



## Kosovo's Masters and Their Influence on the Local Population throughout History

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**Abstract.** – On 17 February 2008, the Kosovo Assembly declared its independence from Serbia. Nevertheless, Kosovo's political status is highly contested, and Kosovar Albanian as well as Western politicians and academics employ political as well as intellectual sources in an attempt to free the country from its historical chains and to provide it with an authentic historical past. However, their wide sweeping arguments need to be handled with caution. In the following, I will delineate how various external power regimes impacted on local Kosovar culture and how the latter was continuously adapted as well as transformed by the local population throughout history. I will mainly focus on the influence exerted by political and legal institutions prior to the arrival of the Ottomans; during the Ottoman Empire; the conflictual periods during the Balkan Wars as well as First and Second World Wars; the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY); the war in Kosovo in 1998/1999; and UNMIK's governance since the war. [*Kosovo, history, local culture, external power regimes, transformation*]

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### Introduction

On 17 February 2008, the Kosovo Assembly declared its independence from Serbia. Yet, Kosovo's political status is highly contested and its negotiation is affected by "competing historical understandings" as well as "national identifications" (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006: 513). Official talks about the future status of the province began in Vienna on 20 February 2006. Under the direction of Martti Ahtisaari, the former Finish President, Kosovo Albanian and Serbian delegates met regularly in order to draft agreements on issues related to decentralisation, religious heritage, and minority rights (Judah 2006: 214). Although well organised, the procedure was an arduous one as it failed to yield a resolution between Serb's willingness to grant a high degree of autonomy and the Albanian's call for full independence for Kosovo (Brown 2005: 1).

Most Western diplomats seemed to agree that the status of Kosovo as a province of the Republic of Serbia under the jurisdiction of the United Nations could not be maintained, and that partition as well as unification with neighbouring states must be avoided. Instead, they supported a compromise solution of "conditional independence," which would cut the sovereign link between Serbia and Kosovo, without granting Kosovo full state status.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the majority of the Albanians in Kosovo accepted nothing less than self-determination and independence.

1 Brown (2005: 2); Di Lellio (2006: xxii); Judah (2006: 214).

For example, Albin Kurti, leader of the Self Determination Movement claimed that only uncompromised sovereignty could “[disable] Serbia’s intrusion and [allow] freedom for development” that is, “[it] is key to both integration and security for all communities” (2006: 153). These calls for sovereignty and independence are echoed by many Western scholars, especially historians. According to some of them, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo’s (UNMIK) reconstruction strategy has undermined Kosovo’s indigenous capacity for recovering by imposing abstract and universal standards for all Kosovo. It is argued that local institutions such as village councils and informal networks were ignored and, thus, delegitimised.<sup>2</sup> A similar stance is taken by scholars who contributed to the book “The Case for Kosovo. Passage to Independence” (Di Lellio [ed.] 2006). By addressing “representative questions,” debunking historical distortions, and deconstructing essentialist arguments, they make the case that an independent and fully sovereign Kosovo “can be democratic, economically viable, secure, and respectful of the rule of law and minority rights, and that this outcome is not only possible, but legitimate and desirable” (Di Lellio 2006: xxi).

Apparently, politicians and historians employ political as well as intellectual sources in an attempt to free Kosovo from its historical chains, to provide it with an authentic historical past, and to convince the international community to grant the Albanians in Kosovo independence, sovereignty, as well as territorial integrity. However, their wide sweeping arguments need to be handled with caution. It is often not clear what these researchers mean when referring to issues such as delegitimised, suppressed, and ignored “local culture,” “local resources,” and “local ways of organisation.” I, therefore, seek to delineate how political processes influenced Kosovo culture and ways of organisation throughout history. First, I will provide an outline of Kosovo’s postconflict administration and its affects on the local population. Thereupon, I will make the argument that, despite the legitimate critique against UNMIK’s governance and ignorance of local culture, it should not be forgotten that Kosovo’s “local culture,” “local resources,” and “local ways of organisation” were subject to a range of transformations throughout history. By either not defining or reducing local issues to buzzwords such as *kanun* (customary law), blood feud, village councils, and elders, some researchers have the tendency to essentialise and folklorise Balkan culture and ig-

nore cultural change as well as complex (political) events that shaped the cultural life of the region. In relation to this argument, I will show how occupiers throughout history have affected and sometimes violently controlled Kosovo’s cultural reality.

## **Kosovo’s Postconflict Administration and Its Affects on the Lives of Citizens**

### **International Governance in Kosovo**

Political reconstruction in Kosovo has been based upon the extreme solution of imposing an international administration to take full responsibility during the postconflict period. The United Nations is authorized to govern Kosovo through its Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), with a mandate to equip Kosovo with a “transitional administration while establishing and overseeing the development of provisional democratic self-governing institutions to ensure conditions for a peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants in Kosovo” (UNMIK 2006). On 10 June 1999, the UN Security Council had adopted the Resolution 1244 during its 4011th meeting with 14 votes in favour and a Chinese abstention (*United Nations Security Council* 1999). Del Re envisions the structure of UNMIK as a façade of a classical temple. Its architraves represent the headquarters, which is currently headed by the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), Joachim Rucker (United Nations Special and Personal Representative). The headquarters are supported by four organisational pillars, each embracing different responsibilities: civil administration falls under the remit of UNMIK itself; humanitarian assistance and issues concerning refugees is preserve of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR); democratisation, institution building, human rights, and elections are covered by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE); and reconstruction and economic development are ordered by the European Union (EU) (del Re 2003: 88; UNMIK 2001).

After one year of municipal institution building and the establishment of Joint Interim Administrative Departments, a Kosovo Constitutional Framework for Interim Self-Government was drafted and approved by international and local experts in May 2001. The goal was to establish Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) in Kosovo through elections. In 2001 the new Assembly of Kosovo was elected. This was followed by the elected Assembly Members’ selection of a Kosovar

<sup>2</sup> Blumi (2000: 18); Pupavac (2004).

president, Ibrahim Rugova. In early 2002, the president assumed responsibility for the appointment of a prime minister, Bajram Rexhepi. In the PISG, 100 of 120 seats of the Assembly were distributed among all parties, coalitions, citizens' initiatives, and independent candidates in proportion to the number of valid votes received by them in the election to the Assembly. Twenty out of 120 seats were reserved for the additional representation of non-Albanian Kosovo communities including Kosovo Serbs, Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Turkish, and Gorani. Although the PISG had no authority over the resorts of justice, foreign affairs, and defence (Schwarz 2002: 530), the UNDP Human Development Report described these developments as "defining moments in extending representation and participation in Kosovo's formal political processes" (UNDP 2004: 62). However, Caplan points out that bureaucracies in Kosovo remain highly politicised and minority recruitment is difficult to achieve. More specifically, "[b]y October 2002, a fair proportion of minorities had been employed in only eight out of 24 ethnically mixed municipalities, the most serious obstacles being security concerns, inter-ethnic tension in the workplace and a limited number of qualified minorities willing to accept civil service positions" (Caplan 2004: 242).

In addition, the Resolution 1244 authorized a Kosovo Force (KFOR) intervention. On 12 June 1999, KFOR entered Kosovo under the United Nations mandate. Its objectives are "to deter renewed hostility and threats against Kosovo by Yugoslav and Serb forces; to establish a secure environment and ensure public safety and order; to demilitarise the Kosovo Liberation Army; to support the international humanitarian effort; and coordinate with and support the international civil presence" (NATO Topics 2008). To facilitate peacekeeping, KFOR set up five multinational zones led by the UK, US, France, Italy, and Germany respectively. All national contingents are supposed to pursue the same objective that is, to maintain a secure environment in Kosovo. One of the first tasks of KFOR was to demilitarise the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). On 20 June 1999, the KLA stroke a deal with KFOR which envisaged the gradual disarmament and abandonment of their positions as well as checkpoints. In return, members of the KLA were granted the possibility to participate in the administration and the newly established police force (Petrtsch und Pichler 2004: 288 f.).

