



## THE SHADOWS OF WAR: ALGERIA AND KOSOVO

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We are approaching the end of the twentieth century. A century which, among other things, has been characterised by war and violence of all sorts. Violence and wars are not the exclusive patrimony of this century. We have been confronted with them throughout human history and in every continent.

What is surprising, however, in this century is the fact that there have been some 150 wars since the end of World War II; technology has increased enormously the destructive capacity of wars (atomic bombs, Vietnam,...); human madness seems to have reached unimaginable limits (Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, “apartheid”, Argentina, Central America, Pinochet, Milosevic), and the culture of violence co-exists in all tranquility with the so-called culture of democracy and human rights.

There was a time when it appeared that great acts of violence were a thing of the past, something we would see only in historical documentaries focusing on the Jewish holocaust, the bombing of Dresden or the massacres of Vietnam. “Never again”, we would say ingenuously. Rwanda, Karadzic, Milosevic, have taken it upon themselves to awaken us from our dreams of democracy. The world is not governed by human rights, but by a corrected and heightened version of a “Western”.

Algeria and Kosovo are the recent settings which have added a bitter flavour to our meals. They are settings that are difficult to comprehend. Why should the Islamists indulge in such cruel killings in Algeria without the Government doing anything to stop them? Why does the Algerian Government prevent journalists from covering events? Why did the “international community” not act in Rwanda, nor Bosnia, nor Kurdistan, and why did it do so, on the other hand, in Iraq and now in Serbia? Who constitutes the “international community”?

*Cristianisme i Justícia*

## **VIOLENCE IN ALGERIA\***

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**Salima Ghezali**

A picture of Algeria has gone round the world: entire towns devastated by massacres perpetrated by terrorist groups, bodies horribly mutilated, burnt corpses, babies with bashed skulls, weeping women, houses in ruins, cemeteries overflowing with horrified people.

Side by side with this picture is another: as though it came from another world, corpulent armed men, members of the State Security Services or militia, who surround the survivors, before television cameras, as if to show (to the inhabitants of other towns?) the sort of savagery they would be exposed to if they did not count with their protection at the fatal moment when these assassin hordes appear.

### **1. VIOLENCE AND PRESS PROPAGANDA**

During these years of terror, millions of Algerians have seen themselves submitted not only to violence as it is in itself, but also, and in a continued fashion, to exposure in the press. Few conflicts have ever shown their victims so much without ever showing their torturers! The truth is that in the case of the Algerian conflict, we find ourselves before a paradoxical situation which has the elements of a war posterior to the cold war, with their “dark points”, and in which journalists, humanitarian organisations and other witnesses cannot be present as long as there exists a State capable of controlling the circulation of information and, above all, the reproduction of pictures dealing about the conflict.

Algeria can be considered a standard textbook example of the political treatment of a long lasting conflict by the way information relating to violence is controlled (as occurred in the classical case of CNN during the Gulf war when information was possible only for a short period of time). Violence appears as a development which fulfils an eminently political function and not as an exercise of reporting about the forces at work on the battlefield. In Algeria, war is principally a matter of the special services of the State, which imply that the “benefits” of violent action should fall exclusively on one protagonist alone, without taking into account the multiplicity of actors and of the motives of their actions. As in some martial arts of the East, the winner is the one who increases his strength with that of the enemy and who knows how to profit from any adverse movement.

In this type of conflict without moral considerations, in which there does not exist any economic limitation (let us remember that the Algerian economy is solvent, taking into consideration that in the south, away from the setting of violence, there are oil

reserves which give the country its principal revenue), nor does there exist excessive concern for the cost of human lives (in a society accustomed to pay a high price in human lives), cynicism turns out to be more the order of the day than political hypocrisy is disposed to admit. To form an idea of the abysmal ignorance and incomprehension that surrounds the conflict, it is sufficient to have seen how on the night of the killing of hundreds of innocent civilians in Si Raïs, Mr Ahmed Ouyahia, president of the Algerian Government, proclaimed on television that these acts clearly showed the failure of terrorism in its struggle against the State and that the people were disposed to sacrifice themselves to put an end to it.

### **The reasoning faculty of the spectator, a victim of mass media**

The most harmful effect resulting from the diffusion of pictures about violent acts in Algeria is the coercive function that it exercises over the spectator (the population sees itself immersed in a climate of terror and hostile rejection of any rational effort) and the spiral of violence that it generates. The broadcasting of violence leaves spectators saturated with haemoglobin and profoundly marked by horror and impotence, uninformed about the context in which these facts are produced, and uninformed, moreover, about the truth or truths that lie behind the occurrences.

By the very force that accompanies it, the spectacle of violence generates new violence which discredits whatever attempt to demand for further information. It appears totally out of place, “obscene” to raise questions before a situation that is presented as “the whole truth”, in which there is no room for interpretation of the facts. But then this gives rise to a surprising phenomenon: on the one hand, the reality in which the violence in question takes place, spills beyond the limited setting of mass media staging to unfold its own implacable logic; and on the other hand, the mind of the spectator finds itself paralysed on account of the disqualification that people, who desire to receive more information, are subjected to. For example, the spontaneous question “who kills who in Algeria?” is considered “obscene” by those who, in reality are converting themselves into builders of a new totalitarianism. With this accusation of “obscenity”, the way is closed to any attempt to get out of the status quo.

We find ourselves brought to a complete halt in our reflections on History. And the fear of the spectator makes this halt possible. Once the impact of the first pictures are overcome, further massacres can be repeatedly carried out in Algeria without any special problem as there is no way of raising questions about the situation. And with no questions raised, what need is there to give answers? There only appears room for supposedly evident statements, before which there exist only two options: acceptance or rejection. All that remains is nothing else than a relation of physical strength (of impotent individuals before organised groups) and symbolical strength (that of an isolated people against the elite of mass media), in which symbolical strength serves as a front for the physical.

### **Mass media hides reality**

The fact that Islamists kill (and they are not the only ones that do so) does not differentiate Algerian violence from that of other countries of the world (Colombia,

Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda...). But in Algeria the propaganda diffused underlines the very special and different nature of violence that prevails there. From the President of the Republic down to the journalists, including a whole range of opinion creators, there are many who affirm “the singularity of the Algerian problem”, “an unprecedented situation in the history of humanity”. Do those that defend the thesis of “Algerian singularity” have any idea of human history where violence is concerned?

The fact is that Algerian violence is presented as an “*incomprehensible phenomenon*”, as though it were the beginning and end of a situation that is “*impossible to explain*”. Despite the secrecy surrounding the Security of State, and despite the fact that the Algerian authorities have not conducted the slightest investigation on location, the comments of the greater part of journalists point out that “*the killings are the work of Islamist groups*”. Surprisingly, in respect of Algeria, it has become a general practice to reproduce information given by the Algerian press without verifying the sources of the information. A specific vocabulary, an authentic *sociolecto* (a sort of exclusive semantic world for this war), formed by fragments of information, by semantic derivations, by misused forms of analogy, has been built around the facts up to the point of not allowing the spectator to come anywhere near reality, and to make any request for transparency sound suspicious. We have no access to the facts, only access to the linguistic world created by official and journalistic propaganda.

There is place only for one thesis, for one idea: “*Islamist fundamentalism is the expression of absolute savagery which entails, both intrinsically and essentially, total violence tied to an ideology (Islamism) or speaking in more generic terms, to a religion (Islam)*”. This idea has replaced in superb fashion any search for information and intelligibility.

### **Reality is more complex**

Nevertheless, reality is not simple. And for this reason, it will be necessary to analyse the Algerian conflict as such, that is to say, in its aspect as a political case which implies a confrontation of a military nature between opposing groups. This would enable us to identify the multiple actors and the different strategies that legitimise violence and their different origins.

