

Myths of Kosovo:

The History of Kosovo Through the Eyes of Dusan T. Batakovic

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For my father, John Havermans (1956-2017)

Where there is love, there is life.

You are in my heart forever.

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Prologue

I first traveled to Kosovo in the summer of 2018. Upon arrival in Prizren, I was pleasantly surprised. The annual documentary festival had just kicked off, and the town was bustling with energy. Tourists and locals enjoyed the pleasant weather by having a cold beer or dinner on one of the town's terraces, or by going on a walk through the town center. It was difficult to imagine that twenty years ago Prizren, as well as the rest of Kosovo, had seen heavy fighting between the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army and the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA, or UÇK in Albanian).

Belgrade, the capital of Serbia, had a totally different atmosphere. Directly after leaving the train station, I was greeted by the sight of a bombed out apartment block. A huge banner, which was placed near the Parliament, commemorated the victims "of Albanian UÇK terrorists and NATO aggression." Furthermore, all Serbian maps depict Kosovo as if it is still a part of Serbia, despite the region having declared independence in 2008. Serbia's opposition to independence for Kosovo is all the more remarkable when one considers that in 2006, Serbia had accepted Montenegro's independence.

Why is Serbia so opposed to independence for Kosovo? And why is the memory of Kosovo still so alive today? These questions haunted me upon arriving back in The Netherlands. I automatically looked to history in the hopes of finding an answer. I also recognized that these questions contained a subject and a case for my Master's thesis.

However, the questions above are too complicated, and also too fascinating, to simply find an answer to. They had to be narrowed down. Starting off with some general thoughts and ideas on the relevance of Serbian nationalism and memory, my preliminary study lead me to historiography and national myth forming. It was with this subject in mind that I started to research the Kosovo conflict from the perspective of one Serbian historian: Dusan T. Batakovic.

Now, roughly two years after my visit to Kosovo, I am able to present this Master's thesis. I fully understand that historiography, national myth forming and the Kosovo conflict have all attracted the attention of historians who have far more research experience than me. This thesis is but a very small piece of a larger puzzle, but I hope that through this thesis, understanding of these subjects will be improved.

I am forever in the debt of everyone who has in one way or another helped me during the process of writing this thesis. Without their support, patience, and love, this thesis would not have been possible. Although everyone who has stood with me does deserve a mention,

I will, for brevity's sake, only single out some of them. Henk Kern, Gerarda van Mourik, Iris Grimminck, Dirk van Vugt, and Pepijn Boumans, *baie dankie* for everything. I wish that I can once repay the favour.

Melle Havermans, 2020

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Introduction

Subject: Historiography, myths, political culture and national identity

Nations are imagined communities. This idea was put forward by Irish political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson in his 1991 book *Imagined Communities*. They are imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of the communion.”¹ As nations are imagined, nation-builders have to construct the nation out of the past, while similarly projecting the modern nation into the past. In the words of Eric Hobsbawm: “nations without a past are contradictions in terms. What makes a nation *is* the past, what justifies one nation against others is the past, and historians are the people who produce it.”² This idea has been elaborated on by historian Stefan Berger. In the book *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective* he argued that the history has been used by nation-builders as a tool to create a nation. It was the most important precondition for establishing shared national identity, while it also gave the nation a place in world and time.³ From this follows the conclusion that without history, the nation cannot exist.

Nineteenth-century nation-builders looked to the distant past in order to construct the nation. In this process, longevity is key. The older the nation was, the more authentic it became.⁴ If nation-builders could claim ancestry of an ancient people that lived in the same area as they did, surely they can also claim this territory as historically theirs. Beliefs that the nation has existed for a substantial amount of time reinforced the being of that nation. Thus, nations are not only imagined constructs between modern-day citizens, they are also imagined into the past. It is here that historians have an important role to play: it is the historian who constructs the nation out of the past, and similarly projects it into the past.

The formulation of national myths has proved a useful tool to construct the nation: by providing a nation its national heroes, birthplace, or tales of eternal suffering at the hands of terrible enemies, the historian connects the modern nation with its distant past and legitimizes it both as an abstract concept and a territorial being. It is this construct of national myths that shapes the nation, the national consciousness, and the national identity. The historian hereby holds great influence over a nation’s past and present.

¹ Anderson, B. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso. p.6.

² Hobsbawm, E.J. 2012. *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today*. In: Mapping the Nation (ed. G. Balakrishnan). London: Verso p.255.

³ Berger, S. 2007. *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p.5.

⁴ *ibid.*

Yet, national myths have proved problematic. For the myth to remain intact, history is presented in a way that is favourable to the nation. Cultural and historical distinctiveness is overemphasized, threats posed by other groups exaggerated, whilst the nation's own agency in causing conflict and pursuing national goals through violence is diminished.⁵ Factual evidence that would contradict the myth is left out of the narrative. Moreover, nation-builders have to present their nation against other nations.⁶ As a consequence, national myths can legitimize repression or lead to ethnic conflict.⁷ It is for this reason that, post-World War II, historians started to critically reflect on their national myths. While this did not deconstruct the nation altogether, it did open the discussion on the national past - i.e. the nation's role in colonization, slavery or ethnic violence.⁸

However, while the appeal of national myths has withered away in Western Europe, it re-emerged in formerly communist Eastern Europe. As federative states, such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, fell apart, successor states experienced a new wave of nationalism which was strongly connected to history: as nations had to be reinvented, they invoked national myths in order to legitimize themselves against their neighbours.⁹ This thesis will focus on national myths in historiography, and how historiography can shape and influence a nation's political culture and national identity. Central is the case of Kosovo.

Case: Kosovo

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008. The population of Kosovo consists mainly of Albanians; this group makes up about 92% of the region's population. Serbs on the other hand constitute only 1,5% of the population of Kosovo.¹⁰ The two ethnic groups have little in common: Albanians in Kosovo are secular Sunni Muslims, speak Albanian and have close connections with Albania proper. Their ethnic connection lies mainly in language not religion. Serbs, on the other hand, are generally Serbian Orthodox, speak Serbian and have strong ties with Serbs in Serbia proper.¹¹ The ethnic groups do not even share an alphabet: Albanian is written in the latin script, whereas Serbian is written mostly in cyrillic. The

⁵ Schnabel, A. & D. Carment. 2004. *Conflict Prevention from Rhetoric to Reality: Organizations and Institutions*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. p.45.

⁶ Anderson, B. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso. p.35.

⁷ Snyder, S. & K. Ballentine. 1997. *Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas*. In: *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict* (ed. Edward Brown, M. et al.) Cambridge MA: MIT Press. p.67.

⁸ Berger, S. 2007. *Writing the Nation: A Global Perspective*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p.47

⁹ *ibid.* p.50.

¹⁰ Zabërgja, S. et al. 2013. *Population: By Gender, Ethnicity at Settlement Level*. Pristina: Kosovo Agency of Statistics. p.11.

¹¹ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp.8-9.

Albanian majority have never been fond of any union with Serbia, either in the framework of a greater Yugoslav federation or as an autonomous province part of post-Yugoslavia Serbia.

¹² Considering this, independence seems a logical step.

Yet, Serbia and its allies have positioned themselves firmly against the notion of Kosovo as an independent state. While countries like Russia, Brazil and China as well as Spain have pointed out that the declaration of independence is an attack on Serbia's sovereignty,¹³ Serbs themselves see Kosovo as ancient Serbian land and "cradle of the Serbs."¹⁴ These views are based on Kosovo's role in medieval Serbian history: the area hosts numerous medieval churches and was also the site of the Battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389, where Serbs believe they suffered a crushing defeat against an Ottoman army.¹⁵ Serbs furthermore feel that in Kosovo they have been victims of violent enemies, usually Albanians, who have attempted to remove Serbs and their heritage, in the process threatening the cradle of Serbdom. This context has placed Kosovo firmly within Serbian culture and national identity: Kosovo has become a leading national discourse, a mythic holy land without which Serbia and the Serb people cannot exist. Therefore, it must be defended from terrible threats; it must always remain Serbian.¹⁶ These myths, which initially have been proposed by historians and politicians in the early nineteenth century and been rediscovered in the 1980s and 1990s as in Yugoslavia communism made way for nationalism, can be identified as key reasons to why Serbia went to war in Kosovo in 1998-1999.¹⁷ The role that historiography, through the creation of national myths, has played in the conflict is important to deepen understanding of the conflict.

Corpus: Dusan T. Batakovic

One of the most important contemporary Serbian historians was Dusan T. Batakovic. (1957-2017). Apart from studying history, Batakovic was also a prominent figure in Serbian political life, always eager to enter political discussion in which he frequently voiced strong

¹² Mertus, J.A. 1999. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.281.

¹³ Kiprop, V. 2018. *Which Countries Recognize Kosovo?*
<https://www.graphicmaps.com/which-countries-recognize-kosovo> Retrieved on 05-02-2019.

¹⁴ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.41.

¹⁵ Saskaovski, Z. 2003. *Claims to Kosovo: Nationalism and Self-Determination*. in: *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (ed. Bieber, F. & Z. Daskalovski). London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.15.

¹⁶ Mertus, J.A. 1999. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.281.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

pro-Serbian opinions. This made him popular in Serbia, but raised questions on his objectivity as a historian.

Batakovic was born in Belgrade in 1957, the capital of the then Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). He pursued a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in history at the University of Belgrade. During his PhD, which he pursued at the Sorbonne in the 1980s, he studied the impact of the French model of development of parliamentary democracy on Serbia.¹⁸ Batakovic concluded that the Serbs had turned to France on several occasions, not only concerning parliamentary democracy but also in the pre-World War II strife for centralization of the country. Batakovic was critical of the post World War II federalization of Yugoslavia, as he maintained that a centralized state form, with Serbia at the rudder, was more capable of keeping the state together.¹⁹

Although he had the option to become a teacher at several French universities, Batakovic decided to return to Serbia in the late 1990s. There he became the leader of a small but influential opposition group, the Council for Democratic Change. The group opposed the regime of Slobodan Milosevic and strived for a united opposition to "vanquish Milosevic's anti-Western coalition and the radicals of Seselj" and hoped to democratize Serbia thus improving the country's position in Europe.²⁰ Together with other opposition groups, Batakovic's Council for Democratic Change did eventually succeed in deposing Milosevic in 2000. Consequently, Batakovic fell in favour of the new government and, as he had studied diplomatic correspondence and was experienced with working abroad, became the ambassador for Serbia, first in Athens, then Ottawa and finally Paris. Although his superiors in Belgrade were more than content with his work as a diplomat, Batakovic became disillusioned with the diplomatic work. In the words of fellow historian Vojislav Pavlovic: "A man of Dusan's temperament and convictions could not have felt at ease in such an environment."²¹

Throughout his career Batakovic always kept a close relation to the Institute for Balkan Studies at the Serbian Academy for Sciences and Arts, an institute which attempts to enhance knowledge on the Balkans. While being an ambassador in France, he was also the vice-director of the Institute for Balkan Studies from 2008 to 2012. After his return to Belgrade in 2012 he became the Institute's director, a post he held until his death in 2017.

¹⁸ Batakovic.com. *Curriculum Vitae*. 2017. <http://www.batakovic.com/curriculum-vitae.html>. retrieved on: 15-08-2019.

¹⁹ Pavlovic, V. 2017. *In Memoriam: Dusan T. Batakovic (1975-2017)*. *Balkanica (XLVIII)*. p.366.

²⁰ Vries, A. de. 1999. *Het Broeit in de Servische Hoofdstad*. *Trouw*, 22-06-1999. <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/het-broeit-in-de-servische-hoofdstad~b075401d/>. retrieved on: 15-08-2019.

²¹ Pavlovic, V. 2017. *In Memoriam: Dusan T. Batakovic (1975-2017)*. *Balkanica (XLVIII)*. p.367.

Batakovic saw Serbia as a part of Western Europe. His belief motivated him in having the Institute's magazine, *Balkanica*, published in English. He furthermore oversaw the publishing of several of the Institute's books.²²

Perhaps the most important subject of his studies was the Kosovo question. Batakovic has never been shy to state his views on the issue; for him, Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia that cannot be separated. He wrote extensively on the subject, not only books and articles concerning the history of Serbia and Kosovo, but also advisory pieces to the government on possible solutions.²³ Batakovic was ambassador in Canada at the moment Kosovo declared independence in 2008. Before he was pulled back by Serbia, he declared that he was "very negatively surprised" by Canada's decision to recognize Kosovo, calling it a "flagrant violation" of international law. Serbia subsequently decided to recall Batakovic from Canada altogether, not because they did not agree with his statements, but because Canada had recognized Kosovo's independence. In other public appearances he similarly opposed independence.²⁴

Perhaps the words that describe him best are those by Vojislav G. Pavlovic, a fellow historian at the Balkan Institute, at the end of the *In Memoriam* he wrote for Batakovic: "Dušan was convinced that a life has a meaning only if lived to the full. He devoted his life to the well-being of Serbia as he understood it. Serbia that cherishes its Orthodox roots and is respectful of its history. Serbia that upholds its democratic traditions and takes care of the well-being of its citizens both at home and in the diaspora. As a historian, he did his best in his lectures, papers and books in order for the present generations not to lose national consciousness. As a diplomat, he fought as hard as he could to prevent Serbia from losing parts of territory and, above all, to prevent it from losing its self-esteem."²⁵ Even after his death, Batakovic is still held in high esteem in Serbia.

This thesis uses the English-language works of Dusan T. Batakovic as corpus. These consist of the books *The Kosovo Chronicles* (Plato; 1992), *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave* (Institute for Balkan Studies; 2007), *Serbia's Kosovo Drama: A Historical Perspective* (Cigoja; 2012) as well as contributions to other books, magazines, online publications and public appearances.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Batakovic.com. 2017. *Articles*. <http://www.batakovic.com/articles.html>. retrieved on: 15-08-2019.

²⁴ CBC News. 2008. *Canada recognizes Kosovo, Serbia pulls ambassador*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/canada-recognizes-kosovo-serbia-pulls-ambassador-1.745469>. retrieved on: 15-08-2019.

²⁵ Pavlovic, V. 2017. *In Memoriam: Dusan T. Batakovic (1975-2017)*. *Balkanica* (XLVIII). p.368.

Research question and methodology

The subject of this thesis is historiography and the creation of national myths. The case is Serbian historiography on Kosovo, and how Kosovo is enshrined in Serbian political culture and national identity. The corpus consists of the writings of Dusan T. Batakovic on Kosovo. This thesis attempts to find an answer to the following question: *how has Dusan T. Batakovic influenced Serbian thinking and myth forming on Kosovo?* To answer this question, this thesis will study (1) which overarching themes in Batakovic's view on the Kosovo conflict can be found; (2) critically reflect on the creation and consequences of these themes; and (3) how these themes are reflected in Serbian national thinking on Kosovo.

The research method of this thesis is critical literature study. To find the overarching themes in Batakovic's work it will compare the works of Batakovic to secondary source material on Kosovo, as well as theories on the creation of nations, victimhood identity and the projection of enemy images. In order to find how these themes are reflected in Serbian national thinking, it will also study Serbian media coverage of the conflict and opinion polls.

Theoretical framework and national myths

National myths often consist of several aspects: proof of the the nation's uniqueness (i.e. by pointing out the longevity of the nation), a focus on national suffering, and the identification of national enemies.²⁶ The theoretical framework offered below elaborates on these three points.

First of all, the myth attempts to prove the longevity of the nation. In this process of nation-building, the medieval era has played an important role. As nineteenth-century historians attempted to construct national myths, they looked to medieval history for two things: (1) proof that they, not another nation or ethnicity, were the first inhabitants of the claimed nation's territory and (2) the "founding myth" of the nation itself, to be found in a certain development or event. This theory has been proposed by Patrick Geary in the book *The Myth of Nations* (2002), who argued: "In the nineteenth century, under the influence of revolution and romanticism, and with the apparent failure of the old aristocratic order in the political arena, intellectuals and politicians created new nations, nations that they then projected into the distant past of the Middle Ages."²⁷ The medieval era became the founding

²⁶ Schnabel, A. & D.Carment. 2004. *Conflict Prevention from Rhetoric to Reality: Organizations and Institutions*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. p.45.

²⁷ Geary, Patrick J. 2002. *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p.18.

ground of nations. As a consequence, the study of history as such became a successful tool of nationalist ideology: it provided a nation with a founding myth and connected this nation with an ancient ancestor. In addition, the nation was claimed to be an ancient being not a modern discovery.²⁸ This reading of history similarly helped nationalists further territorial claims: “ethnic claims demand [...] the right of that people to govern its historic territory, usually defined in terms of early medieval settlements or kingdoms, regardless of who may live in it now.”²⁹

This use of history has been criticized numerous times. Hobsbawm denounced it as “retrospective mythology”³⁰ while Geary himself stated that as “[...] the modern methods of researching and writing history were developed specifically to further nationalist aims” our understanding of history became “a toxic waste dump, filled with the poison of ethnic nationalism, and the poison has seeped deep into popular consciousness.”³¹ Furthermore, historians who created national myths, projected the modern nation into the medieval era as if the nation had already existed in the distant past;³² as if its identity had not changed in the centuries since then. The problem, however, is that nations are not static entities with unchanging identities. Although modern nations claim to descend from their medieval great-great-grandparents, they are not the same. Therefore it is impossible to derive territorial claims from the wheres-and-whens of people in the medieval era.³³ Despite this criticism, projecting the modern nation into the distant past has proved a useful tool in the creation and development of the nation.³⁴

Secondly, the national myth emphasizes the nation’s suffering at the hands of terrible enemies. This paradigm can be called the victim-perpetrator dynamic. Victimhood is something that is not experienced individually: it is transferable from the individual to the group. As such the suffering of one individual becomes collectivized: a crime committed against a member of the group becomes a crime against the group itself. Consequently, victimhood becomes part of the group identity.³⁵ The victim-perpetrator also makes it possible to identify enemies. Alike victimhood, the identity of the perpetrator as enemy is

²⁸ *ibid.* p.15.

²⁹ *ibid.* p.11.

³⁰ Hobsbawm, E.J. 2012. *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today*. In: Mapping the Nation (ed. G. Balakrishnan). London: Verso p.255.

³¹ Geary, Patrick J. 2002. *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp.15-16.

³² *ibid.* p.18.

³³ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.22.

³⁴ Geary, Patrick J. 2002. *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. p.15.

³⁵ Jankowitz, S. 2018. *Intergroup Struggles over Victimhood in Violent Conflict: The Victim-Perpetrator Paradigm*. International Review of Victimology 24 (3). p.259.

also transferable from individual to group. Furthermore, the identity of both victim and perpetrator is inheritable. A group can still feel victimized by crimes perpetrated against them tens or hundreds of years ago.³⁶

After having identified this enemy, the victimized group feels “no longer bound by moral considerations in becoming perpetrators.”³⁷ Victims feel that they have the moral high ground to commit acts they would have otherwise condemned.³⁸ Victimhood, enshrined in national consciousness, becomes a prerequisite for further conflict. Leaders have often invoked victimhood to exonerate or legitimize acts of extreme violence, or even genocide, against other groups who were perceived as enemies.³⁹

This is not to say that victimhood should be ignored. Acknowledging the victim’s suffering helps restore their dignity, which is often the first step of the healing process. It can also help these victims play a positive role in progressing from traumatic periods in time.⁴⁰ However, the dangerous consequences that the victim-perpetrator dynamic might have should always be reflected upon; furthermore, victimhood should never legitimize the victim becoming the perpetrator.

Thirdly, a phenomenon closely related to the victim-perpetrator dynamic is the attribution of enemy images. After “us” - the victim - and “them” - the enemy - have been defined, a process of *Othering* starts, and negative traits are attributed or projected on the *Other* while positive traits are attributed towards the own group.⁴¹

Enemy images are negative stereotypes and are an effective tool to differentiate between the Self and the Other. Convincing enemy images are easily recognizable, threatening, justifiable and emotionally touching.⁴² As such, enemy images can be simplifications of reality or sometimes completely fabricated. Just as the victim-perpetrator dynamic, the process of *Othering* reflects not only on individuals but on groups. As the own group is attributed positive images, the enemy group is identified with negative traits.

