



Arab American University

Faculty of Graduate Studies

“The near future or utopia?”

Reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo”

By

Smiljana Ćurčić

Supervisor

Dr. Nahed Habiballah

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requirements for the Master’s degree in Conflict Resolution**

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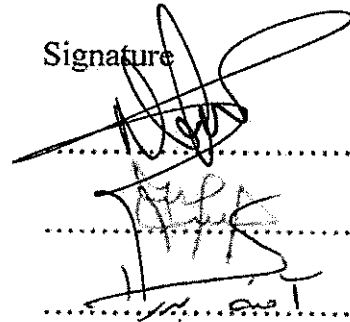
By
Smiljana Ćurčić

This thesis was defended successfully on August 2021 and approved by:

Committee Members

1. Dr. Nahed Habiballah / Supervisor
2. Dr. Ayman Yousef / Internal Examiner
3. Dr. Amneh Badran / External Examiner

Signature



Handwritten signatures of the committee members, each written over a dotted line. The first signature is the most prominent and appears to be 'Nahed Habiballah'. The second signature is less legible but appears to be 'Ayman Yousef'. The third signature is also less legible but appears to be 'Amneh Badran'.

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this MA research thesis is my own original work and that all sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged, and that this document has not been previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted at any university in order to obtain academic qualifications.

Smiljana Ćurčić

Signature:.....Date:.....

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Abstract

The Balkans have long been known as the “powder keg” of Europe and the area of former Yugoslavia as a particularly volatile region. Kosovo as the latest red zone on the territory of former Yugoslavia is the main point of conflict between the Serbian and Albanian ethnic communities. The war ended in 1999, but the post-conflict reality in which these ethnic communities share the same space yet live in parallel worlds is still ongoing twenty two years after the conflict. So where does the rapprochement between these two ethnic communities stand in this kind of reality? The aim of this study is to investigate the possibility of genuine, state sponsored reconciliation process between the two ethnically divided communities in Kosovo. My intention is to take a closer look at the process of reconciliation from the bottom-up, people-centered perspective, and to analyze the elements that hinder the process as well as the real needs of local communities in order to establish genuine coexistence and to reconcile with one another. For this purpose, I used qualitative data analysis. The results obtained in this analysis imply that reconciliation is possible but not before the Serbian and Kosovo societies deal with the past, deconstruct myths and prejudice, define collective truth and rehumanize “the other”. In other words, reconciliation between the Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo is possible, if people embrace an inclusive vision of a society in which there is room for everyone.

Keywords: Kosovo, Kosovo Serbs, Kosovo Albanians, reconciliation, ethnic relationships, political leaders, dealing with the past.

List of abbreviations

EULEX	European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
UNMIK	United Nation Mission in Kosovo

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1. Introduction

During its existence from 1945 until 1991, Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was one of a kind multiethnic conglomerate in Europe, and many people who today live on the territory in which this state extended still remember its glorious days with a strong feeling of nostalgia¹. But many more people remember its painful disintegration and horrific wars of the 1990s. SFR Yugoslavia comprised six constituent socialist republics: Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Montenegro and Macedonia, and two autonomous provinces within Serbia, Vojvodina and Kosovo and Metohija. Following the death of the communist leader Tito, who was in power from 1953 until 1980, sharp rise in nationalistic tendencies among segments of the population of the constituent republics led to the disintegration of the federal union. Officially, the breakup of Yugoslavia occurred on April 27, 1992; however, the separation did not come about without the bloodshed that took place throughout the 1990s, during the ensuing ethnic conflicts and wars of independence. Weakening of the communist system, escalating nationalism, use of religion for political and national purposes, secessionist demands, ethnic intolerance, territorial nationalism, irredentist claims, the Greater Serbia ideology, the Greater Croatia ideology, the Greater Albania ideology—the list of factors that contributed to the disintegration of Yugoslavia and formation of new entities is

¹ The last census in Yugoslavia was conducted in 1991 and it showed that 23,475,887 people lived on its territory. Constitutive ethnic groups were Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, ethnic Muslims (now referred to as Bosniaks) and Montenegrins. Other ethnic groups living in SFR Yugoslavia included Albanians, Hungarians, Roma, Vlachs, Slovaks etc. Albanian minority was the largest, and since they boycotted the census in 1991, according to the 1981 census there were 1,730,364 Albanians in Yugoslavia. Data according to the Statistical Yearbook of Yugoslavia for 1991. SFRJ Savezni zavod za statistiku, Statisticki godisnjak Jugoslavije, 1991, godina 38, Beograd 1991. Available at: <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G1991/Pdf/G19912003.pdf>

extensive². The Ten-day war during the summer of 1991 between the JNA (Yugoslav People's Army) and Slovenian police and Territorial Defense led to the independent Republic of Slovenia. In September 1991, North Macedonia voted for independence from Yugoslavia and this was the only peaceful separation from the federal union³. Croatian war of independence, fought between Serbs in Croatia and JNA and the Croatian Army in 1991-1995, led to the independent Republic of Croatia. In early 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia and this led to the heinous Bosnian war between 1992-1995, that was fought between the forces of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and forces of proto-states (state-like entities) of Herzeg-Bosnia, led by Croatia, and Republika Srpska, led by Serbia. At the beginning of 1992, with new Constitution, Republic of Serbia and Republic of Montenegro proclaimed a federation and established the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The turbulent 1990s ended with the bloodshed on the territory of the Serbian Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija known as the Kosovo war of 1998-1999, fought between the forces of the Federal

²Greater Serbia term indicates the Serbian irredentist and nationalist aspirations and ideology of the creation of the Serbian state that would include areas outside today's Serbia, in surrounding countries where Serbs live. That state would include almost whole of the former Yugoslavia, except Slovenia and parts of Croatia. As a justification for such aspirations, Serbian nationalists cite the historical Serbian Empire that existed in 14th century in Southeastern Europe. Greater Croatia is an irredentist and nationalist ideology of the creation of the Croatian state according to which that state should spread to the territories inhabited by Croats, meaning it would include, besides today's Croatia, the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, parts of Serbia and parts of Montenegro. This ideology has its roots in the 18th century, and according to it all South Slavs are Croats. Fascist Italy supported an independent Croatia and Mussolini offered to the Croatian ultranationalist and fascist movement the Ustase the right to annex all of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Those aspirations arouse again during the breakup of Yugoslavia. Greater Albania, as in the case of Serbia and Croatia, is an irredentist and nationalist ideology of the Albanian people. According to this ideology, Albanians in Albania and all neighboring counties should be united in one Albanian state and that state would include, beside today's Albania, Kosovo, parts of Serbia, parts of Montenegro, parts of Greece and parts of North Macedonia. This idea has roots in the 19th century during the rise of the Albanian nationalism and the establishment of the League of Prizren, an Albanian political organization. Today, this ideology is very much alive among the Kosovo Albanian politicians who often state that they would love to see the unification of Albania and Kosovo.

³ Up until February 2019, North Macedonia was in dispute with Greece over the use of the country name "Macedonia", since the largest Greek region and historically one of the most important parts of Greece is named Macedonia. Hence, the name of the country from 1991 until 2019 was The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army comprised of Kosovo Albanian rebels. Year 2006 brought another secession when Montenegro declared its independence from the federation with Serbia. And finally, the last remnants of the former Yugoslavia disintegrated in 2008 when the Republic of Kosovo unilaterally declared independence from Serbia. In place of the former SFR Yugoslavia, seven independent states were formed, therefore seven official narratives and dominant collective memories have been circulated in public discourse in these newly established countries.

Kosovo is the disputed territory between the Republic of Serbia and the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo⁴. Two main ethnic groups that live on this territory are Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians; the forces of the FR Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army represented these two communities respectively in the armed conflict that lasted between February 1998 and June 1999. The dispute between these two ethnic communities in Kosovo started as a rebellion against Serbian repression of Kosovo Albanians and against Serbian authorities' limitation of autonomy of this province, and ended up as a war with the aim of gaining complete sovereignty over the province.

One of the first factors that arise in regard to the Kosovo war is that this is a frozen conflict. This conflict is officially not resolved yet and parties in conflict, the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Kosovo, show a lack of willingness at the top leadership level to make a negotiated settlement of this territorial dispute. Each of the sides in this conflict adhere to their own demands, show no willingness to compromise,

⁴ In this research I use the name Kosovo in accordance with the Resolution of the United Nations Security Council 1244 and with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 is available online at: https://unmik.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/old_dnn/Res1244ENG.pdf. Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo, Advisory Opinion, I.C.J. Reports 2010 available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>

claim their right to live in Kosovo and to sovereignly own the territory, and thus they do not consider the possibility of designing a strategic plan to establish long-term positive peace and coexistence. What we are witnessing on the ground is a textbook example of negative peace, as Galtung defines this concept⁵. Statements by officials show reluctance to transform the conflict, and often they add to the growing of the divides. For Kosovo Albanians, independence is the only just solution to this conflict. For Serbia, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia is the condition that is not negotiable⁶. Although it has been thirteen years since the unilateral proclamation of independence and two decades of international administration, antagonism, intolerance and social and economic instability are the main features of post-conflict and post-independence Kosovo. Kosovo Albanians fostered great faith in the international community after 1999 NATO intervention, expecting that human safety would be restored and that protection of human rights and law would be the key principles underpinning the new democratic society and institutions. However, the reality on the ground is very different. Unemployment, discrimination, poverty, lack of enforcement of law, distrust, corruption, are just some of the difficulties that people in the region face every day⁷.

⁵ Johan Galtung is the founder of the discipline of peace and conflict studies and he argues there are two compatible definitions of peace: negative peace, as the absence of all kinds of violence, and positive peace, as nonviolent and creative conflict transformation. Galtung Johan, *Peace by peaceful means*, Sage Publications, 1996, pg. 9.

⁶ The preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia defines the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija as an integral part of Serbia. "In the Republic of Serbia, there are the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. The substantial autonomy of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija shall be regulated by the special law which shall be adopted in accordance with the proceedings envisaged for amending the Constitution." The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Article 182.

⁷ According to the latest UN Development Programme statistics for Kosovo, the unemployment rate is 32,9% and the poverty rate is 29,7%. United Nations Development Programme: Kosovo: <http://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/countryinfo.html>. Business anti-corruption portal Gan published Kosovo Corruption Report, last updated in June 2020, and analyzed the level of corruption in different areas, such as: judicial system, public services, police, tax administration, civil society etc., and

Kosovo is a divided society along so many lines: ethnicity, language, education, health, municipal services etc. Serbs predominantly live in the north, with some enclaves situated in the south, where Albanians are the majority. All towns have their local names in Albanian and Serbian languages. Serbs who live in the north do not recognize Kosovo institutions; instead, they rely on parallel Serbian institutions—security structures, courts, schools, healthcare, administrative structures dealing with property issues and documents issued by the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs⁸. These institutions also function in some municipalities where Albanians are the majority⁹. People from these two ethnic groups rarely communicate with each other. Serbian and Albanian children do not attend the same schools and they follow different curricula: Serbian-speaking schools have curriculum instructed by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, while Albanian-speaking schools teach according to the curriculum approved by the Kosovo government. Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo have opposite perceptions of reality, and even though they live in the same space, these two peoples look at life from diametrically opposed viewpoints; they live in parallel worlds. So where does the reconciliation process between two ethnic communities stand in this kind of reality? Or perhaps a better question would be: is reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo possible at all or will it remain elusive? The prevailing general

stated that “the judicial system is considered among the most corrupt public institutions in Kosovo”. Kosovo corruption report is available at: <https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/kosovo/>

⁸ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission in Kosovo (OSCE) published in 2003 a document with aim to emphasize the impact of the parallel institutions on society and public security. OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Parallel structures in Kosovo, Department of Human Rights and Rule of Law, 2003. Available online at: <http://www.osce.org/kosovo/42584?download=true>

⁹ According to the Brussel agreement between Belgrade and Pristina from 2013, these parallel institutions should have been integrated in Kosovo’s institutions, but still every year the Serbian Government allocates millions of euros for majority Serb municipalities for the functioning of these institutions, which government in Pristina sees as illegal. Selimi Behar, *Illegal Serbian Structures in the Republic of Kosovo. Why these structures are illegal and not parallel*, in: Academic Journal of Business, Administration, Law and Social Sciences, Vol. 1, No. 3, November 2015, pp. 115-126.

opinion among the researchers is that the process of reconciliation has not shown significant progress in this disputed territory, it is considered a failure, and I agree with this statement. In this paper I will indicate why I agree with it by analyzing the obstacles to the reconciliation, i.e., the reasons for the failure of this process so far. Furthermore, I will examine what can be done to achieve reconciliation in Kosovo.

1.1. Aim and objectives of the research

When it comes to the topic of Kosovo in the literature, researchers often pay more attention to peace-building and state-building endeavors in post-conflict Kosovo. In other words, preference is given to politics perspective and top-down approach, rather than the real needs of civil society and importance of people-centered approach and bottom-up processes. If the reconciliation process in Kosovo is analyzed in academic research, it is usually done in the domain of history of interethnic relations or relations at a top leadership level. I consider that there is not enough research on reconciliation between two communities analyzed from the perspective of everyday people in Kosovo. Therefore, I would like to focus on the challenges and possibilities of reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians in this disputed territory. The situation on the ground does not constitute a resolution to the conflict since the relationship between these ethnic communities that share the same space has not been restored and these communities cannot envision a shared future since they do not interact in a meaningful way. Therefore, the aim of this research is to understand whether reconciliation between the two ethnically divided communities in Kosovo is possible.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To research secondary literature on interethnic relations and war in Kosovo in order to gain broader understanding of this conflict.
2. To explore the context in which the process of reconciliation between Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Albanian communities is taking place.
3. To collect data on reconciliation in Kosovo in order to determine the main obstacles to reconciliation.
4. To analyze collected data using dominant theories of reconciliation presented in the theoretical framework.
5. To compare collected data in order to establish if reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo is achievable.
6. To evaluate the prospects of the process of reconciliation in Kosovo.

1.2. The purpose of the study and research questions

The purpose of this study is to analyze where the process of reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo stands, which factors influence the process and what its projected possibilities are, taking into account the real needs of local people. I want to focus on the relationship between the two largest ethnic groups in Kosovo, viewed through the prism of reconciliation. Also, I want to examine whether there has been any significant shift in the reconciliation process in recent years, and after some

major developments in Kosovo politics. My intention is to take a closer look at the process of reconciliation from the bottom-up, people-centered perspective, and to examine the elements that hinder the process as well as the real needs of local communities in order to establish genuine coexistence and to reconcile with one another.

The leaders' attitudes toward reconciliation between these two communities are often heard in the public discourse in Serbia and Kosovo. They have important role in this process and, unfortunately, often have negative influence on the general public and individuals from both communities since they use nationalist propaganda and advocate exclusive attitudes. Therefore, one component I will investigate in this paper is exclusivism of the Serbian identity and the effect that such an understanding of identity has on the relationship with the Albanian community. Relation of power between the Serbian government and the Serbian community in Kosovo is the second element that significantly affects the reconciliation process and I will analyze it in this paper.

Accordingly, the main research questions are:

- * Why has reconciliation in Kosovo failed so far?
- * What are the obstacles that the process of reconciliation in Kosovo is facing?
- * What can be done to bring about sustainable and long-term reconciliation in Kosovo?

The research method that I use in order to answer these questions is qualitative content analysis of the data gathered from secondary sources. These sources are peer reviewed literature, existing research articles and surveys on reconciliation in Kosovo, news agencies' data, media material and audio-visual recordings.

1.3. Anticipated contribution of the research

One of the reasons I chose this research topic is small number of critical analyses of what is considered coexistence in today's Kosovo. However, my main reason is a desire to contribute to the process of reckoning with the past in Serbia and the process of peacebuilding in post-conflict Kosovo. This study aims to critique the attitude that the political elites have toward the process of reconciliation, as well as to emphasize the importance of the much-needed process of dealing with the past and of constructively overcoming obstacles for a better future for all in Kosovo, as well as in Serbia. Due to the fact that the war ended twenty two years ago, the case of Kosovo is not so relevant in public discourse outside of the borders of countries affected by this conflict, thus with this study I want to draw the attention of conflict resolution researchers to the shortcomings in establishing long-term and sustainable positive peace and genuine coexistence in this youngest (by date of formation) country in Europe. Since there is a possibility of an escalation within this context, I anticipate that this research will contribute to raising awareness of the value of advocating for a policy of reconciliation and cooperation between former adversaries, primarily in countries affected by this conflict, but also in countries undergoing transitional justice.