Throughout the seven years of horror, propaganda and a secrecy prone to creating more confusion than anything else, an extremely insidious intellectual terrorism has surrounded Algeria with a sort of “sanitary red line” of which there are unquestionable proofs. A person who dares to cross this red line or who mentions certain events that could endanger people of the ruling party is automatically disqualified.

All those who are interested in understanding the function and finality of violence in Algeria have to dedicate themselves to a difficult task of “deactivating ideological mine bombs” and maintaining intellectual hygiene. And not only because there is a “moral” obligation for truth to be revealed but also because in the case of Algeria, if we do not discover the truth, it would be impossible to gain access to reality and to find a solution to the problem. Hence it is necessary to remember certain facts.

## **Memory, the door of truth**

In the first place, one must not forget that violence, both it of political assassinations or of tortures and violations of human rights, does not date from the outburst of this conflict, but goes much further back in time. The physical elimination of political adversaries as also the cleansing of entire groups of people suspected of treason had already been practised among the revolutionary ranks in the days when Algerians struggled for national independence. This was the case of “*la bleuite*” in 1957 which involved the elimination of numerous intellectuals affiliated to the maquis, in reply to a manoeuvre of “intoxication” (that is to say, of introduction of destabilising elements) on the side of the French army. Another such case was that of the killing in the same year 1967 of the population of Melouza, accused of having helped a rival formation of the FLN.

Once Independence was achieved, the official discourse regarding the war was merely apologetic, without leaving any margin for other evaluations of events. In this way any attempt to indulge in “ethical” reflections regarding the use of violence was suppressed right from the roots and this in turn impeded the casting of life-buoys on the troubled waters of Algerian politics – life-buoys which would have prevented people from being shipwrecked on the rocks of savagery. The flagstone that the single party laid down on society until the riots of October 1988 made two things impossible: in the first place, the emergence of a truly democratic consciousness capable of dealing with any conflict, and in the second place, the existence of a counter-power or of moral tribunals capable of mobilising the population efficaciously against the strategy of terror embarked upon by different groups. The short-lived “democratic Spring” which lasted from 1989 to 1991 saw how the incipient process of the reform of justice destined to promote its own independence and the emergence of political pluralism, parties and press, was interrupted before it could establish itself structurally and create the basis of a democratic culture in society.

After January 1992 when elections were cancelled, and a state of emergency was proclaimed with special laws promulgated, it became increasingly difficult to keep people informed about the violence taking place in the country. Steps were taken to have some newspaper offices closed and certain journalists arrested. In the Algerian press one could only publish headlines that were in favour of the suspension of elections and in consonance with the new rules of the game, based on censorship and, above all, on self-censorship. In the sphere of justice, there were lawyers and magistrates who protested. They even went on strike for a few weeks, but the press took it upon themselves to discredit the movement suspected of sympathising with the Islamists.

Politicians were able to gain free access to the means of communication, provided, evidently, they were loyal to the politics of the ruling party. But at the same time, a new discourse of the *poujadista* type was established which was hostile towards the political class, accused of being the origin of the problems of the country and of being paid by foreign governments. The ground was prepared in all respects for the outburst of violence.

## **A fertilised land for violence**

In a universe totally controlled from the highest levels and abandoned in the more humble sectors of the population to passions and arbitrariness, a war without rules or witnesses finally broke out. Each one set himself up as his own and only judge: for example, President Boudiaf did not hesitate to declare before the cameras that he had “no scruple whatever” about deciding to keep 10,000 people in prison camps. In Algeria nobody has suffered from scruples.

Massive arrests and deportations to concentration camps in the south of the country of more than 10,000 Islamists, arbitrary detentions in jails, torture, expeditious trials, kidnapping and summary executions, attacks against patrols of the security forces, assassinations of civil servants, intellectuals, journalists and personalities of all political tendencies. In a few months, terror reigned throughout the country.

The strategy of the security forces aimed at dismantling the organisation of the Islamists who made appeals in favour of violence against those who presumably gave support to the ruling party, consisted in the first place in the dissolution of the FIS (Islamic Front of Salvation) with all its organising directors and its means of communication: public and clandestine newspapers, clandestine radio stations, etc. In the sectors that were traditionally hostile to the Islamists, this strategy met with only partial and restricted success. On the other hand, in the Islamist ranks the impact was stronger as they were deprived of internal communication, and at the same time they suffered an increase of infiltration, manipulations and the promotion of less politicised and more bloodthirsty elements.

## **Two symmetrical factions**

In Algeria a systematic practice has been established of not questioning the methods of the faction that one belongs to and of condemning those of the adversary. This behaviour is typical of the Islamists as well as of the “democrats”, who the mass media all too frequently present as innocent victims obliged to defend themselves. In reality, the easiest strategy to develop is that of victimisation: for which all that is required is to have staff that lend themselves to this sort of game and to have control of information; both of which are disposed of by the Algerian ruling party.

In the first two years of the conflict, a curious coincidence was observed between the discourse that the radically anti-Islamist newspapers maintained and the pamphlets and cassettes distributed by the Islamists. Both factions reproached the population for not involving themselves in the struggle on their own side. In the leading articles of more than one press writer affected by the death of a companion, we find complaints that remind us of those made by one of the first leaders of an armed Islamist group, “colonel Chebouti”, who on an audio tape distributed in the summer of 1993 among the common people, criticised the population for not giving him sufficient support. A year and a half after the outbreak of violence, the major part of the population still kept themselves aloof from either of the two warring factions.

The regime never took advantage of the “passivity” of the population to isolate their unyielding opponents and to start a true process that would overcome the crisis. On the contrary, the increasing role played by those in favour of the eradication of the

Islamist phenomenon by military methods had a lot to do with the rejection of dialogue and with the imposition of theories that would totally exclude their opponents. In the period of time that elapsed since the suspension of elections in 1992 till the elections of 1995, when supposedly the legitimacy of the polls was re-established, a series of discourses proliferated which were worrying, to say the least. In the news columns, free rein was given to all sorts of mad delirium.

Between “*the thesis of the two factions of the population*” and “*the thesis of the useful Algeria in the face of the useless Algeria*”, expressions of this type were made known: “*the family that advances*”, which referred to the family that the “*republican*” elite formed part of and “*the family that regressed*” in whose ranks were to be found nationalists, Islamists, obscurantists; “*the ignorant people, opposed to modern change*”.

To oppose themselves to the fanaticism of the Islamists who divided society in “good Muslims” (necessarily Islamists) and a minority composed of “atheistic communists”, “unbelievers and other pro-Westerners”, harmful pillars of the regime, the dominating discourse of mass media did not discover anything more elaborate than the simple inversion of this dichotomy and the adoption of a classification that was as little democratic as that of the Islamists themselves. And the analogies did not end here. The supporters of violent action defended the same discourse. It is a notorious fact that the Islamists made a call to the physical elimination of their adversaries, but it is not so well known that the anti-Islamists did not limit themselves to just supporting the repression that was carried out by the security forces.

### **When information is converted into propaganda**

In 1993, following the assassinations of women and intellectuals that profoundly shook the population, the newspapers published pamphlets of some secret organisations called OJAL (Organisation of Free Young Algerians) and ORSA (Secret Organisation of Republican Algerians) that announced their intentions to retaliate *with the execution of ten women wearing the Muslim veil for the assassination of every uncovered-with-a-veil woman and likewise the execution of ten pro-Islamists for every anti-Islamist killed*.

