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# THREATENING ARCHIPELAGOS. SERBIAN ENCLAVES AND MINORITIES IN KOSOVO

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### Abstract

Enclaves are like islands in the middle of a sea they do not belong to. Seeing that the enclaves I wish to examine are several and all close together, the comparison with an archipelago does seem the most befitting. Enclaves represent, in my opinion, the very essence of the Balkan Peninsula, which, until as recently as twenty years ago, was almost entirely composed of groups of enclaves. The Nineties wars contributed to partially eliminate these Balkan peculiarities.

Most of these groups are now utterly harmless; nevertheless, some of them were, admittedly, the trigger for the last conflict. Others still pose a threat to peace; among those, I believe the Serbian enclaves in Kosovo are the best example.

My project will focus mainly on inhabitants of Serbian villages in Kosovo, which are the first victims of a process of integration the country they live in failed to enable. For this reason, I will not pay close attention to villages of Northern Kosovo, namely those which are north of the river Ibar, since they have a Serbian majority. My field of research will rather thoroughly analyse Southern enclaves in particular, where, through interviews, I will try to find out what it means to be part of a country without ethnically identifying with it. Among the interviewees there will be politicians, orthodox monks, and especially ordinary people.

In conclusion, my article will focus on Velika Hoča's village, in Orahovac municipality, where I lived for nine months two years ago.

### Key words

enclaves, Kosovo Serbs, Velika Hoca, Srpstvo, Artemije's schism.

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## 1. Introduction

At the end of the war, when the principle of authority and obedience collapsed, Yugoslavia entered that grey area in which economic progress was a chimera and the EU was the only possible lifesaver, and in which the common good wavered between the allure of capitalism and the constraint of nationalism.

Slovenia, Croatia, and possibly Montenegro succeeded in jumping on the yellow-starred blue boat, but the same cannot be said about Serbia. The Serbian society was only able to produce few outstanding politicians<sup>1</sup>, and, along with other Balkan countries,

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<sup>1</sup> Among Serbia's most prominent politicians of the late twenty years, the two most distinguished ones are certainly

it is now indulging in corruption, black market and “*je-m’en-fichisme*”, an attitude first pinpointed by the English explorer Archibald Lyall at the beginning of the XX century. A hundred years later, the expression is still befitting.

Yet, it should also be recalled that „the conditions which triggered the tragic combination of factors [...] of the Yugoslavian case cannot be considered outside of a broader horizon, which concerns the awakening of local identities in a globalised world“ (Sekulić, 2002, p. 21).

Among other things, my article will try to outline the features of Serbia’s national identity in Kosovo, which will be considered equal to any other European identity rather than a Balkan or eastern peculiarity. As indicated by Rogers Brubaker, identity is often regarded as something malleable and fluid which “people have, forge, and construct” (Brubaker, Cooper, 2000, p. 28), since “the habit of speaking without qualifications of ‘Albanians’ and ‘Serbs’, as they were sharply bounded, internally homogeneous groups, not only weakens social analysis but constricts political possibilities in the region” (Brubaker, Cooper, 2000, p. 28).

What do modern Kosovo Serbs villages look like? Are they ready to revive and reflourish, or are they doomed to remain in the background as a neglected beacon?

Do they nurse a Serbian national sentiment, a shared sense of belonging regardless of the country in which one may live?

If so, what is it? How is it built up, how does it interact with and how it is re-created in everyday life? What are its features, what its priorities and weaknesses? First and foremost, how is it articulated at geographical, urban, religious and environmental level?

My article intends to delve into *Srpstvo*, or *Serbdom*, and into the Serbian *Inat*, terms utilised by Serbs to describe themselves, which can be loosely translated as a mix of “stubbornness” and national pride, in order to obtain a better understanding of one of the most debated yet least well-known population of the Twentieth century Europe.

My project will pivot around the analysis of the sense of identity and feeling of belonging to the Serbian nation. Its peculiarity will be due to the fact that the project will be carried out through interviews to prominent figures of each minority or ethnic community. These interviews will include questions

about personal identity feelings and viewpoints concerning alterity, as well as an account about the village and municipality history, one about the interviewee’s family history during Tito era and the Nineties’ war, a description of the political associationism in the area in question, a personal opinion about the European Union, which religion they profess and to which extent, what do they think about other religions, an opinion on education, schooling, language spoken in everyday life and language of study, daily relationships with different ethnic communities, whether there are mixed marriages in the area, urban and architectonic symbols of their identity, and activities dedicated to its preservation. Besides, questions about controversial topics such as Serbian nationalism and the legacy of the War will not be left out.

Furthermore, the choice of specific urban and nonurban contexts, meticulously selected according to their relevance to the questions at issue, should be considered an additional innovative aspect.

I will observe how different ethnic groups interact in order to describe their mutual integration and how identity and relationships are constantly negotiated – or rather *re-negotiated* and *re-asserted* – in everyday life.

I believe that enclaves epitomise the very essence of the Balkan Peninsula, which, until as recently as twenty years ago, was almost entirely composed of groups of enclaves. The Nineties wars contributed to partially eliminate these Balkan peculiarities.

My article will mainly focus on inhabitants of Serbian villages in Kosovo, which are the first victims of a process of integration the country they live in failed to enable. For this reason, I will not pay close attention to municipalities and villages of Northern Kosovo, namely those which are North of the river Ibar, since they have a Serbian majority. They are the following three: Leposavić, Zvečan and Zubin Potok.

My field of research will try to thoroughly analyse Southern enclaves in particular, where, through interviews, I tried to explore what it means to be part of a country without ethnically identifying with it. As the map shows (fig. 1), there are six Serbian municipalities in the Southern part of Kosovo: Klokot, Ranilug, Novo Brdo, Parteš, Gračanica and Štrpce.

Among the interviewees there were teachers, Serbian Orthodox priests and monks, Draganac’s Monastery Abbot, Dečani’s Monastery Abbot, schismatics monks and believers (Artemije’s followers), municipal employees, school employees, nationalistic associations’ presidents and members, local institutions’ presidents and representatives, journalists, ordinary people, the technical director of ‘Gračanica’s

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Zoran Đinđić and Boris Tadić. The former was first mayor of Belgrade, then Serbian prime minister. It was murdered in circumstances still unclear on March 12, 2003. The latter was Serbian president for eight years, from 2004 to 2012.