1.4. Limitations of the research

In the process of creating this study I encountered one decisive limitation: time. The original plan was to conduct interviews with the members of both ethnic communities and they would be the primary data, but since I was limited by time to

conduct this research I was not able to do interviews. Therefore, I was constrained to use only secondary sources and that certainly has an effect on the scope and depth of my research. Nonetheless, I worked diligently to obtain heterogeneity of data, investing a lot of time on selection of reliable sources and the latest validated data required for this study.

1.5. Positionality

Positionality in research refers to the position that the researcher has in regard to the social and political context of the research, or in other words, it is the process of contextualizing the researcher. The researcher's worldview is influenced by their values and beliefs that are formed on the basis of individual's faith, culture, political affiliation, race, gender, social status etc. "Positionality implies that the social-historical-political location of a researcher influences their orientations, i.e., that they are not separate from the social processes they study"¹⁰. Accordingly, I need to disclose myself in this study, because my individual ethics, values and worldview can influence the research process.

I am Serbian by nationality and as a citizen of Serbia, I have directly experienced the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 as a consequence of the disastrous politics led by the then Serbian government. As is the case with most of my compatriots, my memories related to the Kosovo war were exclusively related to the NATO bombing, as if nothing had happened before that devastating intervention. This is a consequence of the

¹⁰ Holmes, Andrew Gary Darwin. "Researcher Positionality – A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research – A New Researcher Guide." *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2020, pg. 3.

exposure to the official state narrative that I unconsciously and uncritically accepted. And that official state narrative is that Serbian people are the greatest victims in the Balkans, who throughout their tumultuous history suffered at the hands of Muslims (first Ottomans, then Bosnian and later Kosovo Muslims) and that, regarding the war in Kosovo, Serbian war generals and the army merely defended the legitimate state interests and borders of the country, as well as “the cradle of the nation”—the “holy land” of Kosovo. This dominant narrative of victimization prevents the truth from being known and blurs the realistic picture of events, which contributes to the vague remembering of the past. However, once I became aware of the fact that I was exposed to one-sided knowledge of the past and how dangerous the manipulation of that knowledge by the state can be, I became more interested in my country’s past and the truth about its role in the events of the 1990s, thus my perception of the Serbian role and responsibility in those events changed significantly. For that reason, this research was initiated in response to my need, as a member of the Serbian people, to express my readiness to reckon with the painful past and to contribute to the quest for sustainable peace in Kosovo. In conducting this research I aspired to act as a third-party researcher, but I am fully aware of the possibility that my personal experience and biases could have, to some extent, directly or indirectly affected my objective comprehension of data and analytical reasoning.

2. Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss methodology of the research and how I will obtain and analyze data to answer the research questions formulated earlier. For this study it is preferred to use qualitative research since its essence, according to the author of *The*

Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research, is “understanding, describing, explaining, unraveling, illuminating, chronicling, and documenting social life—which includes attention to the everyday, to the mundane and ordinary, as much as the extraordinary. Qualitative research can involve the study of others, but also the self and the complex relationships between, within, and among people and groups, including our own entanglements”¹¹. Qualitative approach to research is used to not only explore or explain the social phenomenon, but can help us understand the background and different perspectives on the problem in question and complexity of opinions and feelings of people or groups related to that phenomenon. Therefore, use of qualitative research in this study will help us understand different perspectives on the process of reconciliation in Kosovo and what each ethnic community in this disputed territory indicates as challenges in this process, and what its potential outcomes are.

Summarized above, the nature of the subject of my study leads me to use a qualitative approach based on a single exploratory case study. “A case study, in common parlance, documents a particular situation or event in detail in a specific sociopolitical context.”¹² What is characteristic of the Kosovo case is the complexity of historical circumstances and interethnic relations, thus I want to examine this case from multiple perspectives. A sociopolitical context in Kosovo twenty two years after the war is indeed multilayered; therefore I want to shed a light on it from the standpoint of both ethnic communities in Kosovo.

¹¹ Leavy, Patricia, *Introduction*, The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research, ed. Leavy Patricia, Oxford University Press, 2014, pg. 1.

¹² Simons, Helen, *Case study research: In depth understanding in context*, The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research, ed. Leavy Patricia, Oxford University Press, 2014, pg. 455.

2.1. Data collection

In order to collect data for this study I searched for relevant documents, surveys, researches, agreements, reports and policy papers, produced by international organizations, Serbian governmental institutions, Kosovo governmental institutions, civil society and local and international non-governmental organizations, as well as data produced by media (news, videos, movies, audio-visual recordings). Given the fact that I speak one of the local languages, Serbian language, I was able to expand the search for data in different online sources and libraries, beside the ones published in English language. In order to maintain objectivity in this research, I collected reliable data from the Albanian sources written or translated in English language.

2.2. Data analysis

After I collected relevant data I analyzed them in order to get meaningful insight so I could answer the main research questions in this study. As previously stated, I used a variety of sources to collect data. Then I organized the data in order to have easy access for analysis. I prepared folders for digital data and hard copy folders for paperwork, and then I prioritized data so I could keep focus on the purpose of the research. Next step was to categorize the themes. “To theme in qualitative data analysis is to construct summative, phenomenological meanings from data through extended passages of text.”¹³

¹³ Saldana, Johnny, Coding and Analysis Strategies, in: The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research, ed. Leavy Patricia, Oxford University Press, 2014, pg. 596.

After this preparation phase came organizational phase consisting of coding. “A code in qualitative data analysis is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.”¹⁴ I grouped similar codes in categories so I could further analyze them. I chose headings and subsections of the study, and I explored the interaction between categories and patterns. Third phase was reporting that included description and interpretation in order to convey the themes, followed by the discussion of the findings.

The analysis of my research consists of three parts. The first part is to examine the history of interethnic relations in Kosovo and to select several relevant developments that would contribute to the understanding of the context in which the war in Kosovo took place. The second part is to compare the data I extracted from several documentaries and reportages in order to establish the socio-cultural norm of coexistence and political context in post-conflict Kosovo. The third part is to investigate the specific obstacles to the process of reconciliation in Kosovo that will contribute to better understanding of the failure of this process so far.

All three parts will be analyzed separately by chapters. In the discussion chapter I will synthesize the main components from these three parts and comparatively analyze them so that I can answer the research questions and draw a conclusion. To complete this analysis, I will offer final recommendations.

3. Theoretical framework

Understanding the process of reconciliation between the two ethnic communities in Kosovo requires an understanding of the concept of reconciliation. For this reason, it is necessary to discuss a theoretical framework on this subject. Therefore, on the following pages I will analyze the work of some leading authors in the field of reconciliation in post-conflict societies, with the aim of applying the most suitable theory of reconciliation to this study.

Firstly, it is important to note that there is no universal definition of reconciliation. What most scholars agree on is that reconciliation is an approach within conflict transformation and that it is a long-term process which refers to the human relationship between divided peoples. Ramsbotham in his hourglass model of conflict resolution responses gives us a clear picture of where this process comes in the stages of conflict: reconciliation is positioned in the bottom half of the model as a response within cultural peacebuilding.¹⁵ According to him, the ultimate goal of conflict resolution is reconciliation, i.e. “restoring broken relationships and learning to live nonviolently with radical differences”.¹⁶ He argues that there are four dimensions of reconciliation, namely accepting the status quo, correlating accounts, bridging opposites and reconstituting relations, and they correspond to the stages of conflict de-escalation, which are: ending violence, overcoming polarization, managing contradiction and celebrating difference. In order to step on this long road toward reconciliation, Ramsbotham claims that individuals

¹⁵ Ramsbotham, O., Miall, H. and Woodhouse, T., *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (3rd ed.), Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, pg. 14.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 246.

and groups need to deal with the past so they can recover from psychological trauma, and to that end he states several approaches: official amnesia, truth commissions, national or international criminal tribunals, reparation, retaliation and the one that deserves more attention within conflict resolution community—ritual healing and indigenous peace initiatives. Ramsbotham emphasizes how important it is to obliterate dehumanizing images of the enemy and to “rehumanize” the other in order to reach deeper processes of reconciliation.¹⁷ This attribution of significance to the relationship with the other can be found in the work of John Paul Lederach, who argues that at the root of every conflict and its solution is a relationship, and that along with relationship, encounter and the need to go beyond traditional international political discourses make a conceptual framework for reconciliation. “Reconciliation, in essence, represents a place, the point of encounter where concerns about both the past and the future can meet”.¹⁸ Further, he builds his concept on a theological perspective by using the verse 10 from the biblical Psalm 85: “Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.”¹⁹, and identifies four aspects of the process of reconciliation: truth, mercy, justice and peace. For him, these four aspects are intertwined and they are in the center of problems of any contemporary conflict. The transformation of the conflict must be sought in socio-psychological and spiritual dimension, since the primary factors of the conflict (such as hatred, prejudice, and racism) are ingrained in this dimension of the conflict.²⁰ Lederach understands reconciliation as a focus and a locus. The focus aspects relate to the center of the interest of reconciliation, which is a relationship. The locus is a space of encounter of

¹⁷ Ibid, pg. 259.

¹⁸ Lederach, John P., *Building Peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided society*. Washington D.C., USA: United State Institute of Peace Press, 1997, pg. 27.

¹⁹ The Bible, New King James version, online edition.

²⁰ Lederach, pg. 29.

conflicting parties where they can meet and share their feelings, experiences and visions of future.²¹ Reconciliation as a concept, according to Lederach, aims to create a time and a place for people affected by the conflict where they can deal with the excruciating past in order to live throughout the present so they can envision the shared future.²² He emphasizes the need for recognition of past grievances between adversaries, so they could explore a future relationship. Priscilla Hayner sees this need for knowing the truth about the past as a necessity for reconciliation to take place. She argues that distinction should be made between individual reconciliation and national or political reconciliation.²³ On a group level, opposing parties can discuss about future prospects without fear of a new conflict over the past, if an official conclusion about the facts has been made. However, on an individual level this process of reckoning with the past and reconciling with the perpetrator is much more complex and requires other means. According to Hayner, “reconciliation implies building or rebuilding relationships today that are not haunted by the conflicts and hatreds of yesterday”.²⁴ To determine what reconciliation looks like on the ground, how an assessment of what level of reconciliation a post-conflict society achieved can be made, or how we can tell if this is an on-going process in a certain society, she suggests three questions. First question is “How is the past dealt with in the public sphere?” Meaning, whether people can, without resentment, talk about events from the past with their former adversaries in the public. The second question concerns the relationship between previous adversaries, and is: “Are relationships based on the present, rather than on the past?” Hayner argues that hostility

²¹ Ibid, pg. 30.

²² Ibid, pg. 35.

²³ Hayner Priscilla, *Unspeakable truths: Confronting state terror and atrocity*, New York and London, Routledge, 2001, pg. 155.

²⁴ Ibid, pg. 161.

is continued if people persistently return to the misdeeds of the past or if leaders are using them to create tensions between communities. The third question concerns the mutually opposed versions of the past, and is: "Is there one version of the past, or many?" She explains that this does not mean that there is just one truth, but rather that the perceptions of the past are not fundamentally different, and that one version of the past is not based on denials and lies²⁵. Further, Hayner discusses the factors that encourage reconciliation and lists five main elements. The first one is an end to the violence or threat of violence. Even though this element is obvious, she emphasizes that it is sometimes overlooked and that "threats of political violence and intimidation sometimes continue long after a formal cease-fire or a signed peace".²⁶ The second element is acknowledgment and reparation, and Hayner argues that denial is devastating for the victims and that perpetrators need to acknowledge wrongdoings and "ideally, ask for forgiveness and provide some sort of symbolic reparation".²⁷ Creating links between former opponents in the form of joint projects that can bring benefit for all, like development or reconstruction programs, is what Hayner calls binding forces, and names it as a third element that encourages reconciliation. She further argues that reconciliation is not only a psychological or emotional process but that people in conflict also suffer economically, so those inequalities and economic disadvantages must be addressed in the process of reconciliation. Thus, addressing structural inequalities and material needs is the fourth element. Finally, Hayner argues that reconciliation needs time to take root and that in some societies it will take decades to deal with the past and build sustainable peace between former adversaries. Thus, time is the fifth element that can contribute to the

²⁵ Ibid, pg. 161-163.

²⁶ Ibid, pg. 163.

²⁷ Ibid, pg. 164.

development of the reconciliation process. For the purpose of my research, I find Hayner's approach to the concept of reconciliation most relevant, therefore it will serve as a basis for analyzing the reconciliation process between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo.

4. Turbulent history of interethnic relations in Kosovo

In order to examine the process of reconciliation in Kosovo, I will first interpret the context in which this conflict occurred, its background and the complexity of interethnic relationship between the two ethnic communities throughout history. On the following pages, I will discuss several relevant developments in the history of relations between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo which are of explanatory relevance and which can display main causes of division in Kosovo.

The Balkans have long been known as the "powder keg" of Europe, bearing in mind frequent tensions and wars, and the area of former Yugoslavia as a particularly volatile region. Kosovo as the latest red zone is the main point of conflict between the Republic of Serbia and the self-proclaimed Republic of Kosovo. Today it is mainly inhabited by Kosovo Albanians.²⁸ In Albanian language this region is called Kosova and

²⁸ In Kosovo almost everything is politics and that is the case with its population. There is no generally accepted data on the number of inhabitants, so there is different information available depending on whether one is searching in Albanian or in Serbian or international sources. Last census in Kosovo was conducted in 2011; however, four Serb-majority municipalities in North Kosovo and some municipalities in southern Kosovo boycotted the census, so the results are not complete (the last census in Yugoslavia was conducted in 1991, but at that time Albanians in Kosovo boycotted it). Both parties in conflict manipulate statistics and use rough estimation in a way that benefits one or the other side. Per the State portal of the Republic of Kosovo, Albanians make up 92%, while Serbs make up 5.3% of the total population of approximately 2 million (2.7% are other ethnic groups i.e., Roma, Bosniacs, Turks, Gorani, Ashkali, Egyptians). The State portal of the Republic of Kosovo, accessed February 21, 2021. <https://www.rks.gov.net/SR/f39/republika-kosovo/kosovo>. Tim Judah analyzes demographic changes and depopulation in

in Serbian language Kosovo and Metohija (KiM), or Kosovo or Kosmet²⁹. Like in any other conflict, there are opposing narratives, and in this case they are two incompatible and irreconcilable narratives: Kosovo Albanian and Serbian narrative. Kosovo Albanians, the vast majority of whom are Sunni Muslims, claim that they are the direct descendants from the ancient Dardanians (Illyrians), who lived in this part of the Balkans long before Slavs arrived.³⁰ For Serbs, who are Orthodox Christians, Kosovo is the “cradle of the Serb nation”, or “Serbian Jerusalem”³¹, since it was the cultural, diplomatic and religious center of the medieval Serbian state and the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church from the 14th century, when it gained the status of a patriarchate, and has been known

Kosovo in the article “Kosovo’s demographic destiny looks eerily familiar”, available at Balkan Insight <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/07/kosovos-demographic-destiny-looks-eerily-familiar/>.