More recently, in September 1998, the leading article of a newspaper announced the existence of “death squadrons”, created by a retired general in 1993, that “was operating in the centre of the country”. But this piece of information did not raise any reaction. An excess of misinformation kills information. In August 1994, a circular about “information of Public Security” (“l’Information Sécuritaire”), which increased the opaqueness of information and which added to the prevailing censorship, left the way free for all sorts of grave distortions that prevented people from distinguishing information from propaganda.

The most clear example of the particular concept of information in a country that is caught up in war is to be found in the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1999 issue of an Algerian newspaper, *Liberté*. After publishing news relating to the discovery of piles of corpses in the town of Mitidja, the newspaper received a communiqué from the Civil Protection Services that clearly denied this discovery. Well, at the time of publishing the official

communiqué which denied the news, the journalist added a comment showing surprise that a piece of information relating to Public Security should be the target of a denial.

The communiqué of the Civil Protection services said:

*“Certain news items indicate the discovery of corpses buried in a well in the municipality of Sidi Moussa, in the region of Ouled Allel, of the district of Gran Argel. Civil Protection services would like it to be known that pertinent investigations have been carried out with the collaboration of the security forces, and to date no corpse has been discovered”.*

The journalist added to the communiqué the following note:

*“We are surprised by the reaction of Civil Protection to our information, considering that it is a news item that relates to Public Security, a sphere in which the collaboration and the valour of the security forces has been amply demonstrated.*

*As far as our sources of information are concerned, we consider that they are not open to doubt, especially so, if we take into consideration that numerous journalists that rushed yesterday to Ouled Allel were not allowed access to the well in question. But this detail is unimportant when the facts lead us to denounce the ignoble acts of fundamentalist savagery and when they highlight the self-denial of the security forces in the front line of the anti-terrorist front”.*

All this goes to demonstrate that in Algeria, as in the majority of countries at war, it is difficult to distinguish between information and propaganda, with the aggravating factor that there is a series of clichés which no doubt facilitate the task of mass media who look for “publishable pieces of information” but that contribute very little to clarifying the truth.

### **Are men guilty and women innocent?**

As a result of the 1997 summer massacres, a certain degree of transparency was on the point of being attained, thanks to the repeated requests of the NGOs in defence of human rights and the repeated demands for an independent investigation. But, again, the current state of affairs in the news world deprived public opinion from entering into an in-depth analysis of the conflict that had been converted into an episode of inexplicable horrors, and, moreover, prevented the victims from receiving justice, transforming their Calvary into a spectacle of terror concealed with trite clichés.

In the majority of cases, the pictures we are shown are of women crying in devastated towns or watching alongside the coffins of their assassinated relatives. The mass media discourse relating to the violence in Algeria insist on the fact that women are its main victims. If both the victims as well as the survivors of massacres are women, we find ourselves asking what about the men?

Is it possible that we find ourselves in the midst of a crazy society where men are converted into bloodthirsty fanatics and their main mission in life is to exterminate women and children? Or are we perhaps in the midst of a society in which only the

men belonging to the security forces or to the governmental military groups have preserved their human qualities while the others have been converted into assassins or their accomplices?

In fact, beyond the extreme brutality and the great number of those actively engaged in violent action, violence in Algeria is manipulated and a partisan use is made of it (at all its levels) with the aim of making the Algerian conflict incomprehensible and of undermining whatever initiative is taken to resolve the conflict in question.

### **More than 100,000 dead**

This conflict, which has been dragging on for the last nine years, since the interruption of the legislative elections of January 1992, has caused more than 100,000 deaths, has destroyed the economic infrastructures of the country and has fragmented society, imposing on it a climate of terror and precariousness. The most tragic aspect of this conflict is the redundant nature of the violence of its methods and its discourses which take us back to situations occurring some 40 years ago.

Although the present conflict in Algeria is not focused in the same political terms as in the time of the war of independence against French colonialism (1954-1962), the leading actors of this conflict display attitudes that are reminiscent of the past with all the distortions that are generated by a phenomenon of this nature.

## **2. STATE, VIOLENCE AND SOCIETY**

Two characteristics were specially noticeable in Algerian society during the period following independence: in the first place, *the glorification of armed combat* as the factor responsible for liberating the country; and in second place, *the affirmation of identity* (of which Islam constitutes a fundamental element) as the factor that offered the resistance that brought about the downfall of colonial power. Armed combat and identity.

Throughout the thirty years that the populist discourse of the single party held sway – we are talking of the period from 1962 to 1992 – the discredit the political institutions suffered and the idea (mistaken, in point of fact) that victory against colonialism was exclusively the fruit of military action, led whole sectors of society to think that *only violent action could bring about change*.

The period comprised between 1989 and 1991, characterised by a whole set of economic, political and cultural reforms, and especially by the adoption of a new constitution which established the existence of different political parties and public liberties, as also the creation of a strong associative movement, was too brief a spell to permit a true learning of what constitutes democracy and the exercise of political power,

### **The State, origin of Algerian violence**

Only when the troubled waters will have calmed down, will historians have the opportunity to leave on record that the first crime against peace and democracy in Algeria was committed when the reforms of 1989 were interrupted, even before the presence of the Islamists of the FIS caused the violence to start whether directly or indirectly.

Given the brief extension of this exposition, we will limit ourselves to remind our readers that the present conflict did not arise *ex nihilo*, but was fanned into existence through a series of confrontations between the political regime and society. It reached its peak in the revolts of October 1988, confrontations which tried to move along democratic lines but which finally deviated to the current violent savagery.

Beyond the present horrors and the sufferings, we are profoundly convinced that *the Algerian violence is not so much the fruit of a concrete ideology as the result of the lack of political openness of a system of power that fears more than ever free expression and self-organisation of society.*

This political withdrawal, that began with the establishment of the state of exception in June 1991 and with the state of emergency in 1992 marked the rupture between the political class and society, and turned the present regime into the allied objective of extremist groups. In a political frame of arbitrary practices where citizens' rights are weakened, entire districts and towns have been transformed into death camps where defenceless human beings are exterminated by hordes of assassins who, curiously enough, keep moving in groups of a hundred and more, with no hindrance, from one end of the country to another.

### **Less denunciations and more analysis**

Any discourse on violence can be even counterproductive if it limits itself to a denunciation in the form of a declaration of principles and a long litany of the horrors which form part of the daily life of the Algerians – especially of the less fortunate – instead of basing itself on the analysis of the mechanisms and the political options which have converted it into an almost structural phenomenon in Algeria today.

On the other hand, *a systematic refusal to allow any type of transparency is nothing else than a rejection of any initial effort to check and overcome the machinery of violence.* This lack of transparency was clearly demonstrated, for example, in the far-from-clear circumstances in which certain massacres (especially in the summer and autumn of 1997) were not investigated because a relevant investigation commission was not allowed to be created. It also affected the proposals for a dialogue with the Islamists of the dissolved FIS and its armed wing.

It is evident that *the identification of the authors of violence and the suppression of the secrecy surrounding the negotiations between the regime and the Islamists of the dissolved FIS can only favour peace and the isolation of the extremists.* It is certain that the armed Islamist groups (GIA), as numerous as they are difficult to detect, have clearly expressed their rejection of any dialogue, mediation or transparency. But this is not the whole truth: the attitude of rejection is not something that is adopted exclusively

by these groups, since it is also shared by the successive governments from 1992 onwards as by the political minority, both of whom have shown themselves opposed to these three requisites:

- a) transparency, as it is considered that a commission of investigation would signify an interference in internal affairs;
- b) dialogue with no pre-set conditions, which is seen as making concessions to criminals;
- c) political treatment of the crisis.

