁸³ This comment encapsulated popular understanding of the Albanians as being ‘totally devoid’ of national consciousness: a perception which justified the allocation of Kosovo towns to Yugoslavia, and contributed to the idea that Albania should be placed under Italian mandate.²⁸⁴ Having already endorsed this plan, the British delegation viewed the AAS’s attempts to influence Conference proceedings as an unwelcome intrusion. Crowe quickly rejected a suggestion that Herbert become an official representative for Albania, minuting that ‘his irresponsible vagaries cause endless trouble’.²⁸⁵ He continued that ‘it would be quite impossible for every section of the foreign colonies of every nationality to be represented in Paris’.²⁸⁶ Britain, he explained, had

²⁸³ TNA, FO 608/29, Memorandum by Barnes, ‘Proposed Settlement of Albania’, 25 April 1919.

²⁸⁴ Leon Dominian, *The Frontiers of Language and Nationality in Europe* (Henry Holt and Company, 1917), p. 194.

²⁸⁵ TNA, FO 608/47/3, Representations of the Albanians of America at the Peace Conference, 15 January 1919.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

already ‘felt bound to discourage this in all other cases, Syrians, Jews, etc.’.²⁸⁷ Considering that other groups were demanding statehood, and were being denied it, there was, then, no reason that the Albanian case and its British representatives be prioritised above them. In this way, the British delegation’s aversion to Albanian statehood, and to those who promoted it, emanated not only from the belief that Albania lacked a sense of national unity and capacity for self-governance, but also from the concern that granting Albania independence would spark allegations of hypocrisy from other nationalist groups. This concern was most strongly amplified by nationalist movements within the British colonies.²⁸⁸ As one Irish nationalist politician asked in the House of Commons, ‘if it [the Conference] is to consider Albania, why not Ireland?’²⁸⁹

This question exemplified the issue with promoting an anti-imperial cause to an imperial power. For the pro-Albanian lobby, the difficulty of invoking the principle of nationality was that it spurred associations between the case for Albanian statehood, and the anti-colonial nationalist movements across the British Empire, which were citing the very same principle. The AAS thus portrayed Albanian statehood as a purely *European* matter, a step toward creating a ‘Balkans for Balkan peoples’, with no baring on Britain’s own imperial interests. This led them into a period of collaboration with the pro-Serb lobby, which was dissatisfied with Yugoslavia’s territorial allowance. In February 1920, the Balkan Committee, the AAS and the SSoGB passed a joint resolution condemning the inclusion of ‘some 400,000 Yugoslavs [in northern Slovenia] under

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ See Thomas Gidney, *An International Anomaly: Colonial Accession to the League of Nations* (Cambridge University Press, 2025), pp. 69-71; Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, pp. 77-97; Gerard Kweon, ‘Knocking on the Door: The Irish Presence at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919’, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 30 (2019), pp. 41-57, doi:10.1353/isia.2019.0001.

²⁸⁹ Hansard, HC Debate, 8 December 1919 <<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1919-12-08/debates/448551bb-14ba-4707-8db2-8c61df3992b5/PeaceTreaty>> [accessed 10 July 2025].

Italian dominion’, and demanding that ‘the independence of Albania should be respected’.²⁹⁰ Their statement of collaboration strengthened the shared criticism that Allied delegations had ‘violated at every turn the principle of national rights to which the Conference had bound itself’.²⁹¹ In this way, the lobby groups found a point of common interest in the principle of nationality, and could co-enforce the national claims of their respective ‘pet’ Balkan nations by maintaining that this principle be applied across Europe without exception.²⁹²

The allegation of hypocrisy was a potentially powerful rhetorical device. As British delegate Harold Nicolson reflected, Allied representatives were each responsible to ‘some alert, but ignorant electorate’ and were ‘sensitive to the public mood’.²⁹³ Furthermore, as pressing as the need to maintain domestic credibility, there were real geopolitical consequences that could stem from perceived hypocrisy. As one AAS member argued, the Albanians have ‘looked towards the people of Great Britain and of the United States for sympathy and protection [...] if disappointed in one direction, they will look in another, perhaps towards Russia’.²⁹⁴ The denial of Albanian independence therefore challenged the credibility of the Allied governments in the eyes of their respective electorates, but more importantly, the endurance of liberal democracy and the balance of power in Europe. The AAS produced this imagined scenario to appeal to Britain’s political concerns over the spread of Bolshevism. It was a persuasive hypothetical rather than a reality. However, the plan for an Italian mandate was indeed dropped in April 1920. With these

²⁹⁰ SSEES, SEW/5/3/3, Resolution of a Joint Body Representing the Balkan Committee, the SSoGB, and AAS, 25 February 1920.

²⁹¹ SHC, DD/DRU 35, Resolution of the Balkan Committee, SSoGB, and AAS, undated.

²⁹² Todorova, *Imagining*, p. 121.

²⁹³ Nicolson, *Peacemaking*, p. 63; see also Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (John Murray, 2001), p. 6; Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 17.

²⁹⁴ SHC, DD/DRU 31, Eden, ‘Albania: Its Discontents and their Origin’, 1 April 1920.

considerations in mind, the British delegation's eventual acceptance of Albanian statehood might be seen as an attempt to reach a satisfactory arrangement in the Balkans, wherein Britain could maintain a sphere of influence, mitigate accusations of hypocrisy, and ensure regional stability.

Nevertheless, the fact that both lobbies claimed Kosovo on behalf of their affiliated nations exposed the limits of their collaboration. In particular, by promoting Kosovo as Serbian land, the Serbian Society undercut their stated commitment to the principle of nationality.²⁹⁵ The Society justified the formation of the Serb-Croat-Slovene State on the basis that the inhabitants of each region constituted one nation, united by race, culture, history and language.²⁹⁶ Yugoslavia was not, however, a national state. Within its proposed boundaries were Kosovar Albanians, as well as sizeable numbers of Vlachs, Italians, Germans, Jews and Turks. These non-Slavic minorities contradicted the national basis upon which the Yugoslav ideal rested. Thus, in his published work, Seton-Watson omitted Kosovo's Albanian majority, strengthening the image of Southern Slav national homogeneity, and supporting his representations of Kosovo as Serbian 'heartland'. In doing so, he could maintain the appearance of advocating for 'a state-frontier co-extensive with the nationality frontier'.²⁹⁷ Yet, in private, he could adopt a more 'realistic' position, reassuring Lloyd George that 'no matter how frontiers may be drawn or re-drawn, very considerable minorities must in all cases remain on the wrong side of every one of them'.²⁹⁸ Therefore, the pro-Albanian and pro-Serb collaboration on the principle of nationality was undermined by their irreconcilable claims over Kosovo. The issue of contested regions eroded cross-lobby

²⁹⁵ SSEES, SEW/5/3/1, SSoGB, Informational Pamphlet, undated.