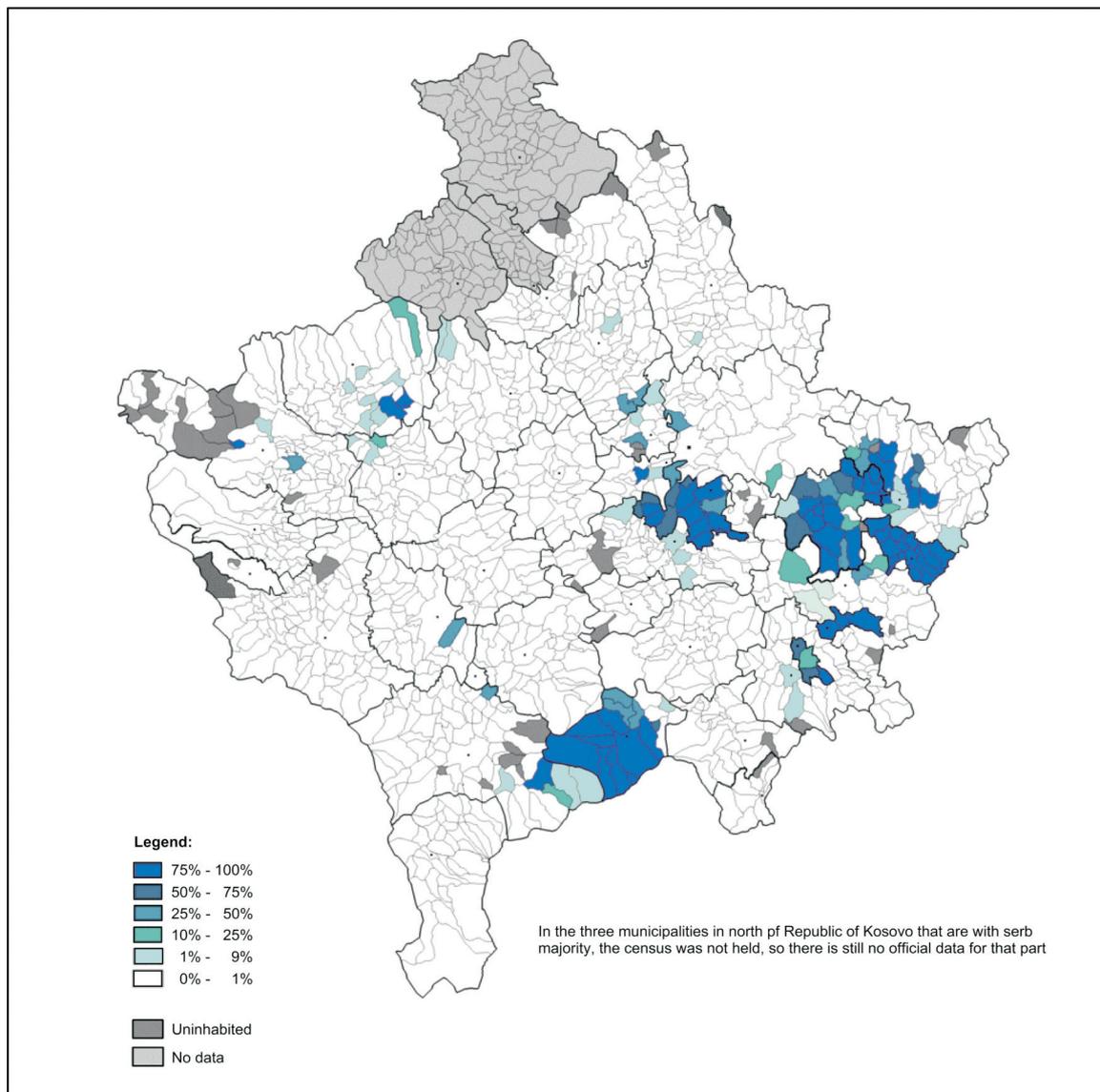


Fig. 1. Percent of Serbs in Kosovo in 2011

Source: Zeqiri, 2013.

House of Culture', a touristic organization's director, a librarian, a photographer.

Finally, my article will focus on Velika Hoča's village, in Orahovac municipality, where I spent ten months over two years ago.

## 2. A bit of history

When I asked about Kosovo's symbols, some people I interviewed answered by mentioning Prizren, Patriarchate of Peć and Gračanica. Others named Gazimestan, where the battle of Kosovo Polje took place in 1389. However, most of them had no doubt, agreeing on the fact that "every Orthodox church or monastery, every Serbian village or town is our symbol. We cannot overlook even the least significant place, because Albanian are trying to manipulate

our history", "we cannot choose a single place. Serbian identity is not a symbol, it is the spirit inside this land", "every town inhabited by Serbs and every town who hosts a Serbian grave is Serbia, from Croatia to Greece, from Bosnia to Macedonia, and obviously here as well". In order to understand this kind of feeling, it is necessary to travel through the centuries and focus our attention on a few decisive moments.

In the past, Serbs were probably the largest ethnic group in Kosovo and in Metochia. Geographically, Kosovo is currently divided into two areas: Metohija (or Rrafshi I Dukagjinit in Albanian) in the North-West and Kosovo (Kosova), properly named, in the Southeast.

In Metohija, the main cities are Prizren (Prizren), Đakovica (Gjakovë) and Peć (Peja). It is surrounded by Montenegro, Serbia and Albania. The name Metohija derives from 'metoh', which refers to agricultural

land belonging to the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Middle Ages. The Albanian name, Rrafshi i Dukagjinit, has also a medieval origin.

Kosovo's main cities are Priština (Prishtina), Gnjilane (Gjilan), Uroševac (Ferizaj) and Kosovska Mitrovica (Mitrovicë). Kosovo borders Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia. The name Kosovo derives from 'kos', blackbird, while the suffix 'ovo' means belonging to. The whole area used to be called Kosovo Polje, which translates to 'plain belonging to blackbirds'. Finally, only the word Kosovo remained in the name.

Conflicts between Albanians and Serbs broke out in 1687 during the war between the Habsburg Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Serbian soldiers fought for Wien and Albanians for Istanbul. However, there were many Serbs on the other side as well, chosen because of their military skill; it usually happened that Ottomans selected young Serbians, trained them until they became soldiers and, eventually, these youngsters ended up fighting against their brothers on the other side of the array.

After the war, Serbs began to migrate towards the Northern Balkan area<sup>2</sup> and the Adriatic Sea, in Krajina. Statistics shows that around forty thousand families left Kosovo. These migration flows did not stop until very recently. Kosovo remained uninhabited and Albanian families migrated slowly, but steadily, in the centuries that followed the war. Furthermore, they obtained privileges from the Ottoman Empire.