These three refusals, added to the confusion created by the political legal action instigated by the resignation of President Zeroual in September 1998 and by the announcement of anticipated Presidential elections, as also the refusal to allow the polls to decide freely – all these suggest *that the only imaginable horizon of a regime that depends for its survival and perpetuation on the manipulation of violence, is precisely the maintenance of this violence which has ended up being converted into something trivial.*

### **3. THE SOLUTION IS IN POLITICS**

If we compare the evolution of the Islamists that participated in the institutions with that of those who have been violently excluded from the political scene, we have to admit that the father of Algerian Islamism was right when he said in 1938 that *“to put a long face on reforms is to smile on revolutions”*.

Algerian Islamism, as any other political tendency, covers a wide range of currents from an extremist fanatic and violent minority to another really political and democratic minority, passing through a majority who show vague convictions and enthusiastic adhesions. This range is applicable to all Algerian currents, without exception, from the communists to the nationalists, passing through the beriberists. If the Islamists have stood out for holding an especially conservative and unjust discourse in respect of women, we must also admit they do not have the monopoly for authoritarian and demagogical tendencies.

All the political parties that desire to count on popular support to accede to power have necessarily to exploit the strong resistance that exists in the heart of Algerian society, gagged and closed-minded insofar as evolution of customs is concerned. In Algerian society extreme behaviours co-exist without individual free election being allowed to express itself and develop in the political field. Besides, it has turned out that those whose duty it was to explain and demonstrate the true implications of a political liberalisation, the so-called “modernists”, have not been truly liberal and have preferred lining up with the repressive power and contenting themselves with primary anti-Islamist proclamations.

**Either a political solution or else, no solution whatever**

History will take care to make the most conservative political tendencies evolve and will get the basic principles of whatever project of public life to prevail: be they dialogue, negotiation, participation, pact or laws.

The day after suspension of elections, January 13th 1982, a political initiative was carried out to stop the escalation of violence by means of dialogue. This proposal that proceeded from the initiative of the directors of FLN (Mehri, Hamrouche), of FIS (Hachani), of FFS (Aït-Ahmed), and under the auspices of LADDH (Algerian League of Human Rights, presided over by Ali-Yahia), gave rise to the *Conversations of San Egidio*, in Rome, in January 1995 and the *Call for Peace in Algeria*, on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1996, endorsed by tens of thousands of citizens. These two initiatives led to the so-called “Letter of the 5+3”, electoral charter signed in February 1999 in Algeria by five representatives of political parties and three independent candidates, and with this charter a political process of capital importance for the nation as a whole was begun.

Later, four candidates to the presidential elections of April 1999 (Aït-Ahmed, Hamrouche, Taleb Ibrahimi and Djabalah), despite their being defenders of very different programmes and ideologies, jointly denounced the electoral fraud in a truly *political* gesture. And we are dealing here with a very important issue since *politics is the only way that will permit Algeria to set itself free from the cogwheels of violent antagonisms and strategies of terror and confusion.*

*April 1999*

## **THE CONFLICT OF KOSOVA. A RAPID GUIDE**

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*Carlos Taibo*

As is well known, the conflict of Kosova towards the end of March 1999 has entered a new phase of an unpredictable future. The aim of this article is to provide some basic information which could help us understand the fundamental issues of this conflict and we propose to do this, moreover, on a threefold basis of an express denunciation of the policies adopted since 1989 by the Serbian Government, a frank defence of the right of self-determination for Kosova and a radical questioning of the role played by the international community.

### **The stage**

Kosova is the Albanian name – Kosovo in Serbocroatian – for a territory with an extension of something less than 11,000 km<sup>2</sup>, a surface similar to that of Asturias. In the early nineteen-nineties some two million people lived in Kosova, of which almost 90% were Albanians; the Serbs being the only important minority: 7% of the population. It must be pointed out that in recent Yugoslavia, the presence of Albanians in Kosova was completed by other contingents of Albanians living in the neighbouring countries of Macedonia and Montenegro, something which reflected a more general phenomenon: the Nation-State of Albania has a significant part of the existing Albanian population – perhaps 40% - living outside its frontiers in the Balkan States.

Specialists on the subject do not agree when it comes to deciding whether or not Kosova is a rich country. Probably the most sensible way of solving this question is to affirm simply that Kosova is economically important in the context of the region – it has, for example, significant mineral wealth and hydro-electrical installations – although on the world stage, this mineral wealth and installations have practically no significance, and so one can hardly have recourse to geo-economic arguments to explain the apparent interest that external powers have shown in Kosova in recent years.

In this quick revision of basic data we must point out two fundamental differences that exist between the conflict in Kosova and that which occurred a few years ago in Bosnia. On the one hand, the importance of Kosova in the ideological fabric of Serb nationalism is much greater than that of Bosnia as Serbia, according to the Serbs, emerged in 1389 as a result of a battle that was waged in the plain of Kosovo Polje. On the other hand, while in Bosnia the principal ethnic groups living in the territory, have often maintained a historical relation of inter-marriages, the same cannot be said of Kosova, where Albanians and Serbs have had fierce confrontations dating back to a hundred years at least.

### **History**

Albanian and Serb nationalisms hold different views about an issue which in the eyes of some, is crucial: the question of who were the “first” inhabitants of Kosova. For the Albanian history-writers, they were, naturally, Albanians, direct descendants of the Ilirians who inhabited the territory many centuries before Christ, and it was only in the XIII and XIV centuries by virtue of an armed imposition that the Slavs succeeded in attaining a doubtful majority of the population. The dominant versions of Serb history-writers would have us believe on the other hand, that the Albanians, a late product in which there was a very disparate mix of different peoples, only made their appearance in Kosova as from the XV century and that too as a result of Ottoman imposition; the Serbs, however, were present in the territory since the VI century.

The above controversy was accompanied by permanent disputes relating to the eventual movements of the inhabitants. These disputes worsened in the XX century and permitted the identification of certain stages of mass emigration of Albanians: the first Yugoslavia (1918-1941); the fifties – or mass emigration of Serbs: the two World Wars; the last years of the Federal Yugoslav State. Without denying the importance of these controversies, which more often than not conclude that the number of Albanians that abandoned Kosova in the course of the XX century is significantly higher than that of the Serbs, our itinerary of relevant events starts in 1945 when the already mentioned Federal State of Yugoslavia headed by Tito saw the light of day.

Between 1945 and 1974 Kosova, inserted in the republic of Serbia, enjoyed no autonomous power whatsoever, a fact that raised complaints among the Albanian population. Those complaints were directed in general to a discrimination that was quite patent: while Slovenians, Montenegros and Macedonians – ethnic groups all of which were less numerous than that formed by Albanians – were endowed with republics of their own, profiting by the theoretical right of self-determination, similar possibilities were denied Kosova. The Serb government, moreover, maintained some singularly repressive policies in Kosova. Things began to change in 1974, when a new Yugoslav Constitution recognised the autonomous province status of Kosova and Vojvodina; although the country still remained not being a republic and carried on depending on Serbia, in point of fact the faculties they enjoyed were very similar to those of the republics. It is necessary to underline, nevertheless, that the new constitutional frame raised contrary interpretations: if for many Albanians it did not resolve the main problem – Kosova still lacked the right of self-determination - , for the emerging Serb nationalism it meant a lamentable transfer of power to structures which, alien to the designs imposed from Belgrade, showed a willingness to foment – although this has never been convincingly demonstrated – the expulsion of Serb citizens.

### **The abolition of the autonomous status of Kosova. The movement of civil disobedience.**

From 1986, and with Milosevic at its head, Serbia suffered an upsurge of an aggressive mode of nationalism which slowly kept on breaking all the rules of the game of a federal Republic which was smarting from the sense of capsizing generated by the death of Tito and the very acute economic crisis it was going through. In the following five years, the Serb government fomented markedly centralised policies, stimulated the illegal creation of “autonomous regions” of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, modified the norms which regulated the succession in the collective presidency and did not hesitate

to use the official mass media to develop discourses that frankly demonised the different ethnic groups, and in singular fashion, the Albanians of Kosova.