²⁹ During the Middle Ages, the southwestern part of Kosovo was covered with estates that belonged to the Serbian Orthodox monasteries and *μετοχή* is a Greek word for this term. A significant part of Metohija was in possession of Serbian medieval monasteries. Hence the name Metohia, in Serbian language Metohija. This name is unacceptable for Albanians because it indicates the Serbian identity of the territory, thus they insist on the name Kosovo. In Albanian language this area is called Rrafshi i Dukagjinit and it means “the plateau of Dukagjin”, named after an Albanian medieval nobleman. “The Autonomous Region of Kosovo and Metohija” was the official name in use during the existence of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia between 1945-1963. During the period of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, this territory was renamed “The Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija”. In order to reduce national tensions with Albanians, term Metohija was dropped from the official name in 1968. Then in 1990, with a rise in nationalistic aspirations, Serbian authorities changed the Constitution and abolished the autonomy of this province, and restored the term Metohija in the name of the province. Today, Kosovo Albanians consider the use of this term as the incitement of racial and religious intolerance and denial of Kosovo’s statehood, while Serbs see the ban on the use of this term as discrimination and denial of the Serbian identity of the entire territory.

³⁰ Petrit Imami was a respected Kosovo Albanian playwright and author who argued that many scientists claim that Albanians are natives because they are descendants of the ancient Illyrians. He is the author of an important work, “Serbs and Albanians through centuries”, in which he analyzes the relationship between these two nations using a variety of sources, presenting verifiable historical arguments, citing Albanian, Serbian and foreign authors, bringing closer cultural and political relations. The book was first published 1998; however, during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, Milosevic’s regime seized and destroyed all copies. Imami Petrit, *Srbi i Albanci kroz vekove*, Samizdat, Beograd, 2000. For more information on the origin of the Albanians visit the Albanian Studies’ website: <http://albanianstudies.weebly.com/albanians.html>. Vladislav B. Sotirović did a research on this subject, “National identity: who are the Albanians? The Illyrian Anthroponymy and the Ethnogenesis of the Albanians.” *History Research*. Vol. 1, No. 2, 2013, pp. 5-24.

³¹ Dušan T. Bataković was a distinguished Serbian historian and diplomat who wrote numerous books and articles on Kosovo. His works “The Kosovo Chronicles” (published by Plato, Belgrade, 1992) is a good source of history of Kosovo and Metohija from the Serbian perspective, as well as “Serbia’s Kosovo Drama. A Historical Perspective” (published by Čigoja Štampa, Belgrade, 2012).

henceforth as the Serbian Patriarchate of Pec.³² The Serbian Empire existed from 1346 until 1371 and it was one of the largest and most powerful in Europe, until Ottomans took over the Balkans in late 14th century. The Battle of Kosovo that occurred on 28 June 1389 became a turning point in the history of the Serbian nation and later an integral part of the Serbian national identity³³. For centuries, Kosovo had a Serb majority, but in the 19th century it became the center of the Albanian national awakening and ultimately the Albanian ethnic group became a majority. The League of Prizren was an Albanian political organization founded in 1878 in Kosovo with the aim of uniting all Albanians, regardless of religion, and all territories where Albanians lived, or in other words, the realization of the Greater Albania project³⁴. During the period of the First Balkan War 1912-13, Christian population in Kosovo decreased and Muslim population expanded, and Albanian nationalists wanted to unite all territories where Albanians were majority into a Greater Albania, but because of the opposition, a smaller, independent, Albania was created in 1913 and Kosovo was annexed to Serbia.³⁵

After World War II, The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was established, comprising six socialist republics, and Kosovo gained the status of an

³² Peć is a town in the western part of Kosovo. For more information on history and importance of the Serbian Patriarchate of Pec visit website: https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/pecarsija/index_eng.html. See also <http://www.srpskoblog.org/Archives/Pec/about.html>

³³ In Chapter 7 there will be more discussion on the topic of Serbian national identity. Serbian historian Sima Ćirković wrote a comprehensive study on the development of the Serbian nation, from 7th to the late 20th century. His work is translated in English language. Ćirković, Sima, *The Serbs*, Wiley-Blackwell. First edition, 2004.

³⁴ Initially, The League of Prizren was defending the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire; however, after the Berlin Congress of 1878 it openly advocated independence of the greater Albania that would occupy Albania, Epirus (in Greece), parts of Macedonia, Kosovo and parts of southern Serbia, hence they organized armed resistance.

³⁵ See László Gulyás, Gábor Csüllög, "History of Kosovo from the First Balkan War to the End of World War II (1912–1945)", *West Bohemian Historical Review* V, 2015, 2, pp. 219-237. Available online at: <https://dspace5.zcu.cz/bitstream/11025/17652/1/Gulyas.pdf>

autonomous province of Serbia during Socialist Yugoslavia, 1946–1990, under the name The Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.³⁶

In the spring of 1981, Kosovo Albanian students of the University of Pristina led a protest over the poor conditions at the university; later this protest morphed into larger riots and Kosovo Albanians demanded their human rights and to be given a republic status for Kosovo. These protests were brutally suppressed by the Yugoslav police and army, at least 10 people were killed, more than 4000 people were imprisoned, and many were expelled from Kosovo's Communist Party.³⁷ As a result of these riots and growing Albanian nationalism, some 4000 Serbs fled from Kosovo into central Serbia. Ever since, ethnic tensions continued with frequent violent outbreaks against Yugoslav state authorities, resulting in a further increase in emigration of Kosovo Serbs and other ethnic groups.

On 28 June 1989, the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, the President of the Presidency of the Socialist Republic of Serbia, later the President of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic, gave a speech at Gazimestan in Kosovo, where the battle had been fought.³⁸ In this speech he compared modern Serbs' fight for the national survival with Serbian fight against Ottomans in Kosovo in the 14th century. Important fact is that this speech was given at a time of not only intense ethnic tensions between ethnic Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, but also at a time of increasing political tensions between Serbia and other

³⁶See Slobodan Bjelica, "Kosovo i Metohija u okviru Jugoslavije", *Kultura Polisa*, UDK 94 (in Serbian language). Available at: <http://www.kpolisa.com/KP4-5/Pdf/kp06-V-3-Bjelica.pdf>

³⁷ Zachariah Henry Claybaugh, "The 1981 Kosovar Uprising: Nation and facework", 2013. Available online at:

https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/bitstream/handle/2142/44144/Zachariah_Claybaugh.pdf?sequence=1

³⁸ Text of the speech of Slobodan Milosevic in English language is available at: <http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/spch-kosovo1989.htm>

constituent republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The possibility of “armed battles” in order to protect Serbian national identity was mentioned in that speech, enthusiastically received by the crowds that chanted “Kosovo is Serbian” and other nationalist slogans. During his presidency, Milosevic reduced Kosovo’s autonomous status and began the cultural oppression of Albanian population, taking control of the media, university, cultural institutions, school curriculum etc. In response, Kosovo Albanians established parallel structures: university, hospitals and other institutions. At that time most Kosovo Albanians accepted non-violent resistance under the leadership of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), and Dr Ibrahim Rugova. In July 1990, Albanians in Kosovo proclaimed the existence of the Republic of Kosova, and its sovereignty and independence was declared in September 1992. Only Albania officially recognized this self-proclaimed republic at that point.

4.1 The Kosovo war

Long-term ethnic tensions between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, resulting in frequent interethnic violence, culminated in the Kosovo War of 1998–99. During this period many war crimes were committed, mainly by the Serbian Police or Yugoslav Army, as well as many violations by Albanian militants, members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The Kosovo Liberation Army³⁹ was an ethnic-Albanian

³⁹ The Clinton Administration's special envoy to the Balkans, Robert Gelbard, criticized violence committed by the Serbian police in Kosovo, as well as condemned the actions of KLA which he described as: “without any questions, a terrorist group.” Presentation of the Republican Policy Committee to the U.S. Senate, “The Kosovo Liberation Army: Does Clinton Policy Support Group with Terror, Drug Ties? From 'Terrorists' to 'Partners'”, 31 March 1999.

paramilitary organization formed with the aim of securing the separation of Kosovo from Serbia in order to eventually establish the Greater Albania. KLA was supported with funds and arms by Albania, where its headquarters were located, and later by the US and German intelligence services.⁴⁰

Ethnic cleansing, massacres of civilians, persecution and deportation, human organ theft, destroying of medieval churches and monuments, concentration camps, kidnappings and executions, were some of the war crimes committed during this horrific ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. International community, primarily USA, UK, Germany and France demanded a cease-fire and withdrawal of Serbian forces from Kosovo. UN Security Council adopted several resolutions regarding this conflict: UN Resolution 1160 on 31st March 1998, UN Resolution 1199 on 23rd

Available online at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20000816165402/http://www.senate.gov/~rpc/releases/1999/fr033199.htm>

Also, United Nations Resolution 1160 condemned “all acts of terrorism by the Kosovo Liberation Army”. Full text of the United Nations Resolution 1160 available online at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20011122091748/http://www.un.org/peace/kosovo/98sc1160.htm>

KLA’s activities were, beside Albanian diaspora’s financial support, funded by drug trafficking, crimes and money laundering. Michel Chossudovsky, Remembering the 1999 NATO-led War on Yugoslavia: Kosovo “Freedom Fighters” Financed by Organized Crime, 15 April 1999. Available online at: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/remembering-the-1999-nato-led-war-on-yugoslavia-kosovo-freedom-fighters-financed-by-organized-crime/12806>. Very important fact about the KLA’s actions is that they were directed not only against Serbian government representatives in Kosovo and Serbian civilian population, but also against ethnic Albanians who were accused of collaborating with the Serbian government. Some of the KLA’s acts of violence against Albanians and its criminal activities are described in Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission Daily Report from December 1998. See Kosovo Diplomatic Observer Mission Daily Report, Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs, Office of South Central European Affairs, U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC. Published on 21 December 1998. Available online at:

<http://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/kosovo-diplomatic-observer-mission-daily-report-21-dec>

⁴⁰ “Albania is the headquarters for the Kosovo liberation Army (KLA), which has been dependent on covert support coming primarily from Germany and the United States.” Gregory Shank, *Commentary: Not a Just War, Just a War, NATO's Humanitarian Bombing Mission*, Social Justice, Vol. 26, No. 1 (75), Human Rights, Gender Politics & Postmodern Discourses (Spring 1999), pp. 4-48. In this article Shank presents information on KLA’s formation, funding, ideology, support from powerful governments, as well as its involvement in narcotrafficking. The main topic of this article is international relations discourse on the justification of NATO’s intervention in Yugoslavia, of which he is critical, as well as of Western policies and double standards when it comes to humanitarian interventions. He also claims that disintegration of the sovereign state of Yugoslavia happened not only because of internal political crisis, but also because of external forces and their imperialistic goals.

September 1998, and UN Resolution 1203 on 24th October 1998. Western nations demanded major compromise from Serbia, including free passage of NATO military forces into Kosovo.

4.2. The failure of Rambouillet peace talks and international humanitarian intervention

In February 1999, diplomatic negotiations began in Rambouillet in France, and NATO proposed a peace agreement between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and representatives of the Albanian majority population in Kosovo. Albanians did not want to accept the option for Kosovo as a part of Serbia, and Serbia was opposed to any international role in the governance of the province, either blue-helmeted UN peacekeeping troops or NATO troops. What was proposed in this agreement is the following: NATO administration of Kosovo as an autonomous province within Yugoslavia; 30,000 soldiers of NATO troops to preserve order in Kosovo; an unhindered right of passage for NATO troops on Yugoslav territory, including Kosovo; and immunity for NATO to Yugoslav law. On March 18, 1999 the Albanian, American and British delegation signed the Rambouillet Accords, while the Serbian and Russian side refused.⁴¹ Just a few months later, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger admitted that the Serbs were cornered by the USA stating that: “The Rambouillet draft agreement text, requiring stationing of NATO troops throughout Yugoslavia, was a provocation. It served as a pretext for the launching of a bombing campaign. The Rambouillet document

⁴¹ Full text of the Rambouillet Accords available online at:
http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/990123_RambouilletAccord.pdf

was such that no Serb could accept it. That horrible document should have not been submitted.”⁴² This agreement implies a new constitution for Kosovo that respects the territorial integrity of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, but at the same time includes the establishment of the principles of democratic self-government for three years, and by that time the final status of Kosovo should be resolved.

When Yugoslav President Milosevic rejected the demands of this accord, NATO launched bombing campaign of Serbia on March 24,⁴³ without the authorization of the UN Security Council.⁴⁴ This intervention lasted for 78 days and caused the significant damage to the Serbian infrastructure since many fabrics, bridges, roads and power plants were destroyed.⁴⁵ Two decades after the bombing, Serbia still does not have official data on the number of casualties. According to Serbian media, that number is around 2500, but the Humanitarian Law Center (Belgrade-based NGO whose data are considered authoritative by international organizations) have data on 754 victims, of which 454 were civilians and 300 members of the armed forces⁴⁶.

On June 9 1999, The Military Technical Agreement between the International Security Force (KFOR) and the Governments of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and

⁴² Quotation in “The NATO-Aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999”, by Milica Radojkovic-Hänsel, April 2013. Available online at: <http://www.voltairenet.org/article178328.html>

⁴³ Press Statement by Dr Javier Solana, NATO Secretary General following the Commencement of Air Operation, available at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1999/p99-041e.htm>

⁴⁴ United Nations Security Council Press Release SC/6657, 24 March 1999, <http://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990324.sc6657.html>

⁴⁵ Noam Chomsky claimed that Strobe Talbott, the Deputy Secretary of State under President Clinton and the leading U.S. negotiator during the war, had written in his foreword to John Norris’ book that “the real purpose of the war had nothing to do with concern for Kosovar Albanians. It was because Serbia was not carrying out the required social and economic reforms, meaning it was the last corner of Europe which had not subordinated itself to the US-run neoliberal programs, so therefore it had to be eliminated.” On the NATO Bombing of Yugoslavia, Noam Chomsky interviewed by Danilo Mandic, RTS Online, April 25, 2006. Available online at: <https://chomsky.info/20060425/>

⁴⁶ Humanitarian Law Center, Human losses in NATO bombing of Serbia and Montenegro. Available at: <http://www.hlc-rdc.org/?cat=282&lang=de>

the Republic of Serbia was signed in Kumanovo, Macedonia⁴⁷. This agreement that concluded the Kosovo war is based on the following: cease-fire between NATO's Kosovo Force and FRY and end of NATO bombing of Serbia if FRY accepts this agreement; withdrawal of FRY forces from Kosovo; placement of civil and security forces within Kosovo.

On June 10th, NATO ended the bombing of Serbia and UN Security Council adopted the Resolution 1244. On the grounds of this resolution, UN established the Kosovo Peace Implementation Force (KFOR) and the Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). After the deployment of almost 50,000 international troops in Kosovo, violence was somewhat reduced, but the tensions continued⁴⁸. After the summer of 1999, the international community failed to prevent a new wave of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, despite the presence of such a large number of soldiers.⁴⁹ Serbs and other minority populations were subjected to violence from Albanian side, and more than half of the Serb population left the province.⁵⁰ Serbs who decided to stay now live in enclaves or divided cities. Kosovska Mitrovica is an ethnically divided city: Serbs in the north,

⁴⁷ Text of the Military Technical Agreement can be found at:
<http://www.nato.int/kosovo/docu/a990609a.htm>

⁴⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO's role in Kosovo, November 2020. Available at:
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48818.htm

⁴⁹ Soon after the Kosovo war, in August 1999, the Independent International Commission on Kosovo was established by the Swedish government, with the aim to examine the events in Kosovo. A year later, the Commission published "The Kosovo report. Conflict, international response, lessons learned". Some of the main findings of the Commission are: vast expulsion of Kosovo Albanians by the Yugoslav Army was systematic and deliberately organized, NATO military intervention was illegal but legitimate, both NATO and the Belgrade government engaged in a propaganda war and made exaggerated claims, a major failure for international community was the inability of KFOR and UNMIK to stop the new wave of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. This document also criticized the contradictory character of UN Resolution 1244, since it includes the preservation of sovereignty of FRY and meaningful self-administration for Kosovo. This critique of the UN Security Council's Resolution 1244 is very important, since even at that time there was a disagreement in the Security Council about how to implement it. See Independent International Commission on Kosovo, The Kosovo report. Conflict, international response, lessons learned, Oxford University Press, 2000.

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch, FRY Abuses against Serbs and Roma in the New Kosovo, August 1999, Volume 11, No. 10 (D). Available online at: https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/kosov2/#_1_9

Albanians in the south, and a bridge that divides them. This city became one of the major points of violence that continues to occasionally escalate to this day.