Another aspect that brought a reduction of the Serbian presence concerns conversions. From the end of the Eighteenth to the beginning of the Twentieth century, just a few years before the end of Ottoman Empire, some Serbian families decided to convert to Islam. It is quite uncommon for a Serb who becomes Muslim to remain within the Serbian community. Since a few decades ago, these families used to be called Bosniaks or Arnauts. Nowadays, Arnauts can be considered completely Albanian<sup>3</sup>.

There were two major turning points during Tito's era. The first one took place in 1966, when Yugoslavia's vice president, a Serbian politician named Aleksandar Ranković, was discharged by Tito. From

this moment on, policy towards ethnical groups in Kosovo started to change. Moreover, the increasing Albanian population outnumbered the Serbian one precisely in those decades (Fifties and Sixties)<sup>4</sup>. As a consequence, in 1968 the Albanian community established the first instance of mono-ethnic classes in Kosovo's history. In many villages, children of different communities attended school in the same building, but at different times, "Albanians went to school in the morning, we went in the afternoon. I remember when we once entered and we found an eagle drawn on the blackboard, symbol of their flag" (a teacher from Velika Hoča, December 2017).

The second turning point was in 1974, with the ratification of the Constitution. Tito decided to divide Yugoslavia into six countries and two regions (Kosovo and Vojvodina) and granted to the latter a distinctive autonomy. As a result, whereas modifications to their regional Constitution were made relatively simple, any change to the Serbian, Croatian or Slovenian Constitutions required previous endorsement by each Yugoslav country.

Among the interviewees, many have different opinions about the socialist period. Someone believes Tito was the real problem: "Yugoslavia was a graveyard for us", "Tito gave Albanian a piece of Serbia", "Tito encouraged the Albanian birth rate, becoming Godfather of every ninth child of an Albanian couple. In wider terms, the more children you had, the more government incentives you got. Having sons and daughters was a business!" Someone else thinks that the Socialist power has been misunderstood: "Yugoslavia was a sort of a European Union before the actual birth of the European Union. However, Serbs relied too much on it and on *Bratstvo Jedinstvo* (Socialist Brotherhood) among Yugoslavia's countries and we were completely destroyed by it", "it was not Tito's fault. Kosovo Serbs governed this region according to Socialist thoughts and rules, and not following nationalistic goals. Nowadays, we found ourselves in this situation because Albanians were smarter than us: they were more nationalistic and patriotic than we were".

Despite that division, they are in agreement on the attack towards religion: the Serbian Orthodox Church was deprived of their territories, lands and holy buildings. Every religion and every Church suffered from the same repression, but since the Serbian one was the wealthiest, it ended up being the most affected by these laws.

After the death of Tito, Milosevic was able to take advantage of some Albanian violations against Serbs

<sup>2</sup> Serbian families moved towards the South of Hungary, where Arsenije III Crnojević moved in the June of 1690, with seventy or eighty thousand people. There, the Serbian community was assigned a territory by Leopold I. This region has never been independent in history, but its name is Vojvodina, which approximately translates to *duchy* or *voivodeship*.

<sup>3</sup> According to Serbs, Arnauts families were extremely violent and held strong nationalist feelings during the Nineties war. Clearly, the Serbs considered Arnauts as Old Serbs and they could not accept that Arnauts fought instead for the Albanian Army against Serbia.

<sup>4</sup> From the end of Sixties, the number of Serbian families that decided to run away towards Serbia started to increase.

that took place in the Eighties. Albanians staged many demonstrations and demanded a stronger autonomy in several occasions throughout the second part of the last century; the most notable of which occurred under the fascist occupation during the Second World War, in 1968 and in 1981, shortly after Tito's death.

Milosević purposely fuelled a chauvinistic feeling among Kosovo Serbs, thus boosting the birth of patriotism, a social phenomenon which was partially absent over the past decades. The Albanians faced an extremely harsh period during Milosević time. Violent repressions against them took place all over the Nineties, when they finally reached their independence in 1999.

Repressions quickly became conflict and later civil war, when Albanians set up a military organization which they called UÇK (Ushtria Çlirimtare Kosovës, meaning Liberation Army of Kosovo), and began to plan attacks and kidnapping Serbs. Milosević then ordered his Serbian-Montenegrin Army to intervene in Kosovo.

The feeling towards Milosević that emerged from the interviewees is often remarkably different from his common depiction made by Western media: "European countries did not understand him. They said war broke out because of him, but it would break out no matter what. There was no alternative. Europe and United States wanted Yugoslavia to fall apart into small pieces" (a man from Štrpce, December 2016). The reason why many believe so is quite simple, as it is clear stated in this sentence: "throughout this period, we had many advantages. We felt freer, safer, and, eventually, part of our own country. I have to say that there was something like a repression against Albanians, but all Milosević did was to protect our Serbian land. The point is that, nowadays, we are suffering from the same repression" (a man from Štrpce, December 2016).

Kosovo has been under the occupation of international peacekeeping forces since 1999. The common feeling of Kosovo Serbs towards this occupation can be summarised by this motto, "someone is beating us so violently we cannot even cry". An interesting detail emerged during my interviews, which could help explaining why some Serbian families continued to live in certain areas and why some others moved to Central Serbia or somewhere else: as I was told, "during the war it occurred something that cannot be a simple coincidence. Our families were treated differently according to the nationality of NATO's soldiers operating in the different areas. Where Italian or Greek soldiers were in charge (Gračanica's area), we were supported; where British ones were in charge (for instance, around Kosovo

Polje), we were forced to run away; where there were Russians (especially in Ranilug's area), nothing happened, not even a petty conflict" (a monk from Ranilug, January 2017).

### 3. Nowadays Kosovo

According to the last census of 2011 (Statistical..., 2017), there are almost 1.8 million of inhabitants in Kosovo. 130 thousand are Serbs and, among them, 70–80 thousand live in the Northern part, next to Serbia. The rest live in several Serbian enclaves scattered everywhere within Kosovo's territory.

Most of Kosovo Serbs lives outside the larger cities; indeed, the most populated cities in Kosovo are almost completely Albanian, with the exception of Prizren<sup>5</sup> and Mitrovica<sup>6</sup>. For instance, there are only between ten or fifteen Serbian families in Priština, Lipjani or in Prizren, and in Uroševac there should only be the Orthodox priest's family.

There are only six municipalities in Kosovo which have a relevant percentage of Serbs (tab. 1); all of which I visited.

Tab. 1. Kosovo villages with a relevant Serb presence

Villages with Serb majority (above 60%)	Villages with relevant Serb presence (between 35% and 60%)
Gračanica	Novo Brdo
Parteš	Štrpce
Ranilug	Klokot

Source: Own studies.