In 1989 the Serb government abolished the status of autonomous provinces that Kosova and Vojvodina had obtained in 1974. This measure that visibly violated all Yugoslavian legal order – the provinces had the right of veto which they could not exercise – did not receive any attention among us, despite the fact that these acts marked the beginning of the process of disintegration of the Yugoslav State. The consequences of the decision of the Serb government were various. The Kosova Parliament was dissolved, the way was paved for a harsh political repression, basic rights were violated, teaching in the Albanian language was banned, practically all Albanians working in the public sector were deprived of their posts – inaugurating thereby a regime of genuine apartheid – and a sort of martial law was applied in point of fact. One cannot refrain from asking what would happen among us if the central government were to abolish the autonomous status of Catalonia, Euskadi and Galicia. What would be the tensions that would be generated and what would be the arguments that would be placed in the hands of nationalist, radical or moderate movements in the three mentioned autonomous communities?

From 1989 and in the eight years that followed, the reply of the Kosova-albanian majority consisted in the deployment of a formidable movement of civil disobedience. Under its protection, underground sanitary and educational systems were organised in the poorest territory of old Yugoslavia. At the same time diverse political structures began to take shape. The most solid civil society of Central and Eastern Europe began to form, paradoxically enough, in one of its most castigated areas. It is good to recall that this admirable movement apparently was not accompanied by any palpable results. Belgrade maintained, without any dissenting voices, a gigantic repressive machinery, while the international community conveniently looked the other side. The pacific Kosova-albanian reply made it even more difficult to justify the policy of the Serb government.

It is convenient, however, to call our readers' attention to some problems that accompanied the resistance movement. The parallel society that the Kosova-albanians had set in motion was more a biological reply to their being expelled from the public sector rather than the product of a radical and elaborated discourse. Another problem lay in the progressive bureaucratisation of the resistance. The Democratic League of Kosova, directed by Rugova, attained a position of clear pre-eminence, and at some moment it was assumed that the general situation was relatively comfortable for his staff. The signing of the treaty of Dayton in respect of Bosnia in 1995 and the fall of the government of Berisha in Albania in 1997 destroyed in great part the hopes that Kosova-albanians had placed in an eventual international mediation. As a result, one part of the resistance, aware of the total lack of success attained by peaceful means, began to toy with the idea of an armed reply to the situation.

Meanwhile, the policy of the Serb government, clearly impregnated with xenophobic overtones, closed the door to any sort of negotiation. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the majority of the Kosova-albanian political forces should opt for a radicalisation of its discourse and should opt, moreover, to claim for frank recognition of its right to self-determination.

## **From armed conflict to the attack of NATO**

Towards the end of 1997 two changes took place on the Kosova scene. The first affected the attitude of many Albanians, who – as we have pointed out earlier – had begun to weigh the suitability of violence as a reply to the aggression that they were being subjected to; the Kosova Liberation Army (ELK) was the first demonstration of strength of this position. The second change, of a more diffuse nature, was provided by the hardening of Belgrade's policies which was brought about by the demands of public opinion in which the moderates were losing out, as was demonstrated in the incorporation of a parafascist party – The Radical Party of Seselj – to the Serb government.

The armed confrontation worsened in the course of 1998, and in this period the ELK unmistakably kept on losing ground. With the pretext of this conflict which generated perhaps around ten thousand deaths and some 200,000 refugees, the Serb police carried out operations, as it had done in Bosnia, which resembled very much the concept of ethnic cleansing. The relative stagnation of the combats, the setting in of winter and pressure exercised by the international community paved the way for a cease-fire and the signing of a peace agreement in 1998. This agreement required the withdrawal of many of the Serb military and police contingents, the progressive disarmament of the ELK, the restoration of autonomy for the region and the opening of a three-year period in which life in Kosova would be normalised. All this was to be the object of inspection by two thousand observers of the Organisation for the Security and Co-operation of Europe (OSCE).

The October Agreement was not respected by either party and this brought about an escalation in the conflict in the early months of 1999. In February, the so-called "contact group" (Germany, USA, France, Italy, UK and Russia) summoned a conference in Rambouillet, France, at which they proposed to impose a peace agreement which, very similar to that of October 1998, substituted, however, the two thousand observers of OSCE by a military contingent of almost 30,000 soldiers under the direction of NATO. Despite the fact that the contact group withdrew any type of concession in respect of an eventual referendum for self-determination in Kosova, with the obvious intention of attracting the Serb delegation to sign the agreement, the Serbs refused to accept the deployment of contingents of NATO in the territory. At the same time, there arrived in Kosova new military and police forces from Serbia.

The lack of success achieved in the Rambouillet talks led towards the end of March 1999 to a NATO attack on Serbia and Montenegro. The reasons for this military intervention were various: the desire to restore a very deteriorated image, the intention of avoiding an open armed conflict which would destabilise neighbouring Macedonia and, quite possibly, the strong desire of the United States to show the world who was indeed the only big power that remained on the planet. It is difficult, meanwhile, to give credence to the idea that NATO acted to restore the rights that in the case of the majority of the population of Kosova had been violated and infringed upon for the last so many years. And it is difficult, among other things, because, as it is known, the intervention brought about a new and savage wave of ethnic cleansing by the Serb army, police and paramilitary forces.

And if all this was not enough, NATO actions were carried out with open disrespect to the system of the United Nations and illustrated once again, the strength of a double-standard leveller which permits action with extreme force against a regime, undeniably bent on genocide, as is that of Milosevic – which earlier was legitimised on several occasions – but which prevents, on the other hand, acting in the same way with another regime, as is that of the Turks, which for decades has practised ethnic cleansing in Kurdistan.

All these reasons invite one to distrust the apparently liberalising function of NATO, the more so, since at the time these lines are being written, the Western powers still refuse to recognise what appears to be an unavoidable demand: the right of self-determination for Kosova.

### **The scenes of the future**

Since we really do not know how the crisis that has resulted from NATO's attack and the new wave of ethnic cleansing carried out in Kosova will finally end, we can do little more than offer some possible scenes for the future. We will put them down to four:

- a) A consolidation, and a legitimisation, of the main part of the effects of repression encouraged by and from Belgrade. It is possible that what the Serb units have tried to do in Kosova from March 24<sup>th</sup> 1999 onwards is to cleanse ethnically those parts of the country – monasteries and mines, to be more explicit – that they consider are not renounceable, so that possibly the international community will accept as a sad reality the partition that they (the Serbs) have set up with violence. This, in the ultimate analysis, is what occurred and was accepted in Bosnia in 1995.
- b) The return of its 1989 status to Kosova, which is actually the key proposal of the contact group. At this stage it is difficult for the Kosova-albanian political forces to accept something that resembles a false close to the crisis. Apart from this, it is necessary to underline the fact that Yugoslavia which is comprised of Serbia and Montenegro is a federation in which the centralising fluxes are much more powerful than what they were ten years ago, so much so that it is not at all simple to imagine what the recovery of its lost status of autonomous province could mean for Kosova.
- c) The conversion of Kosova into one of the entities that comprise the Yugoslav Federation of today, on an equal footing with Serbia and Montenegro. There is no clue to lead us to believe that Belgrade has ever taken seriously at any moment this proposal, though this in theory would give some satisfaction to the demands of one and the other party.
- d) The frank recognition of Kosova's right of self-determination, something that up to this moment has been denied by both Belgrade and the main international entities. Among the possible consequences of the exercise of this right, probably after a period of functioning as a protectorate under the guidance of the United Nations, would be the emergence of an independent Kosova – without doubt this would be the choice of the majority of Kosova-albanians – and a future integration with Albania. In accordance with the first project, Kosova could be converted into an

open and de-militarised State in which there could be, moreover, formulas of forming cantons of those areas in which there would be important minorities, extra-territorial agreements to resolve problems relating to certain zones of historical value for the Serbs and the people of Montenegro. These cantons could be placed under alien jurisdiction and with very open frontiers. Oblivion, nothing unusual in this type of projects, has been produced on account of the intoxication generated by the Serb government, as it prefers to confuse all Kosova-albanian resistance with the Liberation Army and it does not like to distinguish that there are often disparate opinions within the Liberation Army. The Serb government has succeeded in getting many to disregard the upward trend, still very much alive, of a civil disobedience movement which has prolonged its exemplary existence through eight long years.