4.3. Developments after year 2000 and unilateral independence

On March 17th 2004, anti-Serb riots broke out, the worst ethnic violence since the end of the war in 1999. In Serbia these events are called The March Pogrom, when 16 Kosovo Serbs were killed, more than 900 severely wounded, six towns and nine villages were ethnically cleansed, more than 4,000 Serbs expelled from their homes and 35 Serbian Orthodox Church buildings (monasteries, churches, and seminary) were desecrated, damaged, destroyed or burned to the ground.⁵¹

In 2007, the UN issued the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement, known as the Ahtisaari Plan, which suggested “supervised independence” for the province. Although the word “independence” was not mentioned in the text, the plan implied it would give Kosovo the right to apply for membership in international organizations, create a Kosovo Security Force and adopt national symbols. UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari communicated and coordinated policy with the Contact Group⁵², but both sides refused to compromise on key demands: Kosovo Albanians insisted on Kosovo's independence; Serbia on continued sovereignty over Kosovo.

⁵¹ The March Pogrom in Kosovo and Metohija, <http://www.spc.rs/old/Vesti-2004/pogrom.html>. See also Human Rights Watch, The Violence: Ethnic Albanian Attacks on Serbs and Roma, Report 2004. Available online at: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/kosovo0704/7.htm>

⁵² US Department of State, The Contact Group statements on Kosovo. Available at: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/ci/kv/c13102.htm>

On February 17th 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence. This was followed by unrest, mainly in North Kosovo where Serb-majority enclaves are situated, as well as boycott of Kosovo government. While the US, UK and France supported the decision, stating the unique nature of Kosovo's case, this move divided the Security Council. Russia and China argued that the unilateral declaration of independence undermines the United Nations and is illegal under international law. Kosovo has since gained diplomatic recognition as a sovereign state by 98 UN member states. USA recognition of independence came a day after it was proclaimed.⁵³ Serbia lodged a complaint with the International Court of Justice, but the court ruled that the declaration did not violate international law.⁵⁴

In the period between 2011 and 2013, a series of clashes between Serbs in northern Kosovo (where Serbian enclaves, who are under local administration and indirectly under the control of the Serbian government, are situated) and Kosovo police occurred. The reason behind the clashes was that the Kosovo government wanted to impose sovereignty on the whole territory of Kosovo and to take control over the few administrative crossings without consultation with either Serbia or KFOR/EULEX.

In March 2011, EU-facilitated talks between the governments of Serbia and Kosovo began. The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue is a series of talks that took place in

⁵³ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Recognizes Kosovo as Independent State, February 18, 2008. Available at: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/02/100973.htm>

⁵⁴ See International Court of Justice, Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo (Request for Advisory Opinion). Available at: <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?p1=3&p2=4&case=141&p3=4>

Brussels (Belgium), but they have not been fully successful by this point.⁵⁵From the beginning of these talks until today, fifteen agreements have been adopted, but actually only four have been implemented. This dialogue is called the “Technical Dialogue”. In 2013 the governments of Serbia and Kosovo signed the “First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalisation of Relations”, also called The Brussels Agreement,⁵⁶ but only Kosovo ratified it and promulgated it into law. Serbia still refuses to recognize Kosovo as an independent state, although with the Brussels Agreement it has accepted the legitimacy of Kosovar institutions. Normalization of relations with Pristina, and indirectly Kosovo recognition, are preconditions for the accession of Serbia to the European Union⁵⁷. In September last year, Serbian President and Kosovo`s Prime Minister met two times in Brussels under the auspice of the European Union for a high-level meeting to discuss economic cooperation, missing and displaced persons, arrangements for minority communities etc., but the contents of those agreements have not been made public.

What is, at first glance, striking when one reads brief history of this conflict and how it has been managed, is the asymmetry of power. One ethnocentric regime was, with the support and help of the international community, replaced with another. This win-lose result in Kosovo case was inevitable, having such asymmetry of power playing a big role in conflict management. Based on this review of major events from the history of

⁵⁵European Union External Action, Dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/349/dialogue-between-belgrade-and-pristina_en

⁵⁶Text of the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations available at: [http://www.rts.rs/upload/storyBoxFileData/2013/04/20/3224318/Originalni tekst Predloga sporazuma.pdf](http://www.rts.rs/upload/storyBoxFileData/2013/04/20/3224318/Originalni%20tekst%20Predloga%20sporazuma.pdf)

⁵⁷ Chapter 35 of European Union Common Position, November 2015. Available at: https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/pristupni_pregovori/pregovaracke_pozicije/ch35_common_position_eu.pdf

Serbian-Albanian relations in Kosovo, one can imagine in what kind of post-conflict reality the process of reconciliation is taking place.

4.4. The causes of the war

Before I investigate post-conflict reality and today's coexistence of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo on the following pages, I would like to briefly analyze the causes of the conflict that led to the war. In order to understand why the reconciliation process between the two communities in Kosovo is developing at such a slow pace, we need to take into consideration the social, historical, economic and political context in which this conflict occurred, and which continue to exert a heavy toll on the relationship between these two communities. In Serbian public discourse, the narrative of "ancient hatred" was and still is often cited as the main cause of Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, especially as the cause of the Kosovo war. Political elites in Serbia are continuing to impose this narrative, thus continuing to revise the past. However, even a glimpse into history of Yugoslavia and its peoples is enough to see that this is not the case, since despite being a highly heterogeneous state, Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia existed in a state of peace from its creation in 1945 up until 1991. To examine the real causes of the Kosovo war, I will use Kenneth Waltz's Levels of analysis. In his work "Man, the State and War", Waltz argues that there are many explanations why conflicts occur, but we usually tend to classify them in three units, thus analyzing the causes of war at three different levels. The first level is individual level at which the behavior and choices of political leaders and decision makers are analyzed. In other words, human nature is the subject of interest at

this level. War is waged because of different psychological, ideological and nationalistic characteristics of political leaders and political parties. As Waltz argues, “wars result from selfishness, from misdirected aggressive impulses, from stupidity. Other causes are secondary and have to be interpreted in the light of these factors.”⁵⁸ On the second level we look at how societies and states operate, namely we take governmental and societal variables into consideration, because “internal conditions do determine external behavior”⁵⁹. These include the political system of state, political culture, role of religion and religious leaders, impact of ideology, impact of media and public opinion. Third level of analysis is centered at international system itself as we look at how states interact with each other. “With many sovereign states, with no system of law enforceable among them, with each state judging its grievances and ambitions according to the dictates of its own reason or desire – conflict, sometimes leading to war, is bound to occur. To achieve a favorable outcome from such conflict a state has to rely on its own devices, the relative efficiency of which must be its constant concern.”⁶⁰ At this level we analyze the distribution of power between states and other international actors, as well as the lack of influence of international law.

Hence, when considering the causes of war in Kosovo we must not overlook the historic, economic, social and political circumstances in Serbia at the time, as well as Serbia’s position in international relations. At the time when the situation in Kosovo was alarming, with clear indications an armed conflict was likely to ensue, SFR Yugoslavia had already disintegrated. Life in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, namely Serbia and

⁵⁸ Waltz, Kenneth N., *Man, the State and war*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2001, pg. 16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 85.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 159.

Montenegro, was reduced to mere survival. Between 1992 and 1995, FR Yugoslavia was under United Nations embargo (imposed as a response to Bosnian war), which included sanctions on all international trade, cultural and sports exchanges, scientific and technical cooperation, ban on air travel, ban on shipments to and from Yugoslavia etc. The black market (underground economy) was on the rise, gasoline in liter bottles, cigarettes and laundry detergent were sold on the street corners while basic foods such as oil, flour and sugar could only occasionally be found in stores. People were smuggling goods from Hungary or Bulgaria, crime was on the rise. Between 1992 and 1994, hyperinflation of the Yugoslav currency, dinar, had further burdened an already weakened economy⁶¹. In order to conserve energy, in the period between 1993 and 1995, Yugoslav government imposed electricity and gas restrictions on households. All these economic hardships were the result of a disastrous national policy pursued by the President Slobodan Milosevic and its political allies. Today many politicians from the ruling party in Serbia are trying to portray Milosevic as a victim of global politics, forgetting his role and responsibility for the events of the 1990s, particularly in regard to Kosovo war. Milosevic was an autocrat, a nationalist who used hate speech, war-mongering propaganda and manipulations in media to incite the nationalist madness, xenophobia and chauvinism. He used political manipulation of the power to encourage the fear that the Serbian identity was endangered and that unity of all Serbs who lived throughout the territory of ex-Yugoslavia must be preserved within the borders of one country. The idea that Milosevic

⁶¹ Hyperinflation in Yugoslavia was the third most severe hyperinflation in world history (after Hungary and Zimbabwe), and amounted to 19.810,2 %. Prices doubled every day and as a result of hyperinflation the National Bank of FR Yugoslavia printed a banknote of 500 billion Yugoslav dinars. Empty shelves in supermarkets with nothing but matchboxes and toilet paper and people waiting in lines for bread were everyday images of Serbia throughout most of the 1990s. James Lyon has written an informative and interesting article on this subject, see: Lyon James, *Yugoslavia's Hyperinflation, 1993-1994: a social history*, in: *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 10, No. 2, University of California Press, 1996.

and his autocratic regime tried to implement through the wars of 1990s was to change the state borders, so that all Serbs who lived on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia could live in one country, Greater Serbia. This autocratic regime completely denied the ideas of the legitimate interests of other peoples in ex-Yugoslavia. With his nationalistic and hegemonic aspirations, Milosevic pushed the entire country into self-isolation. Because of his disastrous policies toward the non-Serb populations in Bosnia and Kosovo, the international community responded with sanctions which not only economically, but culturally and morally harmed people in Serbia.⁶² For most of the 1990s, various demonstrations and protests took place in Serbia, which Milosevic brutally suppressed. He waged constant media war not only against the foreign enemies such as the West, Bosnian Muslims or Kosovo Albanians, but also against “domestic” ones. Intimidations, beatings, arrests of political dissidents and activists, killings of journalists, censorship and closing down the media, imposing of a draconian Law on Information, suppression of free thought and speech at the University etc. – this authoritarian regime fought against its own citizens on every possible front. All this is important to mention because the current political representatives in Serbia have a visibly uncritical attitude towards the 1990s and Serbia’s role in the wars of that time. This is not surprising because, unfortunately, many representatives of the current government, such as President Vucic and numerous ministers, are ideological heirs to the ruling parties of the 1990s. Many of them continue to spread hate speech and war-mongering propaganda against the Albanians in Kosovo, and continue to deny Serbia’s responsibility for what happened to Albanians in Kosovo during the Milosevic regime. They try to tailor the past in

⁶² UN embargo between 1992 and 1995 and later between 1998 and 2000, during and after the Kosovo war, the sanctions were again imposed by the UN, EU and United States.

accordance with their political ideology, thus imposing the aforementioned narrative of “ancient hatred”. However, as evidenced here, the real underlying causes of the Kosovo war were nationalistic and hegemonic aspirations and discourses, as well as manipulation of identity and societal security that is based on identity⁶³.

5. Post-conflict polarized society

In the previous chapter I investigated interethnic relations between Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo throughout the time. I emphasized several relevant developments in the history of relations between these two communities which are of explanatory importance and which displayed main causes of division in Kosovo.

In this chapter, I want to examine the socio-cultural norm of coexistence and political context in Kosovo, i.e. how everyday people see themselves and the “other” in post-conflict reality. Using the examples of several towns and villages, I will present the life of ordinary people from Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo twenty two years after the war. For that purpose, I will analyze several documentaries produced by the Kosovo-based NGOs Omonia and GračanicaOnline in 2017, a documentary produced by a regional news platform “N1” in 2018, and documentaries produced by news agency Sputnjik Srbija in 2020.

⁶³ For more on the Serbian national identity and the misuse of identity for political purposes see Chapter 7.

Municipality of Pec is situated in southwestern Kosovo and before 1999, 38,000 Serbs lived there. It has majority Albanian population, and today less than 1,000 Serbs live in this municipality. In Vitimirica village, there were 1,200 members of the Serbian community before 1999; however, over the years many Serbs were forced to leave or sell their properties and today only 2 Serb returnees live in this village. One of them says that he does not have security issues, though he has been trying for the last thirteen years to regain the land on which he started building a house, but the municipality has already taken it away twice. Around 1,000 Serbs lived in the Belo Polje village before 1999; now only 20. This village was burned down two times, first time all 370 houses in one day during the war in 1999, and second time 73 newly built houses for the Serbian returnees were burned during the March Pogrom in 2004. Later, 40 houses for the returnees were built, but only 9 houses are now inhabited. How much is invested in the infrastructure renovation is best illustrated by the fact that this village often has power and water outages, especially during periods of strong wind. One Serbian family with four children returned to Brestovik village in 2004, with help from the Italian government. They said that the Serbian institutions failed since they did not get involved in their return. This family is complaining that Albanians often damage their properties. As a consequence of the frequent political turmoil in Kosovo, they say that they feel fear now more than they did in 2004 when they first returned. One older woman from this village is complaining that she lives in constant fear and that she wishes she could sleep at night, because she is afraid every time someone passes by her home. In Ljevosa village, there were 250 Serbs before 1999; today only 15. There is no school, store or a doctor in this village, and there are also often problems with water supply. Serbs in this village are under great pressure

to sell their houses cheaply, which will later be sold at high prices, and they complain that Albanians from the neighboring village steal their fruits and vegetables, cut their forests and graze cattle in their fields. They also complain that neither the Serbian authorities nor the authorities in Kosovo care about the residents in this village. The seat of Pec municipality is in the town of Pec, in which one of the most important Serbian monasteries, the Patriarchate of Pec, is situated. This town was a cultural and religious center of the medieval Serbian state and here in this monastery was the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the 14th century and again later in 16th and 17th century⁶⁴. Before 1999, around 18,000 Serbs lived in this town; today only 11, and 5 of them are members of the Serbian priest's family. Three young girls from this family are the only Serbian children in this town. Serbian Church in which this priest serves was demolished and burned during the March Pogrom in 2004. The church was renovated; he arrived in 2012, and experienced provocations from Albanian citizens. Today he does not feel fear, but he does not walk around town much because, as he stated, "he does not have anywhere to go nor has anyone to talk to". He prefers to stay in the church yard where his house is, too. One of the biggest issues in this municipality is lack of job opportunities, thus many Serbs, as well as Albanians, are leaving⁶⁵.

Orahovac is a town situated in the southwest of Kosovo in the eponymous municipality; the first written record of this town dates from 1348 in the Charter of the

⁶⁴ The Patriarchate of Pec monastery, along with three other Serbian monasteries from Kosovo, was placed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger in 2006.

⁶⁵ NGO Omonia and the portal GracanicaOnline, within the project supported by the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society from Pristina, produced the series of documentaries "Life in a Minority Way" in 2017. This series won the first prize of the UN team in the category of documentary films on poverty and the first prize for the film "Life in a Minority Way – Municipality of Pec" at the International Festival of Documentary Film and Television "Grafest 2017" in Gracanica, Kosovo. GracanicaOnline Info, Zivot na manjinski nacini - Opstina Pec (in Serbian language). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMIK0-M0Gbo>

Serbian King Stefan Dusan. The reportage on this city was made in February 2020 and at that time 300 Serbs lived there, and all of them on one street. A resident of this town, who is a teacher of Serbian language, admits that she is angry at the authorities in both Pristina and in Belgrade because “the Serbs who remained in Kosovo are second-class citizens”. She says that she is even angrier at the Serbian government because the Serbs in Kosovo have to live under double standards. This means that the Serbs need to have both Serbian and Kosovo ID cards, and if they have a car they need to have Kosovo license plates in order to have freedom of movement. But when they go to Belgrade with this car people there curse them because they regard them Albanian, so they need to display a big cross which later on the way back to Kosovo they need to remove. These Serbs consider themselves compatriots to the people in Belgrade, but they cannot hold a Serbian passport. Regarding the relationship with Albanian fellow citizens, this professor says that they greet each other in the street, but there are no real friendships. All the monuments in the Serbian cemetery in the town are destroyed⁶⁶.