Enemy images are self-sustaining. As psychologist Louis Oppenheimer, who has studied the phenomenon argues: “when present, enemy images [...] are self-fulfilling and

³⁶ *ibid.* p.140.

³⁷ Mertus, J.A. 1999. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.1.

³⁸ Sullivan, D. *et al.* 2012. *Competitive Victimhood as a Response to Accusations of Ingroup Harm Doing*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102 (4). p.779.

³⁹ Lim, J. 2010. *Victimhood Nationalism in Contested Memories: National Mourning and Global Accountability*. In: *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (ed. Assmann, A. & S. Conrad). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan p.139.

⁴⁰ Druriolle, V. & R. Brett. 2018. *The Politics of Victimhood in Post-Conflict Societies: Comparative and Analytical Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p.2.

⁴¹ Vuorinen, M. 2012. *Enemy Images in War Propaganda*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars. p.2.

⁴² *ibid.* p.5.

self-reinforcing. On the basis of such images, people tend to act more aggressively toward the other group, Such behavior provokes a hostile response that is interpreted to confirm the initial stereotype and so on."⁴³ If the Other is perceived as threatening for a long time, it turns from Enemy into Arch-Enemy: thus, enemy images are always present and can be applied and projected on the past as well as the present.⁴⁴

Just as the victim-perpetrator dynamic, Othering through enemy images can have dangerous consequences, such as racism and discrimination. In addition, it makes one understand a conflict as if between good and evil, and may serve as a justification for armed conflict or genocide.⁴⁵ Destroying the threatening enemy "will soon appear rational, legitimate, and even honourable."⁴⁶ Victimhood identity can morally justify the destruction of the perpetrator; so too can the creation of an enemy image justify the "honourable" act of destroying that enemy.

Historians play an important role in the creation of a victim-perpetrator dynamic, in which innocent victims are depicted as sufferers at the hands of terrible, threatening images. They can look to history to find examples of their statements, while they can also use the dynamic to legitimize own wrongdoings.⁴⁷

Structure

This research takes a chronological approach to the writings of Batakovic. Therefore, chapter one will cover medieval Kosovo and its relation to Serbia (700-1389), chapter two the first 300 years of Kosovo under Ottoman control (1389-1690), chapter three the final part of Ottoman control (1690-1912), chapter four the period of Kosovo under varying levels of Serbian control (1912-2000), and chapter five the post-war years (2000-2017). Chapter six will discuss how Batakovic's writings are reflected in Serbian thinking on Kosovo.

Apart from chapter six, every chapter has a fixed structure. It will begin with a discussion of the history of Kosovo in the respective period, followed by the views of Batakovic. Finally, the central themes of Batakovic's discussion are summarized and a critical reflection is provided. Chapter six will follow a different structure. It will look at how the

⁴³ Oppenheimer, L. 2006. *The Development of Enemy Images: A Theoretical Contribution*. Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology 12 (3). p.279.

⁴⁴ Vuorinen, M. 2012. *Enemy Images in War Propaganda*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars. p.2.

⁴⁵ Oppenheimer, L. 2006. *The Development of Enemy Images: A Theoretical Contribution*. Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology 12 (3). p.269.

⁴⁶ Vuorinen, M. 2012. *Enemy Images in War Propaganda*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars. p.4.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.5.

central themes found in Batakovic's works are represented in Serbian political culture and national identity. Finally, the conclusion will answer the central question of this thesis, while it will also give recommendations for future research.

Accountability of toponyms and translations

The toponyms to which Kosovo is referred depend on the author's point of view. Internationally, the region is known as Kosovo. However, an Albanian author might use the Albanian term Kosova, while in Serbia the toponym Kosovo and Metohija (abbreviated Kosmet) is used.⁴⁸ While all terms describe the same geographical area, the term Kosovo and Metohija deserves further inspection. Serbs divide the region into two areas: Kosovo (north-east) and Metohija (south-west). While Kosovo is derived from the Serbian word for blackbird (kos), Metohija is a reference to the holdings of monasteries, in medieval times denoted as metoh. The name Kosovo and Metohija thus is a reference to the religious, cultural and political value the region holds for Serbs. A person or institution that uses the term inherently agrees with the narrative that Kosovo is Serbia's birthplace, and that Kosovo should therefore remain Serbian.⁴⁹ Other toponyms are also disputed. For example Mitrovica, an ethnically divided town in the north of Kosovo is referred to as Mitrovicë by Albanians, and Kosovska Mitrovica by Serbs. In order to maintain political neutrality as much as possible, this thesis will use the internationally acknowledged toponyms (i.e. Kosovo or Mitrovica), unless a person or institution is quoted.

Furthermore, this thesis also makes a distinction between the terms Serb (or Serbs) and Serbian. This thesis will use the term Serb as a demonym for the ethnic group, while Serbian remains reserved for institutions or non-human objects (e.g. the government, the president or a newspaper).

All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

⁴⁸ Serbian Constitutional Court. 2006. *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*. p.33, article 182. <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/74694/119555/F838981147/SRB74694%20Eng.pdf>. Retrieved on: 05-03-2019.

⁴⁹ Vickers, M. 1998. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co. p.xv.

Chapter 1: The cradle of the nation (700-1389)

First arrival to last battle: Kosovo 700-1389

Kosovo plays an important role in the national history and founding myths of both Serbs and Albanians. While the Albanians use Kosovo to prove their descendancy from an ancient tribe, the Illyrians,⁵⁰ Serbs point out that Kosovo is their cradle of the nation. On this basis, both groups claim Kosovo to be theirs. As such, history has become a tool if not a weapon to support their claim.

Both Serbs and Albanians ask themselves the same question: who were there first? For the Serbs, this question is to be answered with relative ease. Serbs and Croats, two Slavic tribes, arrived in the Balkans, a region which was then part of the Byzantine Empire, in the sixth century AD. In the early seventh century the Byzantine emperor invited the Croats in to deal with a tribal threat, the Avars. The Croats took the Serbs with them and having driven the Avars out, both groups settled in the territories abandoned by the Avars: the Croats in modern-day Croatia and western Bosnia, and the Serbs in the southern regions of modern-day Serbia as well as Kosovo and Montenegro.⁵¹

Albanians are first mentioned only in 1043, when they are mentioned fighting in an army of a rebel Byzantine general. While this relatively late appearance has been cited by Serbs as proof that the Albanians arrived much later than their Slavic counterparts, other theories claim that Albanians descend from Illyrians, an ancient Balkan tribe. If that were true, this would make them the earlier inhabitants of the area. However, these theories depend more on speculation than science: there is no strong evidence that directly proves that the Illyrians are the ancestors of the Albanians.⁵²

After the Serbs had settled in the territory, they established a kingdom that ranged from Belgrade in the north to the Adriatic coast. Kosovo was also part of the Serbian kingdom. For Serbs, it was in this period that Kosovo gained its importance. The earliest institution of the Serbian Orthodox church, the Patriarchate of Pec, was located in western Kosovo. The region also hosts more churches and monasteries than anywhere else in Serbia.⁵³ This was partly funded by the mineral riches found in Kosovo.⁵⁴ Serbs point out that

⁵⁰ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.40.

⁵¹ *ibid.* pp.23-24.

⁵² *ibid.* p.40.

⁵³ Saskalovski, Z. 2003. *Claims to Kosovo: Nationalism and Self-Determination*. in: *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (ed. Bieber, F. & Z. Daskalovski). London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.15.

⁵⁴ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.19.

a lot of names, including the name Kosovo itself, have Serbian roots.⁵⁵ Finally, Kosovo also hosted Serbian dynasties as well as numerous other figures of Serbian nobility.

The ecclesiastical relevance of the region is one of the main reasons Serbs refer to Kosovo as cradle of the nation. Serb identity is strongly based on religion whereas Albanian identity is built around language. The Albanian tribes that inhabited the area had multiple religions: some were Muslim, while others were Orthodox or Catholic.⁵⁶ What made them Albanian was their language. Serbs, on the other hand, while sharing a language with the largely Catholic Croats, were Serbs because of their Orthodox religion.⁵⁷ As Kosovo played such an important role in establishing the Serbian Orthodox Church, the region plays an important role in Serb identity as well.

The fourteenth century saw the rise of the Ottoman Empire⁵⁸ and the disintegration of the Serbian kingdom into several minor states and principalities.⁵⁹ On St. Vitus Day (June 28) 1389, a Serbian army fought an Ottoman army at the Battle of Kosovo Polje, a grassland located close to Pristina. The Serbs remember the battle as a crushing defeat at the hands of the Ottomans.⁶⁰ Both Prince Lazar and Sultan Murad - the leaders of respectively the Serbs and Ottomans - were killed in battle, and the Serbs were betrayed by Vuk Brankovic who withdrew his troops before the battle commenced. After the defeat, the Serbian lands were incorporated into the Ottoman Empire, and they would remain there for almost five centuries. The death of Prince Lazar still is of great importance for Serbs today as they see his death as follows: Lazar choose death and freedom in the afterlife over living and humiliation under the Ottomans. Even today, the battle is of major importance for Serbian national mythology.⁶¹

However, the real events were different. Both Lazar and Murad did die in battle, but the betrayal by Brankovic never happened. Furthermore, the way Murad died - it is said that he was killed by the "heroic" Milos Kobilic who infiltrated the Sultan's tent to prove his loyalty

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Although most Kosovo Albanians nowadays identify as Sunni Muslims, their conversion only happened relatively recently, after the pressure of Catholic and Orthodox missionaries had been diminished in the late seventeenth century due to the Austro-Ottoman war. See: Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. pp.172-173.

⁵⁷ This strong connection probably has its roots in the Ottoman period. As the Serbian state had ceased to exist, the Orthodox Church remained the only pillar of Serbian identity. The ideas of Christianity and Serbdom had over the centuries become intertwined: it was impossible to observe one without the other: Judah, T. 2000. *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. London: Yale University Press. p.3.

⁵⁸ Shaw, S.J. & M.E. Yapp. 2019. *The Ottoman Empire*. Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire>. retrieved on: 1-10-2019.

⁵⁹ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.59.

⁶⁰ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.19.

⁶¹ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.20.

to Lazar - is also disputed, with theories ranging from Kobilic being just a Hungarian mercenary, or the character not existing at all.⁶²

The most important myth surrounding the battle is its outcome. Serb forces, who were supported by Albanians and Bosnians, did not suffer a crushing defeat: the battle was more of a draw. Although the Ottomans had numerical superiority and the outcome did therefore favour them more as they lost relatively less manpower, the statement that the Serbs were defeated at this specific battle is simply not true.⁶³ The battle was moreover not the end of Serbia, as several Serbian successor states did survive in (relative) autonomy until well into the fifteenth century.⁶⁴

Myths and legends concerning the battle, commemorating the heroic deeds of Prince Lazar and Milos Kobilic, had been circulating in the direct aftermath of the battle,⁶⁵ but interest in the event was revived in the nineteenth century. As Serbia struggled for independence against the Ottoman Empire, linguists and poets such as Vuk Karadzic, started publishing poems and texts on the battle, while academic interest also increased.⁶⁶ This is how the myth became enshrined in Serbian national consciousness.⁶⁷ On the relevance of the battle, Noel Malcolm remarks:

The story of the battle of Kosovo has become a totem or talisman of Serbian identity, so that this event has a status unlike that of anything else in the history of the Serbs. To call this ideologically charged story 'the myth of Kosovo' is not to suggest that everything in it is false, but rather to indicate the talismanic way in which it operates.⁶⁸

Not only does the myth of the battle help in the shaping of Serbian identity, it also places Kosovo in the center of this identity. Thus it is possible to conclude the following. Serbs view Kosovo as a cradle of the nation because (1) Serbs arrived there first and have lived there for more than 1300 years, (2) the region was central in the establishment of the first medieval Serbian state and the foundation of the Serbian Orthodox Church and (3) the battle of Kosovo Polje is talismanic for Serbian identity. These beliefs have made Kosovo a mythological place for Serbia and the myths surrounding the region are enshrined in Serbian

⁶² Judah, T. 2000. *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. London: Yale University Press. p.7-8.

⁶³ Glenny, M. 2012. *The Balkans, 1804-2012. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. London: Granta. p.11.

⁶⁴ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.83.

⁶⁵ Judah, T. 2009. *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. London: Yale University Press. p.30.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p.35.

⁶⁷ Saskalovski, Z. 2003. *Claims to Kosovo: Nationalism and Self-Determination*. in: *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (ed. Bieber, F. & Z. Daskalovski). London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.15.

⁶⁸ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.58.

national identity. While it is possible to doubt the real importance of Kosovo for the medieval Serbian kingdom - the region may not have been so important for religious growth and dynastic developments⁶⁹ - it is not factual correctness that has made Kosovo this mythical place, but the belief that these points are exalted above any doubt. They are part of the indubitable, canonized "national religion."⁷⁰

A Serb Jerusalem: Batakovic on medieval Kosovo

Dusan Batakovic extensively discusses the medieval period in Kosovo's history. While he puts both the Serbian and Albanian versions of history against each other, he clearly favours the Serbian version. Furthermore, his history of Kosovo consists largely of the three points mentioned above.

Kosovo, Batakovic acknowledges, carries opposing meanings to Serbs and Albanians. For Serbs, Kosovo is Serbian "Holy Land." It was central in the creation of the Serbian Kingdom and has dominated "the political and cultural discourse of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century Serbia, while in popular culture the Kosovo legacy [...] remains to be a prevailing historical narrative."⁷¹ At the same time, Kosovo for Albanians "symbolizes the "ancient Albanian land" directly linking the ancient Illyrians of Dardania with the modern Albanian community in this territory."⁷²

Batakovic strongly favours the Serbian version. This version, he argues, is supported by "tangible historical evidence" in writings, archaeology, and place names. On the other hand, the Albanian version lacks this historical evidence. Instead it is a "case of historical revisionism that, by projecting the current demographic situation back into the past, seeks to provide its legitimacy and thus discredit any claim, past or present, Serbia might lay to Kosovo."⁷³

The tangible historical evidence, which the Serbian version is supported by, is firstly to be found in Medieval demography. The Serbs, Batakovic argues, settled in Kosovo way before the Albanians did:

With the mass settlement of Slavs [i.e. Serbs] during the seventh century most of the central Balkans became a fief of different Slavic tribes under stronger or weaker control of Byzantium. A

⁶⁹ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.14.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p.12.

⁷¹ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity in The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.). Los Angeles: Sebastian Press. p.570.

⁷² *ibid.* p.571.

⁷³ Batakovic, D.T. 2008. *Kosovo and Metohija: Serbia's Troublesome Province*. Balcanica XXXIX. p.246.

former Bulgarian and Byzantine possession, the region that has come to be known as Kosovo-Metohija was integrated between the early twelfth century and the middle of the fifteenth century into the medieval Serbian state [...]. As a predominantly Serb inhabited area Kosovo-Metohija became the prestigious centre of the main Serbian political and cultural institutions.⁷⁴

While Batakovic acknowledges that Kosovo was inhabited by other peoples such as Bulgarians, Illyrians and Romans, he strongly criticizes the idea that any of these ethnicities are in any way connected to the Albanians. Albanian claims of Illyrian descendant are “romantic-historical theses” that are not supported by factual evidence.⁷⁵ Thus, Albanians cannot claim Kosovo to be theirs on grounds of them or their ancestors having lived there before the Serbs arrived. According to Batakovic, large numbers of Albanians arrived only at the end of the seventeenth century, after thousands of Serbs had fled Kosovo in 1690 due to the Austro-Ottoman war.⁷⁶

Batakovic argues that after Serbs had settled in Kosovo, the region gained a central role both for the medieval Serbian kingdom and the Serbian Orthodox church:

[Kosovo] was the central part of medieval Serbia, and the homeland of two of her five medieval dynasties. It was the hub of her culture and her religious centre. From the late thirteenth century the see of the Serbian Orthodox Church was at Pec, in Metohija, a region known for the many church-owned Serbian royal endowments.⁷⁷

As the region was rich in natural resources, it was suitable for cultivation, mining of minerals such as gold and silver, and building of political and religious sites. Examples invoked are the mines at Novo Brdo, the fortresses and palaces constructed by Serbian nobility and the churches and monasteries that housed Serbian Orthodox priests and bishops, and religious manuscripts. The most notable example of the latter is the “Jerusalem-like” Patriarchate of Pec.⁷⁸

This is not the only reference to Jerusalem in Batakovic’s works. In fact, he invokes the idea that Kosovo itself is a Serb “Jerusalem” because of its religious

⁷⁴ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity* in *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.). Los Angeles: Sebastian Press. pp.573-574.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ Batakovic, D.T. 2012. *Serbia’s Kosovo Drama: A Historical Perspective*. Belgrade: Cigoja. p.43. For a further discussion, see Chapter 2.

⁷⁷ Batakovic, D.T. 2008. *Kosovo and Metohija: Serbia’s Troublesome Province*. *Balkanica* XXXIX. p.247.

⁷⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity* in *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.). Los Angeles: Sebastian Press. pp.573-574.

importance to the Serbs.⁷⁹ Similarly, Batakovic repeats a 1992 statement by the Serbian Holy Assembly of Bishops which argued that Kosovo is for the Serbs what Jerusalem is for the Jews.⁸⁰ After Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, Batakovic told students of the University of Ottawa that Serbia was strongly against independence for Kosovo as it is a “Serb Jerusalem, a [...] central pillar of Serbian national identity, being a sacred land, the heartland of Serbian culture, art, and both spiritual and political traditions.”⁸¹ The point he makes is a simple one: Serbia cannot let Kosovo go as it is their Jerusalem.

Apart from describing Kosovo as a Serb Jerusalem, Batakovic also refers to the region as “Old Serbia”:

In order to highlight their importance in the national and political ideologies of the renewed Serbian state, they were given a new collective name. It was not by chance that Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic, the father of modern Serbian literacy, named the central lands of the Nemanjic state - Old Serbia.⁸²

He similarly uses the term in relation to the further falling apart of the Ottoman Empire⁸³ or the Serbian population in the region.⁸⁴ Batakovic derives this term from nineteenth century Serbian historians, who became interested in the medieval origins of Serbia and the importance of Kosovo and thus started to refer to Kosovo as “Old Serbia.” The term is thus not a neutral one: it carries the underlying assumption that, as Kosovo was historically Serbian, it should remain Serbian.

Batakovic is more critical of the image surrounding the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. He points out that the battle was a draw, not the crushing defeat as it is remembered.⁸⁵ He also discusses that it was not the end of the existence of Serbia, which managed to exist in one way or another for some decades, and that multiple unsuccessful attempts were made to recover Kosovo.⁸⁶ In addition, Batakovic acquits Vuk Brankovic, stating that he is “[...] unjustly remembered in epic tradition as a traitor who slipped away from the battlefield” and

⁷⁹ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Eight.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part3.html retrieved on: 9-10-2019.

⁸⁰ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity* in *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) Los Angeles: Sebastian Press. p.605.

⁸¹ Batakovic, D.T. 2008. *Kosovo: Serbia's Troublesome Province*.

http://www.batakovic.com/en/full-story/21/2012/02/22/kosovo_-serbias-troublesome-province.html.
retrieved on: 15-06-2020.

⁸² Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 2-10-2019

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.41.

⁸⁵ *ibid.* p.18

⁸⁶ *ibid.* p.19.

instead reaffirms the fact that he resisted Ottoman pressure until 1392.⁸⁷ In respect to the battle and its outcome, Batakovic seems to agree more with contemporary historians who have argued similar views.