Since its declaration of independence, Kosovo is charged with putting forward an Ahtisaari (UN Special Envoy) Plan which includes provisions covering constitutional provisions, rights of com-

munities and their members, decentralisation of local government, the justice system, religious and cultural heritage, international dept, property and archives, the Kosovo security sector, an international civilian representative, European Security and Defense Policy Rule of Law Mission, international military presence (continuation of KFOR), and a legislative agenda. Under the Ahtisaari Plan the legal system is foreseen to be based on terms of the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX). This rule of law mission is projected as a continuation of the international civil presence in Kosovo envisaged by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, although Russia and Serbia perceive the mission as illegal. Until now, the mission's program is vague and its website does not provide more information than "Specific projects are being developed in all relevant areas, based on an analysis of the needs as evident during the planning phase. This assessment has been done alongside the relevant Kosovo stakeholders, and is therefore reflecting a shared view of the problems and opportunities in the area of rule of law" (EULEX 2008).

UN and EU planners are not the only ones interfering in postwar Kosovo. According to Pandolfi (2003), the true agents of military-economic-humanitarian action are the various international organizations, agencies, foundations, and NGOs. Due to outside financial support, the number of NGOs increased significantly across Kosovo (UNDP 2004: 53). Underlying this support, is the assumption that a "healthy" civil society sector tends to be equated with a large number of NGOs as it is supposed "to provide the proper 'climate' for the development of democratic culture, for the promotion of human rights, and for an effective, accountable government" (Sampson 2003: 136). Sampson analyses this foreign presence at two levels: institutions which tend to employ both outside supervisors and local staff, and the foreign individuals, the so-called "internationals," who have their own work routines, social life, and daily practice (Sampson 2003: 147). Pandolfi shows that actors in these circuits develop an "internal rhetoric" to which local elites have to adapt in order to "maintain their international position of power" (Pandolfi 2008: 176). A striking example is Bajram Rexhepi's (Kosovo's former prime minister) special contribution to the Human Development Report in 2004:

"A fragile economy, high unemployment, and a wide spectrum of social groups in need of special assistance are just some of the pressing issues grappled with by Kosovo's new and fragile institutions.

Yet, for every institution charged with improving the living conditions of all Kosovans, time and practical experience are needed to transform them into effective, accountable, and more democratic arms of government ... I strongly believe that democracy cannot be a second order priority. No society can afford to disregard fundamental democratic principles and human rights as it paves the long road toward human development. Democracy is the prerequisite for tackling other pressing issues in society ... While it cannot guarantee development, it has the potential to trigger a virtuous circle of freedoms that empower people and communities to shape good policies that expand economic and social opportunities. Indeed, I believe democracy is integral to development itself" (UNDP 2004).

Rexhepi clearly adopted the international community's jargon based on buzzwords such as "transformation," "democracy and democratisation," "human rights," "human development" ... Interestingly, however, his contribution does not mention the violent outbursts in March 2004, which revealed a more sobering reality. On 15 March, an Albanian youth was shot in the village Caglavica near Pristina and, as a consequence, first clashes between Albanian and Serbian citizens were noted. On the following day, the situation escalated when three Albanian children drowned in the Ibar, and surviving children claimed that Serbian children and their dogs chased them into the water. The Albanian community decided that enough was enough and organized themselves in outrage, violently breaking through KFOR control posts into the northern part of Mitrovica (Petritsch und Pichler 2004: 333). The unrests resulted in nineteen deaths, the displacement of about 4,500 Kosovo Serbs, nearly 900 injured, and the destruction of over 700 homes and up to ten public buildings (UNDP 2004: 45). Observers accredited the sudden violent outbursts to the international interim government's failure to acknowledge and effectively react to high unemployment, poverty, uncertainty, extremism, and organized crime.

### Sovereignty versus Imperialism

Both the political measures with regards to the status question and the governance of the international community in Kosovo are criticized scathingly by historians, social scientists, as well as policy makers. In his book "The New Military Humanism. Lessons from Kosovo" (1999), Chomsky challenges what he calls the "new humanism" with which unauthorized military intervention is justi-

fied. According to him, it is questionable whether the NATO intervention in Kosovo was a multinational effort fought exclusively for humanitarian reasons. Instead, he argues that the establishment of a new world order is marketed and headed by "enlightened states" which "happen to be the rich and powerful", and possess enough military might to turn a blind eye on international law and world opinion (Chomsky 1999: 11).

In a similar vein, Ottaway and Lacina compare the external imposition of a new political framework through UNMIK to imperialistic practices. Although international missions of this kind do not exploit resources (in fact, they bring new ones) and do not intend to develop caste systems of racial superiority, they, nevertheless, transform governing systems and restructure existing states (Ottaway and Lacina 2003: 75–77). The former justice expert of the international administration in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, Dr. Schwarz, even speaks of a "return to absolutism" by comparing the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) to a "princeps legibus solutus" (Schwarz 2002: 527).

From an anthropological perspective, Pandolfi states that we are witnessing a massive transformation in the nature of global governance in Kosovo, which claims its legitimacy to interfere in the name of "coping with 'economic' and 'democratic' emergencies" (2008: 159). Intervention, according to Pandolfi, is a mobile phenomenon which may be conceived of as "a network of military forces, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and international institutions ..." (2008: 158). These interfering transnational institutions attempt to link transnational forms of domination to local political practices and, thus, affected almost all forms of local life in Kosovo (Pandolfi 2003: 369). For example, UNMIK permits that were only valid for a short period of time were substituted by Yugoslav passports; the World Health Organisation (WHO) received special power comparable to a ministry of health; and international organisations instituted priorities and divided the territory according to "rationalised criteria of intervention that had been established by donor countries, much of which hailed from the West" (Pandolfi 2008: 171).

Despite the legitimate critique towards the governance of the so-called international community, it should be remembered that the latter is not the first external regime to occupy and restructure the Kosovar region. The following chapter will show that occupiers throughout history have affected and controlled Kosovo's cultural reality that is, its local culture, resources, and ways of organization.

## Kosovo's Masters and Their Influence on Local Culture, Resources, and Ways of Organization

Kosovo has been occupied and annexed successively and each occupation was accompanied by violence and suppression. Throughout the various occupations, the Albanians of Kosovo were purposefully marginalized and remained largely in their traditional structures. These so-called traditional structures are primarily associated with kin groups, clan alliances, village communities, social networks, informal associations, charities, and patron-client relations (Sampson 2003: 145). Some of these concepts still have meaning for Kosovo today whereas others have lost their importance. In the following I will delineate how the various external power regimes impacted on local Kosovar culture, and how the latter was continuously adapted as well as transformed by the local population throughout history. I will mainly focus on the influence exerted by political and legal institutions prior to the arrival of the Ottomans; during the Ottoman Empire; the conflictual periods during the Balkan Wars as well as First and Second World Wars; the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY); and the war in Kosovo in 1998/1999.

### Patterns of Political and Social Organization Prior to the Arrival of the Ottomans

Historians largely agree that the Albanian population in Kosovo descends from the Illyrians who inhabited the territory of former Yugoslavia and Albania until the 5th century B.P.<sup>3</sup> For example, Ducellier explains with full confidence: "In Kosova, it is evidently the Slavs, or the Slavish peoples, Bulgars and Serbs, who occupied, from the seventh century, a region the population of which was solidly Illyro-Albanian since Antiquity" (cited in Norris 1996: 10). According to several scholars, the Illyrians resisted the rule by the Greeks as well as the Romans for centuries, but were eventually occupied by the Roman Empire under Emperor August in 28 B.P. After the division of the Roman Empire, Kosovo has repeatedly changed its national affiliation.