Djakovica is another town and municipality in the southwest of Kosovo. In the center of the town, there used to be the Holy Trinity Cathedral, built in 1940, but the Albanian militants completely destroyed it with grenades in 1999. 12,000 Serbs once lived in this city; today only 3. Those are three edlerly nuns in The Monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, which is dated from the 16th century. Enclosed by walls and barbed wire, they are guarded by one member of the Kosovo Police. These nuns

⁶⁶ Sputnjik Srbija, Drama iz jedine ulice u kojoj zive Srbi okruzeni Albancima (in Serbian language). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRQITAyigIk>

leave the monastery only for the occasion of a religious holiday when monks from the Decani Monastery come for them⁶⁷.

Pristina is situated in the northwest of Kosovo and it is the capital city. There are 48 villages in municipality of Pristina; Serbs live in 5 of them. At the beginning of 1999, around 230,000 inhabitants lived in the town, of which more than 40,000 were Serbs. Today only 30 Serbs live in Pristina and there are many who grew up here but live in other cities and visit Pristina only for work. They say that “there`s no more feeling of my city, no people to talk with”. Local Serbian cemetery is desecrated, gravestones are broken. Many Serbs are selling their properties and fertile land. Before 1999, more than 600 Serbs lived in the village of Devet Jugovica. Today there are only 9 and they were not willing to give interview because, as some of them stated, “it is safer and less painful if we are silent”. In the Slivovo village, where there is no water supply infrastructure, 50 Serbs live off agriculture and every day go to the spring to fetch water. There is no sewerage infrastructure either. “Some politicians visit us only during election campaigns”, the locals complain and add that there is no work in the village, thus young people are leaving. Serb residents of Pristina Municipality are complaining that there is no water, no sewage nor roads to many of the villages where Serbs live, that aid cannot reach socially disadvantaged families, that there are no employment opportunities for young people, that the procedure for the allocation of subsidies is very complicated, the

⁶⁷ Sputnjik Srbija, Ekskluzivna ispovest jedine tri Srпкиnje u Djakovici (in Serbian language). Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OmZEE7LtvR4>

law on the use of languages is often violated in the governmental institutions, and much more⁶⁸.

All the previously mentioned municipalities are under the administration of the Kosovo government and they are located south of the Ibar River. This river flows through eastern Montenegro, northern Kosovo and central Serbia. The part of the river that flows through Kosovo is usually taken as the border between the northern and southern parts of Kosovo. Four Serbian municipalities are situated north of this river and they are under the local control and indirectly under control of the Serbian government.

Leposavic is the northernmost municipality in Kosovo; it includes 72 villages and has about 16,000 inhabitants. Before 1999, there were 902 Albanians living in this municipality. Today 268 Albanians live in three villages. In Saljska Bistrica village, Albanian residents are complaining that there is no road infrastructure, no opportunities for work, doctor comes to the village once a week, and most of the residents live on 80 Euros of social assistance. There is no signal for mobile telephony either. The Municipality of Leposavic offered to connect them to the mobile phone provider, but the representatives of the Albanian political party that is currently in power convinced them to refuse the offer and promised they would connect them to the mobile telephony and internet provider themselves. That was during the election campaign; they are yet to fulfil their promise. "There is the north side, over there south side, and we don't fit either in the north or in the south side. We are an abandoned middle here, no one cares for us", says an older Albanian resident of this village. The resident of Ceranja village is complaining

⁶⁸ GracanicaOnline, Zivot na manjinski nacin - Opstina Pristina (in Serbian language). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnRh2E_nEfM

that the Municipality of Leposavic provides a document in Serbian language which Kosovo institutions do not accept. There are 8 Albanian household in Kosutovo village, which also has a problem with road infrastructure, and its residents are complaining about a very bad economic situation. They claim that the municipal administration is not functioning properly. One resident of the village says that "the Albanian community here doesn't have problems with Serbs and we live well with them. Whose is Kosovo? Kosovo is common. Kosovo is neither ours nor Serbian, it is common". Ten newly built houses for returnees in this village are empty.

Before 1999, 850 Albanian citizens lived in municipality of Zubin Potok and today 800 Albanians live here but only in Cabra village. A Serbian councilor in the municipal assembly says that they are doing their best to support the Albanian community in this village. All streets in the village are paved, they provided street lightning, and they are equipping the village school. But younger generations are leaving since there is no work. Cabra and the neighboring Serbian village Zupce are proud of the fact that they never faced interethnic problems between them.

In the municipality of Zvecan, 2,261 Albanians lived there before 1999 and today 500 Albanians live in 3 villages. A family in village Zaz has a sick child and they complain of the lack of aid, no help from the Municipality nor residents. Only nuns from the nearby Serbian Orthodox Monastery Sokolica are helping with clothes. In this municipality Albanians are very dissatisfied with the work of their representative and claim he has not done enough for the Albanian community.

Unlike in these three municipalities in the north of Kosovo, citizens in the municipality of North Kosovska Mitrovica face quite different issues. Here everything is politics, from the number of Albanian or Serbian population to the jurisdiction of the northern and southern part of the city. Kosovska Mitrovica was divided in 2013 and the bridge on the river Ibar is the border: north is the Serbian-majority North Mitrovica and in the south, Albanian-majority South Mitrovica. This town and the bridge are the most sensitive points in all of Kosovo, since they were the focus of many ethnic clashes. This bridge was used as a military checkpoint at a time of intense turmoil, and today is open only for pedestrians and it is guarded 24/7 with the Italian Carabinieri patrols from KFOR. A Serbian councilor in the municipal assembly says that “based on the Kosovo Police statistics, most of the incidents happen when someone from the south part of the town comes here and provokes Serbian residents and then they get into a fight”. North Mitrovica is filled with Serbian flags, many walls painted with Serbian nationalist graffiti and messages, the currency here is the Serbian Dinar. On the other side, South Mitrovica is filled with the Kosovo and Albania flags, many walls painted with Albanian nationalist graffiti and messages, the currency here is Euro. Bosnjacka Mahala neighborhood with Albanian majority is an example of multiethnicity since it is the busiest part of the town where everyone trades—Albanians, Serbs, Bosniaks, Gorani, Roma and others. An Albanian councilor in North Mitrovica says that, regarding the life of the Albanian minority in the town, the situation is not so bad. But none of the Albanian residents from different neighborhoods in the town agreed to an interview. This councilor claims that the biggest issues for his community are return of the people who in 1999 and in 2003 left the north part of the town, and unemployment. Some people cannot return since their

houses have been burned down or occupied by Serbs who do not want to leave. Some do not want to come back because they do not feel safe in the town. Many young Albanians left North Mitrovica due to lack of job opportunities. An Albanian resident, who lost her husband during the war in 1999, says: “We have to obey the law if we want to live together”⁶⁹.

This reference relating to the rule of law and compliance with that law is not merely an incidental comment by an Albanian resident. Independent regional news platform “N1” made a documentary in February 2018 about the life of Serbian communities in Kosovo enclaves⁷⁰. The Serb-majority municipalities in the north of Kosovo seem like “The Wild West”, due to obvious lawlessness. In the town of Leposavic, cigarettes are sold on the street, some stores are without fiscal cash register, many cars do not have registration plates, no tax is paid, no inspection conducted. Kosovo Police is present but it does not have much authority. In the southern part of Kosovo, electricity is supplied by a Kosovo electricity producer and consumers get their bills in Euro, while in the north, electricity is supplied by a Serbian company and bills arrive in Serbian Dinar that residents simply do not want to pay. And there are no consequences. The scale of corruption is shown by the fact that at some universities certificates can be obtained “overnight”. Around 10% of locals in Leposavic who are working in the public sector are really lucky, because they get two salaries, one from Serbia and the other from Kosovo. This is possible because in these Serb-majority municipalities in Northern Kosovo parallel Serbian institutions still exist, so a single

⁶⁹ GracanicaOnline, Zivot na manjinski nacin – Opstine na severu Kosova (in Serbian language). Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SP9npQGxH-8>

⁷⁰ Dokumentarni film N1 “Decenija (ne)normalizacije, February 2018 (in Serbian language). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Izxm93JIFu8>

position can be recognized in both the Serbian and the Kosovo systems. Local Serbian residents claim that politics is the only topic of conversation among the Serbs in Northern Kosovo.

On the other side, Serbs who live in enclaves in the south of Kosovo without exception must comply with Kosovo law. All taxes and bills must be paid. Although the economic situation in these enclaves in the south is difficult, as in the whole of Kosovo, living conditions are generally better than in the north, so the Serbs interviewed did not show excessive dissatisfaction. The town of Prizren is situated in the south; before 1999 there were around 12,000 Serbs there and today out of 85,000 inhabitants only 35 are Serbs. This town was always multiethnic since Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Bosniaks, Roma and other minorities shared it and each of them left its own cultural and historical trace. Thus, almost all of its inhabitants speak at least two languages, out of three that are in common use—Albanian, Serbian and Turkish. A priest from a local Serbian Orthodox Church confirms that the spirit of multiethnicity has been preserved and that is why today's relations with Albanian neighbors are fine. Another Serbian resident says that she feels safe in her hometown and that coexistence is possible if people respect each other. There is one Serbian kindergarten, but no Serbian elementary school in the town. The Serbian Orthodox Seminary of St. Cyril and Methodius, known as the Prizren Seminary, is a theological school in which future priests are educated, and currently has about 50 students from Kosovo and from the southern part of Serbia⁷¹. Gracanica is a town located in central Kosovo and during the war in 1999 most of the Serbs from Pristina fled to

⁷¹ Prizren Seminary was established in 1871 and during the war in 1999 it was damaged, students and professors were evacuated in Nis, in southern Serbia and continued to work there. On the day of the March Pogrom (March 17, 2004) it was burned, along with other Orthodox churches in the town, by Albanian militants. Many important personalities of the Serbian Church and history were either students or professors at this seminary. It was renovated in 2011.

Gracanica⁷². It is Serb-majority town and it is estimated that around 20,000 Serbs live there. Two residents interviewed for the documentary are entrepreneurs, an owner of a restaurant of Serbian national cuisine and an owner of a brewery and a pub. Both businesses are registered under the laws of the Republic of Kosovo and the owners pay taxes, stating that “there are elements of statehood that we cannot avoid”. They shared their positive experiences with Albanian customers, but the owner of a brewery explained, on the example of his product, that there is “unspoken desire not to help the Serbian business in Kosovo (not to buy the product made by the Serbs in Kosovo), because that would enable the prosperity and stay of Serbs in Kosovo”. All the Serbs who live in enclaves in the south of Kosovo who were interviewed for this documentary shared mostly positive experiences and comments about their lives, but none of them want their children to stay there - they do not see a bright future for their children in Kosovo.

6. What hinders the reconciliation process?

In the previous chapter I presented everyday life of Serbian and Albanian communities in today's Kosovo. The facts set forth therein contribute to a better understanding of the failure of the reconciliation process. In this chapter I will investigate the specific obstacles to the process of reconciliation. As sources I will use peer reviewed

⁷² The town of Gracanica is centered around the Gracanica Monastery, a Serbian Orthodox monastery built by the Serbian King Stefan Milutin in 1321. This monastery, along with three other Serbian monasteries from Kosovo, was placed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger in 2006.

literature on reconciliation in Kosovo, existing research articles on this topic, news agencies' material, media material and audio-visual recordings.

As already pointed out, Kosovo is an ethnically divided society. Serbs predominantly live in the north, with some enclaves situated in the south, where Albanians are the majority. Serbs who live in the north do not recognise Kosovo institutions and instead rely on the Serbian parallel institutions who operate outside Pristina's control, such as security structures, courts, schools, healthcare, administrative structures dealing with property issues, documents issued by the Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs. The government in Kosovo considers these institutions as illegal.

People from these two ethnic groups rarely communicate with each other, and according to the survey published in 2017, around 52% of those interviewed said that they had never interacted with members of other ethnic groups⁷³. Serbian and Albanian children are not going to the same schools and they follow different curricula: Serbian-speaking schools have curriculum instructed by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, while Albanian-speaking schools teach according to the curriculum approved by the Kosovo government. Even though, there are cases, like in the village in municipality of Vitina in eastern Kosovo, where Serbian and Albanian students physically attend the same school, but one uses the Serbian and the other the Albanian name and they use completely different curricula⁷⁴.

⁷³ Ahmetaj N., Kabashi-Ramaj B., Jacquot M., Buzhala Y., and Hoxha A., *Deconstructing Reconciliation in Kosovo*. Centre for Research, Documentation and Publication, 2017., pg. 90.

⁷⁴ BIRN, Baliu Doruntina, *Udžbenici istorije u školama na Kosovu i u Srbiji zamagljuju devedesete godine*, Novembar 2016, available at: <https://www.ndnv.org/2016/11/07/udzbenici-istorije-u-skolama-na-kosovu-i-u-srbiji-zamagljuju-devedesete-godine/#>

6.1. The Language barrier

As is stated in the Constitution of Kosovo, Article 5, “the official languages in the Republic of Kosovo are Albanian and Serbian⁷⁵”. Thus, the two languages are equal and both in official use. Formally Kosovo is bilingual, but on the ground situation is different. In some parts of Kosovo, especially in the south, Serbian language has almost disappeared from public use. As mentioned in the previous chapter, state authorities in these municipalities present Serbian citizens with official documents, such as court decisions and other legal documents, in a foreign language, i.e., in Albanian language⁷⁶. Albanians who live in Serbian majority municipalities experience the same issues. This means that people have limited access to social services, legal documents, employment, and health protection⁷⁷. Bilingualism was common among older generations; people from both communities who lived during the existence of FRY were in many cases bilingual. They could learn the language of the other major ethnic community at school. However, the events that followed led to the present day where Kosovo Serbs and Albanians can no longer understand each other.

⁷⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Chapter I, Basic Provisions, Article 5, pg. 2. Available at: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=3702>

⁷⁶ A jurist at Mitrovica Basic Court wrote an informative text on linguistic rights violations in Kosovo. Spasojevic Ivan, Linguistic rights in Kosovo amidst legal protection and legal challenges, NGO Aktiv, February 2020, available at: <http://www.ngoaktiv.org/news/linguistic-rights-in-kosovo-amidst-legal-protection-and-legal-challenges>

⁷⁷ BIRN, May 2018, Languages: The Kosovo Problem Nobody Talks About, available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2018/05/04/languages-the-kosovo-problem-nobody-talks-about-04-26-2018/>

6.2. One-sided narratives

Exposure to one-sided narratives presents one of the biggest obstacles to a genuine rapprochement and reconciliation in Kosovo. It is very hard to recognize the truth or suffering of the other if you are taught that your sacrifice is immensely great and that you are the only victim of war. This is the framework in which Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo each see themselves. As Ramsbotham put it, "nothing is more characteristic of violent conflict than the fact that all parties genuinely believe that they are victims of injustice and that therefore 'justice' is on their side"⁷⁸. Kosovo Serbs and Albanians highlight their victimization without critical analysis of their own wrongdoing. Beside victimization, myths that are deeply rooted in both societies prevent people from learning the truth about the past and the nature of their compatriots' actions. The dominant hegemonic narrative of victimization and fostering of collectively held myths distort the truth and thus, exclude the possibility for people affected by the conflict to reckon with the past in a constructive way. "Myths define the ways in which the past is collectively remembered, while memory provides the basis on which myths are created"⁷⁹. The narrative of the Serbian people as the great victims who throughout history suffered at the hands of Muslims (first Ottomans, and later Kosovo Muslims) on the one side and, on the other side, the narrative of the Albanian people as the great victims who throughout history suffered at the hands of Serbs, are both so strong that they greatly contributed to

⁷⁸ Ramsbotham, O., Miall, H. and Woodhouse, T., *Introduction to Conflict Resolution: Concepts and Definitions*. In: Ramsbotham, O., Miall, H., and Woodhouse (eds.) *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (3rd ed.), Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011, pg. 12.