Nationalism in Kosovo is currently on the rise and can be observed in every aspect of social life. Its effects are reshaping and embittering relationships, with people beginning to be more disrespectful to each other than they were before. Each nationality now regards the other as a foreign and usurping force. Any form of integration is increasingly more difficult. For instance, it is surprisingly that some Albanian children do not know that Serbian children live in the same country as well. Others do not want to have any kind of contact with them because of their parents' rules. The same is also true for the counterpart.

Nowadays, for the first time in the recorded history of Kosovo, children of different nationalities cannot play together because they do not share the

<sup>5</sup> In Prizren, approximately ten per cent of its inhabitants are Bosniaks and about five per cent are Turks.

<sup>6</sup> Mitrovica is a town that is completely split in half between an Albanian South and a Serbian North.

same language. This trend is likely to be even more emphasised in the future.

Everything in Kosovo seems to be ambiguous, unclear or contradictory. Indeed, some Albanian families were considered Serbs by interviewees. This is due to several reasons: first of all, many Albanian surnames have a Serbian origin; secondly, in some cities, such as Orahovac, Albanians speak among themselves a dialect which is linguistically closer to Serbian than it is to Albanian; finally, many Albanian families have their own *slava*, a personal saint who is entitled to the protection of the family, in accordance to an old Christian Orthodox tradition. Nevertheless, these families consider themselves as Albanian today, and they consider Kosovo as their own country.

Everything is also double. Kosovan passports are not as powerful as the Serbian ones. Therefore, any Serb who is eligible for double citizenship tend to apply for it as soon as possible. This situation leads to ludicrous consequences such as people having double passport, double identity card, double residence and double driving licence. Schools and universities are separated; health is normally separated as well, with some exceptions regarding serious issues. There are, next to the formal Kosovo Serbs administrative institutions, some local ones which refer directly to Belgrade and are formally illegal, since Kosovo regards them as paramilitary. Therefore, their scope is limited and his actions often hindered by bureaucracy.

### 3.1. Political situation

Few years after the end of the war, Kosovo Serbs decided to establish their own political parties. The main reason behind it was that, according to them, Serbia did not care enough about their interests. The government of Kosovo promptly took advantage of the situation and implemented a law that forbids Kosovo Serbs parties to bear the same name of the corresponding Serbian parties.

In the following years, the opposite phenomenon took place: Kosovo Serbs realised that they could not organise their own political life without the support of Belgrade parties.

Nowadays, there are few Kosovo Serbs' parties (between five and seven) run by Belgrade's politicians. Albeit having different names, the connection with the corresponding Serbian party is conspicuous.

Kosovo Serbs do not show confidence in these parties. In fact, they seem not to believe in political institutions at all. In fact, they are slowly becoming apolitical. Many interviewees held these parties responsible for the current lack of unity and cohesion of Serbian identities and regard this generation of

politician as the worst in Serbian history. Their opinion seems to be clearly reported in the following sentences: "they do not fight for our interests, but for Bruxelles' and Washington's ones. They do not represent us, they are the garbage of our country"; "Serbian politicians are not able to help us. They are not educated and they are corrupted. I am not talking about Albanian politicians, but our ones: Kosovo Serbs' ones. However, I believe that in a few years Albanian and Serbian politicians will find an agreement and will organise a new war. It is the only way to attract new investors", "nowadays, the number of Kosovo Serbs' is at its historical lowest. We live in the greatest humiliation. All of that is happening because our politicians were absolutely incompetent". The opinion about 'Serbia Serbs' parties is unsurprisingly similar: "Belgrade is betraying us and our patriotic interest. They are selling out our country for trivial economic reasons. What they should understand is that we, Kosovo Serbs, will always defend our house in Belgrade, our family, our Church and our Holy land. We will defend our rights until we die, for our children and especially for our ancestors". Some interviewees showed to have more trust in Putin than in Serbian politicians: "his influence should be bigger in the Balkans and I expect that Trump's victory will change something in the relationships among Balkan countries. If the alliance between Trump and Putin will fail, then it would definitely be the end for Kosovo Serbs' hopes".

The point is that political parties are important for each person who wants to find a job, "because without a recommendation from a political party, it is virtually impossible to get a job in the city hall or in municipal organizations and associations, sometimes even in some shops, because everything is linked and it is in the hands of a few people".

Kosovo Serbs' opinion about Serbian politicians and institution was explicitly summarised by the words of Sava Janjić, Dečani Monastery Abbot, when he said, "we do not believe in Kosovo's institutions. Sometimes our politicians do not show up in Parliament for relatively extended periods of time. We want them to actively participate in our political life, otherwise why should they even be part of it? We do not want them to sit there as they were parliament's useless ornaments. Kosovo Serbs need to participate in Kosovo's political life. However, we do not accept Kosovo as an independent country, and we will never accept it. We have to face the reality, but we cannot be satisfied with it".

Furthermore, national minorities in the Balkans gather themselves in an organization, usually named *Matica*. However, I did not come across it during my research. I then asked interviewees why it

is so and I received these answers, “Matica does not exist here, since this is our country”, “we do not need Matica because our Church already gives power and unity to our population”, “we do not need Matica because we are not victims of a diaspora”, “Matica is an organization that protects minorities. We couldn’t be a minority in Kosovo, as Italians couldn’t be a minority in Italy”.

### 3.2. Social situation

Nowadays, many Serbian families encounter huge economic problems due to job scarcity. In order to tackle this problem, they have lately come up with an unusual solution: they have started to sell their homes and lands to wealthy Albanians<sup>7</sup>. They are then using the money to escape from Kosovo, most likely with the intention of never coming back. One of the consequences is that Albanians are now reaching and settling down in territories which they have never inhabited, such as Kosovska Kamenica’s and Vitina’s area and the Northern part of Macedonia.

Many young Serbs refuse to work in the agricultural sector. The Serbs have survived for centuries by working on agricultural lands; Yet today the situation appear to be fairly different. According to older interviewees, the reason behind it is simple: “our children grew learning that they can survive through social help, so they are not encouraged to look for a new job”. Nevertheless, the gap between young people’s lifestyle and wealth in Europe and in Kosovo remains extremely large. An average monthly paycheck in Kosovo is around one hundred and fifty euro.

Kosovo Serbs’ disappointment and bitterness are unconcealed in their words, „Serbia should start building factories here: we cannot find a job in Albanians’ ones“, „there is no perspective for youngsters. If the current trend will not change, there will be no Serbs in Kosovo in ten-years’ time. Although there are reports of cases of brawls, stabbings and even burnt down houses, our most notable problem is young people’s unemployment“, “in this moment in Kosovo there are no factories. There are only a few companies which repackage goods created somewhere else“, „every Kosovan institution should reserve 10% of its job’s places to national minority<sup>8</sup>, such as Serbs, Turks, Roma, Croats. This percentage is actually reached in a few cases; nevertheless, minorities are usually just assigned to unskilled and manual labour.