During the reign of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire in the 7th century, Slavic populations (Slovenes, Croats, and Serbians) entered the western Balkans and pushed the "indigenous"

population (Illyrians, Wallachians, Thracians, Dardanians) back to the highland pastures (Vickers 1998: 6). This interpretation is largely contested by Serbian scholars as well as politicians. According to them, Kosovo was virtually empty and inhabited almost exclusively by Serbians until the 17th and 18th centuries (Dannreuther 2001: 13; Guzina 2003: 31). Thus, Kosovo has a crucial significance for the Serbian national consciousness and tends to be referred to as "the cradle of Serbian civilization" (Clark 2000: xix).

A more balanced view is held by Sima Cirkovic, a Serbian historian, who notes: "Careful and unbiased research proves that the thesis previously held among historians that there were no Albanians on the territory of what is presently Kosovo can no longer be upheld. Nor can one accept the assertion made by some Albanian historians and publishers that Kosovo has been inhabited by Albanians without interruption since ancient times. Modern Kosovo was far from regions where Albanians seem to have settled in the early Middle Age" (Cirkovic cited in von Kohl and Libal 1997: 15). Nonetheless, it should not be overlooked that local archaeological findings at Bronze Age sites are mainly Illyrian in character and do not support Serbian assumptions (Vickers 1998: 3).

After many years of severe conflict between the Serbian population and the Bulgarian and Byzantine Empire, the Serbian Nemanja Dynasty gained control over the region in the 13th century. Kosovo, thus, became "the heart of the Serbian Empire" and expanded rapidly under Emperor Stephan Dushan from the Danube to the Aegean and Ionian Seas (von Kohl and Libal 1997: 13). From the early 13th century on, the region became Serbia's economic as well as religious center. It was and still is the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the site of its most sacred places (Malcolm 1998: 12). Despite the strong Serbian influence, Petritsch and Pichler argue that Kosovo was a region where ethnic boundaries played a rather insignificant role. That is, ethnic boundaries were not perceived as barriers but as flexible realms based on interaction (Petritsch und Pichler 2004: 23 f.).

Before the establishment of a stable national government in the Kosovar region, Albanians as well as Slavs were organized according to "various levels of inclusiveness and exclusiveness" based upon local administration, territory, and kinship (Reineck 1991: 41). More specifically, Albanians were and still are divided into two groups based upon language dialects and way of life: the Ghegs, inhabiting the north of the Shkumbin River in Albania and the Tosks inhabiting the south. The specific

3 Reineck (1991: 20); Norris (1996: 10); Vickers (1998: 2); Wilkes (1992: 27).

form of social organization of the Kosovo Albanian Ghegs was the clans (*fis*), which were determined by the principle of patrilineal descent from a common male ancestor (Kaser 1992: 192; Malcolm 1998: 14f.). Each *fis* was subdivided into a number of segments, of which the first level of descent smaller than the *fis* was the so-called *farefis*. Reineck explains that the *farefis* constituted the widest group of relatives whose blood ties were, generally, known: "All individuals, whether or not they know their clan, place themselves within a group of 'relatives.' They are all *farefis* – literally 'seeds of the clan'" (Reineck 1991: 44). Similar to the *fis*, *farefis* were believed to have their respective founding fathers, which were typically envisioned as a set of brothers, the *vllazni* (brotherhood). Their leading organizational principle was exogamy, which served to avoid incest and to create enduring bonds between other families and their clans. It was enforced strictly because the sentiment prevailed that even potential spouses within the *farefis* were almost family (Reineck 1991: 44).

*Farefis*, on the other hand, were divided into several joint or extended families. According to Hammel, the *zadruga*<sup>4</sup> was "a patrilocal joint or extended family around an agnatic core of father and married sons, or of brothers, sometimes of patrilineal cousins" (Hammel 1995: 232). Moreover, the *zadruga* was characterized by a continual cycle of expansion and fission. That is, once the father died and the children of the sons approached marriageable age, the household was usually divided into equal shares inherited by the respective brothers (Hammel 1984: 223; 1995: 232). In his definition of the extended family, Hammel emphasises the patrilineal and patrilocal aspects of the family formation process. Halpern and Halpern extend this definition arguing that although patrilocality and patrilineality are the most important formal authority patterns of a *zadruga*, it assembles a correlative production and consumption unit. That is, land, buildings as well as technological equipment belong to the household at large and personal belongings may only include small, portable goods: "A prototypical household [is] headed by a father residing together with his married sons and their associated nuclear families in a social unit functioning as a unified socioeconomic entity" (Halpern and Halpern 1986: 212).

According to several scholars, traditional family role relationships carried expectations of the pri-

macy of kinship and seniority: the old had precedence over the young and males over females (Hammel 1984: 223; Kaser 1995: 60). According to the customary law, the *kanun*, control over the household belonged to the head of the house who was either the oldest male member or his first brother. Preferably he was chosen by the acting head of the house, but should the predecessor have died before a successor was appointed, the next leader was elected by the remaining men of the house. The rights, obligations, and duties of the head of the house are spelled out in detail in the paragraphs twenty and twenty one of the *kanun*. Most importantly, he had the right over the earnings of the house; to buy, sell, and alter the land; to construct houses, cottages, and pastures; to assign household members to work inside or outside; and to punish them, when they do not behave in the interest of the house (*Kanuni I Lekë Dukagjinit* 1989: 13–16).

Women were controlled indirectly by the head of the house through the mistress of the house, who was "either the headman's wife or the senior woman of the household capable of leadership" (Reineck 1991: 56). Her main obligations were to ensure the just treatment of the members of the household and their children; to apportion everything produced in the house; and to appoint household chores (*Kanuni I Lekë Dukagjinit* 1989: 15–18). Generally, however, women played a rather secondary role in the household as well as in the society (Denich 1974). It was expected from them to engage in ceaseless housework and labour in the fields and to avoid contacts to the world outside the family until they were old. Moreover, women did not have the right to choose their own husband, and postmarital residence was patrilocal (Malcolm 1998: 20).

Although these social and familial structures seem rather rigid and stable, they have been constantly adapted to the respective political, economic, and social circumstances, and, thus, underwent substantive changes throughout history.

### The Influence of the Ottoman Empire on Kosovo's Political and Social Organisation

In 1386, a new power emerged on the political landscape of the Balkans when the Ottoman Turks managed to extend their frontiers towards the edge of the Byzantine Empire conquering Macedonia and invading Serbia (Vickers 1998: 11f.). According to Serbian epics, the Ottoman Sultan Murad is said to have summoned the Serbian Prince Lazar to grid

<sup>4</sup> *Zadruga* is the Serbian terminology for the concept "extended family."

himself for the battle at Kosovo Polje (the Field of Blackbirds): "The Sultan Murad falling like a hawk, falling on Kosovo, writes written words, he writes and sends to the city of Krushevat to the knees of Lazar, Prince of Serbia: 'Ah, Lazar, Lord of Serbia, this has never been and never can be: one territory under two masters, only one people to pay two taxes; we cannot both of us be ruler, send every key to me and every tax . . . And if you will not send these things to me, then come to Kosovo meadow, and we shall do division with our swords'" (cited in Judah 2000: 4). Lazar accomplished to organise a coalition army led by Serbian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Bosnian, and Albanian nobles determined to confront the Ottoman army (Vickers 1998: 13). Although no clear historical accounts exist on what exactly happened during the battle, it is known that both, the Sultan and the Prince, died. Consequently, Serbia did not finally fall to the Turks until 1459 (Judah 2000: 8; Vickers 1998: 14).