### **For reflection**

If one were to make a few last reflections by way of conclusion, *the first* should remind us of the main responsibility of the Serb government in what concerns the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia. President Milosevic proceeded at one moment in time to dynamite the whole federal structure of the Yugoslav Republic. He did not hesitate in the least to put his bet on formulas of violent “solution” in respect of problems stemming from his own policy. And when it came to dealing with opposition, he showed his talent in the way he decimated it. Later, as if what he had done was not enough, he consolidated willingly in Serbia a model of a Mafia-styled capitalism. As long as the governing people in Serbia and in Croatia are the same individuals who are directly responsible for the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia, it is extremely difficult that our relations with them would move along lines of dialogue and peace.

It is true, *in second place*, that there is a very interesting consequence deriving from the condition of Mafia-styled capitalism that characterises Serbia today. In no way can it be discarded that the Serb regime is looking for an argument to present to its citizens to explain why it is necessary to abandon Kosovo. One should not forget that Milosevic is no nationalist and he is in no way interested in Kosovo becoming the crucible, imaginary or real, of the Serb nation. The Yugoslav president of today is well aware that the birth rate of Albanians is much higher than that of the Serb population, which means that looming in the future is the feeling that if the State does not get rid of Kosovo, it will have to take a majority of Albanians into account. Things being as they are, and according to the interpretation we give to the facts, Milosevic would prefer to preserve the fundamental nucleus in which he has woven a Mafia-styled capitalism rather than wage a war for a territory that has no special meaning for him.

*In third place*, this is the moment to underline the fact that despite the rhetoric and the gestures, the attitude of the international community – with the United States and the European Union (EU) at the head – in respect of the conflict of Kosova is not different from that adopted in Bosnia in 1992. To explain away the failure it met with at that time, and insofar as the EU was concerned, it was alleged the Foreign Policy and that of Common Security were still in the beginning stages. The explanation suggested implicitly that after 1992 and with the passage of time, things would change significantly. Today, however, we are obliged to conclude that these changes have really been minor and the answers proffered for the Kosova conflict remind one

strongly of those given for the Bosnian one, a little over five years ago. And in this matter one will have to ask oneself why at the end of the nineteen eighties the international community remained so indifferent to the development of a prevention policy, why it delayed ten long years before it took part in the affair, why it did not hesitate in Dayton in 1995 to give encouragement to the Serb regime, why it has shown no interest whatever in shoring up democratic opposition, and with it propping up the conscientious objectors who were coming forward in Serbia and in Montenegro, and why, rhetoric apart, it has all along turned a cold shoulder on human rights. When we analysed the causes of NATO's intervention, we underlined the fact that these human rights hardly accounted for these attacks, despite the fact that they were always on the lips of the main spokesmen of the West. Possibly the general rule "tell me who you fancy yourself to be, and I will tell you what you lack" applies in this case!

It is convenient to underline, *in fourth place*, that before the avalanche of arguments invoking geo-strategic attitudes or stability problems, it is necessary to defend in Kosova the right of people to decide their own future. The defence of the principle of self-determination is in this case nothing else than an unavoidable answer to a policy, that of the Serb government, which has kept on closing all other doors and insisting at the same time on violating systematically for a decade the rights of the majority of the population of a territory. Naturally the defence of self-determination should be carried out on parallel lines with the recognition of the rights of minorities. In this respect, it would be of interest to remember that the main Kosova-albanian political group, the Democratic League have in the last few years maintained that the Serbs are as much citizens of the country as Albanians. What is more, their main proposal is based on an independent Kosova that serves for the first time as a bridge between two atavistically antagonistic states: Serbia and Albania.

Let us add, *finally*, that nothing is more serious than accepting as valid the effects of an omnipresent ethnification of language. The satanisation "of the Serbs", as if there did not exist among them an endless range of different positions, is a dramatic distortion of reality. As is also the overlooking of ties that, despite everything, do exist between the communities. In the language the Serbs who live in Kosova speak, there exists up to 20% of Albanian words, and one would expect, something similar to happen with Serb words in the Albanian language spoken by the Kosova-albanians. A Serb priest, Father Sava, has had the courage to defend, in his monastery at Deçani, the victims of ethnic cleansing, and did not hesitate to receive at that time who was then the spokesman of the ELK, Adem Demaçi. We have no reason whatever to conclude that people like him are an absolute rarity.

*16<sup>th</sup> April, 1999*

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# **VERY JUST CAUSE – UNJUST WAR**

## ***How the West ended up converting itself into “The Western”***

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*José Ignacio González Faus*

I would like to set forth these reflections *in the form of questions*: What is happening in Kosovo? Let me make myself clear - I am referring not to what is happening on the military level or that of human tragedy, but on the level of what we call with certain pomposity “the march of history”?

What raises this question is a state of mind which is getting to be more generalised: many people heaved a sigh of relief when they heard that Milosevic was going to be attacked, that the international community was no longer willing to tolerate atrocities like those perpetrated in earlier years, as the bombardment of Dubrovnik or the siege of Sarajevo. *Why is it that these same people are beginning now to turn more and more against the war in Yugoslavia?*

I feel this is what we must ask ourselves at this moment. We are not questioning here either the genocide and criminal aspect of Mr. Milosevic’s character or the horrible human drama of the Kosova people.

We are trying to reflect and ask ourselves a couple of questions, taking as our basis certain statements and arguments that we have all been hearing in the last few days.

### **1. The international community could not remain impassive (Mr. Solana)**

Nobody will disagree to that. But one must add: *NATO is by no means the international community*. Sweden, Switzerland, Brazil, Japan and a thousand other nations are also part of the international community. We detect here the first incoherence. It is admirable to have conquered the moral principle that tyrants should not go unpunished in their own territory. But we should consider ourselves guilty for not creating the necessary channels for this principle to become effective, which would be a truly authentic international community.

And so it happened that when it became necessary to put an end to a cruel tyranny, there was nobody legitimated in this “global village” to do so. Or capacitated with political legitimacy. Traditional morals establish as the first condition for a war to be just “that it should be declared by the one who has authority to do so”<sup>1</sup>. *What*

*authority does Mr. Clinton or Mr. Solana have to declare war? Who has given them that authority?*

This authority rests not with NATO nor with the USA but with the whole international community. And it turns out that in this planetary village, so much a village and so small when it comes to the flow of capital or the market of superfluities or sexual tourism with girls of the east, there does not exist a “town mayor” when conflicts which are the first trait of human coexistence arise.