⁷⁹ Dragović-Soso, Jasna. *Conflict, Memory, Accountability: What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?* in: Wolfgang Petritsch and Vedran Džihčić (eds), *Conflict and Memory: Bridging Past and Future in [South East] Europe*, Nomos, 2010., pg. 32.

the commission of crimes on both sides during the violent conflict, and to the inability to deal with the past in post-conflict period.

6.3. History teaching

In Kosovo, history is highly politicized and is taught in schools in a way that contributes to the widening of ethnic divides and growing of tensions. New, young generations of Serbs and Albanians are exposed to nationalist narratives in history classes that are opposing, exclude each other and increase the prejudices toward “the other”. In history textbooks used by the Albanian students, war in Kosovo is described through inaccurate figures and explanations of events, and in those used by the Serbian students ethnicity of victims is not mentioned, neither are the trials of former Serbian leaders for the crimes committed during the war. Both sets of textbooks present only the crimes of the opposite side and they are full of prejudice and hate speech, and instead of scientific and proven facts they often contain false and exaggerated information with emotional and ideological connotation.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Shkelzen Gashi, a political scientist from Kosovo, authored the report “The History of Kosovo in the History Textbooks of Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia”, in which he analyzes the presentation of the history of Kosovo in the textbooks of the primary and secondary schools in these five countries. Since the history textbooks are approved by the ministries of education of the five countries, the author notes that “in an indirect way the report also reveals what kind of relations with their neighbors the governments of each of the countries is suggesting to the younger generation who are being educated with these textbooks”. Gashi Shkelzen, “The History of Kosovo in the History Textbooks of Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia”, *Alter Habitus*, Pristina, 2016, available at: https://kfos.org/storage/app/media/Historia_e_Kosoves_SHG_ENG.pdf. In regard to this topic, another interesting report was published in recent years, that brings the research on history teaching in Serbian-speaking and Albanian-speaking schools in Kosovo, with a focus on the teaching of the Second World War. Di Lellio A., Fridman O., Hercigonja S., and Hoxha A., “Fostering a Critical Account of History in Kosovo: Engaging with History Teachers’ Narratives of the Second World War”, Belgrade, CFCCS, Faculty of Media and Communications, 2017.

6.4. Lack of trust in Kosovo's institutions

The lack of trust in Kosovo's institutions stands out as a particular problem. Many officials and political leaders of Kosovo are ex-combatants and members of The Kosovo Liberation Army. Up until November 2020, the President of Kosovo was Hashim Thaçi, who was the political leader and senior commander of the KLA, accused of serious human rights abuses and criminal activities. Before this position he occupied different posts in Kosovo's government such as the first Prime Minister of Kosovo, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Council of Europe published a report on organized crime in 2010 and named Thaci as a head of Albanian mafia group ("Drenica group") that dealt with trafficking in human organs, smuggling of weapons and heroin, assassinations, detentions, interrogations etc.⁸¹ In November 2020, he was indicted by The Kosovo Specialist Prosecutor's Office in The Hague with crimes against humanity and war crimes⁸². Kadri Veseli, one of the founders of the KLA and commander who, in this report published by The Council of Europe, is cited as "a lynchpin of the Drenica Group" (Albanian mafia group), was the Chief of the Kosovo Intelligence Service, the Chairman of the Assembly of Kosovo and leader of the Democratic Party of

⁸¹ Dick Marty, a member of Parliamentary Assembly of the council of Europe and the author of this report, lists various crimes committed by Thaci-led "Drenica group", and among other things states: "Thaçi and these other Drenica Group members are consistently named as "key players" in intelligence reports on Kosovo's mafia-like structures of organised crime. I have examined these diverse, voluminous reports with consternation and a sense of moral outrage. What is particularly confounding is that all of the international community in Kosovo—from the governments of the United States and other allied western powers, to the European Union-backed justice authorities—undoubtedly possesses the same, overwhelming documentation of the full extent of the Drenica Group's crimes, but none seems prepared to react in the face of such a situation and to hold the perpetrators to account." Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Inhuman treatment of people and illicit trafficking in human organs in Kosovo. Report, Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Dick Marty. January 2011, pg. 15-16. Available at: https://www.scp-ks.org/sites/default/files/public/coe_1.pdf

⁸²BIRN, Bami Xh. Hague Prosecutors reveal war crimes indictment of Kosovo's Taci, November 2020. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/11/06/hague-prosecutors-reveal-war-crimes-indictment-of-kosovos-thaci/>

Kosovo. Alongside President Taci and two other senior leaders from the KLA, he too was indicted for crimes against humanity and war crimes in November 2020. Agim Çeku, who was the Prime Minister of Kosovo from 2006 to 2008, and then the Minister of Security Forces from 2011-2014, was a military commander of KLA. The War Crimes Court in Belgrade sentenced him to 20 years in prison in absentia for war crimes he committed against Serbs and other non-Albanians in Kosovo. He was charged with killing 669 Serbs and 18 non-Albanians. In September 2020 he was summoned by the prosecutors at The Hague (The Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor's Office) as a war crimes suspect⁸³. Ramush Haradinaj was the third Prime Minister of Kosovo up until February last year, and he was also the leader of KLA. He was indicted for war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of the laws or customs of war by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, although he was acquitted. Witness intimidations are linked to his case, because during the trial some witnesses changed testimonies and some mysteriously disappeared or were killed⁸⁴. The question arises, how can local minorities build trust in institutions when some of the leading positions are occupied by the former KLA militants and war criminals?

6.5. The Issue of Missing Persons

One of the biggest obstacles to reconciliation is the issue of missing persons and lack of information regarding them. Belgrade-based NGO Humanitarian Law Center

⁸³BIRN, Osmani T., Bami Xh., Hague War Crime Prosecutors Call Kosovo ex-PM for Questioning, September 2020. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/09/03/hague-war-crime-prosecutors-call-kosovo-ex-pm-for-questioning/>

⁸⁴BIRN, Ristic, M., Can the New Kosovo Court Keep Witnesses Safe? January 2016. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/01/20/can-the-new-kosovo-court-keep-witnesses-safe-01-20-2016/>

listed in detail all killed, abducted and missing during the war in Kosovo, and most international organizations and Kosovo's institutions use these figures as final. According to these data, 13,518 people were killed and/or disappeared during the war in 1998-1999; most of them were civilians. 10,794 Albanians and 2,197 Serbs were killed; the rest are members of other ethnic groups living in Kosovo. Today, twenty two years after the war, 1,647 people are still missing and of these, 420 are Serbs⁸⁵. In Serbia and Kosovo there are institutions responsible for the issue of missing persons, but it seems that neither side is doing enough to address this issue. By opening of local and international military archives, the fate of these people would be resolved. Serbia and Kosovo asked from each other to open up archives but there were no positive developments. On the contrary, hiding documents and keeping silent are actions that have been taken on both sides on this issue. One of the examples is the case of the discovery of a mass grave in Rudnica in south-west Serbia in 2013, where the remains of Albanians killed by Serbian army in April and May of 1999 in Kosovo in villages that were in the zone controlled by the Yugoslav Army's 37th Motorised Brigade were found. When Belgrade's Humanitarian Law Center asked the Ministry of Defense to open archives about the operations of this brigade, then Defense Minister (and today the Director of The Security Intelligence Agency of Serbia) declared the entire archive of the 37th Brigade a state secret for the

⁸⁵ All those data are gathered in the database named "The Kosovo Memory Book". As stated on the website of the Humanitarian Law Center, "The Kosovo Memory Book is a monument to the victims of war crimes (civilians, the wounded and prisoners of war), persons killed in battle (soldiers) and those who were forcibly disappeared in Kosovo in the period January 1, 1998–December 2000 during the armed conflict between the Serbian police and the Yugoslav Army on the one hand, and the Kosovo Liberation Army on the other. This monument is alive yet indestructible. It calls everyone to pause in front of it, to read each name and find out who these people were and how they died. It urges people to remember people. In time, when the data on the fate of those who are still missing are finally obtained, with information about secret mass graves and new evidence of crimes and victims, the Kosovo Memory Book will have become the most reliable witness to our recent past." Humanitarian Law Center, The Kosovo Memory Book, available at: http://www.kosovomemorybook.org/?page_id=29&lang=de

next 30 years. On the other side, Kosovo's government is trying to justify itself by claiming that the KLA was a guerilla organization and it had no proper archives. A former spokesperson for the KLA stated that: "Serbia planned and organized everything and its archives cannot be compared with those of a guerrilla group"⁸⁶. However, in the "Draft Law on the Protection of the KLA War Values" that was presented in the Kosovo Assembly, the archive of the KLA is recognized as a protected value⁸⁷. Youth Initiative for Human Rights from Belgrade this year published a report "Efficiency of the Mechanisms of the Institutions of Serbia and Kosovo in Finding Missing Persons from the War in Kosovo in the Period from 2016 to 2020", and stated that both sides must take more proactive approach, they must change their legislation on this issue, and among other recommendations also stated that: "Establishing facts about the fate of missing persons should be one of the priorities in detecting and prosecuting war crimes before the judiciary in Serbia and Kosovo"⁸⁸. Representatives of the Albanian families of missing persons are criticizing Kosovo political leaders for the lack of determination to resolve this issue. They want this issue to be prioritized at the ongoing dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia in Brussels, thus they have requested to be part of the Pristina's delegation. "We have been on the streets for 21 years, righteously looking for our relatives, and our institutions have not done anything about it, they have just spoken to the media for the sake of it and then forgotten the issue", stated a representative of the NGO Mother's

⁸⁶BIRN, Haxhiaj, S., Stojanovic, M., Will Serbia and Kosovo Open Up Secret War Archives? Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/08/11/will-serbia-and-kosovo-open-up-secret-war-archives/>

⁸⁷Danas, Djokic, B., Arhiva OVK. September 2020. Available at: <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/suocavanje/arhiva-ovk>

⁸⁸ YIHR Srbija, "Efikasnost mehanizama institucija Srbije i Kosova u pronalazenju nestalih osoba iz rata na Kosovu u periodu od 2016 do 2020". Nacionalni konvent o Evropskoj Uniji, mart 2021. Available at: http://regionalnirazvoj.org/upload/Plan/Documents/2021_04/Efikasnost_mehanizama_institucija_Srbije_i_Kosova_u_pronalazenju_nestalih_osoba_iz_rata_na_Kosovu.pdf

Cries from Kosovo⁸⁹. On the other hand, the attitude of the Serbian state representatives on this issue is best illustrated by the statement from October 2020 of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs at the Serbian TV station with national broadcasting. The journalist asked: “What can we do for Serbia to win over the world’s greatest powers for our cause?” and the Minister answered: “Let go of the Americans, the Germans, the Turks and everyone else. What are we going to do with the Serbs who share information with Albanians and Croats, tell various nonsense, show them where Albanians are buried all over Serbia. Veljko Odalovic (Chairman of the Commission for Missing Persons of the Government of Serbia), that Commission for Missing Persons, little by little, they go to investigate some locations reported by certain spies...”⁹⁰ Since the end of the Kosovo war until today, 529 mass graves have been discovered in Kosovo and Serbia (most of them are on the territory of Kosovo). Many authors argue that truth telling about past abuses by all sides greatly contributes to success of reconciliation. In a research about reconciliation in Kosovo published in 2017, one Albanian woman whose husband is still missing, on question about forgiveness answered: “Maybe I would forgive. It is very difficult not to know where your husband is. If the remains would be returned, my wound would be healed to a certain degree, my pain eased. It was war, and if my husband’s body is returned, I would agree, since there is no other way out. It is very hard, but I want him

⁸⁹ BIRN, Bami, Xh., Kosovo Missing Persons’ Families Seek to Join Talks with Serbia, October 2020. Available at: <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/07/kosovo-missing-persons-families-seek-to-join-talks-with-serbia/>

⁹⁰ Ivica Dacic is the leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia; he has been active in politics since 1990s. He was one of the closest associates of Slobodan Milosevic, former Serbian President who is one of the most responsible people for atrocious wars in ex-Yugoslavia in 1990s. From that time until today, for more than three decades, Dacic has managed to stay in power and to occupy some of the most important positions in the country, such as the Prime Minister, First Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, of Internal Affairs, of Information, President of the National Assembly. TV Happy, Cirilica, Ivica Dacic bez dlake na jeziku o Vasingtonskom sporazumu, Septembar 2020. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I740jP51NM8>

back, wherever he is, I want him back. Since it is a condition, I would forgive him (the perpetrator) if he brings back my husband's body"⁹¹. Finding truth, bringing justice and punishing criminals are steps that must be taken so people affected by the conflict could close wounds, start the healing process and begin to restore trust in the people with whom they were in conflict. Family members of the missing people will not be able to work together with the people from the other ethnic group on building sustainable peace and reconciliation for as long as they lack information about the fate of their loved ones.

6.6. Dependence on a third party

As seen in the previous chapter, security situation in Kosovo is not stable and twenty two years after the war, KFOR is still the main guarantor of security. In March last year, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty made a short reportage in Urosevac, a city near the Camp Bondsteel, the main base of US Army under KFOR command in Kosovo. The possibility of withdrawal of American troops from Kosovo is often heard in the media and many Albanians and Serbs from Urosevac area think that this would be very bad news. One Albanian interviewee stated: "If there were no American presence, we wouldn't stay here. Without US troops you'll have Serbian soldiers at the border within two hours", and the other one said: "We are still a small country, and we still need their support. For us USA is like parents who take care of their small child". A Serbian from Klokot village is also worried: "It's bad, bad for all, Albanians and Serbs. They protect both people". Those who live near the Camp Bondsteel say that they will leave together

⁹¹ Ahmetaj N., Kabashi-Ramaj B., Jacquot M., Buzhala Y., Hoxha A., *Deconstructing Reconciliation in Kosovo*, Centre for Research, Documentation and Publication, Pristina, June 2017, pg. 41.

with the US soldiers. “If they leave, that’s very dangerous, because we’ll leave from this country. This country is strange and things could change in two minutes”⁹². This clearly shows that people in Kosovo do not feel safe and that they depend on the foreign force. So how can they move toward reconciliation when they still need a third party to separate them and prevent attack?

6.7. Return of refugees and internally displaced

The low rate of the returnees and displaced people in their old places of residence occurs as one of the problems in establishing a better relationship between communities affected by conflict. Approximately 220,000 people were displaced from Kosovo during the war. According to the OSCE report published in 2019, only 28,111 persons returned by the December 2018⁹³. Attacks on the returnees, mainly on returnees from the Serbian community, are one of the main reasons for such a low number. Such acts are considered as a message that they are not welcomed in Kosovo, and often returnees are forced to leave Kosovo once again⁹⁴.

⁹² Radio Slobodna Evropa, Strah od odlaska americkih trupa, Mart 2020. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzQUHpyzuGc>

⁹³ OSCE, Assessment of Voluntary Returns in Kosovo, November 2019. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/3/8/440726.pdf>

⁹⁴ Kosovo Sever Portal, New Attack on the Property of Serb Returnees in Dubrava; Kosovo Police Confirms That Two Houses Have Been Damaged, May 2021. Available at: <https://kossev.info/petkovic-new-attack-on-the-property-of-serb-returnees-in-dubrava-kp-confirms-that-two-houses-have-been-damaged/>

6.8. Land swap

As, over the years, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue in Brussels has not yielded concrete results regarding the final status of Kosovo, the idea of land swap (exchange of territory) has increasingly begun to be promoted. Within this idea, a territory in southern Serbia where the majority of the population is Albanian, called The Presevo Valley, would become a part of the Kosovo state. In return, Serbia would regain full control over the municipalities in northern Kosovo with the Serb majority. In that case, Serbs who live in the Presevo Valley would become citizens of Kosovo, and Albanians who live in northern Kosovo would become citizens of Serbia, and these communities would need new legal and political framework that the territorial exchange would require. These communities most probably would not accept such huge change easily and in a peaceful way. Land swap or changing of the borders, which this idea essentially represents, is not a good solution for several reasons. This idea nullifies the principles of multiculturalism defined by the UN Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo status settlement (the Ahtisaari's plan) from 2007 because if it is implemented, Kosovo will become an ethnically clean country. Most of the Serb population that lives in Kosovo and most of the shrines of the Serbian Orthodox Church (along with four monasteries under the UNESCO protection) are situated south of the Ibar River. The position of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the majority of Serbs living there is that they believe that after such an agreement, Serbs would not be able to stay there since the Kosovo government would not be able to guarantee a minimum of rights to those Serbs. As the Abbot of the Decani monastery, Father Sava, explains: "Serbs have been treated badly in this territory for 20 years; they are disenfranchised, their return is prevented, the Kosovo government is

working on the systematic erasure of traces of Serbian existence, years of destruction of Serbian shrines, now we are facing the appropriation of these shrines⁹⁵. One gets the impression that a society is being formed here that is tailored exclusively to Kosovo Albanians.”⁹⁶ Without any doubt, this kind of division would create ethnically homogenous states. After years of the promotion of the dialogue (although it proved almost futile), Serbia and Kosovo officials are now sending the message to its people that coexistence and reconciliation are not possible and that the solution is to completely separate communities. It also affects the return of refugees and displaced persons because they have no guarantees for the security and sustainability of their return⁹⁷.