During the 15th century, Ottoman colonists were sent to the Kosovo region and settled for the most part around Prizren. Under their influence, Prizren as well as Pristina became important trading towns on the revitalised trade route from the Dalmatian coast to Macedonia and Constantinople. These new political and economic developments increasingly attracted Albanian pastoralists to the region. They gradually drove their cattle from the mountain pastures to the plains where they established farming settlements and started to engage in trade along the trading routs (Backer 2003: 63; Vickers 1998: 17). According to several historians, rural life in Kosovo seemed to have thrived during the first century of Ottoman rule as the economic developments worked in their favour and the Ottoman administration took little interest in local forms of organisation (Kaser 1995: 82; Malcolm 1998: 101).

Throughout the 16th century, the captured territories were divided into so-called *vilajets* (provinces) ruled by representatives of the Port and other officials. *Spahis*, a feudal military aristocracy, were responsible for military defence, the maintenance of the civil order, and the collection of taxes. In the course of time, their power as well as landholdings increased and soon became hereditary. To counteract the development of their personal power, the Sultan developed a parallel system which comprised administrators of originally non-Muslim Slaves whose landholdings were strictly conditioned by office (Backer 2003: 58). The rural population was obliged to regularly assign rent as well as taxes in form of one tenth of their agricultural production, and Christians were expected to pay a head tax. Due to these measurements as

well as the fact that the Turks started to declare the valleys and plains as the Port's property, the population retreated into the mountain regions once again. Organised in tribal structures, these mountain dwellers were inclined to resist Ottoman domination and were, thence, granted autonomy and tax exemption (Backer 2003: 58). In return, they had to hand over one boy to the military service of the Port. Along these lines, peasants were enabled to join the soldier class and establish their patronage toward their families and villages of origin (Malcolm 1998: 95).

Not only the young soldiers but also the population in general was converted to the Islamic faith. Mass conversions to Islam took place largely in the 17th and 18th century. Mainly affected were Albanians while other Balkan Christians were determined to resist the encroachment. Most researchers agree that social and economic advantages led many Albanians to convert from Christianity to Islam. Anyone who shared the Islamic faith was provided the same rights as the Ottomans themselves. These included the right to bear arms, pay lower taxes, the opportunity for social and economic advancement, and the permission to practice certain customs such as polygyny, the levirate, blood brotherhood, and trial marriages (Daskalovski 2003: 15; Reineck 1991: 25). Despite the discriminatory laws and practices, Catholicism did not die out since Christian communities were permitted to maintain existing church buildings (Malcolm 1998: 109). Although the Christian belief could be practiced openly, a significant number of extended families invented a phenomenon of "crypto-Catholicism," that is, publicly adopted Islam but received the Catholic sacraments in private. In other cases, women remained faithful to their Christian belief while the male members of the respective households formally adopted Islam (Norris 1996: 17). Thus, a unique blend of Islamic, Catholic, and tribal customs could be found in the region.

In order to control the Empire's diverse ethnic-religious groups, the Ottoman administration implemented sociocultural districts called *millet*. *Millets* were organised according to religious affiliation and, thus, "non-Muslims were brought into the Muslim organisational system but remained able to retain their own cultural and religious freedoms" (Vickers 1998: 21). Nevertheless, Serbian families increasingly emigrated from Kosovo to other parts of Serbia, and Albanians from the mountain regions started to repopulate the area. According to Kaser, this new wave of remigration resulted from the fact that the mountain tribal areas were overpopulated and employment opportunities as pro-

fessional shepherds or merchants within the Ottoman territories were attractive alternatives to full-time pastoralism (1995: 114). Backer writes that due to these social and demographic changes in the mountain regions, new administrative units called *bajraks* were created and implemented by the Ottomans. The respective local leader, the *bajraktar* (standard bearer), was held formally responsible for supplying fighting men, when called on. Informally, his role was that of a broker who was supposed to establish linkages between the central power and the autonomous local communities (Backer 2003: 62). In the literature, *bajraks* are often confused with *fis* or *farefis*. Durham (1909) writes for example that Albanian tribes are divided into *bajraks* and Lowie (1947) identifies a tribe with a *bajrak* (other examples include Amery 1948; Hasluck 1954). Nevertheless, the *bajrak* territories often seemed to correspond with tribal territories (Malcolm 1998: 16).

Throughout the 19th century, the central power was slowly losing control over the region. As a result, the League of Defence of the Rights of the Albanian People, also known as the League of Prizren, could be formed on 10 June 1878. According to historical records, 300 delegates (mostly conservative Muslim landowners) from the four Albanian *vilayets* of Janina, Monastir, Prishtina, and Shkoder gathered in Prizren to represent their people and voice their demands.<sup>5</sup> Their aim was not necessarily independence but rather autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, they intended to organise a political and military opposition to the dismemberment of Albanian-inhabited territory and to petition to the Sultan to unify the four *vilayets* (von Kohl and Libal 1997: 22; Vickers 1998: 44).

At the same time, Kosovo Serbs filed petitions to the Congress of Berlin demanding the *vilayet* Kosovo to be united with Serbia. Since the delegates from the Ottoman Empire were unable to defend the League, Kosovo Albanians started to take the matter into their own hands arming for political protest. According to Vickers, 16,000 Albanian men in arms were prepared to confront the Ottoman authority and army. When the situation in Kosovo worsened and anti-Christian sentiments increased, many Slav families decided to leave Kosovo and emigrate to Serbia (Vickers 1998: 45–48). On 4 January 1881, the Albanian resistance in Kosovo began in dead earnest when the League took over the command of Kosovo and some of

its leaders began to contemplate over the possibility of interdependence (Judah 2000: 12). Yet, the Ottoman army marched into Kosovo, occupied Prizren, and crushed the League (von Kohl and Libal 1997: 22).

### **Between Assimilation and Expulsion: Albanian Politics from 1912–1945**

The final stage of the Ottoman rule was characterised by unrest, shifting alliances, and increasing conflict between Christians and Muslims. Taking advantage of the empire's weakness, Serbia together with Montenegro, Bulgaria, and Greece prepared the expulsion of the Ottomans and declared the first Balkan War in October 1912 (Clark 2000: 26). Seeking control over Kosovo, the Serbian Army marched into Kosovo, defeated the Ottoman forces, and assumed power over the *vilayet*. According to Banac, the Albanian and Serbian population perceived this annexation differently. For Serbia it meant “the liberation of long lost territory” as well as “the opportunity to civilise Kosovo.” For Albanians in Kosovo, on the other hand, it represented “a violent separation from other Albanian territories” (Banac 2006b: 53).

Serbian forces behaved merciless toward the Albanian population, killing about 20,000 of them and displacing others (Clewing 2000: 48; Judah 2000: 18). Moreover, Serbian colonists settled in the region seizing land from the local population, and an array of new taxes was introduced which mainly affected the Albanian population. According to several historians, Serbia aimed at altering the demographic statistics by creating a Serbian majority in Kosovo before the new borders would be finalised at the Conference of Ambassadors in London in May 1913 (Banac 2006b: 55; Malcolm 1998: 255). When the Albanian state boundaries were defined, a great number of Albanians, especially Albanians living in Kosovo, were left outside of the new state (Fischer 1999: 70).

Although the Balkan allies had fought together against the Ottoman Empire, inner frictions persisted. In spring 1913, Greece and Serbia signed a treaty of mutual defence in an attempt to protect themselves against Bulgaria as well as Austro-Hungary. Nevertheless, Bulgaria launched a successful attack on Serbia as well as Greece in June 1913, without declaring war first. Since Bulgarian rule was characterised by atrocities against the local population, rebellions started to take place and, by the end of the war, Kosovo was back under the remorseless Serbian rule (Malcolm 1998: 263).