However Batakovic also argues that the battle does signal the decline of the Serbian kingdom:

Be that as it may, the Battle of Kosovo had far-reaching political consequences for the future of Serbia. Only a year after the Battle, Serbia became a vassal of the Ottoman Empire. Nonetheless, present-day Kosovo-and-Metohija with its rich mining centre of Novo Brdo (seized by the Ottomans only in 1455) remained a border region of exceptional economic and spiritual importance until the very end of the Serbian medieval state - under the first Despot Stefan Lazarevic (1389-1427) and his less successful successors of the Brankovic dynasty (1427-1459).⁸⁸

Furthermore, he also connects past and present as the death of Prince Lazar is discussed:

[the death of Lazar] - the choice of freedom in the celestial empire instead of humiliation and slavery in the temporal world - although irrational as a collective consciousness, is still the one permanent connective tissue that imbues the Serbs with the feeling of national entity and lends meaning to its joined efforts.⁸⁹

While he debunks certain aspects of the myth of Kosovo, he does accept the battle being part of Serbian national memory without critical reflection.

If all the pieces of the puzzle are combined, it is possible to form a clear view on Batakovic's opinion on Kosovo. The Serbs arrived in Kosovo way before the Albanians did. Subsequently, the region was of the greatest importance for Serbian religious development as it was the center of the Serbian Orthodox church. It also played a major dynastic role, as two Serbian dynasties had their origins in Kosovo, and in Serbian cultural naissance, as a large amount of Serbian heritage came from, and can still be found in the region. Although some myths surrounding the Battle of Kosovo are debunked, he does place the battle firmly in Serb national memory. The connection between medieval Serbia and the Serbian state today is, for Batakovic a strong one as it shapes Serbian identity: and Kosovo is pivotal in this connection. This makes him conclude the following:

⁸⁷ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two. https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 1-10-2019.

⁸⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.18-19.

⁸⁹ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two. https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 1-10-2019.

In the thousand year long-history of Serbs, Kosovo and Metohija were for many centuries the state center and chief religious stronghold, the heartland of their culture and springwell of its historical traditions. For a people who lived longer under foreign rule than in their own state, Kosovo and Metohija are the foundations on which national and state identity were preserved in times of tribulation and founded in times of freedom.⁹⁰

This is precisely why Batakovic is so strongly opposed to independence for Kosovo. His 2008 lecture in Ottawa precisely connects these points: independence for Kosovo is unthinkable because Kosovo is Serbia's Jerusalem and a central pillar for Serbian cultural, religious and political identity. In 2009, when Batakovic was heard in his function as ambassador to France by the United Nations on the legality of the declaration of independence, Batakovic again proclaimed himself strongly against independence as "Kosovo is the historic cradle of Serbia and [...] one of the essential pillars of its identity."⁹¹ This connection is also made in some of his academic works. For Batakovic, Kosovo truly is the cradle of the nation, the piece that holds the nation together. Serbia without Kosovo cannot exist; to lose Kosovo would be to lose the nation.

Claiming the region: Discussion of Batakovic's statements

Batakovic's vision on Kosovo in the medieval era is largely in line with the wider Serbian beliefs on the region. First of all, he argues that in the seventh century the Serbs settled in Kosovo, while Albanians arrived some 300 years later. The notion that Albanians have Illyrian ancestry is a case of historical revisionism that incorrectly projects the current demographic situation into the past. This makes Serbs the older ethnicity in the region.

Secondly, Batakovic argues that Kosovo is pivotal for the Serbian development. It was the central part of the Serbian kingdom, the origin of two dynasties and the religious heart of the Serbian Orthodox Church. He agrees with the idea that Kosovo is a Serb Jerusalem, hereby creating the image of Kosovo as a sacred, holy land which is of the utmost importance to Serbia. Batakovic also copies the reference to Kosovo as "Old Serbia." This is a reiteration of the idea that Kosovo is historically Serbian.

Finally, Batakovic does not factually support the myth of the Battle of Kosovo Polje. However, while he agrees with contemporary thought that it was more of a draw than a

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Gray-Block, A. & R. Stevenson. 2009. *Kosovo tells World Court Independence Irreversible*. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo/kosovo-tells-world-court-independence-irreversible-idUSTR E5B03MX20091201> retrieved on: 15-08-2019.

crushing Serbian defeat, he does agree with the battle having a strong symbolic meaning. Despite debunking parts of the myth surrounding the battle, the battle as talisman for Serbian identity remains largely intact.

These three points lead him to conclude that independence for Kosovo is unthinkable. That Serbs arrived in Kosovo before Albanians did, and that Kosovo is so important for Serbian national identity, give Serbia a historical right to rule Kosovo. Similarly, Serbia cannot exist without Kosovo. That more than six hundred years of history, combined with shifts in politics and demography have severely altered Kosovo does not matter. It is the medieval heritage that counts.

These points are problematic for a number of reasons. One is the factual correctness. It is true that two of the five Serbian dynasties had their roots in Kosovo, and that Kosovo is full of Serbian cultural and religious heritage, but this does not make it necessarily the cradle of Serbia. That two dynasties came from Serbia automatically means that three dynasties came from elsewhere. Also, while it is true that Serbs settled in the area in the seventh century, Kosovo was only formally integrated into the Serbian kingdom in the second half of the twelfth century, when the kingdom itself had already existed for three hundred years.⁹² After incorporation into the kingdom, roads and mines were established. The seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church subsequently moved to Pec in the early thirteenth century, while other major religious buildings were constructed in the fourteenth century.⁹³ While it is true that Kosovo was of major importance for Serbdom in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, this is simply too late for it to be considered the cradle of Serbdom.

The importance connected to Kosovo can be considered an example of nineteenth-century retrospective mythology. While folk songs commemorating the Battle of Kosovo and heroic (or cowardly) deeds of the participants had been going round for centuries, interest in Kosovo as founding ground was revitalized in the early nineteenth century, as Serbs rose up against Ottoman rule.⁹⁴ A few decades later, in 1889, the idea of Kosovo as sacred Serbian land was argued even stronger by then Serbian foreign minister Cedomil Mijatovic, who stated that "an inexhaustible source of national pride was discovered on [sic] Kosovo. More important than language and stronger than the Church, this pride unites all Serbs in a single nation."⁹⁵ The nineteenth century also saw the emergence of the Great-Serbian Idea, first iterated by president of the ministry of Serbia Ilija Garasanin.

⁹² Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.17.

⁹³ The Gračanica monastery, near Pristina was built in 1321, while the Decani monastery was built over the period of 1327-1335. See: Vickers, M. 1998. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co. p.8.

⁹⁴ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.21.

⁹⁵ *ibid*.

According to Garasanin, Serbia had the historical mission to reconstruct the medieval Serbian kingdom, including Kosovo.⁹⁶ Just as other nations, Serbia was looking for a founding myth; something to connect the modern Serbian state with an ancient, medieval ancestor. This was found in Kosovo. However, the critique that the myth of Kosovo sees its roots in the nineteenth century is not present in Batakovic's works.

Yet, even if the myth of Kosovo would be true in its totality, and Kosovo would be the cradle of the Serbian state, this would still raise questions when it is used to defend modern-day territorial claims. As Raymond Detrez argues, the cradle of many Balkan nations is to be found in another country. Constantinopel/Istanbul, the "cradle" of modern Greece is to be found in Turkey while the center of Macedonian nationalism, Thessaloniki, is in Greece.⁹⁷ Yet, ownership of these places is not disputed.

This is precisely the point: a founding myth may connect a nation with a region, and history may even prove that that group was the earliest inhabitants of this region. However, a medieval ethnicity or tribe is not the same as a modern nation as the identity of the group is in constant flux. In this case, the Serbs that drove out the Avars and built the Patriarchate of Pec are not the same Serbs of today. Events that happened six hundred years ago simply do not legitimize modern territorial claims.

Similarly, Albanians are completely left out of the equation by Batakovic. To argue that, because of the medieval importance Kosovo holds for Serbia the region should be part of Serbia ignores the agency Albanians have in the region. After all, Albanians do constitute a demographic majority in Kosovo, and have been the majority since at least the early nineteenth century.⁹⁸ They, just as the Serbs, have important cultural heritage in Kosovo. As three centuries of medieval Serbian rule does not provide Serbia with a historical right to rule Kosovo, it also does not give Serbia a right to ignore in totality the wishes of the overwhelming Albanian majority.

However, these points, just as the notion that the importance of Kosovo for Serbia may be less than is sometimes assumed, play no part in Batakovic's narrative. Batakovic attributes a high value to the medieval history of Kosovo and thus keeps the myth of Kosovo (i.e. that it is the cradle of Serbdom) largely intact. While his historical narrative is not at every point factually wrong, the implications very much are. Lacking a critical reflection, Batakovic's account hinders our understanding of the history of Kosovo, while it, as the

⁹⁶ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.28.

⁹⁷ *ibid.* p.18.

⁹⁸ Mertus, J.A. 1999. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.313.

Kosovo myth is so relevant in Serbia today, also may have its implications on reaching an agreement on Kosovo.

Chapter Two: From tribulation to migration (1389-1690)

The first Ottoman years: Kosovo 1389-1690

The medieval Serbian Kingdom did not disappear directly after the Battle of Kosovo Polje, but the battle did signal the beginning of the end. Several successor states, which were consumed fighting the Ottomans as well as each other, lost their autonomy to the Ottoman Empire. Kosovo was incorporated in the early phase of Ottoman conquest and stayed longest under Ottoman control - it was only in 1912, more than five centuries after Ottoman conquest and 34 years after Serbian independence from the Ottoman Empire, that the region was conquered by Serbia during the First Balkan War.⁹⁹

In many Balkan countries, Ottoman rule is synonymous for atrocities and exploitation. For the first years of Ottoman control in Kosovo this view is difficult to uphold. It is true that in the direct aftermath of the Ottoman conquest Serbian properties were plundered. Afterwards, the Ottomans allowed Serbs to restore damaged religious buildings.¹⁰⁰ Initially, the Ottomans were unwilling to pursue Islamic conversion as this would create resentment under the population. This approach was largely down to the Ottoman's focus on military expansion, not demographic or religious consolidation. The Ottoman authorities "needed men to fight wars, and money to pay for them. So long as those requirements were met, [they] cared little about many other aspects of people's lives."¹⁰¹ At the same time, landholder's reduced obligatory labour for peasants, in the process raising the feudal status of peasants.¹⁰² The Ottoman authorities also allowed places of worship to be built or restored. This suggests that, contrary to the popular Serbian narrative, ordinary life in Kosovo did not worsen during the first years of Ottoman control. For Serbs, living conditions remained largely the same. Compared to the rest of Europe, life for Christian peasants in Kosovo was a little harder than in Western Europe, but much easier than in Russia.¹⁰³

However, as Ottoman control consolidated, religious distinction became more important. Although adherents of Abrahamic religions were free to exercise their religion, being Christian in the Ottoman Empire had certain disadvantages. First of all, non-Muslim "People of the Book" had to pay the *Jizya*, a special religion-based poll tax.¹⁰⁴ Second,

⁹⁹ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.253.

¹⁰⁰ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.21.

¹⁰¹ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. pp.92-94.

¹⁰² *ibid.* p.100.

¹⁰³ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.21.

¹⁰⁴ Bowering, G. et al., eds. 2013. *The Princeton encyclopedia of Islamic political thought*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press. p. 283.

through the system of *devsirme*, Christian boys were taken from their families and forcibly recruited into the Ottoman army. Usually they would serve in the Janissary corps. Christians further faced legal disadvantages: for example, a Christian's testimony could not be used against a Muslim.¹⁰⁵ Finally, the formal Serbian Orthodox institutions had collapsed when the region had been added to the Ottoman Empire. Although one was still free to adhere to Christianity, and forced conversions were rare,¹⁰⁶ if one were to remain a Christian one would become a second-rank citizen.¹⁰⁷

This situation caused the religious composition of Kosovo to shift. Serbs, who identified themselves in terms of religion, were not converted easily. Most preferred to face the challenges of second-rank citizenship over abandoning their religion. Albanians, who were more secular, were more eager to convert to Islam.¹⁰⁸ Ottoman tax registers show that Islamic names became more apparent during the sixteenth century, whereas conversions were more prevalent in the towns than in the countryside.¹⁰⁹ Although pressure from Catholic and Orthodox missionaries meant that the Albanian religious landscape was pluriform, converting to Islam had its advantages as it improved social mobility. Albanians, who were willing to convert to Islam, could enter the ruling class whereas Serbs, who were not, remained peasants.¹¹⁰

That the Ottoman authorities showed some tolerance to the Serbian Orthodox church becomes apparent through the fact that in 1557 the Patriarchate of Pec was reinstated.¹¹¹ Orthodox Serbs now gained the status of *millet*; a religious community that enjoyed high levels of autonomy. This led to Orthodox monasteries and churches being rebuilt in Kosovo, and revived monastic life. Through millet autonomy, Serbs were able to preserve their language, religion and ethnic and cultural individuality.¹¹² Similarly, the period also saw major Islamic building projects, such as the construction of the Hadum Aga Mosque in Gjakova (1595), or the Sinan Pasha mosque in Prizren (1615). Those projects signal that while the Serbian Orthodox church was alive and well, there was also a need for new Islamic religious buildings.

¹⁰⁵ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. pp.95-98

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.* p.107.

¹⁰⁷ Saskalovski, Z. 2003. *Claims to Kosovo: Nationalism and Self-Determination*. in: *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (ed. Bieber, F. & Z. Daskalovski). London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.14.

¹⁰⁸ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.8-9. See also: Chapter One.

¹⁰⁹ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.107.

¹¹⁰ Vickers, M. 1998. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co. p.25.

¹¹¹ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.33

¹¹² Leurdijk, D & D. Zandee. 1999. *Kosovo: Van Crisis tot Crisis*. Den Haag: Nederlands Instituut voor Internationale Betrekkingen *Clingendael*. pp.11-12.

Politically, there were attempts to reconquer Kosovo. In 1448, the Hungarian general Janos Hunyadi invaded the region in an attempt to avenge his lost crusade of 5 years earlier. Although the initial circumstances were favourable, he was beaten by the Ottomans in what is now known as the Second Battle of Kosovo Polje.¹¹³

In 1683 war broke out between Austria and the Ottoman Empire. Although the Ottomans initially laid siege to Vienna, Austrian and other Habsburg forces managed to counterattack and subsequently move into the Balkans, driving the Ottomans out of Kosovo in 1689. Hoping to improve their situation, Christian Serbs joined the Austrian troops. However, the Austrians withdrew in early 1690, and as a combined Ottoman and Tatar army reconquered and subsequently plundered Kosovo, a large number of Serbs retreated from the area in an event known as the *Great Migration*.¹¹⁴ They eventually settled in Habsburg lands.¹¹⁵ This marked the beginning of significant changes in the demography of Kosovo. As Serbs hastily abandoned the region, mostly Catholic Albanian tribes were allowed to settle on the lands left behind by the Serbs, and they converted to Islam in the process¹¹⁶ Although Serbs remained the majority, the demographic centre of gravity slowly started to move towards the Albanians.

The Great Migration is in Serbia remembered as yet another traumatic experience in Kosovo, but they are not alone in their suffering. The Serbian version of history tends to ignore that large numbers of Albanians also joined the uprising against Ottoman government. Instead of fleeing the region they remained in Kosovo, bearing the full brunt of the Ottoman heavy-handed reprisals. A number of Serbs also resettled afterwards.¹¹⁷

In conclusion, the first years of Ottoman control were not a period of brutal oppression of the Christian population, as they are sometimes depicted. Although being Christian meant being disadvantaged and the *devsirme* left its mark on the population, Christians were allowed to remain faithful to their religion. While Serbs remained faithful to the Serbian Orthodox Church, Albanians were more willing to convert to Islam. This created a rift between the two groups. The Great Migration of 1689-1690 and subsequent settling of Albanians in the area also severely changed the ethnic fabric of the region.

¹¹³ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.91.

¹¹⁴ The number of Serbs that left Kosovo in 1690 is disputed. Serbian historians claim that 37.000 families - with 10 to 30 members each - fled north. This is based on only one source. More reasonable and more widely believed figures argue that it were not 37.000 *families* that fled the region, but 37.000 *individuals*. See: Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.23.

¹¹⁵ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.139.

¹¹⁶ Miljkovic, E. & I. Cojocar. 2016. *Migrations as a Constant of the Serbian History: On the Example of Kosovo and Metohija Under the Ottoman Rule*. Annals of the Academy of Romanian Scientists Series on History and Archaeology 6 (2). p.9.

¹¹⁷ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. pp.23-25.

“The Age of Tribulation”: Batakovic on the early Ottoman period

The first 300 years of Ottoman control over Kosovo are labeled by Batakovic as “The Age of Tribulation.”¹¹⁸ While Kosovo flourished as part of the Serbian Kingdom, the Ottomans ruled Kosovo heavy-handedly, based on a policy of religious intolerance and repression.

According to Batakovic, the Ottomans, directly after their arrival attempted to coerce the Serbian population into converting to Islam. The number of working churches dwindled after the Ottoman conquest, as they were either turned into mosques or completely destroyed.¹¹⁹ Discrimination against the Christian Serbs was common as they “became second-class citizens in [the] Islamic state”¹²⁰ Although Christians were the majority of the population, it were Ottomans - by Batakovic usually called “Turks” - who ruled the areas and discriminated against the Serbs:

Being Christian Orthodox, the majority of Serbs, both urban and rural, as well as all other non-Muslim ethnic groups (“people of the book”), became *reaya*, second-class citizens under the Ottoman Islamic order. Apart from legalized religious discrimination, discrimination became evident in all spheres of everyday life. [...] They were, like other Christians, not only obliged to dress differently, to pay additional tax in lieu of military service, but they were deprived of such rights as riding a horse, possessing or carrying arms, and so on. Nor had the Christians the right to repair their churches or ring church bells without permission of the Ottoman authorities.¹²¹

The Serbs resisted Ottoman dominance. Batakovic recalls a heroic uprising against the Ottomans in 1594, to which the authorities reacted brutally: they “burned [Saint Sava’s] wonder working relics in Belgrade [...] This triggered off fresh waves of Islamization.”¹²²

According to Batakovic, the goal of this repression was the conversion of the population to Islam; Islamization. While Serbs were, in this period, not receptive to Ottoman conversion attempts, Albanians were. There is a stark contrast between the social positions of Serbs and Albanians: the “intense process of Islamization of the Albanians [allowed Albanians to become] part of the influential ruling class in the Ottoman Empire enjoying

¹¹⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 1-10-2019.

¹¹⁹ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.21.

¹²⁰ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 2-10-2019.

¹²¹ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity in The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.577.

¹²² Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 1-10-2019.

distinct social and political privileges.”¹²³ It is here, Batakovic argues, that the religious and social distinction between Christian Serbs and Muslim Albanians starts: “Christian Serbs and Muslim Albanians, now divided by religion and religion-based privileges, gradually grew into two opposed social and political groups.”¹²⁴ Batakovic makes it clear that by converting, the Albanians sided with the oppressors, and became oppressors themselves.

Thus it were not only the Ottomans that the Serbs had to fear: the Albanians were just as threatening. As “the non-Muslim masses labored under the yoke of the local Turkish administrators [they were] continually threatened by marauding tribes from the Albanian highlands.”¹²⁵ Because the Ottomans forbade Christians to bear arms, but at the same time allowed Muslims to do so, the Serbs were a defenseless target against the newly converted Albanians.¹²⁶

The position of Serbs and Christians only improved after the Serbian Orthodox Church was re-established under the Patriarchate of Pec in 1557. The Orthodox community could now be united in a *millet*. This had several benefits: it were not the Ottomans but the Christian authorities who could collect taxes and preside over court cases. Culturally, it was equally as relevant as “the Patriarchate of Pec organized a proficient and full-scale revival of medieval Serbian cults.”¹²⁷ As such, Serbs saw the institution as a “structural continuation of medieval Serbia that through its chancery, financial and judicial functions became instrumental in preserving both religious and ethnic identity.”¹²⁸

The Austro-Ottoman war of 1683-1690 is, for Batakovic, a watershed moment in the history of Kosovo. The antagonism between Serbs and Albanians reached new heights: while the Christian Orthodox Serbs “joined the Habsburg troops in their military campaign in Serbia as separate Christian militia” the Albanians remained loyal to the Ottomans; they “took the side of the Sultan’s army against the military coalition.”¹²⁹ Thus, in Kosovo the warring parties were defined along ethnic lines.