²⁹⁶ SSEES, SEW/5/3/1, Executive Committee of the SSoGB to Lloyd George, 25 June 1917.

²⁹⁷ R. W. Seton-Watson, *The War and Democracy* (Macmillan, 1914), p. 56.

²⁹⁸ Quoted in David Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, vol. 2 (Yale University Press, 1939), p. 898.

collaboration, as well as the notion that the principle of nationality could be applied equally to all those demanding it.

The pro-Albanian lobby challenged the plan to partition Albania by underlining Albania's entitlement to the principle of nationality. Collaborating on this principle, Herbert and Seton-Watson contributed to an international movement for the rights of small nations across Europe. Their joint allegations of hypocrisy strengthened the case for Albanian statehood. However, the lobbies' rhetorical partnership proved shallow; the fact that both groups claimed Kosovo on behalf of their espoused states encapsulated the incompatibility of the Yugoslav premise with a united Albanian national state. The principle of nationality could not be implemented without conflict and disappointment. This essential clash was epitomised by discussions over the ethnic makeup of Kosovo, and the validity of Serbian and Albanian ethnographic claims.

Contested Ethnographies: Discerning the Ethnic Makeup of Kosovo

Despite the Allies' desire to create states whose population corresponded to their titular nationality, Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority did not guarantee its inclusion into Albania. Contestation over Kosovo was fed by ongoing unclarity and conflict over whether this majority actually existed. The pro-Serb and pro-Albanian lobbies participated in this debate by proposing their own ethnographic statistics to Conference delegates. Whilst the AAS confirmed the ethnic Albanian majority, the pro-Serb lobby proposed a counter-image wherein the Albanians were either a tiny minority, an illegitimate majority who had arrived via conquest, or were actually just ethnic Serbs. Although statistics, maps and reports gave the impression of ethnography as an

objective science, they were highly vulnerable to manipulation by those with a political agenda.²⁹⁹ Kosovo's ethnic makeup, as it was ascertained at the Conference, was not then necessarily a reflection of fact, but of persuasion. This underlying subjectivity allowed room for anti-Albanian prejudice and expressions of national preference to take hold in the British decision-making process.

The AAS demanded that Albania be 'given her full ethnographical frontiers', and that, based on its 'thoroughly non-Slavic character', Kosovo should be included within these boundaries.³⁰⁰ They used ethnographic statistics to corroborate this argument, presenting them as scientific data to convey a sense of impartiality. For instance, in one memorandum to the British delegation, Major Barnes (a member of the AAS) attached a chart which detailed sizeable Albanian majorities in each of the nine Kosovar towns concerned (see Fig. 3). Formatted in a scientific and methodical arrangement, the chart offered population percentages gathered by several different sources.³⁰¹ By disclosing discrepancies between these figures, Barnes framed himself as an objective observer, conveying an ethnic Albanian statistical majority across Kosovo that was corroborated by multiple authorities, despite their varied backgrounds. His mention of these sources thus demonstrated an attempt to appeal to the demand at the Conference for ethnographic expertise, and an awareness this 'data' was useless unless verified by a reputable source.³⁰² As

²⁹⁹ Foliard, pp. 251-56; The inherent subjectivity of ethnography also emanated from the fluidity of ethnicity as a concept; that populations could be divided into wholly distinct, colour-coded blocks ignored realities of intermarriage, religious conversion, bilingualism and migration.

³⁰⁰ RAI, MS 58/08, Minutes of the AAS, 10 March, 1920; TNA, FO 608/29, AAS to Drummond, 1 February 1919.

³⁰¹ TNA, FO 608/29, Memorandum by Barnes, 'Proposed Settlement of Albania', 25 April 1919.

³⁰² Irish, 'Scholarly', p. 366, p. 381.

Lloyd George explained, 'in such a confusion of tongues and origins, no statistics could be regarded as reliable. They depended entirely on the bias of the authority that took them'.³⁰³

District	Percentage of Albanians				Percentage of Serbs.			
	Bulgar- ian Sta- tistics.	Turk- ish do.	Aust- rian do.	Ruman- ian do.	Bulgar- ian Sta- tistics	Turk- ish do.	Aust- rian do.	Ruman- ian do.
Ipek	-	72.5	83.1	75 [*]	-	19	11.9	
Djakova	-	99.2	97.1		-	0.8	0.5	
Prisrend	83.8	79.5	76.9	85 [*]	5.2	20.5	19.2	
Dibra	-	-	-	92.2 ^o	-	-	-	
Gusinje & Plava	-	82.6	86.7		-	15.5	13.3	
Ochrida	21.2	33.1	-		-	-	-	
Tetovo	29.3	69	44.5		-	10	-	
Mitrovitza	23.8	61.5	50		37	37.1	49.4	
Pristina	78.9	82.8	76.2		13	15	19	

^{*} excluding Albanian Catholics.
^o High Dibra 88% Albanians.

Fig. 3. Ethnographic statistics of Kosovo, compiled and presented by Major Barnes, April 1919. Photograph taken by author.

The demand for 'reliable' authorities explains why the pro-Albanian lobby hesitated to use Albanian sources.³⁰⁴ Several Albanian political organisations had also compiled and presented statistical information on Kosovo. The fact that Barnes did not include them in his memorandum was likely intentional. In 1918, for example, the Committee for the National Defence of Kosovo

³⁰³ Lloyd George, p. 915.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

detailed the 86.7 percent Albanian majority in Kosovo to the FO.³⁰⁵ Though this statistic reinforced the AAS's demand for the inclusion of Kosovo into Albania, Barnes' exclusion of Albanian sources from his memorandum suggests an understanding that the British delegation would greet them as partisan and unreliable. As he explained in 1918, testimonies from those living in the region 'are quite worthless in that they utterly contradict each other'.³⁰⁶ He continued that:

The best means of information are the works of impartial and conscientious travellers who [...] in recent years have made a study of the various populations, language, and dialects for purely scientific purposes.³⁰⁷

He further recommended Western authors such as Durham and J. D. Bourchier.³⁰⁸ Therefore, though the AAS welcomed Albanian politicians in publications regarding national ambitions and unity, when it came to ethnographic evidence, they prioritised the work of Western academics and travel writers. This decision echoed the Allied delegates' preference for 'objective' ethnographic data in discerning the makeup of a contested region, over universal national self-representation.³⁰⁹ Albanian sources had an obvious stake in regional politics, and were likely to be treated as partisan. Yet, this strategic choice could also have been formed in response to the stereotypes specific to Albania: that Albanians were naturally predisposed to 'exaggeration' and could not be trusted as credible sources (for matters of ethnography, as for allegations of atrocity). The AAS

³⁰⁵ TNA, FO 608/47, Petition by the Committee for the National Defence of Kosovo, 20 December 1918; TNA, FO 608/47, Committee for the National Defence of Kosovo, 'Statistical report of the inhabitants of the regions within the old Turkish vilayet of Kosovo, and annexed by Serbia in 1913', 1918.