7. Exclusionist identity

In the previous chapter I listed the factors that obstruct the process of reconciliation in Kosovo. Each one of these factors is multifaceted and they are intertwined in such a manner that in order to obtain a complete picture of their causal

⁹⁵ Since 2015, Kosovo’s government is working to admit Kosovo into the UNESCO community. Serbia opposes this request based on the argument that Kosovo is UN-administered territory and not an independent state. Since in 2015 it failed to obtain the membership, Kosovo’s officials are lobbying for the removal of four Serbian monasteries from the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger and for the Serbian cultural and religious heritage to be referred as Kosovan. This is obvious appropriation of the Serbian monuments and heritage in Kosovo.

⁹⁶ Sputnjik Srbija, Sava Janjic upozorava: Na Kosovu se formira drustvo bez Srba, January 2020. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8Z54LHdsdE>

⁹⁷ The EU members, such as Germany and France, are resolutely against the idea of land swap and changing of borders on already unstable Balkans, but the US supports this idea and this was especially evident during the Trump administration. Exit News, US Envoy Has Two Months to Persuade EU on Kosovo-Serbia Land Swap Deal, Says Former US Diplomat, May 2020. Available at: <https://exit.al/en/2020/05/04/us-envoy-has-two-months-to-persuade-eu-on-kosovo-serbia-land-swap-deal-says-former-us-diplomat/>. The famous Deutsche Welle (a German public state-owned international broadcaster) published an analysis of a German policy expert Christian Schwarz-Schilling who argued that territory exchange would undoubtedly destabilize the region and open a Pandora’s box. Deutsche Welle, Opinion: Serbia-Kosovo Land Swap Will Open Pandora’s Box, March 2019. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-serbia-kosovo-land-swap-will-open-pandoras-box/a-47751508>

connection it would be necessary to analyze each of them in detail. Because of the limited space in this study I am not able to investigate each of them individually; however, I will examine the two elements that I consider to have the most impact on the process of reconciliation. The first component is the dominant perception of national identity in Serbia.

Political leaders from Serbia and their counterparts from Kosovo have an important role to play in the process of reconciliation and unfortunately too often they have negative influence on the general public and individuals from both communities, since they use nationalist propaganda and advocate exclusive attitudes. Their statements that spur hostility and mistrust between the communities are often heard in public. Politicians from both sides see the “other” as an eternal enemy which threatens the national identity and thus hinder rapprochement and trust between two communities. This is especially true for the Serbian politicians. “Preservation of the identity of the Serbian people” is indisputably the most commonly used phrase in the speeches of political elites in Serbia. Based on the statements of the politicians, Serbian national identity has been constantly threatened throughout history, and especially in the last few decades. To understand this obsession, I will look into the model and main components of the Serbian national identity.

According to Anthony D. Smith, national identity has complex and abstract nature and a number of different components (ethnic, cultural, territorial, economic and legal-political), which are interrelated, make the structure of national identity and nations⁹⁸. He distinguishes two models of nations: first one is the Western model, whose components

⁹⁸ Smith, D. Anthony, *National Identity*, Penguin book, London, 1991, pg. 14.

are historic territory (historic land/cradle/homeland), legal-political community (a community of laws and institutions with a single political will), legal-political equality of members (civil, legal, political rights and duties, and socio-economic rights; in other words, all members of a nation are legally equal), common civic culture and ideology (common values and traditions, ideas, historical memories, myths and symbols that link people together). In this model, the individual could choose to which nation he/she belongs. The second model is non-Western—Smith called it the ethnic conception of the nation—developed in Eastern Europe and Asia, and it is based on two principles: a community of birth and native culture⁹⁹. This concept is strict, because no matter where one lives, he/she stays forever a member of the community where they were born. Smith believes that national identity enables individuals to identify themselves and that one can define oneself through a shared culture. Using Smith's models of nations as parameter, the ethnic conception of the nation certainly applies to Serbia. We can observe some of the elements from the Western model in Serbian national identity, such as the historic land/homeland/cradle that "becomes a repository of historic memories and associations, the place where "our" sages, saints and heroes lived, worked, prayed and fought."¹⁰⁰ But what is certain is that in Serbia, common understanding of the national identity is that it is considered as fixed, and all those who were born within the borders of the state, and who share the same culture, automatically belong to the Serbian nation. Regardless of the place where one might move, a community of birth and shared culture will always be the identifying components for Serbs. Considering the fact that Serbian society is still traditional and patriarchal, it is not surprising that a strong sense of belonging to family

⁹⁹ Ibid, pg. 11.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, pg. 9.

and family values is something that is being emphasized in everyday discourse¹⁰¹. So, besides this strong feeling of belonging to the nation, belonging to family adds to the concept of Serbian national identity that can also be defined as primordialist¹⁰². Primordialism is the concept in which nations are considered as ancient, and where kinship and feeling of shared origins and characteristics plays important role. In this concept, national identity is given by birth and it is unchangeable.

Serbian language (and Cyrillic alphabet), Serbian Orthodox Church and the Kosovo myth are components that unite members of the Serbian nation, and they were crucially important in building and preserving national identity. The main component of the Serbian national identity is, undoubtedly, the Kosovo myth, that is based on the historical event of the battle that took place in 1389 in the Kosovo Polje (Kosovo Field) between Serbian Christian forces and Ottoman Turks. Historical sources of this battle are scarce and, as expectedly, Serbian and Turkish data differ. The Kosovo myth is based on historical events, but as any other myth, also has elements of legend, historically unverified facts, allegory, and folklore. Before the 19th century, the Kosovo myth was a religious myth, but with the rise of nationalism in Europe, Serbs also fought for their own national state and independence and they recognized the great potential of this myth as a constitutive political myth of the Serbian national identity¹⁰³. The Kosovo myth is a real

¹⁰¹ In the paper "Persistence of Traditionalist Value Orientations in Serbia", Jelena Pesic analyzes patriarchal orientation (along with collectivism and authoritarianism) in post-socialist transformation in Serbia. Jelena Pesic, "Persistence of traditionalist value orientations in Serbia" in: Sociologija, Vol. XLVIII (2006), N° 4, pg. 289-307.

¹⁰² Jasna Milosevic Djordjevic wrote a valuable study of the primordial concept of national identity in Serbia, based on two quantitative surveys conducted in 2003 and 2006. Jasna Milosević Djordjević, "Primordialist Concept of National Identity in Serbia", in: Psihologija, 2007, Vol. 40 (3), pg. 385-397.

¹⁰³ Main focus of the work of eminent Serbian anthropologist Ivan Čolović is political myths, and in his book "The Politics of Symbol in Serbia" he analyzes Serbian political mythology about the nation and also discusses the historical development of the Serbian myths. Čolović Ivan, The Politics of Symbol in Serbia,

mythomoteur, in Smith's definition of this concept¹⁰⁴. The political elite in Serbia direct the Kosovo myth and use it as a means of political struggle in order to legitimize their political ideology; the Kosovo myth has been repeatedly used and misused in the Serbian political discourse¹⁰⁵. What Serbian nationalists overlook, specifically in the case of the Kosovo myth and the central battle on the Kosovo Polje, is the fact that the Serbian forces did not consist only of Serbs, but also of Albanians, Bosnians, Bulgarians and Vlachs who were among the soldiers who fought selflessly on the Serbian side against the Turks. This fact is very important since the Kosovo myth is the constitutive element of the Serbian national identity. This means that not only Serbs, but Albanians as well are integral part of the Kosovo myth. Such a statement would be considered blasphemy in Serbian society. This is because the dominant comprehension of national identity in the

Hurst & Company, London, 2002. His book "Smrt na Kosovu Polju. Istorija kosovskog mita", (English translation of the title is "Death on the Kosovo Field. The History of the Kosovo Myth") is a comprehensive study of the Kosovo myth and in this work he deals with the ideological and political functions of memories of the Battle of Kosovo, from the first stories about them to the present day. Čolović Ivan, Smrt na Kosovu polju. Istorija kosovskog mita, Biblioteka XX vek, 2016.

¹⁰⁴ In his work "The Ethnic Origins of Nations", Smith argues that every ethnic group has specific claims about its origins and those claims consist of a complex of myths, memories and symbols. As he states, "these claims and this complex provide the focus of a community's identity and its *mythomoteur*, or constitutive political myth". Smith, Anthony D, The Ethnic Origins of Nations, Blackwell Publishing, 1988, pg. 58.

¹⁰⁵ During the creation of Yugoslavia, after the WWI, Serbian political leaders used the Kosovo myth, but in the interpretation that included the suffering of people from the other ethnic groups rather than only Serbs in the Battle of Kosovo, in order to gather different ethnic groups under the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. I have previously mentioned the famous speech of the Serbian president Slobodan Milošević in 1989 in Kosovo, when he compared modern-time struggle for the preservation of the Serbian identity with the Battle of Kosovo from the 14th century and struggle against Ottoman occupation. During the war in Bosnia, in July 1995 the Army of Republika Srpska, composed of Bosnian Serbs and a paramilitary unit from Serbia, under the command of Ratko Mladić (Bosnian Serb general) committed genocide in Srebrenica by killing more than 8000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys. General Ratko Mladić (in November 2017 found guilty by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia of committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide), on the day Srebrenica was deserted, gave short speech in which he used the Kosovo myth and the Ottoman occupation as justification for horrific crimes against Bosnian Muslims: "Here we are, on July 11, 1995 in Serb Srebrenica. On the eve of yet another great Serbian holiday, we give this town to the Serbian people as a gift. Finally, after the rebellion against Dahije (Dahije were the leaders of the Ottoman Janissaries unit who deserted from this unit and independently took the power over the Belgrade area in 1801. The First Serbian uprising in 1804 is called Buna protiv Dahija - Uprising against Dahije), the time has come to take revenge on the Turks in this region". Video of this speech, with English subtitles, can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIQB2bZXwM8>

Serbian society implies that the root of the conflict between Serbs and Albanians is in ethnicity itself. It is considered that these two ethnic groups have essential differences and that interethnic antagonism and conflict arise from there. This shows how an exclusionist identity does not accept the other. Smith also refers to this perception when he argues that nationalism “offers a narrow, conflict-laden legitimation for political community, which inevitably pits culture-communities against each other”¹⁰⁶.

8. Power relation

The second element that I believe has a major impact on the process of reconciliation in Kosovo is the power relation between the Serbian government and the Serbian community in Kosovo. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo's unilateral independence. It treats this territory in accordance with its Constitution, which guarantees sovereignty of the state and in which Kosovo is within its borders as an autonomous province. But as we could see from the previous chapters, Serbs living in Kosovo today de facto live in an independent state. The situation is extremely difficult because this community is divided not only physically, Serbs in the Northern Kosovo and Serbs south of the river Ibar, but it is also divided according to how the Serbian and Kosovo authorities treat it. Serbian municipalities in Northern Kosovo are under local control, which means under the indirect control of the Serbian authorities and they receive more support from the Serbian government than Serb municipalities in the south. The political and financial support that the Serbian authorities send to the Serbs in Kosovo, especially

¹⁰⁶ Smith, D. Anthony, *National Identity*, Penguin book, London, 1991, pg. 18.

to those in the north, is conditional. The Serb List is a Serb political party in Kosovo that has close ties to the ruling populist party in Serbia, Serbian Progressive Party, headed by the president of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic. As long as the Serbs in Kosovo vote for this party, they will be rewarded with financial support. Representatives of the Serbian government and the Serbian President himself openly call on the Serb community in Kosovo to vote for this party every time there are local or parliamentary elections. During the visit to the south of Serbia in February this year, Serbian president held a meeting with the representatives of the Serbs from Kosovo and he thanked the citizens for voting for the Serbian List in the last parliamentary elections in Kosovo: “Those who are unemployed in Kosovo and Metohija, they can expect the support of the state of Serbia of 200 Euros per person. It is a direct gift, direct help from the state of Serbia, but we will also provide 100 Euros of additional money for every child living in Kosovo and Metohija, for every child and for every person, that is the difference in relation to central Serbia”. He also promised investments in numerous infrastructure projects in Serb-majority municipalities. The president of the Serbian List party said that the representatives of this party were “a little rude today” because they “asked for a lot of infrastructural investments”, but that the president of Serbia “had understanding”¹⁰⁷. Serbian authorities are already well known for labeling their political opponents in Serbia, and they do the same with their opponents in Kosovo, thus anyone with different political affinities is labeled as “Thaci’s Serb”, “an obedient and suitable Serb”, “those who divide Serbian people” etc. We saw in the previous chapter the kind of lawlessness that reigns in Northern Kosovo. Serbs who live there have been complaining for years

¹⁰⁷ Voice of America (in Serbian language), Vucic obecao podrsku Srbima sa Kosova, Februar 2021. Available at: <https://www.glasamerike.net/a/vucic-srbi-sa-kosova-sastanak-kursumljija/5794128.html>

that Serbian criminals and mobsters have the main say in those cities and that they live in fear from them¹⁰⁸. It is obvious that the authorities in Serbia put party's interest above the national one. They encourage local Serbs not to respect Kosovo's laws and send them financial aid in return. In that way, they only make life more difficult for those people and because of the different treatment of Serbs in the north from Serbs in the south, they only create a gap within the Serb community in Kosovo¹⁰⁹. As long as the Serbian authorities have a say in the lives of Serbs in Kosovo, holding political and financial strings, tensions will continue to exist and these people will not have genuine control over their lives. In such circumstances when people have neither political freedom nor economic stability, when they cannot participate in decision making that directly affects their lives, it is difficult to work on the process of reconciliation.

¹⁰⁸ One of the few independent weekly magazines in Serbia, Vreme, in September 2017 published an interview with a prominent Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic. In this interview he analyzes how difficult political and economic situation is in Northern Kosovo and states that criminals and drug dealers are everywhere, more than 50 cases of burning cars in the last couple of years (his car was also burned right after he announced that he will run for Mayor of North Mitrovica), intimidation of political opponents. He claims that this is done by criminal structures connected with politics. See Vreme, Strah Srba od ekstremnih Srba, September 2017 (in Serbian language), available at: <https://www.vreme.com/cms/view.php?id=1533026>. He was the leader of the civic initiative "Sloboda, Demokratija, Pravda" ("Freedom, Democracy, Justice") and a leader of Kosovo Serbs. Just few months after he gave this interview, in January 16, 2018 he was assassinated in front of his office in North Mitrovica. To this day his murder has not been solved.