There are several national and ethnical minorities in Kosovo, such as Turks, Croats, Roma, Ashkali, but my intention was to focus my attention on Gorans and Bosniaks since their cases are more interesting for my research.

The Gorans are a Muslim minority which got their name from the area they live in, called *Gora*, in the Southern part of Kosovo, between Albania and Macedonia. This land is entirely mountainous, they live in less than thirty villages and in a town, Dragaš (Dragash or Sharri in Albanian), where they live with Albanians. Their language is a mystery, being a mix of Serbian, Bulgarian and Macedonian. They considered themselves Slavic and rejected past Bulgarian and Serbian attempts to incorporate them, as they are now rejecting the same attempt by Albanians. Despite that, during the last conflict, they decided to take the side of the Serbs, and fought against the Albanian Army; for that reason, their relationship is today rather complicated. Yet, the biggest problem they are facing concerns the Islamic radicalization they are undergoing in the last years.

Bosniaks live in a few villages around Prizren. Many interviewees said that they used to consider themselves Serbian Muslims until the Seventies or the Eighties. The Constitution of 1974, with the formation of a new identity among Bosniaks Muslim, especially in Bosnia, arguably permitted a new consciousness also for this small group. In the area, they are named *torbesh*<sup>9</sup>, both from Albanians than from Serbs, but they do not like this denomination, considering it pejorative.

As far as the economic situation is concerned, Serbia tries to help and subsidizes many Kosovo Serbs’ families with an economic monthly subvention. Serbia also provides pensions, health assistance and support in educational fields<sup>10</sup>. Without that economic support, seventy to eighty per cent of Kosovo Serbs would probably be compelled to leave the country. The result is that ‘Serbia Serbs’ feel that their country uses up energies and money helping Kosovo Serbs, without addressing the precarious state of Belgrade’s economic system. As result, a new sentiment towards Kosovo Serbs is rising in Serbia: although theoretically ‘Kosovo is Serbia’, in practice when Kosovo Serbs decide to move towards Central and Northern Serbia, they are often given pejorative names and they sometimes suffer from discriminations, caused by ‘Serbia Serbs’ prejudices.

<sup>7</sup> The market price for a house of one hundred square meters is sixty thousand euro nearby Gračanica, and ninety thousand euro around Kosovo Polje.

<sup>8</sup> Yet one of the conditions to get these jobs is the knowledge of Albanian language.

<sup>9</sup> Literally, torba means bag.

<sup>10</sup> Many interviewees told me they received an economic support for the education of their children. This support covers approximately ten to fifteen per cent of the total outgoings of this sector.

It is also relevant to highlight that Kosovo releases subventions according to the number of inhabitants of each municipality: a lower number of official inhabitants equals a minor subvention for a municipality. In spite of that, many Kosovo Serbs decided not to take part in the last 2011 census.

Interethnic marriage in Southern Serbia and in some Serbian villages in Kosovo is an interesting phenomenon, often caused by socioeconomic reasons: since many young girls opt for moving to large cities, such as Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, to find a job, men are left with little choice in terms of marriage. As a result, some men decide to buy a young girl from an Albanian Christians family. Therefore, Christian girls are brought in from Albania, mainly from the mountainous area around Scutari, in a very precarious economic situation (possibly worse than in some Kosovo Serbs villages). I came across around thirty instances of interethnic marriages in the villages I visited during my research<sup>11</sup>. On the contrary, I neither found nor hear about the existence of any mixed couple formed by a Serb and an Islamic Kosovo Albanian. Moreover, it seems quite unlikely that a Serbian girl would decide to marry an Albanian man; throughout my research I heard many times sentences like the following, “the worst thing that could happen to a Serbian father would be to see his daughter married to an Albanian man”, “an Albanian woman might be integrated in our community, an Albanian man could not. Never”.

Father Srdjan is a priest who works at the Gračanica Monastery, who gave me a very comprehensive opinion about interethnic marriages and the situation as a whole: “in the past, there were many mixed weddings in this area. Therefore, I think it is almost impossible to precisely establish what the nationality of your great grandfather was. However, the question is, does it really matter? The only one who benefit from these divisions are criminal groups, and people should avoid mixing with this kind of people. People should ponder, choose a position, but not be dogmatic about it. Choosing a position, a side is still important because if you remain without identity, criminal groups (either nationalists or fundamentalists) will choose for you. We must choose, without regret. By the way, we did not choose our nationality because we did not choose our parents. Therefore, he who offers you something asking you to change your identity, he is actually exploiting you. It is better to build up your identity on your own. I believe it is possible to create a multi-ethnic and multi-religious

country, where Albanians and Serbs welcome each other to their homes. I believe it is possible because Albanian Islamic girls still follow Christian Easter’s traditions, continuing their egg-painting traditions; since Albanians Islamic families still visit Serbian monasteries; because many Serbs still visit an Albanian *hodža* (Islamic preacher), who predicts them the future. Everybody should carry out these traditions”.

As far as education is concerned, Albanian institutions decided to distance themselves from the former Yugoslav education system during the Eighties, by establishing new schools with Albanian as their official language.

From that moment on, Kosovo Serbs schools ceased to teach Albanian, and Albanian schools did the same with Serbian. Nowadays, there are no longer mixed classes.

As a result, the traditional bilingualism that was a distinctive feature of this area has almost definitely died, since it is no longer a goal to reach. Nowadays, youngsters of different nationalities need to speak English in order to communicate effectively; while middle-aged people have studied both languages. However, whereas middle-aged Albanians are nearly all bilingual, Serbs are not, because they did not study the Albanian language, while Albanians studied Serbian.

Furthermore, some Serbian villages have endless daily issues with Wi-Fi connections and electricity and warm water supplies, due to restrictions of various nature. Serbian villages faced even harder restrictions in the aftermath of the war, due to what seemed to be ethnic and political choices. Nowadays, the situation has not been settled, but it is the same for every village in the area, either Albanian or Serbian. However, these restrictions account for one of the main reasons that pushes Serbs away from Kosovo.

It also appears that the phone network and the electric and water system are simply not able to satisfy the energy demand. Many interviewees do not consider it to be an ethnic issue: “I believe they are not able to solve ordinary problems of both communities”, “sometimes many wells are closed by central government and its water diverted towards Priština or other cities, temporarily leaving both communities without water supply. We live in a nonsensical society”.