³⁰⁶ SHC, DD/DRU 31, Barnes, 'The Future of the Albanian State', *The Geographical Society*, July 1918.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ TNA, FO 608/29, Memorandum by Barnes, 'Proposed Settlement of Albania', 25 April 1919.

³⁰⁹ Karch, 'Plebiscites', p. 17; Prott, 'Plebiscites', pp. 46-47.

thus championed their own ‘impartial testimonies’ over those of the Albanians, either out of an act of self-aggrandisement, or with the hope that the information pertaining to Kosovo’s ethnic Albanian majority would be more favourably received.³¹⁰

However, the British delegation did welcome information on Kosovo’s ethnographic makeup gathered by Serbian sources. Particularly influential was Jovan Cvijić, a respected Serbian geographer and member of the Yugoslav delegation, with a clear political interest in the matter.³¹¹ Cvijić supported the Yugoslav claim to Kosovo by producing ethnographic maps. These maps minimised the ethnic Albanian majority by underrepresenting them in number, and curtailing their distinctiveness as a separate ethnicity. In one map published in 1918, Cvijić acknowledged the Albanian majority in Kosovo, but with an important terminological distinction: instead of labelling them ‘Albanian’, Cvijić denoted the populations in all major Kosovar towns as ‘Albanised’ (see Fig. 4). This distinction delegitimised the Albanian majority by suggesting that the population was not Albanian by authentic racial inheritance, but through forced assimilation. That he was able to distinguish between these two categories demonstrated the elasticity of ethnicity as a tool to delimit territorial boundaries.³¹² Yet, whilst ethnographic ‘data’ could be easily manipulated to support irredentist projects, the end product had to be plausible enough so as not to undermine the source’s credibility. Cvijić’s distinction between ‘Albanian’ and ‘Albanised’ therefore represented a more discrete means to challenge the ethnic Albanian

³¹⁰ TNA, FO 608/29, AAS to Drummond, 1 February 1919.

³¹¹ Alexis Heraclides, *The Macedonian Question and the Macedonians: A History* (Routledge, 2021), p. 23; Henry Robert Wilkinson, *Maps and Politics: A Review of the Ethnographic Cartography of Macedonia* (Liverpool University Press, 1951), pp. 202-03.

³¹² Prot, p. 47.

majority without having to wholly erase it from his maps, something which could threaten his claim to academic impartiality.

The British pro-Serb lobby corroborated Cvijić's findings. Seton-Watson developed close relations with Cvijić and reproduced his maps in his own publications, a dynamic which afforded both men greater access to Conference proceedings through buttressing their academic reputations and amplifying their conclusions.³¹³ For the pro-Serb lobby, the 'Arnautiš thesis' provided a means to challenge Albania's territorial claim over Kosovo.³¹⁴ The theory proposed that during the Ottoman occupation, the Porte encouraged Albanian migration into Kosovo, and imposed a programme of 'forced Albanisation', requiring Kosovo Serbs to convert to Islam and adopt Albanian customs.³¹⁵ Espousing this narrative, Victor Bérard (a member of the KDC) asserted that 'for three centuries the Christian villages of Kosovo were decimated by Albanian Beks and forcibly converted to Islam'.³¹⁶ Laffan further wrote that 'the people saw lands which were historically theirs invaded by alien races'; the Serbs, he explained, 'had taken to the Albanian dress and language' to 'avoid persecution and massacre'.³¹⁷ The Ottoman occupation likely did result in a shift in Kosovo's demography. However, the use of such demonising language positioned the Serbs as victim to forcible displacement, assimilation, and religious persecution, feeding into anti-Ottoman currents in wider British discourse and reinforcing the propagandistic image of Serbian martyrdom. In this way, the idea that the original inhabitants of

³¹³ Seton-Watson, *The Rise of Nationality*; Crampton, p. 741; Alexander J. Kent, 'A Picture and an Argument: Mapping for Peace with a Cartography of Hope', *The Cartographic Journal*, 56. 4 (2019), pp. 275-79 (p. 275), doi:10.1080/00087041.2019.1694804.

³¹⁴ Malcolm, p. 268.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Victor Bérard, *Heroic Serbia* (Women's Printing Society, 1916), p. 14.

³¹⁷ Laffan, p. 80, p. 129.

Kosovo had been forcibly ‘Albanised’ vilified the Kosovar Albanians, and relativised the fact that they had experienced these exact policies at the hands of the Serbian army during the Balkan Wars. The pro-Serb lobby thus reinforced Cvijić’s perceived credibility, supporting the Serbian delegation in their use of the Arnautiš thesis to further Yugoslav claims over Kosovo, and to justify repressive measures against the Albanian population.³¹⁸ In return, Cvijić’s maps corroborated the exaggerated, deeply flawed image of South Slavic homogeneity that the pro-Serb lobby had disseminated, ensuring that Seton-Watson could maintain his own academic reputation.

Having balanced political agenda with a face of neutrality, and benefitted from the corroboration of British pro-Serb voices, Cvijić’s conclusions seeped into decision making processes. Because of the scientific, easily digestible format of maps, and the Allied demand for expertise about contested regions, ‘mapmakers became the agents of truth’.³¹⁹ The British Historical Section accepted Cvijić’s work in this way. In 1919, they published a collection of maps that they had supposedly consulted on the question of territorial configuration in south-east Europe and western Asia.³²⁰ Although the map concerning the Balkans did acknowledge that ethnic Albanians lived in Kosovo, it designated most major Kosovo towns — which were economically significant and highly contested — as Serb-Croat in race (see Fig. 5). For instance, Djakova, which had been confirmed as 90 percent Albanian by the War Office only three years prior, was now coloured by

³¹⁸ TNA, FO 608/47, Memorandum by A. Radovitch, member of the Serb-Croat-Slovene Delegation, 9 July 1919; TNA, FO 608/41/2, Nikola Pašić to Georges Clemenceau, 30 May 1919.

³¹⁹ Foliard, p. 251.