<sup>5</sup> Von Kohl and Libal (1997: 21); Malcolm (1998: 221); Petritsch und Pichler (2004: 26).



In November 1915, when the Austro-Hungarian forces occupied Serbia, they were welcomed by Kosovo Albanians as liberators. During the First World War, Vienna treated Kosovo as a temporarily occupied part of Albania and tried to content the Albanians by opening Albanian-language schools and promoting the new Albanian literary standard (Banac 2006b: 56). However, in 1918, the Serbian army regrouped and pushed the central powers out of Kosovo. After the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Serbian Monarchy was transformed into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians under the Prince Regent Aleksandar Karađorđević.

According to most historians, the interwar period was characterised by Serbian colonisation policies. For example, about 70,000 Serbian families were talked into immigrating to Kosovo. These settlers received up to 50 hectares of land, free transportation, some basic tolls, free use of state or communal forests and pastures, exemption from taxation for three years, and sometimes houses (Vickers 1998: 106). Albanians, in turn, were dispossessed of their property as they had difficulties providing legal proof of their title to ownership (Vickers 1998: 106).

Next to the destruction of the Albanian settlements, the assimilation of the local population was strived for. For instance, Albanians were required to Slavise their surnames. Numerous families changed their given name of the father's father by adding the Serbo-Croatian patronymic-possessive "*ović*" as a suffix. Only in 1947 they were allowed to change their surnames back into Albanian ones (Reineck 1991: 44). Another example is the introduction of the Serbian language education system. In 1918, the Serbian administration closed the Albanian-language schools, which the Austro-Hungarians had opened during the First World War. According to Kostovicova, education in the Serbian language was tailored to encourage the development of a common identity of Serbians, Croats, and Slovenes as well as to denationalise the Albanians. However, the schools remained underdeveloped as only 30.2% of school-age children in Kosovo attended school in the years between 1939 and 1940 (Kostovicova 2002: 157–159; see also Bache and Tylor 2003: 285). By 1921, Serbian authorities decided to completely deny the Albanians access to education so as to keep them ignorant and illiterate (Fischer 1999: 87).

The pressure on the Albanian population culminated in the 1920s, when their expulsion from Yugoslavia was discussed and planned by Serbian civil servants in Belgrade. Their goal was to create

an absolute Serbian majority in Kosovo by bringing another 470,000 colonists into Kosovo and expelling 300,000 Albanians to Turkey. One of the greatest proponents of the expulsion politics was the academic Vasa Čubrilović who pointed out that "[a]t a time when Germany can expel tens of thousands of Jews ... the shifting of a few hundred thousand Albanians will not lead to the outbreak of a world war" (cited in Malcolm 2006: 60). In 1938, a formal treaty was signed between Belgrade and Turkey, which stated that "Turkey was to take 40,000 families of 'Turks,' receiving a payment from Belgrade of 500 Turkish pounds per family" (Malcolm 2006: 60f.). According to Malcolm, a family was defined as "blood relations living under one roof," which included, in the case of Kosovo, extended families of ten and more members. Formally, the treaty was never brought into effect since the outbreak of the Second World War prevented it. However, informally, between 90,000 and 150,000 Albanians and other Muslims left Kosovo as the living there had been made impossible.<sup>6</sup>

In March 1941, Yugoslavia joined the Axis Pact despite the growing anti-German sentiment amongst the population. Following the Belgrade military putsch, Hitler ordered the destruction of Yugoslavia, and the whole of Kosovo was conquered within only one week (Malcolm 1998: 289f.; see also Bartel 1993: 229). German governance in Kosovo contrasted significantly with the Serbian administration as they granted village elders to handle most of their own affairs and even opened several Albanian primary schools (Fischer 1999: 86). Although a noteworthy number of Kosovo Albanians collaborated with the German forces, Fisher states that their collaboration had nothing to do with ideological sympathy or fascism. Instead, "the support was an expression of nationalism" and an attempt to protect the hope for a Greater Albania (Fischer 2006: 73). Consequently, resistance to the Germans grew much slower than elsewhere in Yugoslavia and most Albanians were willing "to overlook the fact that German aggression had been responsible for the union with old Albania" (Fischer 1999: 237). Meanwhile, Serbian and to a lesser extent Kosovar monarchic as well as communist partisans launched attacks against the occupying forces. In 1944, Yugoslavia was widely controlled by Tito's partisan army which took official control over both Serbia and Kosovo in 1945.

6 Malcolm (2006: 61); see also Sundhaussen (2000: 77); Vickers (1998: 116–118).

### Yugoslav Politics and Kosovar Social Organisation under Tito

Instead of unifying Kosovo with Albania or giving it the status of a republic, Tito's regime decided to maintain the region within the Serbian federal unit of the Yugoslav federation (Banac 2006a: 65). The unification with Serbia involved a range of repressive measurements for Kosovo Albanians. Albanians were deliberately excluded from political decision-making processes, that is, no Albanian was represented in the Politburo until 1978 and in the Yugoslav Communist Central Committee until 1953. Instead, the local party and leading positions were dominated mainly by Serbians and Montenegrins in the 1950s. Moreover, "Kosovo and Metohija" was reinstated as the territory's official name; Albanians were forced to adopt Serbo-Croatian as the official language; Albanian monuments were replaced by ones portraying Serbian historical or mythological heroes; street names were changed; and shopkeepers were required to have signs in Cyrillic (Clark 2000: 37, 71).

The harsh Serbian domination was perpetuated by Alexander Rankovic, the head of the Yugoslav Secret Police as well as vice president of Yugoslavia. Under his regiment, Albanians were exposed to persecutions, terror, and violence, and members of political and democratic organizations were forced to flee abroad (Daskalovski 2003: 20). At the same time, the ordinary Albanian population suffered from great economic losses, poverty, and illiteracy. According to Reineck, peasant families were hit especially hard as they were encumbered with high fertility, significant inequalities in wealth, inadequate investments, and dependence on external economic aid. Moreover, Kosovo farmers were required to assign high taxes and were coerced into providing the government with large quantities of grain (Reineck 1991: 118).

Poverty as well as population growth forced many households to split. This procedure endowed each son with an equal share of the land and, consequently, the amount of land and wealth held by each family decreased rapidly (*European Stability Initiative* 2006: 14). At the same time, increasing labour migration made household fission more feasible. Formerly, Reineck notes that work was sought predominantly in Istanbul, Ankara, Thessaloniki, and Sofia. However, after the Second World War men emigrated to Belgrade and other industrialising Yugoslav cities: "Beginning around 1950, the greatest wave of rural-urban migration took place from 1961–1971 when thousands of Albanian men became manual laborers in the capital city

of Beograd and in other northern cities, especially in Serbia proper, Vojvodina, and Croatia" (Reineck 1991: 118). Typically, one man of the family migrated and left his family behind to farm the land and guard the moral integrity of the family. In the 1960s, the intake capacity of Yugoslav cities began to diminish, and labour migrants ventured into Western European countries. Most of them migrated to Germany, Austria, France, Switzerland, and Holland as European factories increasingly demanded labour from southern Europe (Rogers 1985: 7).