Yet, the amount of Kosovo Serbs complaints towards Albanians piles up in a sort of unwritten *Cahiers des doléances* (English: lists of grievances), “they steal our wood during winter, although we need it to warm our houses; they let their cows and sheep pasture in our vineyards, thus ruining them”, “they once destroyed a house to decrease his economic value.

<sup>11</sup> Most of the interethnic marriages I come across with were in Velika Hoča and in the municipality of Novo Brdo. I then discovered a few more in Ranilug as well.

Then, they were able to buy it at a lower price”, “they are used to entering bars in Gračanica and then asking to switch to Albanian music or starting to sing Albanian songs”, “they pass by Serbian villages waving their flag and insulting our girls”, “we do not have appropriate infrastructure, as private sewer and wells and they do not build them for us”, “during quarrels and fights, it is completely useless to call the local Albanian police. *Kadija te tuži, kadija ti sudi*”, meaning “the one who accuses you, is the one who will judge you”.

Serbs are split in two when it comes to the accession to the European Union. There are many different opinions with respect to joining the European Union. The side which advocates the access to the EU, tend to firmly support it: “Serbia must accede to the UE. It is the only solution that could improve our life. Not acceding would bring Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo to further isolation and, possibly, it would bring along conflicts and war”, “we need to join some international organizations, to feel part of something larger than our country”, “it would be important especially for our documents’ value”, “EU is a noble idea. War disappeared and peace is reigning in our continent. Yet, I do not think our national pride should vanish with the entrance in European Union”. The other side is strongly against the accession: “acceding what? We are already Europe! I do not think about it. I have more important problems in my life”, “we cannot enter in the UE because they recognized the independence of Kosovo”, “the EU will disappear in a few years. Their values are extremely noxious. While our founding values are family, church and the army, European Union’s ones are drug legalization, gay marriages and prostitution. We cannot stand to live in that kind of society”.

### 3.3. Religion

In order to better understand the role of Kosovo, and particularly Peć’s Patriarchate (fig. 2), it is essential to point out that it represents the heart and the



Fig. 2. Peć’s Patriarchate

Source: <http://srbijatop10.com/pecka-patrijarsija/>

essence of Serbian identity. The Serbian Orthodox Church plays a primary role in the everyday life of the Serbian community, since its importance relies not only on its spiritual guidance, but also and especially on its logistic role: the church provides and arranges daily assistance to the population, by delivering food to the poor and arranging the sale of medicines, wood, clothes, blankets and other commodities

Moreover, it contributes to preserve the social cohesion of Kosovo Serbs and keeps *srpstvo* and *inat* alive, key-terms to the Serbian culture, concepts which encompass nationalism, pride and stubbornness.

Yet, despite its ostensible unity, the Serbian Orthodox Church has recently undergone a schism which separated Otac Artemije’s followers from traditional believers. I managed to interview some members of the former group and their criticism towards the leaders of Serbian Orthodox Church and its role emerged noticeably, «it can no longer lead our community because it demands us to recognise Kosovo’s independence. We will never accept it, as Otac Artemije made clear when he was bishop of Kosovo», «our religious representatives support the Albanian occupation. They are in agreement with them».

The division seems due to political rather than spirituals reasons, but that comes as no surprise, since religion, politics and nationalities are largely intertwined matters within the Serbian society. I personally believe this strong link between religion and nationality could be the most dangerous threat to peace coming from both sides.

The following account seems appropriate to explain this strong link. In 2016, many Albanians took photos in front of some Orthodox monasteries and Peć’s Patriarchate, in order to reclaim their lands, a behaviour that has been construed as provocative by Serbs. Interviewees’ almost unanimous opinion about these events was rather unexpected, «if your wish is to demonstrate that those monasteries belong to your community, then you are at the same time admitting that in the past you have been Orthodox as well as (and especially) Serb, since our religion and our nationality were born together, from the Holy Nemanjić family».

An educated man from the little village of Velika Hoča expressed me same concept in a few words, “the Serbian identity is linked to the Orthodox one. Technically, non-Orthodox people are not Serbs. The reason behind it is that our culture was founded on Christian Orthodox values. Whoever leaves our religion, no matter under what circumstances, will become someone else in a few generations, thus changing both religion and, consequently,

nationality. The point is that the Serbian community never accepted non-Orthodox Serbs as real Serbs, which then decide to shift towards a different religion, a process made even easier in our area, due to Islamic proselytism. The link between religion and nationality is extremely evident in our community, and in Kosovo in particular”.

Albania is today home to an interesting phenomenon. The Greek Orthodox Church has been improving his number of Albanian believers over the last few decades, and otac Srdjan, a priest from the Gračanica Monastery, is sure that “our church got it wrong about Albanian people. It should have attracted them to our Church via proselytism, as did the Greek Orthodox by building many churches in Albania in the last few decades. This could also constitute a potential issue in the future, if the Greek Orthodox Church will manage to spread among Kosovo Albanians. Nobody knows how the two Orthodox churches would interact if put side by side within Kosovo”.

These issues regarding the Orthodox Church fit inside a greater phenomenon that is affecting Kosovo’s area. There were seventy active mosques until 1999, one hundred twenty Islamic religious sites and only one hundred people were employed in these sites. Nowadays, the situation has radically changed; the number of mosques has increased tenfold to a total of seven hundred mosques, Islamic religious sites have almost doubled and over 2500 people are employed in these sites. Many mosques in Kosovo have been directly founded by several Arabic countries. Furthermore, as already mentioned, it seems that Wahhabists and Islamic fundamentalists are taking advantage of widespread unemployment and general lack of values by paying some female believers to wear burqas or niqabs and some male believers to grow their beards, in order that the Islamist ideology can be spread. Unfortunately, it is complicated to find accurate information about this radicalisation. Nobody feels free to speak about it and direct answers are generally avoided. Nevertheless, it seems to be a serious issue to the extent that to some interviewees “Islam is becoming a cancer for Christian Europe”, and “we can accept moderate Islam, but we must reject any radical deviation because the European Union was founded on Christian roots”.

In conclusion, according to many interviewees, “we are witnessing the greatest process of Islamisation in the history of the Balkans”. This sentence might be overstated due to the emphasis Serbs put on religion issues; however, it is undoubtedly true that this radicalisation is almost unprecedented in the recent history of Kosovo, a land where, as already

explained, Serbs were the absolute majority until as recent as fifty years ago.

## 4. Enclaves

### 4.1. Gračanica

This municipality is easily recognizable on the map thanks to its position in the midst of Kosovo, near to the capital Priština (called Prishtina in Albanian).