¹²³ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity* in *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.579

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 1-10-2019

¹²⁶ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.20.

¹²⁷ *ibid.* p.22.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity* in *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.580.

The aftermath of the war was even more important:

[After the Habsburg defeat] tens of thousands of Serb families, headed by the Patriarch of Pec, Arsenije III Crnojevic, withdrew from Kosovo and Metohija and adjacent districts to the northern areas, neighbouring Habsburg Empire, in fear of Ottoman reprisals.¹³⁰

The Great Migration is for Batakovic another example of great suffering at the hands of the Ottomans and Albanians. Ottoman forces, composed mainly of Albanians, looted and burned villages. The Christian population, on the run from these reprisals, “was additionally decimated by plague, and whatever had remained after that by the reprisals carried out by Ottoman irregular troops.”¹³¹ The Great Migration is also seen by Batakovic as a turning point in Kosovo Serb history. Not only did large amounts of Serbs leave Kosovo, the area was subsequently “colonized” by Albanians, who took over Serbian lands:

[...] once the Serbs withdrew from Kosovo and Metohija, Islamized Albanian tribes from the northern highlands started settling the area in greater number, mostly by force, in the decade following the 1690 Great Migration of Serbs. Ethnic Albanian tribes (given their incredible powers of reproduction) were posing a grave threat to the biological survival of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija. Colonies set up by the ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, Metohija and the neighbouring areas provoked a fresh Serbian migration towards the north, [and] encouraged the process of conversion and upset the centuries-old ethnic balance in those areas.¹³²

And so, the first 300 years of tribulation at the hands of the Ottomans and Albanians ended with a tragic migration that would change the history of Kosovo for years to come.

Becoming the victim: Discussion of Batakovic's statements

For Batakovic, the tribulations for Serbs start directly after Ottoman conquest. The Ottoman state pursued a policy of Islamization and used coercion to convert the Christian Serbs. Living conditions for Serbs deteriorate for multiple reasons: they have to pay an additional tax, have to dress differently and do not have the same rights as Muslims. The Ottomans similarly repressed their religion as Christian Serbs were not allowed to repair their churches or ring church bells.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. pp.27-28.

¹³² Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two.
https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 1-10-2019.

The Serbs do not take this lying down, but their resistance ends in heroic failure. Furthermore, through the Patriarchate of Pec it were only Serbs themselves that were able to alleviate their living conditions.

While the Serbs were the main victims, and the Ottomans were the regime that victimized them, Batakovic identifies yet another perpetrator: Albanians. As Albanians are more willing to convert to Islam, they are able to enter the ruling class and, from this position, also able to oppress the Serbs. The Serbs were also threatened by marauding Albanian tribes who robbed Serbs labouring under the yoke of Ottoman rule. The violence of Albanians against Serbs is depicted as sometimes organized, and sometimes random. While the suffering of Serbs was made possible by the Ottomans, it were the Albanians that the Serbs had to fear the most.

The strongest example for this is given by Batakovic in the Austro-Ottoman war. While Serbs joined the Austrians and rose up against the Ottomans, the Albanians sided with the Ottomans. While Serbs afterwards suffered heavily from Ottoman reprisals, the Albanians are set to gain. Islamized Albanian tribes took over the lands left behind by the Serbs and were in this supported by the authorities. Through high birth rates, by Batakovic denoted as “incredible powers of reproduction” they posed a grave threat to the biological survival of Serbs, while their arrival in Kosovo also disturbs the ethnic balance of the region.

There is a lack of nuance in Batakovic’s narrative. The first three hundred years of Ottoman rule are depicted as an age of tribulation. This was, however, not entirely the case. Initially, the Ottomans did not care for conversion. Living conditions for Serbs did not worsen, as Batakovic suggests, and although later on life for Christians did become harder, forced conversions to Islam were rare. The Ottoman authorities also allowed the reinstatement of the Patriarchate of Pec and the creation of an Orthodox millet. Through this system Serbs could indeed preserve their language, religion and ethnic individuality. The example of the Patriarchate of Pec shows that Ottoman authorities were not as ruthlessly anti-Christian as Batakovic depicts them: in Ottoman-ruled Kosovo there was a certain level of religious tolerance.¹³³

The antagonism between Serbs and Albanians was also not as strong as Batakovic suggests. Although some Albanians indeed did manage to rise through the ranks of Ottoman administration, the major part of the Albanian population shared their socio-economic position with their Serbian counterparts, as well as some customs and traditions.¹³⁴ Finally, Albanians did not, as Batakovic suggests, convert to Islam *en masse*.

¹³³ Vickers, M. 1998. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co. p.19.

¹³⁴ *ibid.* p.41.

In Batakovic's narrative the distinction between Serbs and Albanians becomes clearest during the Austro-Ottoman war: Serbs sided with the Austrians, and Albanians with the Ottomans. After the Austrians had been beaten, tens of thousands of Serbian families fled the region, while Albanians were allowed to settle on the lands Serbs left behind. However, large numbers of Albanians did rise, together with Serbs, against the Ottomans. This is completely ignored by Batakovic. Similarly, the number of Serb refugees is grossly overstated: it were not tens of thousands of families, but tens of thousands of individuals that left Kosovo. Not all of these were Serbs from Kosovo; similarly, a sizeable number of refugees were Albanians.¹³⁵ At the same time, while it were mostly Albanians who settled on the lands left behind, they were joined by Serbs and Montenegrins from the north.¹³⁶ In conclusion, the Great Migration may not have been as great as Batakovic suggests; similarly, it were not only the Serbs who suffered.

Batakovic gives a one-sided and historically inaccurate version of history. Yet, this version is in line with the Serbian nationalist historical narrative. In this narrative, Serbs are the innocent historical victims while the Albanians are the historical perpetrators.¹³⁷ As Raymond Detrez argues:

The Kosovars [= Albanians] are almost personally held responsible for the battle of Kosovo Polje and the Ottoman domination which followed afterwards. The Serbs thus have no sympathy for them; what Kosovars suffer today is, in their eyes, little compared to the suffering of Serbs at the hands of Albanians 'and other Turks' during Ottoman times. For Serbs, even the idea to live in a Kosovar state, is equal to restoration of Ottoman domination.¹³⁸

Batakovic agrees with this version of history, and through his writings, has reinforced this belief. However, to present history in such a one-sided way, he has surrendered factual correctness.

Finally, Batakovic depicts the Albanians as violent Others and employs enemy images against them. While Serbs already suffer under the yoke of the Ottomans, Albanians happily join the ranks of the oppressor as they hope to improve their own position. Serbs similarly stood defenseless against Albanian raids. After the Austro-Ottoman war, Albanians opportunistically colonize Serbian land and threaten the biological survival of Serbs in Kosovo. The enemy images attributed to Albanians are clear: they are opportunistic

¹³⁵ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.24.

¹³⁶ *ibid.* p.25.

¹³⁷ Leurdijk, D & D. Zandee. 1999. *Kosovo: Van Crisis tot Crisis*. Den Haag: Nederlands Instituut voor Internationale Betrekkingen *Clingendael*. p.11.

¹³⁸ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.21.

oppressors who feel no remorse for raiding unarmed and vulnerable Serbs. At the same time positive images are applied to the Serbs: they are heroic in their resistance against Ottoman oppression, and are willing to sacrifice themselves in this struggle. Batakovic places this antagonism deeply in history: Albanians have for long been a violent, threatening Other; the mythical arch-enemy of Serbian physical and cultural survival in Kosovo. This belief has complicated the relation between both ethnic groups, and has fuelled the antagonism between them. Combined with the identity of the victim,¹³⁹ this belief may also lead to further conflict, as it may serve to legitimize the destruction of the Albanian threatening enemy.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ibid. See also: Lim, J. 2010. *Victimhood Nationalism in Contested Memories: National Mourning and Global Accountability*. In: *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (ed. Assmann, A. & S. Conrad). p.143.

¹⁴⁰ Vuorinen, M. 2012. *Enemy Images in War Propaganda*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars. p.4.

Chapter Three: A nation established (1690-1912)

Decay of Ottoman control: Kosovo 1690-1912

The period of 1690-1912 saw important social and demographic developments that helped shape Kosovo. These developments, which will be discussed later in this chapter, need to be understood in the light of geopolitical developments in the Ottoman Empire. Although the Ottomans initially strengthened their control over the area, the Empire itself started to erode during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Multiple problems lay the foundation for this erosion: financial difficulties, the schism between centralists and regionalists in the Ottoman government, and pressures for more autonomy within the regions themselves. Ottoman control over its territories was waning: Greece fought a war of independence for nine years - independence was declared in 1821 and recognized in 1830¹⁴¹ - while elsewhere in the Empire, uprisings were similarly common.¹⁴² Although Kosovo remained under Ottoman control, a Serbian state - The Principality of Serbia - was founded as a consequence of the Serbian Revolution (1804-1817). Although *de jure* under Ottoman control, the Principality enjoyed high levels of autonomy until 1878 when it became officially independent after two wars with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴³ Despite remaining under Ottoman governance, Kosovo also witnessed conflict. A war between a coalition of Venice and Austria against the Ottoman Empire, that started in 1714, saw Catholic Albanian tribes in Kosovo rise up in support of Venice and Austria. The revolt, in which Albanians and Serbs fought side by side was repressed by Ottoman forces as they gained the upper hand in the conflict.¹⁴⁴ Serbs and Albanians both rose against the Ottomans in the mid-nineteenth century.

From 1839 onwards the Ottoman government pursued a policy of *Tanzimat* - reform - which would end *millet* autonomy and give all citizens equal rights despite religion. This caused tensions within Kosovo: as Christian Serbs drastically improved their socio-economic position, Albanian Muslims lost their privileges and position as favoured Ottoman class. This caused resentment under the Albanians against Ottoman governance. At the same time there was also frustration against Ottoman rule under Serbs as they longed for more autonomy themselves and resented conscription.¹⁴⁵ The *Tanzimat* also led to the

¹⁴¹ Glenny, M. 2012. *The Balkans 1804-2012. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. London: Granta. p.22.

¹⁴² *ibid* p.40.

¹⁴³ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.201.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*. p.169.

¹⁴⁵ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.30.

modernization of the economy, education and press, which would play a major role in spreading nationalist sentiment within both Serb and Albanian communities.¹⁴⁶

Albanian nationalism was on the rise. Feeling threatened by the expansion of the young states of Serbia, Greece and Montenegro, Albanian nationalists, both progressive and conservative, formed the League of Prizren in 1878. While at first willing to work together with the Ottoman regime,¹⁴⁷ the decay of the Ottoman empire caused the League to change into a movement that advocated full Albanian independence.¹⁴⁸ That the League had been founded in Prizren, a major city in Kosovo, meant that Kosovo was now also seen as the cradle of Albanian nationalism.¹⁴⁹

Overall the nineteenth century witnessed a vicious circle of anti-Ottoman uprisings which further weakened Ottoman control over the region. The Ottomans reacted with oppression, but failed to pacify the region completely. In 1912, after another Albanian revolt the central government granted far-going autonomy to the Albanian regions. According to Noel Malcolm, the Albanian revolt and its outcome “persuaded the Balkan states that the time was ripe for anti-Ottoman war, and so fatally weakened the Ottomans that the war was quickly won.”¹⁵⁰ During this First Balkan War, the Ottoman army was unable to defend Kosovo against the attacking Serbs and Kosovo was thus conquered by Serbia. At the same time, Albania also rose against the Ottoman government. An international conference decided that Albania was to become an independent state,¹⁵¹ but that Kosovo was to be added to Serbia.¹⁵² This started a new era in Kosovo history.

Socially, the antagonism between Serbs and Albanians sees its roots in the nineteenth century. Eroding Ottoman control combined with rising nationalism saw the ethnic groups project themselves against each other in order to further their own national political goals. Serbs and Albanians began to distrust each other.¹⁵³ After Serbia gained independence in 1878 and fought two wars against the Ottoman Empire, the Serbian government expelled Muslims from the country: an estimated 60 to 70.000 Albanian refugees found their way to Kosovo.¹⁵⁴ Relations deteriorated even further during the early

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.31.

¹⁴⁷ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.221.

¹⁴⁸ Vickers, M. 1998. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co. p.46-48.

¹⁴⁹ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.18.

¹⁵⁰ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.248.

¹⁵¹ Leurdijk, D & D. Zandee. 1999. *Kosovo: Van Crisis tot Crisis*. Den Haag: Nederlands Instituut voor Internationale Betrekkingen *Clingendael*. p.16.

¹⁵² This “Conference of Ambassadors consisted of Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia and Italy. It had to make decisions on what should be done with the Ottoman Empire’s former Balkan possessions. See: Vickers, M. 1998. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co. p.80.

¹⁵³ *ibid.* p.41.

¹⁵⁴ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.228-230.

twentieth century as Albanians, encouraged by the Ottomans, became more hostile against the Serbs. The Serbian government, who were already agitating Serbs against the Ottomans, also became involved in agitation against Albanians.¹⁵⁵

While it is true that Serbs were generally worse off, the claim that Albanians received a far better treatment than their Serbian counterparts should at least be disputed: Albanian peasants suffered from the same kind of violence and extortion by local leaders as the Serbs.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the mid-nineteenth century also saw more activity in the Serbian Orthodox community: schools and churches were built, priests were recruited and education in Serbian was provided, largely with support from Serbia and Russia.¹⁵⁷

Demographically the period was similarly turbulent. The Serbian population dwindled further after the failed uprising against the Ottomans resulted in a “Second Migration” in 1737.¹⁵⁸ This is not to say that the Serbian population disappeared completely: the Christian Orthodox population slowly returned throughout the later eighteenth and nineteenth century. At the same time Albanians migrated to the region and, by 1838, Muslims outnumbered Christians by 31.000 individuals.¹⁵⁹ Although not all Muslims were Albanians, and not all Christians were Serbs, it is reasonable to argue that by the mid-19th century Albanians did constitute an absolute majority in the region.

Apart from (forced) migration, another theory has been posed to answer the question why the number of Serbs dwindled. This theory argues that there are little to no indigenous Albanians in Kosovo but merely Albanized Slavs: Slavic peoples who had converted to Islam and had in the process lost their Serbian identity. This has been called the *Arnautasi*-thesis. Adherents of this theory count converted Serbs on the Serbian side of the ethnic balance: at a census in 1905, the number of Serbs is put at 206.920, Albanians at just 20.000 and “Albanized Muslim Serbs” at 390.010.¹⁶⁰ While it is possible to assert that the process of converting to Islam lead to social mimicry, the process was not as widespread as claimed.¹⁶¹ The thesis is also problematic if it comes to categorizing people: if Serbs lost their religion, stopped speaking Serbian and adopted Albanian culture, why should they still be categorized as (Islamized or Albanized) Serbs? Despite this critique, the *Arnautasi*-thesis

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* p.234-235.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* p.178.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.* p.188-189.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.* p.170.

¹⁵⁹ Mertus, J.A. 1999. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.313.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.* p.314.

¹⁶¹ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.197.

has been used as a tool to prove that Kosovo's population are Serbs and that, therefore, Kosovo should belong to Serbia.¹⁶²

In conclusion, the period of 1690-1912 is a period of change: change in the political situation, change in ethnic relations, change in demographics. It is also a period that requires moderation: both Serbs and Albanians were guilty of committing violence upon each other, and both groups were victims of Ottoman decay. This, however, is not the story that Batakovic tells. His history of Kosovo in this period is one of one-sided aggression and one-sided victimhood.

Violence and Arnauts: Batakovic on the late Ottoman period

Batakovic's narrative of Kosovo in this period tells not a moderated or nuanced history, but sees this period merely as one of one-sided aggression and one-sided victimhood. According to Batakovic, an overarching problem for Serbs in Kosovo was that they were second-rank citizens. While Albanians, who through converting to Islam had gained privileges and were thus able to improve their living conditions, Christian Serbs remained citizens of a lower order. Politically and economically, Serbs in the early nineteenth century lived under "extremely unfavourable circumstances."¹⁶³

Status inequality meant that Serbs were easy victims of Albanian-perpetrated crime. Batakovic states that: "due only to the fact that he was Muslim by religion, an Albanian cattle breeder was allowed to carry a gun and could, without fear of punishment, persecute and rob an Orthodox Christian, in most cases a Serbian peasant, deprived of any means of self-protection."¹⁶⁴ Batakovic similarly puts forward that Albanians used the unrest caused by wars between Austria and the Ottoman Empire in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries to further their own interests. As the region was in upheaval, Albanians committed "raids, murder, rape against the unarmed [Serb] population." Albanians were motivated by greed, but also by ethnic and religious motives - to force Serbs to convert to Islam or leave the region altogether.¹⁶⁵

According to Batakovic, the Tanzimat, which would mean that Christian Serbs would gain equal status, did not improve Serb living conditions. Instead, Batakovic holds a negative

¹⁶² *ibid.*

¹⁶³ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Three. https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part2a.html retrieved on 27-10-2019

¹⁶⁴ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity* in *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.582.

¹⁶⁵ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two. https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 2-10-2019.

opinion on the reforms as they ended millet autonomy and Orthodox Serbs became direct subjects of the Ottoman sultan.¹⁶⁶ At the same time, the reforms “turned the Albanian feudal lords and tribal chiefs of Kosovo against the Orthodox Serbs.”¹⁶⁷ As Serbs lost autonomy and violence raged, Serbs were “stuck between local [Muslim Albanian] outlaws [...] and frequent Albanian revolts against the central authorities’ attempts at modernization.”¹⁶⁸ To avoid attacks by Albanians, Serbs either converted or fled Kosovo.¹⁶⁹

The suffering of Serbs was not alleviated during the mid- and late nineteenth century:

At the beginning of the 70's, until the opening of the Eastern crisis and the Serbian-Ottoman wars, the position of Serbian inhabitants did not alter drastically. Even though there were no large Albanian moves nor Turkish campaigns, the Christian Serbs were confronted with high taxes, unpaid labor (*kuluk*), attacks and blackmail. The main targets were usually Serbian girls seized by ethnic Albanians who then forced them accept Islam. Religious intolerance and thirst for land and property were causes for much blackmail, conflagration estates and cattle raids. The custom of the ethnic Albanians was first to warn the Serbian family the property of which was to be arrogated, by leaving a bullet on the hearthrug. The choice was limited to evacuating the entire family, or, in case of resistance, killing the men and kidnapping or Islamizing the girls.¹⁷⁰

In short, this period saw “successive waves of violence perpetrated by Muslim Albanians against Christian Serbs.”¹⁷¹

Inter-ethnic violence escalated even further in the late-nineteenth century. Batakovic states that in the aftermath of the 1878-1879 Serbo-Ottomans wars, Albanians who lived in Serbia “migrated [...] both voluntary and forced, [in numbers] of at least 30.000 Muslim Albanians from the liberated territories of the present-day southeast Serbia.”¹⁷² Albanians who had left Serbia did so because they were “reluctant to accept their loss of feudal privileges in a Christian-ruled European-type state.” As they arrived in Kosovo, these Albanians “[took] out their frustration on the local Serbs” which, in turn, caused “dozens of thousands of Serbs [to flee] from various parts of Old Serbia [...] into the newly liberated

¹⁶⁶ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.32.

¹⁶⁷ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Three. https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part2a.html retrieved on 27-10-2019.