The year 1966 marked the end of harsh Serbian domination since Tito expelled Rankovic from leadership. This was the first step in which Tito signalled greater tolerance for critics of Serbia's role in Yugoslav history: "In short, he wanted to take centralism, with its political locus in Serbia, a few notches lower in general regard without stirring up a great deal of fuss" (Banac 1992: 1087). Further anticentralist steps were instituted and culminated in Kosovo's new constitution in 1974. The new constitution put Kosovo on a par with the other Yugoslav republics by providing it with similar competences, a provincial party committee, its own legislation, and budget authority. However, Kosovo was not granted the status of a republic and was, therefore, denied the right for secession (Banac 2006a: 66).<sup>7</sup>

After 1974, a time of increasing Albanisation set in when Albanians started to claim high-ranking positions in politics and jurisdiction. As a consequence, traditional problem-solving mechanisms increasingly lost their function, and the formerly broad influence of kinship relations were reduced to a mainly social level. From now on, inter-village disputes were governed by the municipality system, and mechanisms of blood revenge were substituted by the establishments of courts, judges, police, and prisons (Backer 2003: 57, 89).

Moreover, Albanian was valorised as the official language, Albanian books started to be printed in newly established local publishing houses, local media like the Pristina Radio and Television center cropped up, and, most importantly, Albanians took over teaching positions in educational establishments such as at the university and high schools.<sup>8</sup> Due to these developments, new employment opportunities were available and, as a result, rural Kosovo Albanian men as well as women were

<sup>7</sup> In Yugoslavia the status of a republic was reserved for *narod* (constituent nations), not for *narodnosti* (nationalities) that realized the fullness of their statehood elsewhere (Banac 2006a: 66).

<sup>8</sup> Clark (2000: 40); Banac (2006a: 66); Hetzer (2000: 113).

able to move into employment in Pristina, Prizren, and Peja.

At the same time, agricultural production was increasingly reduced to subsistence. Halpern argues that due to the abandonment of agriculture as primary source of income, the agricultural population had declined to 42% of the population (half of what it had been in 1890). Most peasants lived in what he calls a "compromise situation," working in the nearby towns in the mornings and on the farms in the afternoons. During the 1960s, the number of farms with peasant-workers increased by 10%, that is, more and more families were willing to come to a compromise between the security of wages and the security of independent subsistence. In relation to these developments, the gendered division of labour shifted in that women had to presume a larger share of agricultural work (Halpern 1975: 89). Nevertheless, family and kin units were not destroyed since it was through kinship relations that initial education and job opportunities were perceived and obtained (Halpern 1975: 91, 95). By overcoming the urban-rural divide, kinship ties served to connect rather than to separate rural and urban spheres of society.

### Prelude to the War

After Tito's death in 1980, the tension between the dominating Serbian minority and the suppressed Albanian majority escalated and culminated in the first student protests in March 1981. They started as small-scale protests demanding improved living conditions in the dormitories and better food in the school cafeteria. Over time, the protests became political and expanded across Kosovo when construction and metalworkers joined in, calling for a Kosovo Republic. Officials in Belgrade denounced the demonstrations as "hostile, and organised by hostile forces as part of a hostile plot to destabilise Yugoslavia and destroy its unity as a state using economic and social problems as pretext" (cited in von Kohl and Libal 1997: 58). Moreover, the authorities declared a state of emergency and sent additional units of special police forces as well as tanks into Kosovo.<sup>9</sup>

According to Malcolm, the actual heterogeneity of complaints voiced by young intellectuals, miners, journalists as well as politicians were lumped together as "counter-revolutionary" and it was bluntly assumed that "a call for Kosovo Repub-

lic was identical with a call for unification with Enver Hoxha's Stalinist state" (Malcolm 1998: 337). Furthermore, Albanians were accused for driving Serbian inhabitants out of the country. Despite the fact that independent legal reports found out that Kosovo had one of the lowest crime rates in Yugoslavia, media reports alleged that Albanian men were raping Serbian women and girls, beating up Serbian men, burning their fields, and destroying their homes. Newspapers like *Politika* and the weekly *NIN* in Serbia increasingly printed letters and articles that described Kosovo Albanians as "bestly, monstrous, and disgusting" (von Kohl and Libal 1997: 73) and condemned the Serbian migrations from Kosovo with terms like "pogrom" and "genocide" (Guzina 2003: 35). These allegations were taken up by members of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU), who wrote in their memorandum in 1986: "In the spring of 1981, open and total war was declared on the Serbian people, which had been carefully prepared for in advance in the various stages of administrative, political and constitutional reforms . . . It is not just that the last remnants of the Serbian nation are leaving their homes at an unabated rate, but according to all evidence, faced with a physical, moral and psychological reign of terror, they seem to be preparing for their final exodus" (cited in Clark 2000: 17f.).

These clearly nationalist sentiments were instrumentalised by Milošević, then president of the Serbian Republic, to start not only an extensive propaganda machinery against the Albanian population but to formulate a new constitution that deprived Kosovo of its political rights. In 1989, Milošević introduced the final stages of Yugoslavia with his speech at Kosovo Polje that commemorated the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. After a brief reference to the past, describing the lost battle 600 years ago as a failure due to disunity and treachery among the Serbians, Milošević went on to state that "today, six hundred years later, we are fighting once again. New battles lie before us. They are not military battles, although we cannot exclude such a possibility" (cited in von Kohl and Libal 1997: 10). The Serbians, who arrived in chartered busses and trains at the site, echoed these sentiments singing the song of the Serbian trumpeter, "Blow stronger, blow louder, oh brother and hero, for the Plain of the Blackbirds is Serbian once more" (cited in von Kohl and Libal 1997: 11).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Judah (2000: 39); von Kohl and Libal (1997: 59); Malcolm (1998: 334); Mertus (2000: 29).

<sup>10</sup> Melody and words stem from the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 when Serbs drove the Ottomans out of southern Serbia and Macedonia and seized control of the historic battlefield after more than five hundred years of Turkish rule (von Kohl and Libal 1997: 11).

This combination of historic myths, symbols, and quests for a greater Serbia transformed the historical commemoration into a highly political one (Norris 1996: 11).

Following these events, the National Assembly of Serbia modified the Serbian Constitution by reducing Kosovo's autonomy significantly. In fact, the constitution provided Serbia with control over Kosovo's police, courts and civil defence, social and economic policy, education policy, as well as with power to issue administrative instructions and the choice of an official language (Malcolm 1998: 343; see also Funke und Rhotert 1999: 22). New laws were created and Kosovo Albanians were expelled from all public institutions including police, media, political offices, industry, schools, and medical institutions. Furthermore, Serbo-Croatian was reintroduced as official language (Clark 2004: 108–111; Petritsch und Pichler 2004: 60–63). Kosovo Albanians responded immediately by building up a large-scale civil resistance movement. Rather than rioting through the streets, activities were taken up which strengthened the moral and unity of the people. Clark reports that students from the University of Pristina ventured into the villages to persuade families divided by blood feuds to reconcile: "Some 1,000 feuds involving death, 500 of wounding and 700 other disputes, or instance about water or women, were reconciled in the course of this campaign" (2000: 63). Thus, the familism of the past gave way to a sense of solidarity and unity among the people and created a context for peaceful resistance.

Building on this spirit, 123 Albanian Assembly members met in the street to vote for a new status and declare Kosovo a sovereign and independent state. Although this was not recognised by Yugoslavia, Ibrahim Rugova of the LDK (Democratic League of Kosovo) became the first president of Kosovo in the underground in 1991. One of his first initiatives was to create a parallel society based on a proclaimed Albanian "tradition of patients and prudence, facing domination" (Rugova 1994: 130, cited in Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006: 515). The parallel system was developed and financed by Kosovar intellectuals and the taxation of the Kosovar diaspora respectively. 90% of the revenues from the parallel state went toward education, the central element of the passive resistance program (Bache and Taylor 2003: 288).