There are sixteen villages in the municipality of Gračanica, ten of which have a Serbian majority; three have an Albanian majority and the remaining villages are mixed. It is actually rather difficult to determine an accurate ratio between the two ethnic groups, since the Serbs are consistently selling their houses to Albanians, in a process which is bound to reshape the ethnic composition of several villages.

The exact number of inhabitants is actually unknown, due to the fact that many Serbian families chose not to show up for the last census. This choice had its consequences, since the government of Priština decided to subsidise the area according to the number of its inhabitants. However, it is estimated to be around twenty-three thousand. The percentage of Serbs should be close to the eighty-five per cent, with an Albanian minority (seven to nine per cent) and a quite significant Romani presence.

Early Settlements of Albanian families in this area are recorded since the end of the Middle Ages, although at that time, thanks to the historical role played by Gračanica Monastery, they were mostly Christians, with possibly only a few Orthodox families.

The Roma minority is split into three communities, one which completely Orthodox, one completely Muslim, and a mixed third one. The first mosque around Gračanica’s area was built by Muslim Romani, a detail that stands out as a demonstration of their successful integration within the municipality. Gračanica is one of the few municipalities in Europe that recognised Romani among their languages. An interesting phenomenon has recently been taking place in this municipality: some families belonging to the Roma minority are getting closer to the Wahhabism movement, which grants them a salary. Some interviewees advocated that “they are people with no values who consider their faith as a job; they do not actually believe in Wahhabism doctrine, they just convert to it for the economic reward, because they need it”.

A Croat village, Janjevo<sup>12</sup>, can also be found nearby. Despite the fact that it had always been inside

<sup>12</sup> There are even some Catholic Albanian families in Lipljan.

Gračanica's diocese, its inhabitants decided to leave this municipality after the Nineties war and to join Lipljan's municipality.

One of the most recurring issues in Gračanica is the lack of water, despite the reservoir being just a few kilometres far from the town. Unfortunately, it is shared with the nearby capital Priština, which is in constant demand of water supplies owing to its overpopulation problems.

Gračanica is considered by the Serbs to be the true capital of Kosovo, due to its facilities, namely a cinema, a theatre, a cultural Centre, which are hard to find in other Serbian Kosovan cities. Some interviewees told me that its "cultural life is full of events and this is the only place in Kosovo where Serbs can find it".

Inside the *Dom Kulture* (cultural centre), located in the city centre, it is possible to admire an interesting art show by a Serbian artist called Goran Stojčetović which represents a way to remember all the Serbs that were kidnapped and never returned during the last war. Its artwork is a simple word, MISSING, with photos of kidnapped Serbs attached to each letter. This artwork was thought also as an answer to a similar Albanian artwork, located in the city centre of Priština; it a single word, NEWBORN, which stands for the new birth of Kosovo as a country.

#### 4.2. Novo Brdo

This municipality is located East of Gračanica municipality, closer to the Serbian border.

In 2007, the UN implemented the Ahtisaari Plan, changing the composition of Kosovo's municipalities with the intention to better integrate minorities. Novo Brdo is one of the municipality that was most drastically modified; the plan increased the number of villages to thirty-four, thus enlarging its area. Many villages which were previously part of Gnjilane or Kosovska Kamenica's municipality were included in Novo Brdo's. This new partition resulted in the municipalities of Gnjilane and Kosovska Kamenica losing a high percentage of Serbian families, whereas Serbs' percentage in Novo Brdo's grew to the fifty-five-sixty per cent in. However, it is again quite difficult to establish an exact number of inhabitants due to the Serbs' choice not to vote in the last census.

This area was historically inhabited by Albanians, Serbs and Saxons; it was well known in the Middle Ages thanks to its gold, silver, zinc and lead mines. These are all run by Albanians today, meaning that not many Serbs are still employed in the mines.

Due to the lack of work, Kosovo Serbs that lives in this municipality are trying to attract tourists by promoting visits to some monasteries and castles and by improving infrastructures.

#### 4.3. Ranilug

Ranilug municipality borders Novo Brdo's municipality on the Western side, and Serbia on the Eastern side.

It was also established in 2007 by the Ahtisaari Plan. It was previously included within Kosovska Kamenica's municipality, where Kosovo Serbs had always been a minority. On accounts of this plan, they managed to be no longer a minority. In fact, Serbs now account for the ninety-five per cent of the inhabitants of this municipality. A few Albanian Muslim families live in this municipality as well.

However much their situation might have improved, it is still somehow bizarre: Ranilug's municipality borders Serbia, but the correspondent Serbian municipality has an Albanian majority.

#### 4.4. Parteš

This municipality is located South-West of Ranilug. Most of its territory is surrounded by Gnjilane's municipality.

According to the last census, there are less than one thousand and eight hundred<sup>13</sup> inhabitants, yet almost three thousand people voted in the last elections. That anomaly was addressed by Interviewees, many of which believe the actual number of inhabitants to be higher than five thousand, although the last census failed to register many of them.

Every Serbian municipality is provided with elementary schools, although the same is not always true as far as high schools are concerned. Nevertheless, the education imparted is rather good and it is still possible to follow several high school's careers (in Serbian language) in the towns of Ranilug, Parteš and Klokot.

#### 4.5. Klokot

It is an enclave entirely located within the border of Vitina's municipality, which it was part of until Ahtisaari Plan's implementation in 2007.

Klokot is one of the smallest municipality of Kosovo, with less than five thousand inhabitants. Seventy-five to eighty per cent of them are Serbs, while the rest are Muslim Albanians. There were only a few Albanians in this area until 1999, yet their number is now increasing "since Serbs are selling their houses. Half of the Serbs that lived here fled after the war. It was even worse in Vitina: only twenty per cent of us is still living there. Everybody ran away!"

There are three villages inside the municipality, besides Klokot itself: Vrbovac, Mogila (Mogillë in Albanian) and Grnčar (Gërncar). While Vrbovac seems

<sup>13</sup> The exact number of Parteš' inhabitants is 1787.

to be an entirely Serbian village, Albanians make up around half of the population of Mogila. This small village is home to an interesting intercultural peculiarity: the high school building is used by both communities and it has two different names, Serbian and Albanian.

This area was once very important because of a large presence of mineral salts, essential to the local economy. Almost every family had a member who used to work at the factory that bottled mineral water, as it is for the mines in Novo Brdo's area. At the end of the war, the government of Kosovo decided to privatise it. As a result, today "workers and employees are almost entirely Albanians and it is really complicated to get a job in the area for a Serb".

#### 4.6. Štrpce

The last enclave I wish to write about is also the most isolated, nestled among the mountains near Macedonia and Gora. It spreads South-West of Klokot, towards Prizren.