¹⁶⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.32-33.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Three. https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part2a.html retrieved on 27-10-2019

¹⁷¹ Batakovic, D.T. 2014. *Serbia, the Serbo-Albanian Conflict and the First Balkan War* in *Balcanica* XLV p. 318.

¹⁷² *ibid.* p.321.

territory.”¹⁷³ Thus, the independence of Serbia and Montenegro and their subsequent attempts at enlargement also fed “religious and national [Albanian] frustration” and led to violent outbursts against Christian Serbs.¹⁷⁴

A final danger to the Serbian population Batakovic identifies is rising Albanian nationalism. The League of Prizren, formed in 1878, is seen by Batakovic as a conservative Muslim group that aimed at implementing Sharia law in Kosovo. Batakovic argues that Albanian nationalism in essence was tribal rather than national, and religiously intolerant:

Modern Albanian nationalism, stemming from its tribal roots, gave priority to tribal rather than any other loyalties. Although defined in ethnic terms the Albanian national movement was still dominated by a Muslim majority and burdened by conservative Islamic traditions reinforced both by the Pan-Islamic policy and by fears of European-style reforms. During the Greek-Ottoman war [in 1898] Albanian volunteers demonstrated absolute solidarity with the Ottomans, while their patriotism, directed against Christians, was easily transformed into religious fanaticism.¹⁷⁵

While Batakovic gives a negative verdict on Albanian nationalism, he also argues that the movement received important foreign support, most importantly from Austria-Hungary. A former ally of the Serbs, the Habsburgs wanted to expand eastwards into Serbia and as a tactic boosted Albanian nationalism in order to weaken Serbia. In order to do so, The Dual Monarchy published works on Albanian nationalism, invented the national coat of arms, promoted a uniform Albanian language and even spread the theory that Albanians descended from Illyrians.¹⁷⁶

The suffering of the Serbs at the hands of the Albanians leads Batakovic to the following conclusion: The violence against Serbs constituted “genocide upon the Serbs.” Although the Ottomans kept a watchful eye, the Albanians were the main perpetrators of this genocide.

Developing into a movement, the purpose of which was to exterminate a people, Albanian anarchy was adjusted by circumstances, lead by political motives, tribal, economical or personal gains, displaying itself in various ways. Muslim fundamentalism and religious fanaticism were interwoven with feelings of national and tribal belonging. [...] Thus the ethnic Albanians applied a method of

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.37.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity in The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.587.

persisted violence day after day which, being radicalized in periods of crises, lead to a sure completion of their purpose - the extermination of Serbs in the Kosovo Vilayet.¹⁷⁷

Although Batakovic in his later works does not repeat the claim of genocide he does hold the opinion that violence against Serbs constituted ethnic cleansing: violence against Serbs was orchestrated and had as a goal to remove Serbs from the area.¹⁷⁸ By putting forward that violence against Serbs either constituted genocide or ethnic cleansing, Batakovic suggests that the Albanians had a clear goal: to remove all Serbs from Kosovo.

As a consequence of the continued and escalating repression against Serbs, some Serbs converted to Islam. Batakovic argues that Serbs only saw conversion as a temporary solution: their conversion was only a disguise to escape persecution. Thus Serbs “waited in vain for the right moment to re-embrace the faith of their ancestors” while they preserved their language and culture.¹⁷⁹

The right moment never came. Under pressure of “a strong ethnic environment” - or intermarriage between Serbian males and “girls from ethnic Albanian tribal community” - Serbs started to mimic Albanians: they dressed as Albanians, spoke Albanian and gradually started to lose their Serbian identity. This process of assimilation - by Batakovic labeled “Albanization” - was not limited to an insignificant part of the population: Batakovic argues that “about 30% of the present-day ethnic Albanian population of Kosovo and Metohija is of Serbian origin.”¹⁸⁰ In this, he clearly adheres to the *Arnautasi*-thesis.

Victims and Enemies: Discussion of Batakovic's statements

Batakovic's discussion of the 1690-1912 period is a continuation of his discussion of the 1389-1689 period. Serb victimhood is continued, and the perpetrators are identified as Albanians. According to Batakovic, the socio-economic distinction between Christian Serb and Muslim Albanian not only made Albanians the privileged class and Serbs second-rank citizens; it also meant that Albanians could without difficulty commit violence upon Serbs.

Although Serbs and Albanians became equal for the law with the Tanzimat, Serbian living conditions were not improved. On the one hand, Serbs lost autonomy and became

¹⁷⁷ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Five.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part2c.html retrieved on 27-10-2019.

¹⁷⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.44.

¹⁷⁹ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity* in *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.582.

¹⁸⁰ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Two.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1b.html retrieved on 2-10-2019.

direct subjects of the sultan, while on the other hand, Albanians, who were frustrated at their loss of privileges, took out their frustration on Serbs.

For Batakovic, rising Albanian nationalism constituted yet another threat to Kosovo Serbs. Its tribal, conservative and religiously intolerant roots made it vehemently anti-Serb and pro-Ottoman. It is furthermore not indigenous as its symbolism, language and history were Austro-Hungarian inventions. This links Albanians to a fifth column that served to assist Austro-Hungarian expansion into Serbia. The continued anti-Serbian atmosphere in Kosovo makes Batakovic conclude that the Albanians had a clear goal: removal of all Serbs from Kosovo. This could be achieved through ethnic cleansing or genocide.

Finally, Batakovic adheres to the Arnautasi-thesis. Serbs saw conversion as a temporary solution to escape persecution, and did not wish to remain Muslim. However, under Albanian pressure they eventually assimilated into the Albanian community. Batakovic argues that even today, about 30% of Kosovo Albanians are of Serbian origin.

The narrative Batakovic provides is a one-sided tale of Serbs being victimized. Batakovic makes it seem as if the pre-Tanzimat socio-economic distinction between Serbs and Albanians was opportunistically exploited by Albanians to rob Serb peasants. However, this distinction was not as strong as Batakovic indicates.¹⁸¹ Batakovic's suggestion that Serbs were always the victims of Albanians is also an oversimplification of the situation. While it is true that there was some inter-ethnic violence between Serb and Albanian, the outlaws (so-called *hajduks*) which terrorized the region cared little for ethnicity or religion. Muslim hajduks also attacked Albanians, while Christian hajduks had no objections to looting Serbian villages.¹⁸² This nuance is absent in Batakovic's discussion.

That Serbs were the sole victims of the Tanzimat-reforms also proves a difficult view to uphold. The modernization of the economy gave a significant impulse to the economic position of Serbs, who could take over economic life in villages and towns without too much difficulty. Furthermore, reforms in education boosted literacy while through the creation of Serbian-language press nationalist ideas could be proliferated.¹⁸³ The Tanzimat thus stimulated Serbian nationalism. It is indeed true that loss of privileges caused resentment under the Albanian population, which sometimes boiled over into violent uprisings. These uprisings were, however, not so much against Serbs as well as against the Ottoman authorities. In addition, the Serbian population also violently resisted the Ottoman

¹⁸¹ Vickers, M. 1998. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co. p.41.

¹⁸² Leurdijk, D & D. Zandee. 1999. *Kosovo: Van Crisis tot Crisis*. Den Haag: Nederlands Instituut voor Internationale Betrekkingen *Clingendael*. p.14.

¹⁸³ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.30.

authorities. Batakovic's narrative has no mention of the improvements in the living conditions of Serbs, instead, he only focuses on their victimization at the hands of Albanians.

Another example of this victim-perpetrator dynamic is found in his discussion of the 1877-1879 Serbo-Ottoman war. During this war, the Serbian army managed to occupy large parts of Kosovo. Albanian mosques and houses were destroyed.¹⁸⁴ Subsequently, an estimated 60.000 to 70.000 Albanians were violently expelled from Serbia; most of these refugees found their way into Kosovo.¹⁸⁵ Batakovic ignores the destruction of mosques and houses by the Serbian army. The number of Albanian refugees is reduced to 30.000 and their motives of fleeing are disputed by Batakovic: while he admits that some were forced to leave, others left voluntarily because they were reluctant to live without privileges in a European-type state (sic). Instead, it were the Serbs that were the real victims. Upon arrival, Batakovic states that Albanian refugees attacked Christian Serbs, which were then forced to flee en masse to "liberated" Serbia.

Framing the League of Prizren as a conservative anti-Serb and pro-Ottoman institution is also an oversimplification of reality. It is true that the League was dominated by conservative Muslim landowners, who favoured close ties with the Ottoman authorities over being dominated by other nations (i.e. the Christian new nations of Serbia, Greece or Montenegro.)¹⁸⁶ However, their closeness to the Ottomans was a marriage of convenience not love. Muslim Albanians feared the expansion of Christian states, and that if Albanian lands would come under these states' control, they would either be killed or expelled.¹⁸⁷ Finally, the League of Prizren did contain progressive elements.¹⁸⁸ All these elements did play a role in the development of the League of Prizren, but apparently not in the narrative of Batakovic.

Batakovic suggests that in Kosovo, in the end of the nineteenth century, Albanians committed genocide against the Serbs or, at least, attempted to ethnically cleanse the region of Serbs. This suggests the clear goal of Albanians to remove, by any means necessary, all Serbs from Kosovo. It also creates the image of the Albanian as a threatening Other, who is willing to exterminate Serbs, force Serb women to marry them, and steal Serb-owned lands. It is true that Serbs were generally worse off in the region, and that they did suffer from violence, which could locally amount to ethnic cleansing.¹⁸⁹ However, contrary to what

¹⁸⁴ Leurdijk, D & D. Zandee. 1999. *Kosovo: Van Crisis tot Crisis*. Den Haag: Nederlands Instituut voor Internationale Betrekkingen *Clingendael*. p.15.

¹⁸⁵ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.228-230.

¹⁸⁶ Vickers, M. 1998. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co. p.44.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.* p.43.

¹⁸⁸ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.31.

¹⁸⁹ Vickers, M. 1998. *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*. London: Hurst & Co. p.46.

Batakovic suggests, the breakdown of interethnic relations was not entirely caused by Albanians. Serbs suffered the brunt of violence in Kosovo, it were Albanians who were worse off in Serbia or Montenegro. The ethnic groups were also manipulated into hatred: while the Ottoman government, fearing Serbian expansion, fuelled anti-Serbian hostility, Serbia and Russia agitated against Albanians through their consulates.¹⁹⁰ Finally, despite rising ethnic tensions, the studied literature on the 1690-1912 period does not suggest that the Albanians had the clear goal to remove all Serbs from Kosovo through ethnic cleansing or genocide.

Finally, Batakovic's adherence to the Arnautasi thesis also raises questions. Batakovic argues that a large number of Serbs was converted to Islam and thus assimilated into the Albanian ethnic group. He even argues that 30% of modern-day Albanians are the direct descendants of Serbs. This is problematic for two reasons. First of all, this belief is based on a 1905 statistic that notes an unlikely high number of "Albanized Muslim Serbs" - 390.010 compared to only 21.560 Albanians. Categorizing a part of the Kosovo population as Albanized Muslim Serbs, and subsequently inflating their number so that they could constitute a majority, was done so to strengthen the claim of Serbia over Kosovo.¹⁹¹ Apart from this factual critique, another problem is that people who did not behave as Serbs were categorized as Serbs. Both critiques are not incorporated in Batakovic's narrative, who prefers to present demographics in a for Serbia favourable way.¹⁹²

Overall, Batakovic's discusses the 1690-1912 period in a one-sided way. Serbian victimhood at the hands of the Albanians is overemphasized, while instances in which Albanians were victims are either ignored completely or watered down. Albanians are depicted as opportunistic, greedy and violent, while their nationalism is identified as intrinsically anti-Serbian. This presentation of history allows Batakovic to keep the victim-perpetrator dynamic intact. Albanians are collectively held responsible for Serb suffering. This is a continuation of the dynamic discussed in Chapter Two. The narrative that Serbs are historical victims is reinforced by Batakovic, although the factual correctness of this narrative can be disputed. Implementing this feeling of historical victimhood into Serb national consciousness also makes it hereditary. Meanwhile, Batakovic depicts the Albanian as an enemy, a violent Other. While Serbs are mythologized as eternal victims, Albanians become their eternal prosecutor. Apart from factual correctness, the problem of this narrative is that depicting Serbs as innocent victims and Albanians as evil enemies has fueled antagonism between the two groups in the past. It also provides Serbs with a tool to defend

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.* p.58-59.

¹⁹¹ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.39-40.

¹⁹² See above.

their own acts, to justify themselves becoming perpetrators. This justification becomes visible in Batakovic's discussion of the twentieth century, which is under investigation in next chapter.

Chapter Four: Pendulum of domination (1912-2000)

Conquest after conquest: Kosovo 1912-2000

The twentieth century saw rule of Kosovo shift multiple times between Serbs and Albanians. Rather than creating an open society or attempting to assimilate other groups into the own group, both ethnicities placed themselves in a dominant position; exercising power over the other while similarly not allowing the dominated group to have power themselves.¹⁹³ Whenever Kosovo was ruled by Serbs they were the dominant group, whereas Albanian rule meant Albanian dominance. Consequently, the Albanian-dominated periods saw Serbs lose out, while during the Serb-dominated periods the Albanians were worse off. Historian Marina Blagojevic labeled this dynamic a *pendulum of domination* in the late 1990s. Lazar Nolic, co-author of the acclaimed work *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (2000) further elaborated on this term, arguing that “roles have changed between Albanians and Serbs, switching the role of the victim between the mid-nineteenth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.”¹⁹⁴

This domination-based model is essential to understand the antagonism between Serbs and Albanians. Both groups have dominated and victimized the other whenever possible, thus creating a fertile basis for the victims, when they came into power, to become perpetrators themselves and victimize the formerly dominant group. As this dynamic is so important in the conflict between Serbs and Albanians, it is necessary to discuss exactly how it functioned throughout the twentieth century.

In 1912 the First Balkan War broke out, in which Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria aimed to expand their borders at the loss of the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Kosovo was conquered by Serbia and Montenegro and in 1913 officially added to Serbia. Serbs rejoiced: the conquest of Kosovo was felt as historical justice. Similarly, Kosovo Serbs, at that point between 30% and 40% of the population felt that after more than 500 years they were reunited with their motherland.¹⁹⁵

Meanwhile, Albanians had lost their privileged position and now it were the Serbs who were dominant. In the direct aftermath of the conquest, Serbian forces massacred Albanians: reports in the European press estimated that the number of Albanians killed

¹⁹³ Zamyatin, K. 2017. *Power-Sharing or Ethnic Domination? Ethnic Representation in the Republics of Russia in the Late 2000s- Early 2010s*. Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe 16 (3). p.47.

¹⁹⁴ Nolic, L. 2003. *Ethnic Prejudices and Discrimination: The Case of Kosovo*. in: *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (ed. Bieber, F. & Z. Daskalovski). London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.55.

¹⁹⁵ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.39.

reached 20.000 in 1913. A similar number fled the region. Furthermore, the Serbian forces also forcibly converted individuals to the Serbian Orthodox Church. Albanian resistance against the Serbs was met with a severe response.¹⁹⁶

The Balkan Wars were the prelude to the First World War. After suffering heavy losses at the hands of Austria-Hungary the Serbian government decided to evacuate Serbian soldiers and civilians in an attempt to reach Corfu through Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania.¹⁹⁷ The retreat turned into disaster as the retreating Serbs faced hunger, cold and illness. As Serb control had suddenly disappeared, the Albanians found themselves again in a dominant position and carried out reprisals against the retreating Serbs. Only 120.000 soldiers of the total 300.000 would eventually be rescued.¹⁹⁸ The retreat is one of Serbia's most tragic memories.

After the First World War, Kosovo was added to the newly founded Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (henceforth Kingdom of Yugoslavia) in which Serbia was the dominant actor. Serb dominance over Kosovo was consequently restored. Kosovo Albanians were either seen as Albanized Serbs or an ethnic minority, not a constituting nation of their own. Thus, they lacked rights other ethnicities had, such as educating their people in their own language. After crushing Albanian resistance the Serbian government attempted to shift the demographic balance towards the Serbian side through two tactics.¹⁹⁹ First of all, Serbs were motivated to settle in Kosovo on land confiscated from Albanians.²⁰⁰ Secondly, the Serbian government attempted to expel Albanians. Coercion, though effective, did not go rapid enough. Consequently, the Serbian government considered deporting Albanians to Turkey. In 1938 the Turkish government agreed to take up 200.000 Albanian individuals.²⁰¹ Although the plan was never executed, it shows the lengths Serbia would go to remove Albanians from Kosovo. Still, between 90.000 and 150.000 Albanians emigrated from Kosovo.²⁰²

With the Second World War, the tables turned once more. Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany defeated Yugoslavia in 1941. Parts of Kosovo were added to Albania proper - then a puppet state of Italy - while in Nazi-occupied Kosovo an autonomous Albanian government

¹⁹⁶ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.254.

¹⁹⁷ Judah, T. 2009. *The Serbs: History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. London: Yale University Press. p.99.

¹⁹⁸ Hall, R.C. 2014. *War in the Balkans: an Encyclopedic History from the Fall of the Ottoman Empire to the Breakup of Yugoslavia*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO. p.279.

¹⁹⁹ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.44.

²⁰⁰ Nikolic, L. 2003. *Ethnic Prejudices and Discrimination: The Case of Kosovo*. in: *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (ed. Bieber, F. & Z. Daskalovski). London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.55.

²⁰¹ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.43.

²⁰² Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.287.

was installed.²⁰³ As the Axis occupiers favoured the Albanians over the Serbs, the former came back into dominance while the latter suffered from discrimination. Some Serbs, for the majority recent settlers, were sent to concentration camps; others were forced to work in the mines.²⁰⁴ At the same time Serbs feared Albanian reprisals and for this motive fled Kosovo. As a consequence, the demographic situation shifted: some 70.000 Serbs, fled or were deported from Kosovo, while similar numbers of Albanians moved back in.²⁰⁵

Directly after the Second World War, the pendulum swung back to the Serbian side as Kosovo was yet again added as a province of Serbia to Yugoslavia, a federal state now under communist rule. As a province, Kosovo lacked the rights of a republic as it had no rights of self-management or separation.²⁰⁶ Just as in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Albanians only had the status of national minority, not of constituting nation.²⁰⁷ Yugoslav authorities attempted to win the Albanian population in the aftermath of the war but these attempts were stillborn.²⁰⁸ In the years under Aleksandar Rankovic, minister of interior and head of secret police and after 1963 vice-president of Yugoslavia, centralization was policy, and Albanians were viewed with suspicion.²⁰⁹ This resulted in anti-Albanian discrimination and policies, which caused hundreds of thousands of Albanians to emigrate.

Rankovic was removed from power in 1966 and the Yugoslav constitution was changed in 1963 and 1974,²¹⁰ granting Kosovo more powers. However, Kosovo never gained the status of republic and remained subordinate to Serbia. If central authorities wanted to retract autonomy, there was little Kosovo could do.²¹¹ The region furthermore was Yugoslavia's weakest link, economically speaking, with high levels of unemployment and a lack of opportunity for Kosovo Albanians.²¹² At the same time, Albanians gained more privileges, and discrimination against Serbs was widespread, which led to Serbian

²⁰³ Fischer, Bernd J. 1999. *Albania at War: 1939-1945*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press. p.62.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.* p.58.

²⁰⁵ Nikolic, L. 2003. *Ethnic Prejudices and Discrimination: The Case of Kosovo*. in: *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (ed. Bieber, F. & Z. Daskalovski). London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.58.

²⁰⁶ Judah, T. 2009. *History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. New Haven: Yale University Press. p.139.

²⁰⁷ Nikolic, L. 2003. *Ethnic Prejudices and Discrimination: The Case of Kosovo*. in: *Understanding the War in Kosovo* (ed. Bieber, F. & Z. Daskalovski). London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.59.

²⁰⁸ The Albanian language was allowed to be used in official life and communication, Serbian settlers who had fled during the Second World War were not allowed to return, and there were even some talks between Yugoslavia and Albania on transferring Kosovo to Albania. See: Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.317-318.