*Why does such a “town mayor” not exist?* The reply, hard though it be, is: *because care has been taken to see that he should not exist.* A couple of examples to illustrate this:

- a) These days we have been living with the “case of Pinochet”. Beyond how it will end, one has to acknowledge that we are dealing here with an enormously complicated case from the juridical point of view. And this complexity stems from the non-existence of an “international penal tribunal” – something that has been demanded so many times by so many people and which the United States has always tried to put obstacles to with the help of their acolytes. For this reason, we have heard many good people these days saying: “what is most important is not how the Pinochet case ends, rather that it serves to establish finally an international penal tribunal”
- b) It has been said (and this has neither been confirmed nor denied) that Milosevic accepted signing the treaty of Rambouillet on the condition that the treaty compliance vigilance troops should be under the command of the UNO and not under NATO<sup>i</sup>. Allow us to comment then: if the troops are of NATO - should they not necessarily be *under the command of the UNO?*

And the UNO appears on the scene. As everybody knows, when the Second World War was over, at that moment of horror and crisis, the United Nations was created to be the world authority that everybody was beginning to see as necessary after the adventure of Hitler. As everything human, this institution has functioned with some deficiencies. For this reason, in recent times voices have been raised incessantly demanding an urgent reform of the United Nations (especially now that it is in its fiftieth anniversary). These voices were systematically discredited by politicians as embodying mad utopias dreamt of by crazy visionaries. Neither the United States have ever wished a United Nations which could be other than “submitted nations”, nor the member of the Security Council have ever wished to renounce their right of veto, nor are the countries that enrich themselves with the commerce of arms, willing to cede even an inch to allow the world authority to concentrate – and reserve for itself – the use of force, as happens in any country that is minimally civilised. What is more: the United States have been systematically neglecting to pay their quota to the United Nations up to the point of becoming the most insolvent of all their members. Later, however, the United States have shown no signs of economic difficulties when it was a question of spending millions of dollars on a war like this... Is this not something enormously suspicious?<sup>iii</sup>

A further question is now raised: *Is not the well known Spanish proverb applicable here, the proverb that says: "That dust brought this mud"?*

Or in other words: if when it was necessary to finish off with Milosevic, there was nobody legitimised to do so (because the only one who could be legitimised for this situation had less real capacity than a terminally sick person would have to referee a boxing match), then we should resort to the easiest solution of all: *the legitimisation of force*. "We will do it ourselves since we have the authority of arms, though we do not have the arms of authority".

I believe this is what has happened. It is for this reason we feel really uncomfortable when arguments are put forward in the name of civilisation, progress and "Twentieth Century", another of the slogans we have been hearing these days.

## **2. These things cannot happen again, at the end of the XX century (something like this was said by Mr. Solana)**

And our discomfiture rises because in the process we have just described, we see that what was related twenty centuries ago (!) by the Roman story-teller Fedro, when translating the Greek fable-writer Aesop, still holds good today.

Fedro has a fable (the fifth of his first book) in which he introduces to his readers a number of animals who are getting ready to share a victim that has been killed. The lion is the first to speak and says: "I will keep the first part because I am called lion" (and then the second part because I am the strongest; and the third because I am the bravest etc). Is this not what has happened today? This is how the American "Western" is converted into the best paradigm of what we call with so much conceited pride *The West*.

That is to say: what frightens us about the current war in Yugoslavia is *the possibility of it ending up legitimising in the future a paradigm of international action that can be absolutely totalitarian in nature*. The world is going to have "a gendarme" that will arrogate for himself the power to act, bombard and kill when it appears to him right, simply because he is the strongest. And the best the other countries can do is to put themselves on his side, if they do not want to get things complicated for themselves. A lesson – permit me to say so – that the president of our government seems to have learnt very well<sup>iv</sup>.

We can ask ourselves why is it that Serbia is bombarded whereas no action was taken in Rwanda, or in Turkey, or in the Israel of Netanyahu, seeing that the treatment meted out to Kurds and Palestinians are not very different from that meted out by Milosevic to the Kosova-albanians. But this question – obvious though it appears – does not have any moral reply: because when *right* is identified with *might*, right can at best be arbitrary. Right tries to be rational; might tends to be irrational. And the latter is what we fear might end up prevailing after what has occurred in Serbia.

(Let us remind the reader in a parenthesis that this tendency has been reflected on other occasions: the bombardments carried out on Libya, Sudan, Iraq, the invasion of Panama or the tightening up measures in Colombia... But in these instances, the very ambiguity of the cause could turn the bombardments against the perpetrators, as in reality has happened in great part. Here, however, as it is a

question of so just a cause, the injustice in the way of dealing with the situation appears to justify itself by its own right.

Let us remind the reader again of another president of the United States – perhaps one of the worst that that country has had in its history – who was ingenuous enough to claim this right for his country, basing it not on military superiority but on moral reasons: we are legitimised on account of “the manifest moral superiority of our nation”. This cannot be forgotten. It was said soon after the first “terrorism of the Golf”. At that time, it sounded ridiculous. But now, the moral superiority of the cause can substitute for that of the gendarme).

Closing this parenthesis, it would appear this tendency is being confirmed. On the occasion of the celebration of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary NATO assigned to itself powers that fall outside NATO’s territory, “in defence of human rights and *of our interests*”. This linking together of the two concepts that is so typically North-American, legitimises the following question: *Could NATO one day end up converting itself into some sort of inter-state ETA (or IRA)*, paradoxically enough when ETA or IRA now appear to have given up killing? (The question is raised without putting in doubt the good faith of Mr. Solana in the way NATO has acted in the current Kosova conflict).

Weighing, then, the first two comments, it would appear, the growing discomfiture felt by many people lies not so much in what is happening currently (which perhaps was inevitable in the circumstances) as in the action that was not taken in the past and in the action that might take place in the future, given the Serb precedent.

In the other statements that I wish to comment on, we are going to pay attention to what is happening currently, since many are beginning to ask themselves *not if this military action was legitimate but if it was well thought out*.

### **3. *This war is an attack against Milosevic alone, and not against the Serb nation*** (also of J. Solana)

#### ***This war has got out of control*** (Commander Tello)

The reply to the first statement: Nobody would say so! Because after more than one month of war, Milosevic appears to be as strong as ever (and even with more support) and the Serbs have remained with their country in ruins.

Going step by step: I would admit that perhaps at the beginning an attempt was made to do things in the best possible manner. There was at first an admirable patience which Milosevic just jeered at. A thousand different ways of negotiation were tried to no avail. Then there was talk of bombarding only military targets ...

But very often, the explicit recognition of good intentions is equivalent to an implicit recognition of incompetence.

In fact: everything seems to indicate that the tough guy underestimated the obstinacy of Milosevic. And when operations are drawn out over a long period of time, it often ends happening that the whole structure of a country takes on military significance: roads, bridges, airports, television stations, industries of a civil nature which could, however, be made to work for the army...

“Five hundred civilians dead and two million people put out of work” maybe is an exaggeration but these figures came from a Serb source. Even if we were to divide these figures by five (and even if we were to avoid that shameful euphemism by which our dead were “assassinated” whereas the dead of the enemy were “collateral damage”) this is reason enough for us to feel uncomfortable. Especially so if we add this datum (though we may not fully trust information coming from the Serbs) that the statement made by commander Tello, got him into trouble.

And, nevertheless, this “getting out of control” seems confirmed by another statement to be commented upon.

#### **4. It is a war in defence of the people of Kosovo**

In the first place, God forbid that it does not end up becoming a war *on the side of the ELK* which group, as happens in the case of all terrorist movements, is not the best representative of their people.

But above all: up to the present time the war in Yugoslavia has multiplied a hundred times the tragedy of the Kosova people. With the added difficulty that after what has happened, it would be almost impossible to obtain the reconstruction of a future co-existence among Serbs and Kosova-albanians, even if Kosova were to be granted independence (something which NATO was opposed to initially).