³²⁰ TNA, FO 373/1/1, Ethnographical maps of Central and South Eastern Europe and Western Asia, April 1919.

the Historical Section in Serb-Croat yellow.³²¹ This change in ethnographic labelling likely resulted from the involvement of Cvijić, whom the Historical Section credited as the source for their map.³²² Though the map did not include Cvijić's distinction between 'Albanian' and 'Albanised', the Historical Section supported the Arnautiš thesis elsewhere. In one handbook, it adopted the dehumanising language used by the pro-Serb lobby, presenting the Albanians as vermin which had 'multiplied and overrun' Kosovo.³²³ In another, it explained that the Turks had 'planted' the 'Albanian colonies' after 1878.³²⁴ The British delegation's embrace of Cvijić and his conclusions therefore limited the degree to which the pro-Albanian lobby could use Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority to argue for its inclusion into Albanian. The extent of Cvijić's influence further demonstrates that Albanian sources were excluded from consideration, not because of their obvious political stake in the matter, but from their reputation amongst FO officials as 'unreliable witnesses'.³²⁵

In light of the popularisation of the Arnautiš thesis, the question of Kosovo's true ethnography inevitably transgressed into a discussion of competing historical injustice and ancient ethno-national origins.³²⁶ The pro-Albanian lobby contested pro-Serb propaganda by claiming that the Albanians were 'the original inhabitants of the Balkan peninsula', having descended from the

³²¹ Geographical Section of the War Office, 'Proposed Boundary between Greece and Albania and Population Composition of South Central Yugoslavia and Northern Albania' (1916), *Library of Congress* <<https://tile.loc.gov/image-services/iiif/service:gmd:gmd6m:g6811m:g6811fm:gct00268:cs000001/full/pct:12.5/0/default.jpg>> [accessed 11 July 2025].

³²² TNA, FO 373/1/1, Ethnographical maps of Central and South Eastern Europe and Western Asia, April 1919.

³²³ Historical Section, *Albania*, pp. 24-25.

³²⁴ Historical Section, *Handbooks Prepared Under the Direction of the Historical Section of the Foreign Office*, vol. 4, no. 20, *Serbia*, ed. by G. W. Protheroe (H.M. Stationary Office, 1920), p. 48.

³²⁵ TNA, FO 371/2099, Crackanhorpe to Grey, 11 May 1914.

³²⁶ For more on national identity, primordialism, and the construction of historical origins, see Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (Routledge, 2009).

ancient Illyrians and the Kingdom of Macedon.³²⁷ As Durham lamented, ‘the Great Serb idea is a refusal [...] to admit that Balkan lands had owners before the arrival of the Serbs’.³²⁸ However, this search for the more primordial racial link limited the value of ethnographic arguments for determining territorial boundaries. As Lloyd George recalled, ‘myriads could legitimately lay claim to any racial ancestry that suited them for the time being’.³²⁹ It was not the plausibility of the argument that determined its value for ‘the ascertainment of the true racial frontier of Yugoslavia’, but the credibility given to the source presenting it.³³⁰ On this front, the British delegation exhibited a preference for Serbian sources over Albanian sources, thereby blunting the proposition that Kosovo be included into Albanian on ethnic grounds. Yet, in some ways, Lloyd George’s awareness that history could easily be fabricated by those with a political agenda devalued ethnography as a resource for territorial delimitation. As discussed below, there were other considerations at play.

The Stability of the Nation State: Minorities, Historical Claims and the League of Nations

Considering that ethnic makeup was so contested and historically volatile, the question of the Serb-Albanian border strayed somewhat from implementing the ‘seductive’, yet unachievable, premise of homogeneous nation-states, to finding a solution that would best ensure regional stability.³³¹ On the pro-Albanian side, this argument involved portraying the Albanian national

³²⁷ SHC, DD/DRU 31, Barnes, ‘The Future of the Albanian State’, *The Geographical Society*, July 1918; Michail, *The British*, p. 120.

³²⁸ Edith Durham, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle* (George Allen and Ulwin, 1920), pp. 83-84.

³²⁹ Lloyd George, p. 915.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Phauphilet, ‘A Corrective’, p. 194.

minority in Yugoslavia as a menace to the security of the State. For those supporting Yugoslav sovereignty in Kosovo, the cession of Serbian national 'heartland' to Albania would facilitate ongoing confrontation between the two states. Ultimately, whilst the former argument might be reconciled through the implementation of minority protection schemes, the latter was deemed a wholly intractable threat to international stability. As conflict and insurrection continued across Europe, the British delegation prioritised Serbia's supposed historical attachment to Kosovo in the name of peace, and at the expense of its ethnic Albanian majority.³³²

For the pro-Albanian lobby, the question of regional stability returned again to the issue of Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority. This issue rested as much on Albania's ethnographic entitlement to Kosovo as it did on the idea that the Kosovar Albanians would generate conflict if included within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The commitment at the Conference to the formation of homogenous nation states derived not only from a rhetorical pledge to the principle of nationality, but from the problematisation of national minorities as a source of instability.³³³ As J. D. Bouchier summarised, enlarging state boundaries by 'the inclusion of an alien element' was 'radically unsound, inasmuch as the overgrown States thus constituted would be weakened', both by 'internal discontent' and 'by the hostility of despoiled neighbours'.³³⁴ Both on a domestic and international level, then, national minorities were considered a danger to peace and political security. For Britain, the issue went further. Strong states with stable internal

³³² Steiner, *The Lights*, pp. 257-58; Macmillan, *Peacemakers*, p. 62.

³³³ Macartnery, *National States*, p. 18; Pablo de Azcarate, *League of Nations and National Minorities* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1945), p. 8; Matthew Frank, 'Fantasies of Ethnic Unmixing: 'Population Transfer' and the End of Empire in Europe', in *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 81-101 (p. 83); Matthew Frank, *Making Minorities History: Population Transfer in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 12-13.

³³⁴ SHC, DD/DRU 31, J. D. Bouchier, 'The Final Settlement in the Balkans', *The Quarterly Review*, October 1917.

politics could provide a bulwark against the spread of Bolshevism from Russia and against a revived Germany.³³⁵ Capitalising on this concern, the pro-Albanian lobby argued that by allocating a sizeable Albanian population to Yugoslavia, Allied delegates risked facilitating ongoing conflict, and offsetting the balance of power in Europe.

Here, stereotypes about innate Balkan violence could perhaps be employed to the Albanians' advantage. For example, Herbert informed the War Cabinet in 1917 that if Serbia gained Peć and south-east Macedonia, 'she will have to rule hostile Bulgars and Albanians, fanning the old Balkan flames of race hatred, which reacts on all Europe'.³³⁶ This memorandum displayed two central stereotypes about the Balkans: that its inhabitants were embroiled in mutual ancient hatreds, and that of the Balkan 'powder keg'. He thereby warned that if Kosovo were allocated to Serbia, the resulting localised conflicts would inevitably enmesh the whole of Europe, as they had done before the First World War. Tuning his appeal to the priorities of the War Cabinet, Herbert actively employed Balkanist stereotypes to make the formation of the Serb-Albanian border directly relevant to Britain's security interests.