By August 1991, Belgrade had expelled 6,000 secondary schoolteachers as well as the principals and deputies of 115 elementary schools. When in 1992 the authorities banned Albanian children from receiving an education, the teachers' union

started to teach the children in private places such as empty houses, warehouses, garages, basements, and mosques. Nevertheless, dropout rates increased severely affecting mainly village girls (Clark 2000: 99; see also Kostovicova 2002: 166–169). University students were organised in a similar fashion. Bache and Taylor note that by 1995 around 12,200 students were organised in twenty faculties of the parallel education system. The curriculum mainly focused on promoting Albanian consciousness and identity and was, thus, a major focal point of resistance to Serbianisation (Bache and Taylor 2003: 288).

Other parallel institutions included the health-care system in which dismissed clinicians set up in private practices and generally offered free treatment to certain categories of people; the media whose goal it was to inform the rest of the world about the situation by reporting mainly about the LDK leadership and the details of Serbian repression; as well as arts and sports which were kept alive in private realms (Clark 2000: 106–111; Petritsch und Pichler 2004: 71–73). Despite the success of the parallel system, the population became increasingly impatient with the continuing Serbian oppression. As a consequence, Rugova's position started to crumble and support for armed resistance increased.

### Kosovo Conflict

The appearance of and support for the KLA marked the end of passive resistance in Kosovo. The KLA grew out of guest worker communities in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and France and made its first public appearance at a funeral in November 1997. By that time, the organisation was unheard of outside Kosovo and hardly numbered 200 members. Yet, soon afterwards the first training camps sprang up in Albania, instructing men from all societal classes in the age from fifteen to seventy.<sup>11</sup> Over time, more and more Kosovo Albanians within and outside Kosovo supported the organisation ideally as well as financially when switching their donations from Rugova's government-in-exile-fund to the KLA. With this money, the KLA managed to buy weapons, uniforms, and training from Albanian as well as retired Western officers (Sullivan 2006: 105).

11 Ignatieff (2000: 13); *Independent International Commission on Kosovo* (2000: 51); Judah (2001: 20); Sullivan (2006: 107).

The KLA's first attacks against Serbian policemen as well as government officials were immediately answered by the Serbian military police with harsh counter-attacks directed at villagers who provided shelter to KLA fighters. Not only Serbian authorities condemned the KLA guerrilla attacks, even the US envoy Gelbach stated that the KLA "is, without any questions, a terrorist group" and that the United States "condemns very strongly terrorist activities in Kosovo" (*New York Times*, 13 March 1998, cited in Caplan 1998: 753). In other newspaper reports it was presumed that the organisation had ties to Al Qaeda and was mainly funded with drug money and Albanian criminal networks (Sullivan 2006: 104). Hockenos refutes these arguments by stating that although heroin was smuggled through Albania and Macedonia in large quantities, it was not drug barons who sponsored the KLA. Instead, most of the money came from the migrant communities and only "[a] portion of the KLA's funding may have been dirty money" (Hockenos 2003: 255).

Among the founders of the KLA was Adem Jashari from the village of Prekaz in the central Drenica region. Judah describes him as a local tough, "a kind of a Maverick who liked to get drunk and go out and shoot at Serbs" (2001: 22). In February 1998, the Serbians decided to arrest Jashari and seek revenge for his bloody deeds. A first large-scale civilian killing was the result, leaving twenty-three civilians dead, among them a pregnant woman and ten male members of one family with no ties to the KLA. Jashari's martyr death made him to the rallying point for KLA recruits in and outside Kosovo, and served as a trigger for the formation of village militias.<sup>12</sup> This was the beginning of a full-fledged war between the KLA and the Yugoslav forces.

Although the Independent International Commission on Kosovo had great difficulty quantifying the number of killings and abuses, they estimate that between February 1998 and March 1999 around 1,000 civilians were killed up to September (the number of killings between September and March is unknown), and 400,000 people were displaced (*Independent International Commission on Kosovo* 2000: 2). Similarly, the Human Rights Watch reported that a wide range of civilians died during this period of the conflict, and that war crimes such as rape, torture, looting, pillaging, and arbitrary arrests were undertaken by Serbian

forces and authorities mainly in rural communities (*Human Rights Watch* 1998). When, in January 1999, the Yugoslav forces attacked the village Racak killing 45 Albanians and, subsequently, refused to allow the persecution team of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia to carry out investigations, it became obvious that "Belgrade was reluctant to investigate the murderous actions in Kosovo either through domestic or international channels, leaving little hope that the same government would alleviate the suffering of the displaced population" (Popovski 2003: 53).

The NATO, condemning Yugoslav authorities for their use of excessive violence and the KLA for its use of terrorism, summoned the Serbian and the KLA leaders to the French Chateau Rambouillet in order to negotiate a peace settlement (Mandelbaum 1999: 10). The delegation sent from Kosovo arrived on 6 February 1999 and is described as the most unusual one in the history – "a motley collection of guerrilla commanders, newspaper editors and Westernised intellectuals, carpentered together by the Americans for the occasion and so unfamiliar with each other that most had never met until the moment they boarded the French military transport plane, taking them from Pristina to Rambouillet" (Ignatieff 2000: 53). When NATO presented the Serbian and Albanian delegates with a plan for political autonomy in Kosovo under NATO auspices, both parties refused and, thus, the negotiations ended in a stalemate (Mandelbaum 1999: 10).

Nonetheless, the UN Secretary-General Annan demanded that the Yugoslav armed forces instantly cease their offensive in Kosovo. As soon as it became apparent that Serbia would not accept the demand, the NATO aircraft started a bombing campaign against Yugoslavia which lasted from March until June 1999. Researchers do not agree whether NATO's military operation improved the situation of Kosovo Albanians, and good evidence exists that the humanitarian condition deteriorated severely. According to Ignatieff, pilots had little impact on the ethnic cleansing while observing the crimes committed from above (2000: 105). Yet, the US and NATO defend their air strikes on moral as well security grounds. It is argued that, on the one hand, the intervention was required to prevent further atrocities against the civilian population and, on the other hand, to prevent the conflict from affecting the stability of surrounding states, especially Macedonia and Albania (Croft and Williams 2006: 122; Dauphinee 2003: 109).

According to the Independent International Commission on Kosovo, NATO hoped that the brief bombing campaign would persuade Milošević to

12 Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers (2006: 516); see also Judah (2001: 22f.); Lange (1999: 32–34).

sign the Rambouillet Agreement. This was an enormous mistake since Yugoslav forces increased their attacks intending “to drive almost all Kosovo Albanians from Kosovo, destroy the foundations of their society and prevent them from returning” (*Independent International Commission on Kosovo* 2000: 88). Estimates suggest the number of killings to be 10,000, with the vast majority of the victims being Kosovo-Albanians. An additional 863,000 civilians sought or were forced into refuge outside Kosovo and 590,000 were internally displaced. War crimes such as rape and torture as well as looting, pillaging, and extortion were committed regularly by the Serbian forces (*Independent International Commission on Kosovo* 2000: 2f.; see also Buckley and Cummings 2001).

The majority of refugees fled to Albania, a country that lacked the capacity to coordinate all the appropriate institutions in a crisis situation. Nevertheless, Albania became an exemplary case for close cooperation between local and international agencies as well as civil engagement. It is estimated that 300,000 of the 478,000 refugees in Albania were hosted by Albanian local families, who often received no compensation whatsoever (Bozo 2001; Van Selm 2001). Others fled to Macedonia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina as well as outside the region to Turkey, Italy, and Austria, Australia, Canada, Croatia, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Switzerland, and the USA (*UNHCR* 1999). Many of them felt like losing control over their own lives while living in the refugee camps and were, thus, eager to return to their homes in Kosovo once the Yugoslav forces finally withdrew from Kosovo.