As for the other enclaves, many Štrpce's Serbs did not take part in the last census of 2011. Whereas official statistics says its inhabitants are less than seven thousand, the actual figure is more likely to be above twelve thousand people. Indeed, according to this census, Albanians are more or less three thousand and five hundred, and they should account for thirty per cent of municipality's inhabitants. Albanians live both in ethnically pure Albanian villages and in some mixed ones.

Legend says Štrpce's inhabitants are luckier than other Kosovo Serbs, since "the Ottomans did not feel the need to fight against Serbs in this area because they were not aggressive and they lived in an area too isolated to pose a threat to the Ottoman Empire".

#### 4.7. Velika Hoča

Before the Nineties war, Velika Hoča (fig. 3) was a Serbian village of seven or eight hundred inhabitants.



Fig. 3. Velika Hoča, from one of his vineyards

Source: Sanja Jovanović, 2016.

It is an ancient village of archaeological interest: its ruins date as far back as the fourth and sixth century and some churches as far as the twelfth. A legend says that there were forty thousand inhabitants and twenty-four churches during the Middle Ages. This legend also says the area was so densely populated that a cat could have travelled from Velika Hoča to Prizren<sup>14</sup> just by walking on roofs. Nevertheless, at the beginning of this century, its inhabitants amounted to only two thousand.

Velika Hoča is located within the municipality of Orahovac, which has a large Albanian majority, and the small Serbian community, inside Orahovac's town, amounts to just four hundred inhabitants. Before the outbreak of the 1999 conflict, the Serbian population in the area that comprises Velika Hoča, Orahovac, Žočiste<sup>15</sup> and others small villages was five thousand people.

Nowadays, there are less than one thousand Serbs in this area. Many Serbs who were able to rebuild their houses in the following years still decided to sell them in order to move out, since they felt at risk and unwelcomed. Despite that, Velika Hoča inhabitants did not feel compelled to leave as other Serbian groups were, since their village is completely closed and protected by a valley and because the wine produced in their vineyards allows them to make a decent living. Nevertheless, they will probably force to leave this land in a few generations, since every factory nearby the village is own by Albanians and Serbs have serious issues in finding a job. According to them, "Serbia should help us by building factories in Serbian villages. Unemployment is a big issue for Albanians as well, but it affects us even more, and we could not cope with it without Serbia's assistance".

Many families from Orahovac have considered themselves as Albanians for generations, despite speaking a Serbian dialect at home, having some Orthodox icons in their basements and despite they have converted to Islam over the last decades. It is not uncommon to overhear Albanians speaking Serbian among themselves in Orahovac, "but if a Serb were to walk past, they would promptly switch to Albanian". Orahovac's inhabitants were the closest to the Serbian community and identity. Nevertheless, the civil war was particularly violent in this area. Nowadays, there is still evidence of it. For instance,

<sup>14</sup> The distance between Velika Hoča and Prizren is approximately twenty-five to thirty kilometres.

<sup>15</sup> There is an ancient monastery in Žočiste. It was completely destroyed by UÇK attacks twice in the last twenty years. Some Serbian families used to live in the village which bears the same name, but in the aftermath of the war they decided to sell their houses to Albanians and to definitely leave this area.



Fig. 4. Road signs in Kosovo

Source: Jansen, 2015.

municipality's employees are required to speak Serbian as well as Albanian and they should accept Serbian document, but they do not do it and many road signs in this area have been vandalised, as the picture below shows (fig. 4).

Political parties are almost completely absent from village, such as Velika Hoča; therefore, locals are slowly becoming apolitical because they feel that «the situation is such and there is no alternative, besides there has not been any politician that ever helped us. Whoever fled from our village and from Kosovo in general, did not come back: this is all it is needed to show that in our community politics isn't working on our behalf».

One of the questions I asked was about the reasons that persuaded them to stay in these villages. Jovana from Orahovac answered me with the wonderful sentence I quoted at the beginning of this paragraph.

As a man from Velika Hoča reminded me, «today we feel as we are the victims of this situation. But maybe, in the future, our sacrifice will acquire a sense, a meaning for our kids and nephews».

## 5. Conclusions

When defining nationalism, Ernest Renan (1993) and Max Weber (1995) isolated a shared collective memory and a patriotic fervour, meant as a common fate, as its key element. I believe we could easily find it in those villages. Benedict Anderson (1996) said that nations always loom out of an immemorial past and glide into a limitless future. I have already written about this past, but it appears that the future is limited for Serbian youngsters nowadays, as though their future could not take place in the same geographical space as their past.

Gellner believes that some sort of a 'selection of traditions' should lay behind every form of

nationalism. As I showed, the so-called "Serbdom" has its own history of traditions in Kosovo. However, in the last decades a second nationalism, brought forth by the Albanians, has created its own selection of traditions in the same territory. The coexistence of two such opposed form of nationalism is a source of constant clash, for which it would be daring to predict a peaceful resolution

Bearing in mind that any scientific starting point will have to lie on the interaction between theory and fieldwork, I tried to assume a specific outlook and to focus my reasoning on towns and villages, and not necessarily on generic as much as abstract concepts, which usually lack insight the more the situation gets elaborate or shifting. Following Karl Schlögel (2011, p. 57), I find it "more useful to look at a fragmented reality rather than at reality as a whole, which is now only a promise". Karl Schlögel again thinks about inhabited places as *diagnoses of time* and maintains that "nothing is more stimulating than the challenge of deciphering a city's pattern: several layers superimpose within it, and languages and styles interweave; it fosters not one but many interpretation" (Schlögel, 2011, p. 1).

As Karl Schlögel (2011, p. 39) wrote, "at the beginning of this century, we find ourselves in a particular stage of a *clash of civilizations*. Yet, no country is able to withstand the coexistence of such ethnic differences in the long term". Indeed, despite the intentions of European and American policies, a sense of belonging to Kosovo is today quite uncommon among Serbians. They actually consider it an artificial entity, something less of a country.

Coexistence failed in Kosovo, and people spent their life in a place shaped by this failure, without a clear understanding of the process. Kosovo Serbs do not seem to have political parties associations or even ideals that allow them to believe in something. My view on the subject is rather pessimistic; I do not foresee any future for them in this land. I actually believe that in a few years more and more families will move to Serbia, Kosovo Serbs will sell their homes to Albanians, a process that will lead to a slow but definitively disappearance of those enclaves.

## Technical informations

Quotations do not show any name since interviewees asked me to avoid doing so; I respectfully obliged.

I mentioned every city's name in both languages. Serbian names were written before the Albanian ones (even if Serbs are the minority in the most part

of these cities) for the sole reason that my project primarily focused on them and on their point of view.

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