Durham took a similar approach, arguing in one AAS pamphlet that 'it will not strengthen Serbia if she includes by force a million very hostile Albanians'.³³⁷ This argument was not purely theoretical; Kosovar Albanians had been resisting Yugoslav domination through the armed force since 1918.³³⁸ By framing this population as 'hostile', she attempted to employ derogatory

³³⁵ Macmillan, p. 5, p. 132.

³³⁶ SHC, DD/DRU 35, Memorandum to War Cabinet, 6 February 1917.

³³⁷ SHC, DD/DRU 31, Durham quoted in Barnes, 'The Future of the Albanian State', *The Geographical Society*, July 1918.

³³⁸ Elsie and Destani, *Kosovo*, pp. 284-300.

imaginative constructions of Albania in their favour.³³⁹ The resulting image of turbulence and disorder was not, then, a reflection of underlying Balkanist prejudice, but of political strategy. However, the issue with this approach was that it was liable to misinterpretation, and contradicted the emphasis that the pro-Albanian lobby had placed on Albanian docility and civilisational development. When it suited one argument the Albanians were peaceful and law-abiding. Yet, when it suited another, they were hateful and erratic. Though the existence of armed resistance supported the argument that national minorities would produce conflict, this image of Albanian hostility undermined Albania's claim to Kosovo by reinforcing perceptions of Albanian unruliness, and the demand for foreign administration.

Furthermore, while a large national minority might weaken a state's internal politics, denying that state a region to which they were historically attached could be equally destabilising. The widespread acceptance in Britain for Serbia's historical claim to Kosovo drove a concern within the British delegation that if Kosovo were allocated to Albania, Serbia would be willing to use military force to re-alter the border in their favour. This assumption was largely an effect of propaganda directed by the SRF and the SSoGB during the War. As previously discussed, the Serbian historical claim to Kosovo permeated initiatives such as Kosovo Day, the Meštrović Exhibition, literary representations of the Great Retreat, as well as academic histories of Serbia written by members of the pro-Serb lobby.³⁴⁰ Samuel Foster dismisses these initiatives as having had little bearing on British official opinion.³⁴¹ However, they were crucial in marrying Serbian

³³⁹ SHC, DD/DRU 31, Durham quoted in Barnes, 'The Future of the Albanian State', *The Geographical Society*, July 1918.

³⁴⁰ Askew and Askew, p. 27, p. 200; Laffan, pp. 223-28; Waring, p. 210; Kosovo Day Committee, p. 19; Temperley, *History of Serbia*, p. viii..

³⁴¹ Foster, *Yugoslavia*, p. 113.

suffering, Serbian history, and South Slavic unification, to the Serbian claim over Kosovo. The important question is not whether policymakers agreed on a personal level that Serbia was entitled to Kosovo on the basis of their historical claim. Rather, the success here of British pro-Serb advocacy was that it cemented the idea that Serbia felt a strong connection to the region. This knowledge was enough to convince officials that denying the Serbs their heartland would spark protest and conflict.

The British delegation endorsed the Serbian historical claim over Kosovo, not as a territorial demand that was wholly justified, but as one that Serbia would be unlikely to relinquish without a fight. Temperley, for example, though confirming ‘the essentially Albanian character’ of Djakova, minuted that Peć and Dečani ‘are historically prized by the Serbs and their possession by the Albanians would stimulate comitadji warfare on the Serb side’.³⁴² Temperley thus refrained from personally endorsing the Serbian historical claim, yet still demanded that it be taken into consideration to prevent ongoing border raids from Serbian irregular forces. Although the pro-Albanian lobby attempted to expose the Serbian claim over Kosovo as ‘purely sentimental’, rooted only in ‘fables, romances, historical legends’ and ‘religious superstitions’, the rationality of this claim was thus irrelevant so long as the British delegation thought that the Serbs felt it strongly enough to wage war.³⁴³ The presence of the Serbian military in Kosovo from 1918 to 1920 further substantiated the fear that Serbia would spark conflict if denied their historical ‘heartland’.³⁴⁴ As Sir Alban Young explained, ‘If we want peace in this corner of Europe we

³⁴² TNA, FO 608/29, Memorandum by Barnes, ‘Proposed Settlement of Albania’, 25 April 1919.

³⁴³ SHC, DD/DRU 31, Barnes, ‘The Future of the Albanian State’, *The Geographical Society*, July 1918; SHC, DD/DRU 35, Herbert, ‘The Whitling Away of Albania’, undated; SHC, DD/DRU 31, Eden, ‘Albania: Its Discontents and their Origin’, 1 April 1920.

³⁴⁴ Elsie and Destani, pp. 201-75.

should abstain from enquiring too closely into the extent to which the democratic principle of free elections and self-determination are applied in practice'.³⁴⁵ In this way, the British delegation endorsed Serbian rule to maintain regional stability. With Britain's own army, expenditures, and priorities stretched between 'more and more trouble in its Empire', it was hardly worth jeopardising the peace over one ethnographic claim in this 'corner' of Europe.³⁴⁶ Accordingly, on the 9 November 1921, as the decision-making process came to a close, the Allied representatives announced the allocation of all contested Kosovar towns to Yugoslavia: a settlement made 'to ensure good neighbourly relations between the states situated on either side of the frontier line'.³⁴⁷

Despite Serbian attempts to disprove the existence of Albanians in Kosovo, the decision to prioritise a historical claim over an ethnographic one did ultimately result in the inclusion of a large Albanian minority within the new Yugoslav State. This outcome demanded a solution to the 'fundamental dilemma' of managing 'minorities within the nation state as a source of contention between nation states'.³⁴⁸ With the knowledge that the ethnic Albanian population risked posing these very difficulties, the allocation of Kosovo to Yugoslavia was justified by the League of Nations minority protection schemes. As one of fourteen states made to sign a Minority Treaty, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was required to ensure that 'the principle of liberty and justice' be granted to all those within its boundaries 'without distinction of birth, nationality,

³⁴⁵ Quoted in Evans, pp. 193-94

³⁴⁶ Ibid.; Macmillan, p. 50.

³⁴⁷ TNA, FO 93/117/1, Decision of the Conference of Ambassadors at Paris Regarding Albania, Paris, 9 November 1921.

