

Montenegrin-Albanian relations according to the views of Edith Durham

Afrim Sijarina

Abstract

This manuscript analyzes Madam Durham, who visited every corner of Balkan for a quarter of century. In her works there has been a multidimensional picture of events such as international, regional, and local. She has written about the relationship of cooperation and friendship between Montenegro and Albania, including the way of life, habits, traditions and customs. The description of events starts from the congress of Berlin to the Balkan wars. Being a very intense period for relations between the two countries, the entire backstage has been analyzed. According to Mrs. Durham the conflict was not dispersed for national religious reasons. In most of the cases the reasons were based on property and wealth purposes.

Keywords: Albania, Montenegro, Relations, Edith Durham.

Introduction

No one has described Montenegrin-Albanian relations throughout their complexity and drama, and precisely in the crucial moments of "friendship" and the hostility between these countries and people, in a more brilliant and multifaceted way than Mrs. Edith Durham.

Being a traveler and philanthropist, she has brought the whole picture of the events, the scenes and behind the scenes of these relations, followed by the description of international, Balkan and local relations, combined by many simultaneously actors. No one else has been able to bring a so clear and deep picture into a three-dimensional view than this honorable lady.

The first journeys in the Balkans, as well as the recognition with the people and countries, started between 1900-1902. Although they, Balkans strutted and pretended that they were leading actors and protagonists of events, according to the description that Durham's works brought, it is clear that these "protagonist" Balkans were either just some tools in the hands of great powers or just some artificially inflated balloons, who were injected with a dose of nationalism.

Along the 19-th century until the Congress of Berlin, the period when Albanians were in their efforts to national awakening, even Montenegrins without their territorial units, and state used to have an autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, but without legally certain and internationally known borders. Such circumstances are not about authentic interstate relations, but mainly random and mostly conflicting relations. The main causes of these conflicts have been; robbery, blood feuds (revenge), religious and national loathing, pastoral issues and agricultural land, which were caused in the deficiency of borders assignment between Turkey and Montenegro.

Having briefly introduced the history of the country, and the Balkan peoples, Durham brought a special emphasis on the developments that include a period of approximately a quarter of a century, from the Congress of Berlin until after the

Balkan wars.

Mrs. Durham in her book "Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle" sheds light about the fact that Russia at this time was very active in the Balkans. Until the Treaty of Saint Stephen, Russia aimed its appearance into warm seas through Bulgaria. However, when this was prevented by England and Germany in the span of a few months, St. Stephen was corrected and the great Bulgaria should withdraw in its one third. Since then Russia changed lanes, aiming its exit in the sea through Serbia (Durham, 1928, 77).

In her book, "Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle" Durham quotes the abbot of Mirdita Prenk Doçi, who says:

It is wrong to act now against Turkey. Albania has terribly suffered from the Turks. But Albania has not died. Now we have another enemy, much worse, that grows day by day and this is Slav. Russia with its fanatical churches, who is ready to destroy Albania. Right now Turkey is the only protection we have against Slavic violators. When the Turkish Empire is to collapse, and undoubtedly it will, we should not fall in the hands of the Austrian, nor in the hands of Slavic countries (Durham, 1928, 113). In Durham's book "High Albania", which was written during her eight-month expedition in the the year 1908, she travels in the whole North Albania, starting from Shkodra, all through Malesia to Prizren, Gjakova, Mitrovica and Pristina. A fascinating confession, shocking, though not dramatic, that brings alive a heroic, epic, as well as backward, primitive, ruthless world, where nothing is as it seems, often quite different from the romantic images that we have for the history.

In the book "The Burden of Balkan" Mrs. Durham analyzes that: The diplomat, the geographer, the archeologist, I do not pretend to be able to teach. My aim is a far humbler one. I wish to give the general reader a somewhat true idea of the position of affairs in the Balkan Peninsula than he usually possesses (Durham, 1998, 5).

Although the Balkan countries differ based on language and religion, in their everyday life, they had a common lifestyle. Having lived in the hills of the high mountains, or through Montenegrin Brda, and experiencing poverty and the lack of basic conditions, the Montenegrin and the Albanian framed to the conditions were obliged to improvise a lot allowing them to survive. Mrs. Durham brought the fact that Albanian and Montenegrin women were sold and bought in the cross-border area. Buying women, was the reason that Interreligious marriages were happening (Durham, 2005, 232-284).

Analyzing Durham's books, it can be understood the difficulties that were produced by the abruption of marriages despite the reasons, and the phenomenon of blood feud that was very strict and reluctant. There were times when the woman intervened to stop a quarrel, and when it comes to family honor, they are just as equally as men when it comes to blood feud worries (Durham, 1909, 142).