During the repatriation the response from NATO and UNHCR is described as “consistently slow.” That is, when they started to plan for the refugees’ repatriation, the latter were already returning to their homes in Kosovo at the rate of 20,000 to 30,000 per day (Bozo 2001: 40). The return of the refugees to Kosovo fired off another wave of violence, this time directed against the Serbian population and other minorities living in Kosovo. Over 100,000 Serbians as well as tens of thousands of Roma fled from systematic violence by returning KLA forces and their supporters.

## Conclusion

Kosovo’s “local culture,” “local resources,” and “local ways of organisation” were subject to a range of transformations throughout history, which are only comprehensible against the background of

their specific cultural and historical contexts. The Albanians of Kosovo are organised in a segmentary society, consisting of distinct but at the same time interconnected segments which mutually influence each other. Each entity may be viewed as a sub-unit of its respective superordinate concept. That is, extended families disintegrate into *farefis*, *farefis* into *fis*, and *fis* into a nation. Of course, the opposite holds true too as the nation may be subdivided into *fis*, *fis* into *farefis*, and *farefis* into extended families. The different segments are distinguishable but cannot be viewed in complete isolation from one another. Since the importance, meaning, and content of the respective segments have varied significantly throughout history, researchers should specify what they mean when referring to local issues. Reducing them to buzzwords such as *kanun*, blood feud, village councils, and elders essentialises and folklorises Balkan culture and ignores cultural change as well as complex (political) events that shaped the cultural reality of the region.

At the beginning of the Ottoman reign, Kosovar Albanians were organised according to clan structures, which comprised at least two segments, namely, the *farefis* and the extended family. Each unit was organised around the principles of patrilinearity and patrilocality. The extended family itself could be characterised as “community of goods” (Brumann 1998: 1), since its members not only constituted a production and consumption unit but were required to share all possessions. Their loyalty was mainly shaped by kinship and seniority.

Although the Ottoman Empire took little interest in local forms of organisation, it nevertheless affected Albanian culture by introducing new ways of organisation and new elites to the region. As mentioned above, the region was divided into so-called *vilajets* (provinces ruled by beys and other officials); the urban centers into *milletts* (town quarters organised according to religious affiliation); and the mountain region and lowlands into *bajraks* and *ciflik* systems respectively. In addition, the local population was introduced to new obligations and forms of solidarity by having to pay rent and taxes, and providing the military service of the Port with one of their boys. In order to gain somewhat equal rights to the Turkish invaders, it was mandatory for Albanians to accept the Islamic faith; this resulted in mass conversions during the 17th and 18th centuries.

A national consciousness developed relatively late among the Albanians. Historians date it to the formation of the League of Prizren in 1878, when Kosovo Albanians candidly claimed autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, fought against the dis-

memberment of Albanian-inhabited territory, and petitioned to the Sultan to unify the four *vilayets*. Yet, it was not up to them to restructure the region. During the Balkan Wars it was the Serbian army that gained control over the *vilayet* by killing and displacing Albanians in large numbers. Thus, when the Austro-Hungarians managed to occupy the territory during the First World War, they were greeted as liberators by the war-shaken population. A short period of "Albanisation" set in as Albanian language schools were opened and a new literary standard promoted. In 1918, however, the Serbian army conquered the territory once more and integrated it into the newly established Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians.

The interwar period was marked by Serbian colonisation strategies, which included the naturalisation of numerous Serbian families on Albanian property in order to Serbianise the region. As a consequence, Albanians lost a significant amount of their settlements, were deprived of their Albanian language schools, and had to Slavicise their surnames. Serbian rule was shortly interrupted during the Second World War after the German army entered Kosovo. Just like the Austro-Hungarians, German soldiers were perceived as rescuers because they granted village elders to handle most of their own affairs and constructed a number of Albanian primary schools. As a result, resistance against the German occupying forces grew only slowly among the local population. Nevertheless, Tito's partisan army was able to take control over the region in 1944 and officially integrated Kosovo within the Serbian federal unit of the Yugoslav federation in 1945.

A new phase of tremendous suppression set in. Albanians were intentionally excluded from all official decision-making processes, forced to adopt Serbo-Croatian as the official language, and had to witness the destruction of their national monuments and change of street names. Rural communities were equally affected by the new power matrix. Since peasant families were obligated to allocate taxes as well as grain to the government, they suffered from immense economic losses and were unable to sustain their large households. Consequently, many households had to split earlier and the amount of land held by each family decreased rapidly. Furthermore, young men increasingly emigrated to Belgrade or Western European countries so as to guarantee their families' survival.

Due to changes within the Yugoslav power structure, Kosovo received a new constitution in 1974, which endowed the region with similar rights to other Yugoslav republics. Albanians started to

claim high-ranking positions in the government and Albanian culture was revalued. At the same time, however, traditional problem-solving mechanisms (such as village councils and familial authority) lost their wide-ranging influence. Instead, intervillage disputes were increasingly governed by the municipality system, and manners of justice, such as blood feuds, were replaced by state jurisdiction. In addition, clan structures started to lose their importance as new forms of solidarity emerged and families lived territorially dispersed because of labour migration and urbanisation processes.

After Tito's death in 1980, the former President of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milošević, adopted and propagated an extreme Serbian nationalist agenda and revoked autonomy in Kosovo in 1989. Albanians were largely barred from public institutions and Serbo-Croatian was reintroduced as official language. Yet, the Albanian community in Kosovo proclaimed Kosovo in 1990 as a federal unit within Yugoslavia but outside Serbia and declared itself independent as the Republic of Kosovo in 1991. Despite the fact that the Republic was not recognised by Yugoslavia, Ibrahim Rugova was elected to be the first president in the underground in 1990. Under his authority, the local population built an extensive civil resistance movement, which culminated in the establishment of a parallel society. In the course of these developments, interfamily and -village conflicts were largely desisted from, and loyalty shifted from kinship and other social relations to nationalist ideals and practices.

As a consequence, Serbian oppression against the Kosovar Albanian population increased severely and, thus, led to open conflict between the two antagonistic ethnic groups. In 1998 the conflict escalated when Serbia declared war on Kosovo. From now on, the solidarity and support of most Albanians was aimed at the Kosovo Liberation Army, whose members were believed to fight for the common nationalist goals "self-determination" and "independence from Serbia." In response, Serbian forces used excessive violence against the civilian population and, thus, turned the conflict into a full-fledged genocidal war. In order to stop the intense conflict and prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, the UN Secretary-General Annan insisted that the Yugoslav armed forces cease their offensive in Kosovo at once. After it became evident that Serbia was not about to adhere, the NATO aircraft started a bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. When the Yugoslav forces finally withdrew from Kosovo pursuant to the peace plan, the UN Security Council passed the Resolution 1244, which established the framework of the UN civil administration as well

as the establishment of an international security presence.

The returning refugees found not only their houses looted and destroyed but an entirely novel power structure in place. Their territory was subdivided into five multinational zones administered by members of the contact group and new political, juridical, and economic structures were created. Once again, the Albanians of Kosovo were required to adapt to ways of organisation alien to them. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that they are passive bystanders bearing their fate silently. Instead, avenues for change are created as the younger generation shifts from rural extended family enclaves to more isolated nuclear family dwellings located in larger towns or urban centres so as to take advantage of the newly evolving job opportunities and the associated lifestyle (Sluzki and Agani 2003). For them, the significance of clan, family, or bloodlines is waning and traditional forms of conflict resolution, marital procedures, property protection, and inheritance become increasingly obsolete.

These societal changes endow anthropologists and historians with new challenges. Instead of mourning over lost or ignored traditions, it is vital to gain a better understanding of “the ways in which identity is shaped, constructed, imagined and reconstructed for various political ends” (Marden 1997). Hence, it is crucial to explore questions, which are important to the local population itself, and focus on “cultural reserves” (Hauschild 2003: 11) that combine old as well as new mandates so as to ensure life within and against the mounting influence of globalisation.

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