³⁴⁸ Frank, *Making*, p. 14; Frank, 'Fantasies', p. 84; Olena Palko and Samuel Foster, 'Contested Minorities in the "New Europe": National Identities in Interwar Eastern and Southeastern Europe', *National Identities*, 23.4 (2023), pp. 303-23 (pp. 308-09), doi:10.1080/14608944.2020.1749837.

language, race or religion'.³⁴⁹ This stipulation represented a way to '*internationalize* the protection of minorities'.³⁵⁰ If one state took issue with the 'ill-treatment or oppression' of a co-national minority in another state, they could address the League Council, rather than confronting the accused state directly.³⁵¹ Summarising this rationale, Lloyd George reconciled that any conflict that might arise from the existence of national minorities could be eliminated by 'the rigid enforcement of minority obligations'.³⁵² There thus seemed little reason to draw the Serb-Albanian border along ethnic lines, which were in any case highly contested and changeable, when there was an infrastructure that could theoretically ensure both the protection of the Albanian minority, and the satisfaction of their co-nationals. The League of Nations Minority Treaties therefore formed part of 'a collective security arrangement designed to ensure international peace and stability', that complemented the ultimate inability to construct ethnically homogeneous states across Europe.³⁵³

With minority protection now being 'under the guarantee of the League of Nations', the British FO had little direct interest in the welfare of the Kosovar Albanian minority.³⁵⁴ From 1920, the AAS redirected their appeals against Serbian repression in Kosovo to League officials.³⁵⁵ Yet, the Minorities Section could just as easily negate responsibility. Responding to one AAS

³⁴⁹ Geneva, United Nations Library and Archives (UNLA), S357/22/4, Treaty between the Principle Allied and Associated Powers and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State, 10 September 1919.

³⁵⁰ Azcárate, p. 15, emphasis in original.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Lloyd George, p. 898.

³⁵³ Jenifer Jackson Preece, 'The League of Nations System of Minority Guarantees (1919-1939)', in *National Minorities and the European Nation-States System*, ed. by Jennifer Jackson Preece (Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 67-94 (p. 89).

³⁵⁴ UNLA, S357/22/4, Treaty between the Principle Allied and Associated Powers and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State, article 11, 10 September 1919.

³⁵⁵ UNLA, R552/11/4370/1240, Herbert to Drummond, 6 May 1920.

memorandum detailing the prohibition of Albanian schools in Kosovo, the Director of the Minorities Section, Erik Colban, minuted that these measures were ‘certainly deplorable’ but ‘the claim for protection for Albanians under Yugoslav and Greek sovereignty seems to be sufficiently covered by the respective Minority Treaties’.³⁵⁶ Considering that these treaties had not yet ‘been out into force’, according to Colban, the League of Nations had ‘no legal standing in the matter’.³⁵⁷ This negatory attitude exemplified a dynamic central to the Minority Treaties; minority protection was not stipulated in the interest of the welfare of minority populations, but in the security interests of the states within which they resided.³⁵⁸ In the following years, Belgrade subjected the Albanian minority to ‘policies of elimination’ that wholly defied its Minority Treaty obligations.³⁵⁹ Its ability to do so with impunity exposed the lack of humanitarian concern inherent to the League infrastructure. The League minority protection scheme had ensured, in principle, that the decision to allocate a large Albanian population to Yugoslavia would not disturb regional peace and security. However, it offered no real benefits to that population.

The Allied delegates approved the formation of a boundary between Albania and Yugoslavia that prioritised Serbia’s historical claim to Kosovo over the argument that the inclusion of thousands of Albanians within its borders would compromise regional security. Though this was at face value a geopolitical calculation, it was also a choice driven by stereotypes of Albanian unruliness, and imaginative connections between Serbia and its medieval history. The Minority Treaties further justified Yugoslav rule in Kosovo by promising a theoretical solution to the perceived

³⁵⁶ UNLA, R552/11/4370/1240, Status of Albania, 28 May 1920.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Macartney, p. 16.

³⁵⁹ Frank, ‘Fantasies’, p. 84.

threat that the Albanian minority posed to state security. Yet, this body provided a protection that was only in name. The Serb-Albanian border ultimately neither reflected Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority, nor guaranteed the welfare of those populations.

Conclusion

Tasked with the reconstruction of territorial boundaries in Europe, the Paris Peace Conference represented an opening for British political advocates to consolidate their espoused groups' national claims. By proclaiming the national right to self-determination and demanding that Conference delegates adhere to it, British pro-Serb and pro-Albanian advocates contributed to an atmosphere of nationalist lobbying within and beyond Europe. The ongoing precarity of Albanian statehood drove a degree of collaboration between the AAS and the pro-Serb lobby, a mutually beneficial relationship that provided both groups with rhetorical leverage. However, this partnership cut short on the issue of Kosovo. The very existence of contested regions undermined the principle of nationality, demonstrating the impossibility of constructing a 'New Europe' based on the premise of homogenous nation states.³⁶⁰

The debate over the ethnography of Kosovo further exposed the cross-lobby collaboration as superficial, and the principle of nationality as unrealistic. Whilst the pro-Albanian lobby demanded that Kosovo's statistical ethnic majority be respected, pro-Serb voices challenged this demand by undermining the existence and validity of the majority. The British delegation seemed willing to accept the argument that the Albanians were merely 'Albanised Serbs'. As well as

³⁶⁰ Masaryk, *The New Europe*.

illustrating ongoing British perceptions of Albanian untrustworthiness, this preference for Serbian sources also demonstrated the success of British pro-Serb advocates in infiltrating Conference proceedings.

However, this contestation signified that ethnography was too volatile and unreliable to be the sole foundation for the construction of state boundaries. For the British delegation, the Serbian historical claim took precedence over the Albanian ethnographic claim. Though the pro-Albanian lobby warned that the fulfilment of Serbian medieval territorial ambitions would result in the inclusion of a large Albanian national minority, this argument was undermined by the skepticism surrounding the ethnic Albanian majority in Kosovo, as well as the presumption that any threat that this minority population might pose to the new Yugoslav state could be resolved through the Minority Treaties. Ultimately, the region of Kosovo was allocated to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Britain's support for Yugoslav rule reflected a consistent indifference toward the welfare of the Kosovar Albanian population, a perception that Serbian administration would foster civilisational development, and a decade of British pro-Serb advocacy that had entrenched Serbia's claim to Kosovo in the public mind and the decision-making process.