²⁰⁹ Judah, T. 2009. *History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. New Haven: Yale University Press. p.143.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ Ramet, S. *et al.* 2006. *Serbia Since 1989: Politics and Society under Milosevic and After*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. p.314.

²¹² Mertus, J.A. 1999. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.23-26.

migration from the region.²¹³ Thus, the period of Rankovic's removal can be seen as a mixed period: while the Albanians were the dominant population, institutionally the Serbs were still in control.

The 1980s witnessed the rise of Slobodan Milosevic. In 1986 Milosevic became the president of the League of Communists of Serbia; five years later he became the president of Serbia itself. Milosevic had risen to power on the wave of nationalism, while his rhetoric also fuelled that same wave. Kosovo played a central role in his ideology. In 1988 he delivered a speech in Belgrade expressing that Kosovo was an inherent and inseparable part of Serbia because "every nation has a love which eternally warms its heart. For us it is Kosovo."²¹⁴ At a speech at Kosovo Polje a year later, Milosovic argued that Serbs should remain in Kosovo by historical right.²¹⁵ That a Serbian nationalist like Milosevic was in power essentially meant that dominance was once back with the Serbs. In 1989 and 1990 constitutional changes saw Kosovo lose its high level of autonomy. Albanians in official jobs were fired and replaced by Serbs.²¹⁶

The breaking apart of Yugoslavia, which saw ethnic violence and attempts of genocide²¹⁷ put the situation in Kosovo under extreme tension. In 1997, large amounts of Albanian weapons found their way into the hands of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), the armed wing of the pro-independence Popular Movement for Kosova.²¹⁸ A year later all-out war broke out. By autumn 1998, 250,000 Kosovars, overwhelmingly Albanians, had fled to neighbouring countries.²¹⁹ The international community, fearing genocide, was triggered into action and attempted to open negotiations. These negotiations, which took place at Rambouillet in France, failed: the Serbian delegation had refused to agree with holding a referendum in Kosovo on the future of Kosovo. The result was a bombing campaign by NATO forces on Serbian military targets in Serbia, Kosovo and Montenegro.²²⁰

²¹³ Nikolic, L. 2003. *Ethnic Prejudices and Discrimination: The Case of Kosovo*. in: Understanding the War in Kosovo. London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.59.

²¹⁴ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.343.

²¹⁵ Judah, T. 2000. *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. London: Yale University Press. p.52.

²¹⁶ Nikolic, L. 2003. *Ethnic Prejudices and Discrimination: The Case of Kosovo*. in: Understanding the War in Kosovo. London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.62-63.

²¹⁷ Slovenia's war for independence only lasted ten days; Croatia fought a bloody war that was only resolved in 1995. The Bosnian war is perhaps best remembered as civil war between Serbs, Muslims and Croats escalated, ethnic cleansing and attempted genocide became modus operandi for all three parties. In the end, the war was only resolved with the Dayton Agreements, but only after more than 100.000 people had been killed, with a further 2.2 million individuals displaced. See: Glenny, M. 2012. *The Balkans, 1804-2012. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers*. London: Granta. p.638.

²¹⁸ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.76.

²¹⁹ Perritt, H. 2009. *The Road to Independence For Kosovo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.37.

²²⁰ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.84.

During the Kosovo War, both parties were guilty of war crimes. However, while there were cases of ethnic cleansing and attacks on civilians by the KLA, most of the war crimes were committed on the Serbian side. Just as in the aftermath of the conquest of Kosovo and 1912, and the Interbellum period, Serbian forces “killed and deported the Kosovar Albanians in an attempt to balance the ethnic population.”²²¹ An estimated 90% of the Albanian population were displaced during the war.²²²

In June 1999 Milosevic agreed to pull back his forces and the NATO would stop their bombing campaign. A NATO stabilization force (KFOR) and civil administration by the UN (UNMIK) would be implemented in Kosovo. The KLA would furthermore be disarmed. All this was codified in the UN Security Council Resolution 1244.²²³ Kosovo remained a de jure part of Yugoslavia, but de facto it became an UN protectorate. Furthermore, Kosovo gained its own parliament, police force, amongst other aspects of self-determination. After a bloody century, the pendulum of domination swung, once more, to the Albanians.

The pendulum does not swing: Batakovic on twentieth-century Kosovo

Kosovo’s twentieth century was a period in which dominance repeatedly swung between Serbs and Albanians. However, the narrative provided by Batakovic is rather different: Batakovic sees Kosovo’s twentieth century not as a pendulum of domination but - apart from the conquest of Kosovo in 1912 - as a period of continued victimhood for Kosovo Serbs.

The conquest of Kosovo by Serbia in 1912 is by Batakovic described as liberation:²²⁴

Highly motivated Serbian troops advanced in exaltation. The general feeling among the Serbian soldiers, embued (sic) with the Kosovo tradition, was that they were the “Avengers of Kosovo”, the heartland of medieval Serbia (“Old Serbia”) which had fallen under the Ottoman rule after the fateful Battle of Kosovo in 1389. [...]The Serbs in Prizren shouted “Thank God, thanks Serbia!” stressing that they had been waiting for that moment for five hundred years [...]. They emphasized the fact that they had been persecuted solely by the Albanians and that they maintained good relations with the ethnic Turks. [...] In Pec, the local Serbs were also thankful to ethnic Turks, who had often been robbed by Albanian outlaws as well. [...] The jubilant Serbs in Pec reported bitterly to a war

²²¹ Perritt, H. 2009. *The Road to Independence For Kosovo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.49.

²²² PBS Frontline. 2000. *War in Europe: Kosovo*.
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/kosovo/>. retrieved on: 21-07-2020.

²²³ *ibid*, p.51.

²²⁴ Batakovic, D.T. 1991. *The Great Powers, Serbia, and the Albanian Question* in *Balkanica XXII*. pl 119.

correspondent that there was not a single Serbian house among the remaining 500 in that town that did not lose one or two family members during the reign of terror of Albanian outlaws.²²⁵

While Kosovo Serbs celebrated the conquest of Kosovo as liberation and historical justice, Kosovo Albanians “remained hostile to the new Serbian regime.”²²⁶ At first, they had attempted to “defend their Ottoman fatherland in arms and use weapons obtained from Serbia against its army.”²²⁷ Subsequently, after Kosovo was conquered by Serbia, many Albanians fled to the mountains or took up armed resistance against the Serbian army, despite “Serbian officers [...] reassuring the Albanian population that Serbia is at war against the Ottomans, not against them.” The reason for this, according to Batakovic, was anti-Serbian agitation by Albanian tribal leaders.²²⁸

During the First World War, Albanians were quick to grab power. They were supported by Austro-Hungary, which instructed its officials “to provide full financial and military support to an Albanian insurrection in Serbian territory.”²²⁹ This helped Austro-Hungarian forces defeat the Serbs, after which the Serbian government decided to evacuate the country. Albanians treacherously (sic) attacked the retreating army and refugees that followed in its footsteps, while they also “refused to provide food without differentiating between soldiers and civilian refugees.”²³⁰ Furthermore, Albanians significantly profited from the Serbian defeat: “After the Serbian army’s retreat from Pec, Albanian outlaws pillaged many Serbian homes and shops.”²³¹

In the Austrian-occupied zones, Albanians were the favoured population while Serbs were continuously discriminated against:

As protectors of Albanians, Austro-Hungarians were quick to establish schools and local administration in the Albanian language. Kosovo Albanians remained privileged, whilst Serbs were utterly distrusted.²³²

²²⁵ *ibid.* p. 343.

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter Six.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part2d.html retrieved on 2-10-2019.

²²⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity* in *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.590.

²²⁹ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.47.

²³⁰ *ibid.*

²³¹ *ibid.*

²³² *ibid.* p.48.

Things were even worse in the Bulgarian-occupied zones:

In Kosovo rural communities Bulgarians often appointed ethnic Albanians and Turks as chairs, officials or gendarmes, who then assisted their compatriots in plundering local Serb property, in winning court cases against Serbs, and in hushing up occasional murders. In some Kosovo villages, Turks and Albanians jointly oppressed Serbs without fear of punishment, just as it was during the last years of Ottoman rule.²³³

After the Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian forces had eventually been defeated, it still took until December 1918 to get Kosovo under full control, as “Muslim Albanians [...] took arms left behind by the defeated Bulgarian and Austrian troops and attacked representatives of the Serbian civil and military authorities.”²³⁴

During the Interbellum, after Serbia and Kosovo were reunited, the policy of sending colonists to Kosovo in order to reinforce Serbia’s rule over the region is positively reflected upon by Batakovic, who also sees the policy as historical justice. The admittedly huge waves of “repopulation” were an attempt of “restoring the demographic balance disturbed during the last decades of Ottoman rule.”²³⁵ That Albanians nevertheless remained a majority in Kosovo is used by Batakovic to argue that there were not mass migrations or expulsions of Kosovo Albanians. Similarly, Batakovic ignores the fact that large numbers of Albanians left the region during the Interbellum, as well as the attempts of the Serbian government to extradite Albanians to Turkey. Claims of Albanian mass migration from Kosovo are labeled as anti-Serbian propaganda.²³⁶

Batakovic’s verdict on Serbian rule and authority over Kosovo during the Interbellum is positive. The Serbian government attempted to pull “these regions out of their centuries-long backwardness” by abolishing the feudal system and serfdom, setting up schools and implementing Serbian institutions.²³⁷ Albanians however remained hostile to these Serbian institutions. Batakovic argues that this hostility stems from Albanian dislike “towards the new [Serbian] state ruled by their former Slavic serfs.”²³⁸

The hostile attitude to Serbian rule would eventually cause Serb victimization. Batakovic mentions the raids of kaçaks - Albanian rebels - and denounces them as terrorist

²³³ *ibid.*

²³⁴ *ibid.* p. 49.

²³⁵ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity in The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.592

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ *ibid.*

²³⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2008. *Kosovo and Metohija: Serbia’s Troublesome Province*. *Balkanica* XXXIX. p.250.

incursions, supported by the local Albanian population.²³⁹ Batakovic does acknowledge that the Yugoslav authorities “responded with severe and often brutal military and police measures” against the kaçaks and occasionally against civilians, but these actions are justified by Batakovic as they were in reaction to the Albanians.²⁴⁰

After Serbia had been defeated in the Second World War, attempts to create a Greater Albania were made by the Axis occupiers, and so a new era in which Serbs were victimized was entered. Batakovic describes the suffering of the Serbs, but also emphasizes the connection of Albanian nationalism with fascism, and how enthusiastically Albanians operated in cleansing Serbs:

The main consequence of establishing a Fascist-sponsored and Nazi-supported “Greater Albania” was the merciless persecution and expulsion of some 60.000 to 100.000 Serbs, mostly colonists. Roughly 10.000 of them, native Kosovo Serbs included, fell victim to punitive actions of various Albanian militias [...] The new Fascist rulers gave the Kosovo Albanians the right to fly their own flag and open schools with instruction in Albanian. The tribal and mostly peasant Kosovo Albanian population received the newly acquired national symbols enthusiastically, but was not ready to restrain its actions to the cultural and political plane.²⁴¹

Batakovic states that Albanian aggression not only targeted Serbs, but also their places of worship and religious institutions. As Serbs were “perceived as oppressors under the Kingdom of Yugoslavia [by Albanians]”²⁴² Batakovic sees anti-Serb violence as an Albanian act of vengeance.

Large-scale destruction of Serb colonist villages was a major component of a strategic plan: to demonstrate to potential post-war international commissions drawing new borders that Serbs had never lived in Kosovo.²⁴³

The period after the Second World War had ended is marked by Batakovic as a period in which Serbs remained victims. According to Batakovic, The newly installed communist government perceived Serbian nationalism as greatest threat. They attempted to

²³⁹ *ibid.* p.249.

²⁴⁰ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity in The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed.Vasiljevic, M.) p.593.

²⁴¹ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.55.

²⁴² *ibid.*

²⁴³ *ibid.* p.57.

break up Serbian territory and in the process worked together with Albanian nationalists, because of shared hostility towards Serbian nationalism.²⁴⁴

Serb settlers, who either were expelled or fled Kosovo during the Second World War, were not allowed to return to Kosovo - a policy seen by Batakovic as a concession to Albania.²⁴⁵ Batakovic furthermore argues that the centralism that prevailed under Aleksandar Rankovic was strongly anti-Serb and anti-Orthodox as well as it was anti-Albanian. However, Albanians were targeted for their nationalism, while their hostility against Serbs seems to be based on prejudice:

The first two decades of bureaucratic centralism (1945-1966) were necessary of the communist leadership to avoid the debate on genocide perpetrated against the Serbs during the civil war. Together with ethnic Albanians who were persecuted for supporting former "Balli Kombëtar"²⁴⁶ nationalist forces (actions of confiscating guns) the Kosovo-Metohija Serbs, especially Orthodox priests, were constantly arrested and monastic properties destroyed or confiscated.²⁴⁷

In addition, Batakovic argues that during an operation aiming to find weapons during the winter of 1955-1956 "Serbs and Albanians suffered almost equally, despite the fact that larger quantities were found in Albanian possession."²⁴⁸

While Batakovic has a negative opinion on the Yugoslav-centered approach under Rankovic, he also reflects negatively on the period after Rankovic's removal, in which decentralization became the new policy. Batakovic argues that this policy of "national-communism introduced majority rule for the majority nation in each of the six republics and two provinces of the federation. As a result, discrimination against small-in-numbers nations or national minorities within the boundaries of each republic or province continued."²⁴⁹ The decentralization "gave Kosovo Albanians the main say in political life." According to Batakovic, Albanians did not understand their autonomy

²⁴⁴ Batakovic, D.T. 1992. *The Kosovo Chronicles*. Belgrade: Plato. Chapter One.

https://www.rastko.rs/kosovo/istorija/kosovo_chronicles/kc_part1a.html retrieved on 27-10-2019

²⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.60.

²⁴⁶ The Balli Kombetar were a partisan group during the Second World War that rejected both fascism and communism. Despite initially working together with the Albanian Communist Party (KPJ) against the occupation, the Balli Kombëtar's wish to create an ethnic Albanian state including Kosovo caused a split between them and the KPJ. See Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. p.48.

²⁴⁷ Batakovic, D.T. 2012. *Kosovo-Metohija: The Serbo-Albanian Conflict (with map)*.

http://www.batakovic.com/en/full-story/21/2012/02/22/kosovo-metohija_-the-serbo-albanian-conflict-with-map.html. retrieved on: 02-11-2019.

²⁴⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity in The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.598.

²⁴⁹ Batakovic, D.T. 2008. *Kosovo and Metohija: Serbia's Troublesome Province*. Balcanica XXXIX. p.256.

[...] as an additional opportunity for furthering their national and cultural development but rather as a long-awaited occasion for an ultimate historical revenge against the Serbs, still considered archenemies keeping Albanian Kosovo under occupation.²⁵⁰

While Albanians were the main perpetrators of anti-Serb actions, Batakovic argues that the communist government were their accomplices. Communists and Albanian nationalists were, according to him, on one side, while Serbs “were given both moral and political support by priests, monks and bishops of the Serbian Orthodox church, which was generally perceived as the archenemy of the communist regime.”²⁵¹

Throughout the later part of the twentieth century, the demographic situation also changed:

The result of this silent process of ethnic cleansing - not just tolerated, but even encouraged by the federal communist leadership - the Serb population in Kosovo and Metohija, despite a relative high birth rate, was dramatically reduced by nearly a half: from 23.6 percent according to the 1948 census to 13.2 percent according to the 1981 census.²⁵²

This statement suggests that the absolute number of Serbs diminished in this period. The census data that Batakovic bases this statement on, however, only show a relative decrease in number. Over the same period, the Serbian population actually increased in absolute numbers: from 171.911 in 1948 to 209.498 in 1981 - more than 20%.²⁵³

Rising ethnic tensions were to blame for the instability of the post-Titoist system, and Albanian extremists eventually “brought Slobodan Milosevic, a Serbian hard-line party apparatchik, to power.”²⁵⁴ Milosevic, while perceived as a Serbian nationalist, “turned out to be a communist only pretending to be a Serb patriot” whose “hard-line communist approach to the national question soon proved to be the most discrediting element for general Serb interests in Yugoslavia” and who also manipulated the Kosovo question in order to remain in power.²⁵⁵

As the Kosovo conflict spiralled out of control, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) became more and more prominent. This organization, rather than the armed wing of a

²⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.257.

²⁵¹ *ibid.* p.260.

²⁵² *ibid.* p.258.

²⁵³ Mertus, J.A. 1999. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.316.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Batakovic, D.T. 2015. *Kosovo and Metohija: History, Memory, Identity* in *The Christian Heritage of Kosovo and Metohija* (ed. Vasiljevic, M.) p.603.

nationalist political party or even a nationalist guerilla force, is seen by Batakovic as “the military wing of one of many pro-communist guerillas, often of Stalinist or Hoxhaist inspiration, tied to the Albanian narco-mafia and political radicals in the diaspora.”²⁵⁶ The road to war subsequently saw “Albanian-sponsored terrorist attacks” which then led to “severe, often excessive, police measures targeting both terrorist KLA groups and, occasionally, civilians involved in providing logistics.”²⁵⁷

The involvement of NATO forces in the conflict, in bombing targets within Serbia and Montenegro after the Rambouillet talks had failed, also severely impeded the relationship between Serbs and Albanians. “Kosovo Albanians supporting the paramilitary KLA units openly rejoiced at the bombs falling on Belgrade and other towns in Serbia.”²⁵⁸ The bombing campaign, which was, Batakovic argues, an Anti-Serbian illegal involvement, also caused the conflict to escalate even further as it gave Albanians cover to ethnically cleanse the area of Serbs and other ethnic minorities. The Serbs reacted in force, and overall, the conflict saw “many crimes against civilians, committed by both sides, [and a] high percentage of civilians, mostly Albanian, displaced to neighbouring countries.”²⁵⁹

Everlasting Victims: Discussion of Batakovic’s narrative

In his discussion of the twentieth century in Kosovo, Batakovic completely overlooks the pendulum of domination. As in his discussion of previous chapters of Kosovo history, his focus remains on the Serbs as victims of Albanian perpetrators.

Batakovic emphasizes Serbian suffering during Albanian-dominated periods. He points out how Albanians, in the First World War, supported by Austria-Hungary, treacherously (sic) refused to give food to, or even attacked, the retreating Serbs, and looted Serbian shops after the Serbs had gone. Albanian hostility had not decreased twenty years later, when Serbs were mercilessly persecuted (sic) in acts of vengeance. Revanchism did not end there: as Kosovo gained more autonomy under the communist government, Albanians abused their autonomy to deliver “historical revenge” upon the Serbs. To prove the extent of Serbian suffering, Batakovic argues that that the Serbian population during the Communist era “was dramatically reduced by half.” However, this is an incorrect way to

²⁵⁶ Batakovic, D.T. 2008. *Kosovo and Metohija: Serbia’s Troublesome Province*. Balcanica XXXIX. p.262.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.77.

²⁵⁹ *ibid.* p.78.

present data: while the Serb share of the population dropped relative to the Albanian share, the absolute number of Serbs in Kosovo grew.

Serbian rule, on the other hand, is reflected positively upon. The Serbian conquest of Kosovo in 1912 is seen as a liberation of Ottoman repression, while the Interbellum period saw attempts of modernization for the region. In both scenarios, Albanians reacted with unreasonable hostility against the Serbs. Despite being dominated by Serbian officials, the early period of communist rule is reflected negatively upon by Batakovic, as the authorities viewed upon Serbs with suspicion. Batakovic does not deny that Albanians were victimized as well, but suggests that while Albanians were victimized because they were hostile to the regime, Serbs suffered just because they were Serbs.