If those occupying responsible positions in NATO did not foresee the atrocity of the exodus of the Kosova people, the savagery of (un)controlled assassinations, or the use of human beings as shields, they must be truly irresponsible. If they say, as they have done, that the exodus is not the result of bombing but had begun before, then it is worse: because it would have been in this case much easier to foresee. *And they would have then been obliged to take the necessary measures to avoid it.*

And now we broach a topic which is taboo in all this war: *military operations with ground troops*. One does not have to be a military man to understand that without the presence of troops in Kosovo, with bombardments alone, one could not stop the massacre of Kosova-albanians. That is again the expectations of the powerful guy, really not that of the wise person. There were military men that had already warned about this. The politicians, however, chose not to know!

Curiously enough, when traditional morals reflected on a just war, the factor of self risk was specially significant as it implied a certain generosity which could help to moderate excessive thirst for violence. A factor that is not present in terrorism (hence, the cowardice of terrorism) and which, although it does not justify, did nevertheless make more digestible to us, certain “blessings” of arms and armies that today seem so ridiculous.

But this risk is not something one can demand from this “happy and self-satisfied city” which is the western society of our day. In the earlier-mentioned fable of Fedro, the lion could put forward the argument that not only was he “the strongest” but also “the bravest”. This is not true of westerners, who are too well off to want to be upset with the arrival of coffins. The United States knows well enough that with the

arrival of a couple of coffins, they will be confronted with the same reaction from the American people that forced the end of the war in Vietnam.

And this is not due solely to the deep sorrow that is caused by the death of a loved one. I would wish this point could be clearly driven home. No doubt, suffering is serious and overpowering and should give us room for much thought.

But *in addition to that suffering*, there occurs something that in our “culture of satisfaction”, in our society that one sociologist calls a society of “shopping and fucking”, one cannot tolerate that coffins begin to arrive by the same ports through which oranges enter from China and kiwis from New Zealand, or Jabugo ham and avocados from Mexico, cars from Japan, plantains from Guatemala, shirts from Korea and house-workers from the Philippines... It would be turning upside down the foundations of our society of market economy and consumption. And it appears to me this social factor weighs more than the sorrow of individual people.

It sounds, therefore, quite sarcastic that in the speech of the fiftieth anniversary of NATO, President Aznar should take the liberty of quoting the following words of Cervantes: “Liberty is the greatest gift that heaven has given to man. Greater than all the treasures of earth and sea. For its sake, man can and should *risk his life*”.

Very correct was the person who found the quote for the president. But, after what has been said in the preceding paragraphs, one is obliged to repeat that it sounds a little sarcastic: because what one has striven to achieve in this war has been precisely not to risk a single life for the liberty of anybody. Or in any case, to risk the lives of *others*: of the Kosovo-albanians and the Serbs....

#### **4. The wife of Caesar should not only be virtuous but should also appear so (attributed to Julius Caesar)**

The last question cannot be raised by us by way of comment on any statement made by any person in particular since *about this nobody at all speaks*. But it constitutes one of the most important suspicions:

*Who has armed Milosevic?* Who has been selling arms to him during the last five years? The biggest sellers of arms are precisely the countries that have the right of veto in the Security Council of the UNO<sup>v</sup>. In NATO there is a sort of tacit agreement not to sell arms to countries that do not respect human rights. But – as Amnesty International denounces – it is an open secret that nobody fulfils this agreement. Precisely on account of this, nobody provides any information about this point. Spain obtains annually fifty thousand millions in income from the sales of arms. And when Mr. Borrell accuses Aznar of not informing the Parliament sufficiently, it does not seem at all that he is referring to this point in particular when he asks Mr. Aznar for an explanation.

The suspicion that this war has more to do with the market for arms than with the defence of human rights, cannot be taken away from us so easily. Because what cannot be denied is that *the arms' industry has been converted into an industry of consumption* as a result of the market becoming universalised as the only form of

relation. The same has occurred with culture, with the human body, etc. And an industry of consumption needs to have what it produces used up so that it can go on improving what it produces.

It is only a suspicion. Perhaps false. But we have to add that the people responsible in the West have done everything possible to make the suspicion seem well founded. Perhaps that would explain why it was only after five weeks of bombing (at the moment of my writing these lines) that a recourse to other means (such as embargoes, freezing of bank accounts and even exclusion from sports competitions..) was being taken into consideration and which could possibly turn out more efficacious than air strikes, and which could, moreover, have been resorted to earlier.

At any rate, this structural evidence will always remain irrefutable: if all the money humanity has spent in weapons and wars were to be invested in *fixing the causes of war*, we would be much better off definitely!

## Conclusion

This is a case of how something that had to be done, has been done badly. It has been done badly, firstly, because it could not have been done in another way. But it is us who are to blame for causing the situation in which we could no longer do it in any other way. Much insulted traditional morals also uphold the criterion of “guilty *in cause*”

Secondly, it has been done badly because it is causing more damage than it had intended to avert. I wish to God that this affirmation holds true only for the present and does not have lasting effects in the future.

And given the trend that this article has followed, I wish to close it also with a couple of questions:

- 1. If at any point in time Mr. Clinton has deserved respect, it was when he appeared emaciated and tearful on TV, after the recent school killing in Denver, asking himself in a state of overwhelming sorrow: Why? why? why?

I would not like to appear cruel. But I think raising another question is inevitable. This time the question cuts deeper: Was it because what that couple of crazy kids did was *the same that he has seen his country do whenever inconvenienced by somebody?* Was not the terrible Littleton massacre the fruit of a society “addicted to violence”? Was it not a child’s version of the way adults behaved in the world? Everybody knows how children like to play imitating grown-ups. How I wish those why’s of Clinton would not remain sterile!

- 2. From the beginning of the conflict, Aznar took advantage of the situation to give us his own peculiar lesson: the cause of all this disaster stems, he says, from excluding nationalisms.

Although some nationalist leader may be offended by this statement, I have not the least doubt that when Aznar said this, he was referring more to “imperial” nationalisms rather than to “seceding” nationalisms. To be more explicit, he seemed

*to be referring to Hispanic nationalism* which is what in this country has the worst record in that it denies autonomies and behaves in an excluding way. We should pay attention then to Hispanic nationalism. And our thanks to Mr. Aznar for the warning.

But, having said this, another question awaits answering, a question that is directed to the other nationalisms that are concerned about their small identities. Does this obsession for one's identity have any meaning when it leads to antipathy and disdain towards one's neighbours when in the context of this Europe with no real fixed aim as yet, nobody – neither Catalans, Basques, Castillians, French, Bavarians, Germans, Scots, nor what have you – is left with any identity other than that of being mere “clones of the United States”?

In all sincerity, these two questions are to my mind in no way futile.

27<sup>th</sup> April, 1999

### Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Remember the affirmation of St. Thomas: “it does not fall within the competence of a private individual (let us add: or entity) to declare war” *Summa Theologiae* (2.2, 40, I,c).

<sup>ii</sup> It is certain that at least one of the clauses of the unsuccessful Agreement of Rambouillet claimed total and exaggerated impunity for the possible actions of NATO in its vigilance over the compliance of this agreement.

<sup>iii</sup> Regarding the reform of the UNO cfr. the magnificent book of Vicenç Fisas: *El desafío de Naciones Unidas, ante un mundo en crisis*. Barcelona 1994. And take note of the allusion to the world crisis appearing already in the very title of the book.

<sup>iv</sup> Many of us would prefer Mr. Aznar, when he speaks about this type of issues, not to try to look like the mediocre guy of the gang who always takes sides with the strongest bully, precisely because this latter inspires the most fear. Justice and human rights are concepts that do not seem to be made to arrogate more power for ourselves but to boldly stand up to the most powerful.

<sup>v</sup> 90% of the arms sold between 1988 and 1992, according to the book cited by V. Fisas (page 42). With the aggravating circumstance that these same countries have not signed many of the pacts proposed by the UNO in respect of human rights.

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