Conclusion

On the 9 November, after two years of deliberation at Paris, the ‘Albanian Question’ was concluded. The Conference of Ambassadors, a peacemaking committee comprising of Britain, France, Italy and Japan, ratified Albanian statehood and announced its final decision regarding the delimitation of Albania’s boundaries. Allocating almost the entirety of the old *vilayet* of Kosovo to Yugoslavia, the decision brought political debate in Britain to a close. Durham no longer wrote to the Foreign Office and the League of Nations regarding the rights of Kosovar Albanians, Herbert died in 1923, and the Anglo-Albanian Society suspended operations.³⁶¹ The Serbian Society was reconstituted as the Yugoslav Society of Great Britain, and dropped its political tone, focusing instead on the promotion of friendly British-Yugoslav intercultural relations.³⁶² The 1920s had ushered a period of ‘renewed indifference’ to Balkan politics.³⁶³ With Kosovo’s absorption into Yugoslavia, and without anyone willing, or able, to reinvigorate a conversation surrounding the Serb-Albanian border, the political arguments and imaginative constructions that drove a once lively political debate faded from British discourse.

Both lobbies had reason to reflect positively on their work. Albanian statehood was confirmed, and the first Yugoslav state was created. Whether a direct result of British political campaigning or not, the primary goals of both advocacy groups were satisfied. Yet, at least a part of their waning interest in Balkan politics emanated from a level of disenchantment that both lobbies felt toward these developments. The highly centralised 1921 Yugoslav constitution was a far stretch

³⁶¹ Robert Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania*, 2nd edn. (Scarecrow Press, 2010), p. 14.

³⁶² SSEES, SEW/9/4, The Yugoslav Society of Great Britain (1921-1944).

³⁶³ Seton-Watson quoted in Evans, p. 212; For political disengagement in the interwar period, see Michail, *The British*, pp. 19-25; Foster, *Yugoslavia*, p. 126.

from the federalist picture that Seton-Watson and his colleagues had aspired for when advocating for Southern Slav unification.³⁶⁴ For Edith Durham, the situation was bleaker; Yugoslavia was ‘purely artificial’ and the day would soon come when it ‘breaks up violently’ — a prognosis that proved prescient.³⁶⁵ Lacking the power to do anything about it, Durham became increasingly hostile to Serbia and Seton-Watson, whom she deemed personally responsible for Albania’s misfortune and for her ostracism from British politics and academia into the 1920s.³⁶⁶ Her visits to Albania stopped after 1921, and she diverted her attention to proving Serbia’s guilt for the outbreak of the First World War. In 1925, this pursuit led her into public confrontation with Seton-Watson over the alleged complicity of Belgrade in the assassination of Franz Ferdinand.³⁶⁷ Her increasing isolation after this period reflected Seton-Watson’s success in branding Durham as a ‘rabid’ anti-Serb voice who challenged the legitimacy of the state upon which he had staked his good name.³⁶⁸ Yet, more generally, Durham’s fall into obscurity and her abandonment of the Albanian cause symbolised Britain’s own disengagement with Balkan affairs, of which Albania was the first to be forgotten.³⁶⁹

In other words, for these individuals, life had moved on. From 1912 to 1921, they had appointed themselves representatives of a foreign national cause, fighting for the rights and welfare of a particular group of people. But as much as they were truly invested in Balkan politics, they

³⁶⁴ Drapac, pp. 108-09; Foster, *Yugoslavia*, p. 123; Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo* (Hurst & Company, 1998), p. 95.

³⁶⁵ LSC, MS 405, Durham to Boyle, 6 July 1943; LSC, MS 405, Durham to Boyle, 23 May 1923.

³⁶⁶ Drapac, p. 130; LSC, MS 405, Durham to Boyle, 20 September 1943.

³⁶⁷ Drapac pp. 130-35; David Kauffman, ‘The “One Guilty Nation” Myth: Edith Durham, R.W. Seton-Watson and a Footnote in the History of the Outbreak of the First World War’, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 25.3 (2023), pp. 297-321, doi:10.1080/19448953.2022.2143839.

³⁶⁸ Seton-Watson quoted in Drapac, p. 132.

³⁶⁹ Foster, *Yugoslavia*, p. 126.

always had the freedom of distance, should they choose it. However, for the populations who actually lived in Kosovo, the dispute over the Serb-Albanian border was an everyday, unavoidable reality. On the ground, contestation continued. During the Kaçak movement, which was coordinated by the Committee for the National Defence of Kosovo and lasted from 1918 until the late 1920s, Kosovar Albanian armed bands protested Serbian rule through violent raids.³⁷⁰ Belgrade attempted to eradicate dissent and consolidate control through a programme of colonisation, enforcing policies of assimilation and expulsion which lasted until 1941.³⁷¹ Kosovar Albanian representatives launched multiple complaints with the League of Nations Minorities Section regarding their treatment under Belgrade. These petitions detailed consistent violations of the Minority Treaty, ranging from the prohibition of Albanian language schools, the denial of parliamentary representation and employment discrimination to extra-judicial murder, rape and pillage, all allegedly committed by Serbian military and civil officials.³⁷² Yet, the League Council had little power or inclination to manage the consequences of the Allies' decision to allocate Kosovo to Yugoslavia.

The procedure that dealt with minority complaints placed so many conditions on the petitions that it effectively guaranteed their failure. These obstacles enabled League Council members to evade the obligation to act against Minority Treaty infractions.³⁷³ As well as requiring that minority complaints be launched by a member of the League Council itself, from 1921, it also became necessary for the accused state produce their own comments on the alleged infraction.³⁷⁴ This

³⁷⁰ Vickers, *Between Serb*, pp. 99-102.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-08.

³⁷² See for example, UNLA, R1657/41/11379/41229, *Albanian Minorities in Yugoslavia*, 1924.

³⁷³ Preece, p. 816

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

development allowed Belgrade to revise and refute allegations. Responding to one petition from 1924 regarding programmes of colonisation in Kosovo, Belgrade seized this opportunity to protest that the Albanians were ‘neither peaceful, nor civilised’, thus relativising the programme as necessary to instate law and order to a primitive peoples.³⁷⁵ In 1923, the League procedure was further amended to disqualify any petitions that were related to calls for political autonomy or secession.³⁷⁶ This stipulation was particularly damaging to Kosovar Albanian petitions. Complaints were necessarily interlinked with calls for autonomy because of the very nature of the repression detailed, most of which was underscored by Belgrade’s ambition to eradicate the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo, either through the prohibition of factors that made them a distinct group (language, religion, national displays, etc.), or through physical violence. The League system was thus inherently opposed to addressing the root cause of violence against minorities, and these complaints were disregarded.