Batakovic is right to point out that Serbs did indeed suffer from Albanian violence during the World Wars. However, he fails to acknowledge Serbian acts of violence against the Albanian population. His narrative does not mention the atrocities that occurred after the conquest of Kosovo, such as the burning down of villages and the massacre of an estimated 20.000 Albanians. It were these atrocities that caused Albanian resentment of Serbian rule, not just “tribal agitation.”

A similar dynamic can be witnessed in the Interbellum period. While Batakovic points out that the Serbian government modernized and repopulated (sic) Kosovo, the very real discrimination against Albanians, i.e. Albanians lacking the rights constituting nations had and the confiscation of Albanian-owned land has not made Batakovic’s narrative, just as the attempts of the Serbian government to expel 200.000 families to Turkey. Again, it is not victimization at the hands of Serbs that made Albanians resist Serbian rule, but dislike to being ruled by “their former serfs.” Similarly, Batakovic denies that Albanians fled *en masse*. However, in the Interbellum period, between 90.000 and 150.000 did leave the region.²⁶⁰ While Serb victimhood is emphasized, Albanian suffering is downplayed.

Discrimination of Albanians in the aftermath of the Second World War is also watered down. For Batakovic, policies that discriminated Albanians similarly harmed Serbs, but in the end Serbs were worse off: pre-war Serb settlers were not allowed back to Kosovo and Orthodox priests harassed. Batakovic emphasizes Serb victimhood and overlooks Albanian victimhood. However, Albanians had very real reasons to complain: Kosovo’s institutions were dominated by Serbs and Montenegrins although these groups constituted a minority in the region.²⁶¹ As Kosovo was a province of Serbia - and Kosovo Albanians were a “national minority” - both Kosovo and Kosovo Albanians lacked rights other constituting nations

²⁶⁰ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.287.

²⁶¹ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.51.

enjoyed.²⁶² In fact, the reintegration of Kosovo into Yugoslavia as a province of Serbia was against the wishes of the majority of the population of Kosovo.

However, even for Batakovic it is hard to deny all instances in which Serbs were perpetrators. On these occasions, Batakovic uses a context of Albanian violence to explain why Serbs reacted as they did. He views the “severe and often brutal military and police measures” during the Interbellum as a reaction to kaçak violence, thus suggesting that the Serbian reaction, although being heavy-handed, was justified.

The run-up to the Kosovo War (1998-1999) perhaps best exposes the dynamic of Batakovic’s discussion of the twentieth century. Batakovic argues that it was Kosovo that brought Milosevic, in his eyes a hard-line communist, to power. Furthermore, Batakovic directly links the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) to both communism and organized crime. While Batakovic acknowledges that the army and police used “severe, often excessive police measures” against the KLA, this was only in reaction to acts of terrorism perpetrated by the KLA. Batakovic finally argues that both parties committed crimes against civilians.

Several facts are obscured or omitted in Batakovic’s narrative. First of all, Kosovo’s support for Milosevic was only achieved through coercion. Kosovo’s assembly, surrounded by tanks and armoured vehicles, voted to reinstate Serbian authority, which made Kosovo’s support for Milosevic’s bid for the presidency of Yugoslavia possible.²⁶³ The notion that Milosevic is a communist hardliner is also problematic: mostly he is seen as a nationalist who used the communist structure to come to power, not vice versa. Furthermore, while Albanian nationalist groups indeed named themselves “Marxist-Leninist”, ideologically they were only communist in name. Their communist jargon was only a cover for their nationalist beliefs: the deduction that because of their name the groups were hard-line communists is incorrect.²⁶⁴ Batakovic ignores the fact that the KLA was born out of frustration with the Serb-dominated regime, which had stepped up repression of Albanians in the 1990s. Instead, he emphasizes the ties the KLA had with the mafia and political hardliners.

The account Batakovic provides of the Kosovo War places Serbian crimes in the context of Albanian violence. Although civilians sometimes became victims of police measures, these measures, according to Batakovic, were legitimate as they were in response to KLA terrorism. The suggestion that both sides committed crimes against civilians obscures that it were the Serbs who were the worst offenders. While Batakovic

²⁶² Nikolic, L. 2003. *Ethnic Prejudices and Discrimination: The Case of Kosovo*. in: Understanding the War in Kosovo (ed. Bieber, F. & Z. Daskalovski). London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.59.

²⁶³ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.345.

²⁶⁴ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.76.

emphasizes that Albanians rejoiced NATO bombs falling on Belgrade, he ignores the mass killings and deportations of Albanians, committed by Serbian troops.

Rather than using the pendulum of domination to understand the developments in twentieth century, Batakovic's narrative of Kosovo's twentieth century only emphasizes Serb victimhood and leave out Albanian suffering. This keeps the victim-perpetrator dynamic in place. Leaving out facts and rejecting the pendulum of domination has hindered his understanding of the twentieth century; not taking into account the repression Albanians endured at the hands of Serbs, he is unable to understand why Albanians became frustrated with Serbia. He rather blames Albanian resistance on backwardness or ethnic hatred.

At the same time, Batakovic's narrative is also an example of the victim-perpetrator dynamic at work. Because, in his eyes, Albanians have victimized Serbs for six hundred years, Batakovic justifies the use of excessive violence by Serbs against the Albanian threat. Moreover, this reasoning would lead to victimized parties committing more and more extreme violence upon their perceived enemies. It would lead to a vicious circle of violence, a never ending pendulum of domination. This is precisely what already happened in the twentieth century. By keeping the victim-perpetrator dynamic intact, Batakovic has elaborated on a paradigm which may very well legitimize another outbreak of violence.

Chapter Five: The independence epilogue: 2000-2017

After the bombs: Kosovo 2000-2017

The Kosovo War ended in 1999 after NATO bombed Serbia for 78 days.²⁶⁵ Through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 it was established that the region would be placed under United Nations administration in form of United Nations Mission In Kosovo (UNMIK), although Kosovo would de jure remain part of Serbia. UNMIK was also responsible for establishing institutions of limited self-government in Kosovo. In practice, this meant the creation of a legislative parliament in 2001.²⁶⁶

Yugoslav and Serbian army units and police forces were required to withdraw to Serbia as an international peacekeeping force would also be established - currently this is carried out by the NATO through the Kosovo Force (KFOR). KLA and other Albanian units were disbanded. A policing force, the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) was also established. While the KPS would consist mainly of citizens of Kosovo, both Albanian and Serb, it would work together with the international missions in its training and maintenance of law and order.²⁶⁷

A new period of Albanian dominance worsened victimization of Serbs, who had lost their dominant position after the Kosovo war had ended. Serbs experienced ethnic cleansing at the hands of Albanians and some fled the region. Those who remained in Kosovo retreated mostly to the area north of the river Ibar.²⁶⁸ International institutions were unable of preventing ethnic cleansing, and local authorities were sometimes accused of accommodating perpetrators rather than protecting victims. The worst example of anti-Serb violence occurred in during the riots of March 2004. Albanian crowds attacked Serbs, their houses and religious sites as UNMIK, KFOR and the Kosovo Police Force lost control. In total 16 Serbs and 11 Albanians lost their lives, while 4100 Serbs and other minorities were displaced.²⁶⁹ Although there is no proof that the riots were planned beforehand, they did rapidly take on a more organized character.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ Judah, T. 2009. *The Serbs: History, Myth, and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*. London: Yale University Press. p.329.

²⁶⁶ Perritt, H. 2009. *The Road to Independence For Kosovo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.69.

²⁶⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) of 10 June 1999. In: Krieger, H. (editor). 2001. *The Kosovo Conflict and International Law: An Analytical Documentation 1974-1999*. pp.364-365.

²⁶⁸ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.95.

²⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch. 2004. *Failure to Protect: Anti Minority Violence in Kosovo, March 2004*. p.2.

²⁷⁰ Vrieze, Franklin de. 2004. *Kosovo after the March 2004 Crisis*. Helsinki Monitor 3. p.150.

The riots were quickly denounced: Human Rights Watch argued that “the future of minorities in Kosovo never looked bleaker” and criticized the international community for failing to protect Kosovo’s minorities.²⁷¹ NATO stated that the riots were ethnic cleansing, and the Serbian government compared the riots to anti-Jewish violence by referring to it as the March Pogrom.²⁷²

Yet, living conditions for Serbs did improve over the years. A study by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia found that, while Serbs suffer from a lack of socioeconomic development, qualified teachers and Serbian-language media, their overall standards for living have been on the rise, and that Serb sentiment that they are in every aspect of life treated as second-rank citizens is more perceived than real.²⁷³ Unfortunately, Serbs and Albanians remain living in different worlds. Serbs remain in their enclaves and do not recognize the Pristina government. Instead, they have built their own parallel institutions that rely on financial support from Belgrade.²⁷⁴

The 2000-2017 period also saw Kosovo’s declaration of independence (2008). Already before the March 2004 riots, Western policy followed the principle of “Standards before Status”: if certain standards were sufficiently met, independence would become negotiable.²⁷⁵ Subsequently, in 2007 the Ahtisaari plan, which was seen as a full independence package by both Serbs and Albanians, was launched.²⁷⁶ Although the plan was against Serbian wishes it motivated Albanians to push on for independence. On 17 February 2008, all members of the Assembly of Kosovo - apart from the absent Serbian representatives, who boycotted the meeting²⁷⁷ - voted in favour of independence.²⁷⁸ The Albanian population of Kosovo happily conceived the declaration of independence.²⁷⁹ At the same time, Serbs organized protests in Belgrade and in Serb-dominated northern Mitrovica to voice their dissatisfaction.²⁸⁰

²⁷¹ Human Rights Watch. 2004. *Failure to Protect: Anti Minority Violence in Kosovo, March 2004*. p.16.

²⁷² *ibid.* p.27.

²⁷³ Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. 2012. *Serb Community in Kosovo*. pp. 9-12.

²⁷⁴ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.98.

²⁷⁵ All standards were: (1) functioning democratic institutions, (2) rule of law, (3) freedom of movement, (4) sustainable returns and the rights of communities and their members (5) the economy, (6) property rights, (7) dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade, and (8) the Kosovo Protection Corps, which was essentially more than a police force but less than an army. See: Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.109.

²⁷⁶ Perritt, H. 2009. *The Road to Independence For Kosovo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.164.

²⁷⁷ The Assembly consists of 120 members; 11 seats are reserved for Serbian representatives.

²⁷⁸ International Court of Justice. 2010. *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo*. The Hague. p.29, par. 76.

²⁷⁹ BBC. 2008. *Kosovo MP's Declare Independence*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7249034.stm>. Retrieved on: 26-03-2019.

²⁸⁰ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.145-146.

Internationally, reactions were mixed. Most Western countries, as well as several Muslim and Latin American countries had recognized Kosovo by the end of the year. On the other hand, Serbia's ally Russia argued that independence for Kosovo would be a "terrible precedent" as it violates international law; a view that is shared by China and India.²⁸¹ The legality of the declaration of independence was also disputed. Although in 2010 the International Court of Justice in The Hague ruled that the declaration did not violate any applicable rule of international law.²⁸² As of 2020 97 of 193 UN countries have recognized Kosovo as an independent state. While supporters of independence argue that this is more than half of the world's countries, opponents point out that the countries that have recognized Kosovo by no means command a majority of the world's population.

Where does Kosovo stand now? While it sees itself as an independent country, lack of recognition has surely afflicted the country. On a population of nearly two million, 30,7% is unemployed, the second highest percentage in Europe.²⁸³ About 30% of Kosovars live below poverty line. The percentage of youth unemployment is double the national average;²⁸⁴ an alarmingly high number in a country where the median age is just 29,6²⁸⁵. Corruption is widespread²⁸⁶ and Kosovars are very dissatisfied with their government.²⁸⁷ Travel options are limited as even countries that do recognize Kosovo have regularly refused visa requests by Kosovars.²⁸⁸ Kosovo has no entry to several international organizations, such as the United Nations and its sub-organizations.²⁸⁹ It is also heavily reliant on international institutional and financial support. EULEX, the European Union law keeping mission, which largely took over

²⁸¹ Russia Today. 2008. *Russia, China & India Insist Kosovo and Serbia Resume Talks*. <https://www.rt.com/news/russia-china-and-india-insist-kosovo-and-serbia-resume-talks/> retrieved on 03-04-2019.

²⁸² International Court of Justice. 2010. *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo, Advisory Opinion*. I.C.J. Reports. p.53.

²⁸³ The highest unemployment is found in Bosnia-Herzegovina with 34,45%. In fact, the 5 European countries with highest unemployment are (in this order): Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Greece and Montenegro. All-but-one have been part of Yugoslavia. See: Trading Economics. 2018-9. *Unemployment - Europe*.

<https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/unemployment-rate?continent=europe>. Retrieved on: 05-03-2019.

²⁸⁴ Cimmino, R. 2019. *Ten Years Later: Progress and Impediments Since Kosovo's Independence*. <http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=14579>. Retrieved on: 05-03-2019.

²⁸⁵ Kosovo has the lowest median age in Europe. See: CIA. 2019. *The World Factbook: Kosovo*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html>. Retrieved on: 05-03-2019.

²⁸⁶ Transparency International. 2019. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2018*. <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2018>. Retrieved on 05-03-2019.

²⁸⁷ Only 21% are satisfied with how their government is doing. See: Cimmino 2019.

²⁸⁸ Testa, A. 2018. *Kosovo Finds Little to Celebrate After 10 Years of Independence*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/15/world/europe/kosovo-independence-anniversary.html>. Retrieved on: 05-03-2019.

²⁸⁹ United Nations. 2019. *Member States*. <http://www.un.org/en/member-states/>. Retrieved on: 05-02-2019; In 2015 Kosovo was denied membership of UNESCO. See: UNESCO. 2015. Tenth plenary meeting of the 38th session of the General Conference. p.14.

the UNMIK-mandate by 2007, is still responsible for keeping law and order in the region. As the country has no army of itself, this task is executed by NATO, through KFOR.²⁹⁰ As long as no agreement is reached on Kosovo's status, its future remains fragile.

"Surviving in enclaves": Batakovic on post-war Kosovo

In the post-war period, Batakovic laments the fate of Kosovo Serbs, who have to survive in "Ghetto-like enclaves": towns and villages in Kosovo inhabited primarily by Serbs.²⁹¹ The Albanian-dominated environment is hostile and violent, and Serbs are only protected by the international peacekeeping force. Violence is not only aimed against the Serbian population and their property, but also against their cultural heritage: "Kosovo Serbs [were cut off] from their historical and religious traditions."²⁹²

This anti-minority violence is not happening at random. Batakovic argues that "some leaders of the Kosovo Albanians believed that by several orchestrated waves of ethnic cleansing of all the remaining Serb population from the Province they could present the international community with a *fait accompli*". Attacks on Serbian cultural heritage similarly were marked as "vandalism with a mission".²⁹³ "This was a systematic effort to obliterate any trace of previous Serbian presence in the area in pursuit of further legitimization of post-war Kosovo as an exclusively Albanian-inhabited land."²⁹⁴ According to Batakovic "it was only after a decade of successive campaigns of ethnic cleansing that the Albanians became a ninety-percent majority in Kosovo."²⁹⁵

Apart from violence, the general living conditions of Kosovo Serbs are woeful as well. In Pristina "there are less than a hundred [Serbs] living in a single building, under appalling conditions, constantly guarded by KFOR" while in the rest of Kosovo Serbs experience "rampant unemployment (up to 93 percent) and extreme poverty, while the living standards in general remain far below the average in the region and the province itself."²⁹⁶

²⁹⁰ United Nations. 2019. *Member States*. <http://www.un.org/en/member-states/>. Retrieved on: 05-02-2019; In 2015 Kosovo was denied membership of UNESCO. See: UNESCO. 2015. Tenth plenary meeting of the 38th session of the General Conference. p.14.

²⁹¹ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.239.

²⁹² *ibid.* p.248-250.

²⁹³ *ibid.* p.251-255.

²⁹⁴ Batakovic, D.T. 2008. *Kosovo and Metohija: Serbia's Troublesome Province*. *Balkanica* XXXIX. p.265.

²⁹⁵ *ibid.* p.264

²⁹⁶ Batakovic, D.T. 2012. *Kosovo & Metohija: A Negotiated Compromise vs Chaos and Instability*. http://www.batakovic.com/en/full-story/21/2012/02/22/kosovo--metohija_-a-negotiated-compromise-vs_-chaos-and-instability.html. retrieved on: 02-11-2019.

The March 2004 riots were, according to Batakovic, planned in advance and highly orchestrated, and not only denounced as ethnic cleansing, but also compared with anti-Semitic violence before and during the Second World War. Batakovic refers to the riots either as the March pogrom or Kosovo's Kristallnacht.²⁹⁷

As Kosovo "failed to comply with minimal requirements for democracy and inter-ethnic tolerance, defined in 2003 by the UNMIK administration as "standards before status""²⁹⁸ Batakovic is shocked that Western countries set in motion the process of creating an independent Kosovo.²⁹⁹ He furthermore deems the declaration of independence in 2008 illegitimate, as ethnic minorities were absent at the vote, and because Kosovo had no rights of secession.³⁰⁰ Therefore, the declaration of independence is null and void, goes against international treaties such as UNSC Resolution 1244, and severely infringes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Serbia.³⁰¹ Batakovic's verdict on the proclamation of independence is as follows:

Thus, the declaration of independence of Kosovo, proclaimed solely by the Kosovo Albanians, was not a success of restoration of human rights and democracy, as proclaimed as a goal by NATO before the bombing of FR Yugoslavia, but rather a triumph of post-war ethically-based persecution, ethnic cleansing and consistent discrimination of all the non-Albanian population considered as hostile to the Albanian-dominated independent Kosovo. Moreover, this process, favouring separation instead of integration, exclusion instead of inclusion, intolerance instead of tolerance, continued throughout Kosovo after February 2008.³⁰²

In general, Batakovic is pessimistic about the outlook of Kosovo.

Ethnic purity as envisaged by Kosovo's Albanian extremists is not a concept that can be accepted as a legitimate basis for either democracy or state independence. It has become evident that none of the values of the West will be able to eventually take root in the lawless, illegal trafficking paradise of a mafia-ruled Kosovo, "Balkan Columbia" as it has often been described by renowned international experts for drug-trafficking routes leading to Western capitals"³⁰³

²⁹⁷ *ibid.* p.256.

²⁹⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2017. *The Case of Kosovo: Separation vs. Integration Legacy, Identity, Nationalism*. Studia Srodkowoeuropejskie i Balkanistyczne XXVI. p.117.

²⁹⁹ Batakovic, D.T. 2008. *Kosovo and Metohija: Serbia's Troublesome Province*. Balcanica XXXIX. p.270.

³⁰⁰ *ibid.*

³⁰¹ *ibid.* p.571-572.

³⁰² Batakovic, D.T. 2017. *The Case of Kosovo: Separation vs. Integration Legacy, Identity, Nationalism*. Studia Srodkowoeuropejskie i Balkanistyczne XXVI. p.119.

³⁰³ Batakovic, D.T. 2008. *Kosovo and Metohija: Serbia's Troublesome Province*. Balcanica XXXIX. p.266.

Instead, Batakovic argues that Kosovo would have been better off, had it stayed with Serbia. While Kosovo became a “Balkan Columbia” governed by the Albanian majority with little respect for ethnic minorities, in Serbia “democracy was finally restored in Belgrade after the ousting of the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000.”³⁰⁴ This point is further elaborated:

In spite of latent instability in Kosovo and Metohija [...] it is important to stress that a democratic Serbia, recently invited to join the Partnership for Peace, is due to her strategic, economic and political potentials, a key state in the Western Balkans, and the main guarantor of the long-term stability of the region.³⁰⁵

Batakovic finally offers a conclusion on the differences between Albanian and Serbian nationalisms:

1,700,000 Albanians cannot be satisfied for their particular interests and ideological demands of a nineteenth century type nationalism and permanently frustrate and antagonize eight million Serbs who are rightfully considered, in long-term, as the key factor for the stability of the Western Balkans.³⁰⁶

In addition to the scientific books and articles, Batakovic also wrote advisory pieces on Kosovo, hereby leaving the sphere of history and entering the realm of politics. In September 1998, when tensions in Kosovo had escalated to all-out war, Batakovic argued for the cantonization of Kosovo: in order to protect the Serbian minority and give them a voice in Albanian-dominated Kosovo, cantons modeled on the Swiss example would be formed in rural areas along ethnic lines, while urban areas would be administered by a bicameral assembly (a democratically elected lower house, and a half-Serb-half-Albanian upper house).³⁰⁷ Under this proposal, Serbs would receive vetoing powers in practically every aspect of Kosovo self-governance.