¹⁰⁹ Close ties between mafia and political elites in Kosovo and Serbia, especially with the ruling party in Serbia, violence, organized crime, intimidation of the political opponents and of the citizens of northern Mitrovica, are the topics covered in the article published by the Center for investigative journalism of Serbia. This article contributes to a better understanding of the situation in the north of Kosovo over the past few years. Center for investigative journalism of Serbia, Bombs and bullets: Fear and Loathing in North Kosovo, 2019. Available at: <https://www.cins.rs/en/bombs-and-bullets-fear-and-loathing-in-north-kosovo/>

9. The near future or utopia?

Without any doubt, reconciliation is a complex and comprehensive, multidimensional process. It is one of the major components of peacebuilding process that should take place after the end of violent conflict, so affected communities can understand the roots of the conflict, come to terms with the past and transform themselves in order to achieve long-lasting peace. One of the first factors that arise when it comes to Kosovo is that this conflict is officially not resolved yet and both sides in conflict, Serbian and Kosovo Albanian, show a lack of willingness at the top leadership level to make a negotiated settlement. Both sides adhere to their demands, show no willingness to compromise, claim their rights to live in Kosovo and to own the territory, and thus they do not take into account the possibility of designing a strategic plan to establish long-term positive peace and coexistence. Statements by officials very often show reluctance to transform the conflict. For Kosovo Albanians, independence is the only just solution to this conflict. For Serbia, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia is the condition that is not negotiable. The dialogue in Brussels between Belgrade and Pristina is still in progress, with numerous suspensions and resuming. Serbia doesn't recognize Kosovo as an independent state, but as its province, and yet at the same time does not have any authority over it. On the contrary, Serbia de facto lost this territory. In Serbian public discourse, the fact that Kosovo is lost forever will hardly be recognized any time soon, as for Serbs, Kosovo is the heart of the nation and crucial element of the

Serbian national identity, thus the Serbs have emotional bond with Kosovo¹¹⁰. This shows that Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo have opposite perceptions of reality, and even though they live in the same space, these two peoples look at life from diametrically opposed viewpoints, they live in parallel worlds, with opposing and conflicting national narratives. In such atmosphere it is hard for the process of reconciliation to make significant progress. If, as Hayner states, “reconciliation implies building or rebuilding relationships today that are not haunted by the conflicts and hatreds of yesterday”¹¹¹, then what can we say about the reconciliation in Kosovo from all the above? We can conclude that the relationship between the Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo is still burdened by past conflicts and hatreds. Bitterness over the past is still present in the public and political discourse. That bitterness comes from the fact that Serbian and Kosovo societies have not dealt with the past in an adequate way. The leading political figures who decide on the future of two ethnic communities in Kosovo and their coexistence are precisely those who dragged these communities into the conflict. In Kosovo the highest political functions in the country (such as the President, Prime Minister, Ministers) were held by the KLA fighters who committed serious war crimes. Neither Kosovo nor Serbia confronted political elites from the past with the consequences of human rights violations that they committed. Now more than ever, lustration is needed in Serbia because individuals from the former regime are still present in government and social institutions. The catastrophic failure of the Serbian society to come to terms with the past is best

¹¹⁰ Words of a renowned Serbian poet and academic Matija Beckovic demonstrate well the attitude towards the case of Kosovo in the Serbian public discourse: “If Kosovo is not ours, why are they asking us to give it to them? If it’s theirs, why are they stealing it from us? And if they can easily steal it, I don’t know why they are hesitating so much?” Sputnik News, Zasto nam otimaju Kosovo ako odavno nije nase, Oktobar 2015, <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/autori/201510201100419586-kosovo-komentar-srbija/>

¹¹¹ Hayner Priscilla, *Unspeakable truths: Confronting state terror and atrocity*, New York and London, Routledge, 2001, pg. 161.

reflected in the fact that one of the main warmongers in Milosevic's regime, the one who just few days after the genocide in Srebrenica in July 1995, in a speech to the Serbian Parliament, stated: "Come and bomb us. Kill one Serb and we will kill 100 Muslims. So let's see if the international community or anyone else dares to strike at Serb positions,"¹¹² is the current President of Republic of Serbia. War criminals still treated as heroes, denial and silencing, relations between state, security forces and ultra-nationalist right-wing groups; all those are challenges for the Serbian society. This applies equally to the Kosovo society. The KLA fighters who committed horrific crimes during the war are still glorified as freedom fighters who just fought against Serbian hegemony and colonialist policies and they had not done anything wrong or illegal. Most of the ex-combatants from the KLA are today's political establishment in Kosovo. Organized crime, corruption, political violence, religious and ethnic violence, unemployment, are just some of the challenges for the Kosovo society. In such living conditions, when a citizen feels belittled and marginalized, when political elites use him for their dirty political games in which these citizens are important only as numbers and not their lives, the will to establish a new relationship with former opponents is poor. As we could see from the Chapter 5, most of the Serbs and Albanians who participated in interviews (not counting those who continue to have negative experiences with members of another ethnic community) described their relationship with members from another ethnic community with the phrase "we have no problem with them". This means that the first thought when it comes to "the other" is problem. "The other" is still seen through old glasses, although the diopter has change in the meantime. The issue is that citizens cannot see "the other" clearly because their political leaders often raise tensions between

¹¹² This statement can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGqy9CJbd3U>

communities, not giving them the opportunity to heal the painful wounds of the past and to find a way to establish new relationships. The Serbian and Kosovo political elites make moves that damage the relationship between two ethnic communities, since everything they say or do reflects on the ordinary citizens and their daily life. They should lead the change, but unfortunately in their political activities they recycle old meaningless phrases, use cheap propaganda and encourage the maintenance of stereotypes, thus hampering the development of new interethnic relations. When Serbian and Kosovo leaders go to talks in Brussels they act in such a manner as if they were going to competition. For them the dispute is not resolved yet, mistrust between them is still high because of the past wrongdoings, thus instead of negotiating with each other they compete against each other who will get the bigger piece of the pie. They show obvious lack of culture of dialogue. They act as if their priority is territory and not the people who live on it and whose lives are at stake. It is crucially important that these political leaders during the negotiations think about how the proposed solutions affect the life of ordinary people, and not about how many political points they will get.

In public discourse in Serbia and Kosovo, emphasis is on the divides between two ethnic communities, such as religion, language, cultural norms, ethnic myths, historical narratives. Politicians and nationalists, especially in the Serbian society, constantly insist that it is a matter of centuries-old hatred between the Serbs and Albanians. Negative rhetoric that the Serbian politicians use toward the Kosovo Albanian officials only encourages superior attitudes toward Albanians. When this is combined with the dominant understanding of the national identity in the Serbian society, it becomes clear why ethnocentrism and prejudice are the main features of the Serbian politics and society

in general. The victimization of one's own people and the dehumanization of another people is a long-standing disease of the Serbian society. Because of such a one-sided narrative to which Serbian citizens (in both Serbia and Kosovo) are exposed, it is very difficult to see "the other" as a human being and to understand that "the other" is also a victim and that they also suffered. This applies to the Kosovo Albanian society as well, since the Serbs are still seen as an enemy and as those who have always inflicted injustice and pain on the Albanian people. Changing the basis on which the relationship between Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo rests and the reconciliation process between them will not show any progress as long as the people dehumanize each other. And this will happen as long as there are multiple versions of the past and competing memories of the events from the past. Serbian and Kosovo societies deal with contradictory facts, different data, and unverified information and proclaim them the only truth. Twenty two years after the war the truth has not yet been established, there are still many events that have no epilogue and there are still many questions to which there are no answers. Serbia and Kosovo have not yet defined historical, collective truth.

10. A look into the future. What can be done to achieve reconciliation?

Based on the current situation on the ground, and on the basis of all the foregoing in this research, one gets the impression that reconciliation between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo is unattainable. The obstacles to the normalization of relations between the two communities listed in this study are only part of many. When analyzing the speeches

of the Serbian and Kosovo Albanian politicians, one can get the impression that the hatred and antagonism between these communities has been there since time immemorial and that there is absolutely no possibility of finding a compromise solution. But the truth is that historical sources clearly indicate that this antagonism has only been happening since the second half of the 19th century, with the rise of the Albanian national consciousness. Before that, mutual respect and cooperation between Serbs and Albanians is described in the works of some Serbian authors, such as Marko Miljanov, Dositej Obradovic and Dimitrije Tucovic¹¹³. This supports the fact that hatred and enmity are not the only relations that these two communities have always had. Prejudice and stereotypes distort reality and truth, because they do not allow us to see beyond what we subjectively think is true. Thus, myths must be deconstructed and new generations of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo must be offered a new perception of their own people and the other. Instead of a constant reminder of a differences and divides, search for a common ground must become imperative for the Serbian and Kosovo Albanian politicians. Instead of constant tensions they should promote constructive cooperation on all levels between the Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo. Because these people need to see the points of connection, not of divide. They need real political visionaries who will promote dialogue and tolerance, and who will be able to do that by first confronting their own societies with the past. War crimes against civilians in the Kosovo war need to be recognized, addressed, the perpetrators must be brought to justice and individual responsibility for the atrocities must be taken. Those who committed crimes are individuals, people with names and addresses, not whole nations. Along with the process

¹¹³ Pavlović A., *From Heroes to Savages: the Albanians in Serbian Heroic and National Discourse from the Mid-Eighteenth to Early Twentieth century* (in Serbian language), in: *Figura neprijatelja: preosmišljavanje srpsko-albanskih odnosa*, KPZ Beton, Beograd 2015, pg. 15-33.

of dealing with the past, the Serbian and Kosovo Albanian societies need to reinterpret pernicious one-sided narratives and to accept other victim's story. Those victims need to be heard and they need to be involved in establishment of new relationships between the communities. If an apology cannot be offered to them, then acknowledgment of their suffering and symbolic acts can be done. They are very powerful and can contribute to the rapprochement among the people and to the process of reconciliation. Those symbolic acts can be more genuine and more effective than words, thus the Serbian and Kosovo Albanian politicians, but individuals as well, should make every effort and make symbolic acts. The change of the narratives is directly connected to the change in history teaching in the Serbian and Kosovo schools, so new generations will learn that there is no one truth, but different and compatible perspectives on the same events. In these schools multicultural education should be promoted, so the Serbian and Albanian students in Kosovo (as well as in Serbia) can learn about the history, culture and values of the other community and that the equality, justice and equity applies not only to their own people, but to the other people as well. Within that, schools in Kosovo should enable students to learn the language of the other community, so that they could not only meet peers from the other ethnic community, but also that in the future they could make political and social changes in their own society without translators, as is the case with current politicians.

There is no doubt that the state authorities and political elites from Serbia and Kosovo should lead the reconciliation process in Kosovo, but ordinary people also have power to make a change in interethnic relationships. With joint forces and endeavor, through bottom-up initiatives, people from both ethnic communities could initiate and

manage authentic dialogue and reconciliation process, with significant involvement of civil society and women's participation. There are already such initiatives in Serbia and Kosovo, but they must be promoted more among ordinary people.

From all of the foregoing it can be concluded that bringing together former adversaries and establishing a new relationship, that is, achieve reconciliation between the Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo is possible if people embrace an inclusive vision of a society in which there will be room for everyone.

11. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine whether the reconciliation between the Serbian and Albanian communities in Kosovo is possible. My intention was to take a closer look at the process of reconciliation from the bottom-up, people-centered, perspective and to examine the real needs of local communities in order to establish genuine coexistence and to reconcile with one another. Why reconciliation in Kosovo failed so far, what are the obstacles that this process is facing and what can be done to bring about sustainable coexistence in Kosovo were the questions I wanted to answer in this research. In order to do that, I analyzed several theories of reconciliation and concluded that most authors agree that the reconciliation represents a long-term process which refers to the human relationship between divided peoples. According to Hayner, "reconciliation implies building or rebuilding relationships today that are not haunted by

the conflicts and hatreds of yesterday”¹¹⁴. In order to assess the level of reconciliation in a post-conflict society, she proposes three questions regarding the past and today’s relationship between former opponents. Basing this research on Hayner’s theory and using her questions for the assessment of the level of reconciliation, I gave answers to my main research questions. The reconciliation in Kosovo failed so far because the Serbian and Kosovo Albanian societies did not genuinely decide to move forward. They still have not chosen to work with the other side for the joint future. Serbian and Kosovo Albanian political elites are either not ready or not entirely interested to work towards rapprochement and the establishment of cooperation. There are neither initiatives from the politicians nor support from citizens to reach a permanent solution to resolve the situation in Kosovo. Authorities on both sides take a maximalist stance without the possibility of concessions and compromises. The issue of Kosovo is a matter of the spiritual, cultural and historic identity of the Serbian people. Kosovo Albanians use their majority status in Kosovo as an argument for the justification of independence, and Serbs on the other hand claim to have the right to Kosovo as their historical, cultural and religious heritage. Serbian politicians are aware they lost Kosovo militarily and politically, but that defeat will not be publicly recognized in the Serbian society for a long time. Serbian and Kosovo societies are burdened with victimization and nationalism which have a negative effect on the lives of ordinary people from both communities in Kosovo. These people are the ones most affected by the conflict and therefore they must find ways to make coexistence possible and sustainable. That is why the Serbian and Kosovo Albanian leaders must have a common interest and a genuine willingness to

¹¹⁴ Hayner Priscilla, *Unspeakable Truths: Confronting State Terror and Atrocity*, New York and London, Routledge, 2001, pg. 161.

work on the reconciliation process. They have to sacrifice, to make concessions for the benefit of all, for better coexistence and successful cooperation of the two ethnic communities in Kosovo. For that to happen, both sides need to deconstruct the common belief about the centuries-old hatred and antagonism between the Serbs and Albanians and to transform current relationship by reintegrating the memories of positive experiences. Reconciliation is a psychological process, because during this process we are working on changing our attitudes, beliefs, emotions, perspectives. Thus, perception and beliefs about “the other” in the Serbian and Kosovo societies must change. More needs to be done on what connects these two communities, that represents mutual similarity and respect. Thus, the discourse will be shifted from animosity toward cooperation and friendship, something that both people deserve to happen.

Serbia and Kosovo haul heavy luggage from the past: human rights abuse, war atrocities, social amnesia, denial, legacy of silencing of war crimes committed in the name of the nation, memory of victimization. Not only individuals, but both societies as a whole need to go through a process of catharsis. They need to deal with the past and genuinely embrace transitional justice, so they can face the future. This is certainly not an easily feasible task, but for the societies that carry such burden it is the only one so they can transform into democratic societies, in which human rights of all its citizens are recognized and reconciliation between divided communities is possible.

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ملخص الدراسة:

لطالما عُرفت البلقان باسم "برميل البارود" في أوروبا ومنطقة يوغوسلافيا السابقة باعتبارها منطقة مضطربة بشكل خاص. كوسوفو باعتبارها أحدث منطقة حمراء على أراضي يوغوسلافيا السابقة هي النقطة الرئيسية للصراع بين المجتمعات العرقية الصربية والألبانية. انتهت الحرب في عام 1999، لكن واقع ما بعد الصراع الذي تشترك فيه هذه المجتمعات العرقية في نفس المساحة ما زالت تعيش في عالم متوازي ومستمر بعد 22 عام من الصراع. إذن، أين تقف عملية تقارب المصالحة بين هاتين المجموعتين العرقيتين في هذا النوع من الواقع؟

الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو التحقيق في إمكانية وجود عملية مصالحة حقيقية برعاية الدولة بين الطائفتين المنقسمتين عرقياً في كوسوفو. أعتزم إلقاء نظرة فاحصة على عملية المصالحة من منظور ينطلق من القاعدة و متمحور حول الناس، وتحليل العناصر التي تعيق العملية وكذلك الاحتياجات الحقيقية للمجتمعات المحلية من أجل إقامة تعايش حقيقي وتصالح مع بعضها البعض.

لهذا الغرض، استخدمت تحليل البيانات النوعية. تشير النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها في هذا التحليل إلى أن المصالحة ممكنة ولكن ليس قبل أن تتعامل المجتمعات الصربية وكوسوفو مع الماضي، وتفكيك الأساطير والتحيز، وتعريف الحقيقة الجماعية، وإعادة إضفاء الطابع الإنساني "على الآخر". وبعبارة أخرى، فإن المصالحة بين الطائفتين الصربية والألبانية في كوسوفو ممكنة، إذا تبنى الناس رؤية شاملة لمجتمع يوجد فيه متسع للجميع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوسوفو، صرب كوسوفو، ألبان كوسوفو، مصالحة، علاقات عرقية، زعماء سياسيون، التعامل مع الماضي.