Another phenomenon that Mrs. Durham brings in details is the practice of women who wear men's clothing which exists even in that part of Montenegro known as the Brda, which includes those tribes which, according to the tradition, share close consanguinity with the Albanian tribes (Durham, 1909, 172).

In her book for the tribes, laws and customs of the Balkan, Ms. Durham brings many details that show similarity of Montenegro habits with those of Albania. She further

argues that in Montenegro, as in Albania, a man can not kill when it is accompanied by a friend. Further describing every province and village that she has visited, Mrs. Durham presents a wild nature. However despite these facts, the character, hospitality and the loyalty of these Balkan peasants is superlative. Even the "laws" that were in force in this area, despite the lack of state and institutions, were precisely and strictly implemented with no exception.

In the period between Berlin Congress to the Balkan wars, in distant mountain areas there was coexistence between Albanians and Montenegrins. But occasionally this fragile peace was ruined because of the property and livestock reasons. As Durham claims there were numerous troubles in the border between Albania and Montenegro. Each of the parties embraced cattle found in what it considered its own side of the border. No one else has better described the frustration and victimization of an entire population, in front of the empty promises of Turkey or Montenegro.

Frustration over Turkey was manifested when with the declaration of the Constitution; in 1908 the whole crowd of people had flooded in Shkodra to celebrate this act, hoping the improvement and promotion of their rights (Durham, 2000, 238). Not long later turned out to be a barren act that did not bring any privileges for residents. Albanians had illusions and hopes in the Montenegrin support. As well as being adjacent to them somehow undetectably they crept under Montenegrin influence. Besides general developments, Mrs. Durham has brought the spiritual, emotional side of these highlanders in these border areas. Dissatisfied with their position under Turkey, initially two or three families from the tribes Hoti and Grudes, emigrated in Montenegro to avoid the Turkish army service. The number of immigrants gradually increased as a result of Montenegrin temptation and intrigues (Durham, 2000, 44).

Having been for a long time in the land, Miss Durham was not only a simple spectator and an observer, but she was taking a role as protagonists of events. As we have mentioned above in the absence of a coherent factor that will unite and defend the interests of these residents, Albanian Highlanders began to have Mrs. Durham as a reference point for consultation and assistance.

Mrs. Durham had it all, the clear vision, and the bright mind, the human soul to help people, but facing a frost climate that was created in the background, a dunk flower was fated to fade and to not reach the destinations through her messages.

By seeing that Albanians were innocent victims, and noting that their fate was an important flyer, Mrs. Durham emphasizes the fact that "in all the world, there are no human creatures that are more pitiable than those who were used as a lure on their hooks by the kings and emperors when they want to fish new territories." Mrs. Durham took a clear pro Albanian position, becoming a diligent lawyer on protecting the rights of Albanian people.

In such circumstances, Mrs. Durham was the one who with all of her being was committed to help the displaced population. In front of all difficulties to provide donations from governments, or various donors, she decided to use personal money in order to help the population in need. Using all of her authority, she became a reference point in the territory, and in this way she managed to provide donations and certain proceeds of money.

Conclusions

Whoever as an individual, or group of authors, trying to recall the complete situation in the territory of Balkan as well as the Montenegrin-Albanian relations, either by writing books or making movie scripts, without the works of Durham will be partial, incomplete and unrealistic. No matter how detailed are the authors who have covered this period, their objective has still been focused only on separate fragments, and those as such still do not bring the real-time images. No one had a clearer, wider and bigger objective about the events in the area as Mrs. Durham had. She has brilliantly described the international circumstances, as well as their protagonists, who intentionally were trying to inject the actors in the Balkans with additional doses of nationalism, so in some certain moments they could use those nationalism doses against each other. Mrs. Durham has described with a very negative shade the Albanian-Montenegrin relations. Describing Montenegrin aims and tendencies at the expense of Albanians, she presents numerous complaints against the government and Montenegrin Army, who she loudly had named as invaders, and violators of the Albanian population. As a sign of dissatisfaction with Montenegrin politics she had turned back the royal medal that the King of Montenegro had given her.

Durham's works: *High Albania*, *Twenty Years of Balkan Tangle*, *The War for Shkodra*, *The Concern of Balkans for the tribes*, the laws and the customs of the Balkan peoples, as well as a series of journalistic works are a valuable source in the illumination of this period. We can properly say that she did not only describe a part of history, but she herself was the Balkans history.

References

- Durham, E. (2001). *Twenty years of Balkan tangle*, Tirana.
- Durham, E. (1998). *The burden of the Balkans*, Tirana.
- Durham, E. (2005). *The struggle for Scutari*. Shkoder.
- Durham, E. (2000). *High Albania*. Tirana.
- Durham, E. (2005). *Some tribal origins, laws, and customs of Balkans*, Tirana.