These developments were not unforeseen. The experience of the Kosovar Albanian populations under Serbian rule during the 1920s mirrored the fears and expectations that the pro-Albanian lobby expressed in the previous decade. It was their concern over this exact outcome that had motivated pro-Albanian humanitarian campaigning. During the Balkan Wars, the Albanian Committee protested against Serbian rule under the assumption that unless Albania was given control of Kosovo, its inhabitants would continuously suffer violence and oppression. They conveyed this argument through graphic atrocity propaganda, and attempted to incite the Liberal government to act by accusing them of anti-Muslim prejudice, and of jeopardising Whitehall’s

³⁷⁵ Belgrade continues that the Albanians had ‘a very low level of civilisation; They were living scattered in tribes, without law or general authority, and without any notion of order and legality’. UNLA, R1657/41/11379/39302, Albanian Minorities in Yugoslavia, 1924.

³⁷⁶ Preece, p. 81.

relationship with Muslim subjects. Yet, anti-Muslim prejudice continued to shape British official framings of the atrocity reports as having been exaggerated by an innately untrustworthy people. With the outbreak of the First World War, the pro-Serb humanitarian advocacy campaign undid any progress made by the Albanian Committee in previous years. SRF propaganda was interwoven with Christian symbolism and patriotic imagery which cast Serbia as victim to both Turco-Germanic evil, and to Albanian savagery. Utilising Kosovo as an allegorical device to attract public engagement, this propaganda eclipsed the argument that Kosovo be allocated to Serbia on humanitarian grounds. By 1918, Britain was unwilling to accuse Serbia of committing the violence detailed in renewed atrocity reports, and happy to frame these reports as misinformation and ‘melodrama’.³⁷⁷ This response cannot be attributed to ignorance. Aware of the human consequences of Serbian rule in Kosovo, Britain’s endorsement for the Serbian claim reflected predominant constructions of Albanian savagery and confirmed the success of pro-Serb humanitarian propaganda in establishing links between Serbian martyrdom and a national connection to Kosovo.

Stereotypes surrounding Albanian backwardness informed the Serb-Albanian border debate in more ways than undermining the perceived credibility of Kosovar Albanian atrocity reports. They contributed to an understanding that Serbian rule would benefit Kosovo by instating a higher level of civilisational development. The pro-Albanian lobby conveyed a construction of Albania modelled on Western Europe to mitigate stereotypes of Albanian primitiveness and incapacity for self-governance. In these publications, the Albanian was ‘white’, culturally advanced, and the northern Albanian tribal system was omitted in favour of a picture of urbanised law, order and

³⁷⁷ TNA, FO 608/29, Durham to Lord Curzon, 14 May 1919.

taxation. These images reveal that British observers understood the roots and political consequences of Balkanist prejudice. Representations of Balkan people were purposefully tailored to serve a political purpose; they were not always passive reproductions of subliminal stereotyping. However, perceptions of Kosovar primitiveness, savagery and vendetta persisted. Juxtaposed against the images of Serbian cultural, artistic and governmental achievements that Seton-Watson and his entourage promoted, this imaginative construction informed British official preference for Serbian rule in Kosovo over Albanian, as the nation more equipped to govern such an unruly people. The methods by which Serbia might introduce modernity to Kosovo were deemed inconsequential. As Belgrade's response to minority complaints in the 1920s demonstrates, the rhetoric of '*l'action civilisatrice*' provided a blanket justification for a range of repressive measures to which Britain remained indifferent.³⁷⁸

Imaginative constructions of Balkan peoples thus informed the perceived drawbacks of Albanian rule in Kosovo. During the Paris Peace Conference, the Allies' stated commitment to national self-determination presented an opportunity for the pro-Albanian lobby to prove that, regardless of these potential disadvantages, the Albanian nation was entitled to a state of their own, and one with boundaries that reflected ethnic composition. Pro-Serb voices justified Yugoslav rule in Kosovo on this same basis, claiming South Slavic homogeneity within the proposed boundaries of the new state, and erasing the Kosovar Albanian majority in Kosovo to provide this state project with legitimacy. The British preference for the Yugoslav argument emanated from socio-cultural subjectivities, the ongoing stereotype of Albanian disreputability, and the success of the pro-Serb lobby in re-contextualising the ethnographic figures in Serbia's favour. However, it also

³⁷⁸ UNLA, R1657/41/11379/41229, Albanian Minorities in Yugoslavia, 1924.

reflected a presumption that had been drawn throughout British pro-Serb advocacy in the previous decade: that Kosovo was the core component of the Serbian national identity. The British delegation upheld this argument, not as something that was right or fair, but with the desire to promote peace and stability in the Balkans. The pro-Serb lobby had popularised the notion that Kosovo was Serbian heartland, and thus fostered an assumption that Yugoslav rule was a necessary part of the postwar political settlement in the Balkans. Combined with the apparent undesirability of Albanian administration — a perception that the pro-Albanian failed to dismantle — the outcome was the configuration of a boundary which left thousands of Albanian communities under Yugoslav governance.

During the Second World War, Yugoslavia was dismembered between the Axis powers. Edith Durham wrote a series of letters to Sir Edward Boyle, who had been involved in the SRF during the First World War, reflecting on the lasting impact of pro-Serb advocacy. Condemning his support for ‘the idea of great Serbia’, she attributed the ‘present disastrous affairs’ to Seton-Watson.³⁷⁹ Durham quite clearly over-credited Seton-Watson for both the construction of Yugoslavia and its apparent failure. However, her frustration with him shows the strength of British support for Serbian expansionism in the early twentieth century, and highlights the active role played that the pro-Serb lobby played to produce such sentiment. Analysing the content and outcomes of these British political advocacy campaigns reveals that derogatory cultural constructions of Albania, and conceptions of Kosovo as Serbian ‘heartland’ co-informed Britain’s endorsement for Serbian rule in Kosovo from 1912 to 1921.

³⁷⁹ LSC, MS 405, Durham to Boyle, 12 July 1942; LSC, MS 405, Durham to Boyle, 6 July 1943.

Kosovo remained under Yugoslav rule until the state's ultimate collapse, declaring independence in 2008.³⁸⁰ However, the Republic of Kosovo is not universally recognised. As in the early twentieth century, certain states continue to endorse the Serbian historical claim and will continue to do so as long as it is congruent with their own domestic political climate and foreign policy concerns. The case of British political advocacy and the Serb-Albanian border speaks to the co-informing relationship between stubborn cultural stereotypes and political priorities that determine policy toward competing nationalisms and contested territories abroad. Whilst the specific international developments and imaginative interpretations covered in this dissertation were unique to the period in question, this relationship continues to sustain boundary disputes across the world. Kosovo is but one region where the impact of nationalist expansionism, and of those who enable it, is felt.

³⁸⁰ For an introduction to the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the Kosovo War, 1998-1999, see Catherine Baker, *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

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