³⁰⁴ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.240.

³⁰⁵ Batakovic, D.T. 2012. *Kosovo & Metohija: A Negotiated Compromise vs Chaos and Instability*. http://www.batakovic.com/en/full-story/21/2012/02/22/kosovo--metohija_a-negotiated-compromise-vs--chaos-and-instability.html. retrieved on: 02-11-2019.

³⁰⁶ Batakovic, D.T. 2005. *Kosovo: For a mutually acceptable solution*. http://www.batakovic.com/en/full-story/21/2012/02/22/kosovo_for-a-mutually-acceptable-solution.html. retrieved on: 02-11-2019.

³⁰⁷ Batakovic, D.T. 1998. *The Cantonization of Kosovo and Metohija: A Proposal with Maps and Statistics*. http://www.batakovic.com/en/full-story/21/2012/02/22/the-cantonization-of-kosovo-metohija_a-proposal-with-map-and-statistics.html. retrieved on: 02-11-2019.

In a 2003 paper, Batakovic again voiced his support for the reintegration of Kosovo into a democratic Serbia and Montenegro, albeit with a high level of autonomy for the region. Thus, both the Serbian population as well as their religious and cultural heritage would be protected. If Kosovo would however be separated from Serbia, the future would be bleak for Kosovo itself, Kosovo Serbs, and Serbian heritage.³⁰⁸ Two years later Batakovic wrote a paper supporting a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina in order to reach a “mutually acceptable solution.” In it, he strongly voiced his opposition against independence for Kosovo:

Independence of Kosovo means dividing Serbia. I agree with the statements that Kosovo cannot be divided, because Serbia cannot be divided either. It is the minimal standpoint for us: no partition of Serbia. Any other solution would lead to the new cycle of conflicts and the renewing of endless spiral of violence in the region.³⁰⁹

Just as Batakovic’s academic works on the history of Kosovo, his advisory pieces clearly take the pro-Serbian side in the conflict.

A triumph of persecution? Discussion of Batakovic’s narrative

Batakovic’s narrative of the post-war situation in Kosovo consists of three notable topics: living conditions of Serbs, the declaration of independence and the general state of Kosovo after the war. Batakovic sees all three in a negative way. Living conditions of Kosovo Serbs have worsened since 2000 as they find themselves in “ghetto-like enclaves”, Kosovo is becoming a “Balkan Columbia” and would have been better off had it remained part of Serbia, and independence is “a triumph of post-war ethically-based persecution, ethnic cleansing and consistent discrimination” while it also constitutes a violation of international law and resolutions.³¹⁰

After the Kosovo War, Serbs did experience ethnic cleansing at the hands of Albanians and thus fled the region. In the aftermath of the March 2004 riots, leaders of Kosovo have failed to strongly denounce the violence against Serbs.³¹¹ However, in recent

³⁰⁸ Batakovic, D.T. 2003. *Kosovo: From Separation to Integration (with maps)*. http://www.batakovic.com/en/full-story/21/2012/02/22/kosovo_-from-separation-to-integration-with-maps.html . retrieved on: 02-11-2019.

³⁰⁹ Batakovic, D.T. 2005. *Kosovo: For a mutually acceptable solution*. http://www.batakovic.com/en/full-story/21/2012/02/22/kosovo_-for-a-mutually-acceptable-solution.html . retrieved on: 02-11-2019.

³¹⁰ Batakovic, D.T. 2007. *Kosovo and Metohija: Living in the Enclave*. Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies. p.58

³¹¹ *ibid.*

years living conditions for Kosovo Serbs have improved, although the situation is still precarious.³¹² While Batakovic is right in arguing that life was hard for Serbs in direct aftermath of the war, the recent improvements have not made any of Batakovic's works.

Batakovic is critical of independence for the region. It is illegal, null and void, and goes against international treaties. Those on the Serbian side of the conflict will indeed argue this. On the other hand, those in favour of independence will point out that every people has a right to self-determination. While Batakovic negates this argument by stating that, within Serbia, Albanians are a minority, this is a purely technical argument as they constitute an overwhelming majority in Kosovo. At the same time, the debate on Kosovo's independence is not entirely ideological: the 2010 ICJ ruling, which argued that the declaration of independence did not violate general international law, is left out by Batakovic.

Kosovo's position is precarious as well. It has high levels of corruption and unemployment. Its youth struggles with lack of opportunity. Its political situation remains fragile and there are fears Kosovo is becoming the playball of international powers. For example, in 2018 the Kosovo government illegally extradited 6 Turkish individuals linked with the failed coup in 2016 to Turkey.³¹³ At the same time, Kosovo is not as much the failed state Batakovic makes it out to be. Over the years the unemployment rate has dropped,³¹⁴ while violent crime is also on the decline.³¹⁵ Batakovic's description of the region as "illegal trafficking paradise of a mafia-ruled Kosovo" is far from the truth, and seems like an unfounded attempt to discredit Kosovo's self-rule under international auspices.

Finally, Batakovic argues that Kosovo would have been better off had it stayed with Serbia. While Kosovo has, according to Batakovic, become a failed state, Serbia has risen from ashes and, since the removal of Milosevic, been a stable democratic state. Batakovic argues that Serbia is "[...] a key state in the Western Balkans, and the main guarantor of the long-term stability of the region." However, Batakovic does not discuss the agency the Serbian government has in the conflict. The Serbian government has created and funded parallel institutions for Kosovo Serbs while it has similarly discouraged Kosovo Serbs to

³¹² Minority Rights Group International. 2018. *Kosovo Serbs*.
<https://minorityrights.org/minorities/serbs-3/>. retrieved on: 13-06-2020.

³¹³ Fatos Bytyci. 2018. *Six Turks Arrested in Kosovo over Gulen links extradited to Turkey: Anadolu*. Reuters.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-kosovo/six-turks-arrested-in-kosovo-over-gulen-link-s-extradited-to-turkey-anadolu-idUSKBN1H51JL>. retrieved on: 13-06-2020.

³¹⁴ Trading Economics. 2020. *Kosovo Unemployment Rate*.
<https://tradingeconomics.com/kosovo/unemployment-rate>. retrieved on: 30-04-2020.

³¹⁵ Overseas Security Advisory Council. 2019. *Kosovo 2019 Crime and Safety Report*.
<https://www.osac.gov/Country/Kosovo/Content/Detail/Report/d0ff62ac-1d7b-45dd-84a4-15f4aeb9e219>. retrieved on: 13-06-2020.

participate in the politics of Kosovo.³¹⁶ For the same reason, various Serbian political parties have radicalized their stance in the Kosovo conflict.³¹⁷ While this tactic may certainly have brought in the additional voters,³¹⁸ it has also had an impact on Kosovo Serbs. They look to Belgrade, not Pristina, for social security, pensions and salaries.³¹⁹ Serbs in general refuse to participate in Kosovo: they boycott censuses and elections and strongly distrust the Pristina government and its intentions.³²⁰ The Helsinki Committee even remarks that “Belgrade [has] sacrificed Serbs from out of Serbia for political purposes.”³²¹

At the same time, Serbia has also blocked access to international institutions for Kosovo. While this is understandable from their perspective - access could be the first step to recognition - lack of status and access remains a major hindrance in the development of Kosovo. If Serbia would take a more light-footed approach to Kosovo, Kosovo as well as Kosovo Serbs would find themselves in a better position. Again, these points are overlooked by Batakovic, who rather depicts Kosovo as a failed state. Kosovo would, according to Batakovic, only improve if it were to be reunited with Serbia.

Batakovic depicts the post-war period as a continuation of the everlasting woes for Kosovo Serbs. Similarly he is hostile to the idea of Kosovo independence and instead argues that Kosovo would have found itself in a better position had it stayed with Serbia. This position is also reflected in his advisory pieces. However, Batakovic is only able to maintain this view through cherry-picking sources; he uses sources that support his point of view while leaving out sources that might debunk it. Thus he has created a subjective, historically inaccurate narrative of the most recent part of Kosovo’s history.

³¹⁶ Perritt, H. 2009. *The Road to Independence For Kosovo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.164.

³¹⁷ *ibid.* p.20.

³¹⁸ Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. 2012. *Serb Community in Kosovo*. p17.

³¹⁹ Perritt, H. 2009. *The Road to Independence For Kosovo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.69.

³²⁰ *ibid.* p.204.

³²¹ Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. 2012. *Serb Community in Kosovo*. p16.

Chapter Six: Batakovic and Serbia

Overarching themes in Batakovic's narrative

So far, this thesis has found three overarching themes in the works of Batakovic. First of all, Batakovic sees Kosovo as a Serbian Holy Land, because of the role it played in the medieval era. For Batakovic, Kosovo is the “cradle of the nation.” This importance makes him conclude that Kosovo should remain part of Serbia. Secondly, Batakovic argues that Kosovo Serbs have been the victims of violence, mostly perpetrated by Albanians. This process is age-old, and has started, according to Batakovic, directly after Kosovo was conquered by the Ottomans. Finally, because they have victimized Serbs for so long, the Albanian is depicted as a threatening Other. Batakovic applies multiple negative stereotypes to Albanians. As Batakovic has ignored or omitted factual evidence that would contradict these themes, they are not factual truths but mythical truths: their veracity and sincerity has transcended the necessity of factual evidence.

By using government documents, media coverage and opinion polls, this chapter will focus on how widespread these themes are in general Serbian thinking on the Kosovo conflict. It will use government documents, media coverage and opinion polls. It will also discuss the implications these beliefs have on the wider Kosovo conflict.

The myth of the cradle

The theme of Kosovo as cradle of Serbdom is a widespread phenomenon in Serbian political culture and national identity. The Serbian government often invokes this idea when it discusses Kosovo. In the book *March Pogrom in Kosovo and Metohija* (2004), released in the aftermath of the 2004 Kosovo riots, the religious relevance of Kosovo was pointed out as “[...] in Kosovo and Metohija the richest group of religious endowments bequeathed by the Christian East to the European civilization can be found.” As the book also discussed the importance of Kosovo in the establishment of Serbian dynasties, it placed Kosovo right in the heart of Serbia.³²²

Strong statements on Kosovo's historical role were also made in reaction to the declaration of independence in 2008. Then president Vojislav Kostunica issued that Kosovo was “Serbia's first name” and that it has been Serbian forever. Similarly, Metropolitan

³²² Dragan, K. 2004. *March Pogrom in Kosovo and Metohija. March 17-19, 2004 : with a survey of destroyed and endangered Christian cultural heritage*. Belgrade: Serbian Ministry of Culture. p.17.

Amfilohije, one of the highest ranking bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, similarly emphasized Kosovo's historical importance as he stated that Kosovo is a Serbian Jerusalem and cradle of the Serbs.³²³ Politically, this idea remains very much alive today: In 2019, Serbian minister of Innovation Nehad Popovic argued that Serbia was created in Kosovo, and therefore, it could not exist without it.³²⁴ In reference to Kosovo's role in the development of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the region is by Serbs still referred to as "Kosovo and Metohija."³²⁵

Another example of this importance medieval Kosovo bears for Serbia occurred in January 2017, when Serbia and Kosovo attempted to restore the rail connection. While at first welcomed as a positive development, hope turned to fury as the train, which departed from Belgrade, was covered with the slogan "Kosovo is Serbia" and filled with imagery depicting Serbian heritage in Kosovo. The train's crew was similarly clad in Serbian national colours. Kosovo's authorities saw this as a provocation and deployed its special forces to halt the train. The train was eventually stopped before it had reached the border.³²⁶ This example perfectly illustrates the link between medieval history and the belief that Kosovo is, and should remain, Serbian.

The opinion that Kosovo is Serbian holy land is shared by the Serbian population. A 2019 survey by the United States Embassy in Serbia and the Center for Social Dialog and Regional Initiatives (CSDRI) found that their sample group overwhelmingly believed that Serbia has a historical right over Kosovo (75,5%) and that Kosovo is the heart of Serbia (68,5%).³²⁷ When asked about recognition 68,7% believed that recognition would be national treason, while 68,2% felt that it would mean shame and humiliation.³²⁸ This sentiment is also articulated in popular culture: the popular rap collective Beogradski Sindikat declared in the song *Dogodine u Prizrenu (Next Year in Prizren)* that Kosovo is "[...] a spring and a riverbed from which the nation came" and that Serbs feel helpless because "a nation without its

³²³ Judah, T. 2008. *Kosovo: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p.147.

³²⁴ Tanjug. 2019. *Minister: Serbia without Kosovo cannot exist*.

https://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2019&mm=01&dd=02&nav_id=105896. retrieved on 22-01-2020.

³²⁵ Serbian Constitutional Court. 2006. *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*. p.33, article 182.

<https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/74694/119555/F838981147/SRB74694%20Eng.pdf>. Retrieved on: 05-03-2019.

³²⁶ Dwyer, C. 2017. *Kosovo, Serbia Exchange Heated Words Over Train Stopped At The Border*.

NPR: The Two Way.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/01/15/509957543/sparks-on-the-tracks-kosovo-serbia-spar-over-train-stopped-at-the-border?t=1595333590782> retrieved on: 21-07-2020.

³²⁷ 1192 respondents, 3-stage random stratified sample. Margin of error = 2,8%. See: United States Embassy in Serbia; Center for Social Dialog and Regional Initiatives. 2019. *Normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina from Citizens Perspective: What We Know and Feel?* Belgrade: CSDRI. p.5.

³²⁸ *ibid.* p.16.

origins is a river dried up.”³²⁹ What should be noted is that age and education level are indicators of the attitudes held towards Kosovo. Another 2019 survey, conducted by the Institute for European affairs found that, while still strongly opposing independence, a majority of younger, higher educated Serbs considered Kosovo a lost cause, whereas the elderly Serbs and Serbs with less education thought Serbia still had influence over the region.³³⁰

The myth of the victim

The victim-perpetrator dynamic is similarly prevalent. The image of the Serb as victim has been invoked in the direct aftermath of the conquest of Kosovo in 1912 and the run-up to the Kosovo War and has also prevailed afterwards.³³¹ The Serbian government frames Serbian history as a righteous struggle against oppression, i.e. through the celebration of national holidays. At the same time, the Serbian people are framed as victims, whereas the Serbian part in perpetrating crimes upon others is continuously overlooked.³³² The victim-perpetrator narrative is also frequently invoked by Serbian politicians, who use it to justify its attempted involvement in Kosovo.³³³ Rather than attempt to address its own agency in the wars of Yugoslav succession, successive Serbian governments focus on depicting themselves as victims of other’s aggression and war crimes. This narrative is repeated by the Serbian media.³³⁴

Serbs themselves, too, feel that they are exclusively victims. A 2005 survey by the Belgrade Center for Human Rights found that 81 percent of the Serbian population thought Serbs themselves were the most victimized ethnic group in the wars of Yugoslav succession.³³⁵ A research by historian Helena Zdravkovic-Zonta discusses the victimhood narratives of both Serbs and Albanians, and their “vernacular rhetoric in terms of discursive

³²⁹ Beogradski Sindikat and Etno Grupa Trag. 2018. *Dogodine u Prizrenu*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFH8lwX7eT4&has_verified=1. retrieved on 23-04-2019; the video received nearly five million views in the first year after it was published. Translated by Etno Grupa Trag.

³³⁰ Bjelotomic, S. 2019. *Poll Most Serbian citizens think that Kosovo is lost forever*. Serbian Monitor. <https://www.serbianmonitor.com/en/poll-most-serbian-citizens-think-that-kosovo-is-lost-forever/>. retrieved on: 28-07-2020.

³³¹ Judah, T. 2000. *Kosovo: War and Revenge*. New Haven: Yale University Press. p.59.

³³² Simic, O. 2016. *Rape, Silence and Denial*. Transitional Justice and Reconciliation: Lessons from the Balkans (ed. Fischer, M. & O. Simic). p.104.

³³³ *ibid.*

³³⁴ Lamont, C.K. 2016. *International Criminal Justice and the Politics of Compliance*. New York: Routledge. p.73.

³³⁵ *ibid.*

strategies used in creating historical victim identity.³³⁶ Individual Serbian interviewees argued that Serbs were always victims while Albanians were hostile villains.³³⁷ Interviewees placed this victimhood in history, with one stating that “[...] it has always been this way. During the Turks, they [Albanians] killed our men and raped our women. [The Albanians] always hated Serbs. Always wanted just to kill us all.”³³⁸ Similar to Batakovic, the interviewees selectively invoked memories and history, so to ignore the reciprocity of the process.

The 2019 CSDRI-survey found that Serbs not only believed to be victims of the Albanians, but 59% also believed Serbs also were victims of an international plot, which caused the loss of Kosovo.³³⁹ Especially elderly Serbs held this belief: 70% over 55. However, almost half of the Serbs in the age category between 18 and 34 also felt this way.³⁴⁰ Interestingly, Serbs who live outside of Serbia and Kosovo tend to be more ready to abandon the narrative of Serbs as exclusive victims than their counterparts in Kosovo and Serbia proper. This distinction between domestic and diaspora belief systems indicates that the national myth of Serbs as eternal victims, which is strongly supported by historians, politicians and the media, weakens when one is confronted with factual evidence that contradicts the Serbian national narrative.³⁴¹

Within Kosovo, both Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians feel they are victims of each other. This has led to a process of competitive victimhood, which has “detrimental effects on reconciliation processes, feeding the hatred between groups long after the conflict is formally resolved.”³⁴² Intergroup contact may break this cycle of mutual distrust. However, historians’ depiction of Serbs as historical victims and Albanians as perpetrators, and political attempts to create Serb parallel structures and institutions, have so far hindered the process of reconciliation.

³³⁶ Zdravkovic-Zonta, H. 2009. *Narratives of Victims and Villains in Kosovo*. Nationalities Papers 37 (5). p.675.

³³⁷ *ibid.* p.674.

³³⁸ *ibid.*

³³⁹ United States Embassy in Serbia; Center for Social Dialog and Regional Initiatives. 2019. *Normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina from Citizens Perspective: What We Know and Feel?* Belgrade: CSDRI. p.16.

³⁴⁰ *ibid.* p.23.

³⁴¹ Tadic, K. 2020. ‘Westernised’ Serbs More Open, But Nationalist Narratives Linger. *Balkan Insight*. <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/26/westernised-serbs-more-open-but-nationalist-narratives-linger/>. retrieved on: 28-07-2020.

³⁴² Andrighetto, L. et al. 2012. *Reducing Competitive Victimhood in Kosovo: The Role of Extended Contact and Common Ingroup Identity*. *Political Psychology* 33 (4). p.526.

The myth of the enemy

Enemy images of Albanians are also widespread. The Serbian government has repeatedly depicted the Albanian as a violent, threatening Other, whose state is steeped in criminality.

³⁴³ This has led to dehumanization of Albanians. In the words of Slovene sociologist Renata Salecl:

[In Serbian authoritarian populism] the primary enemies are Albanians, who are perceived as threatening to cut off the Serbian autonomous province of Kosovo and thereby stealing Serbian land and culture. [...] In Serbian mythology, the Albanians are understood as pure Evil, the unimaginable, which cannot be subjectivized; they are beings who cannot be made into people, because they are so radically Other. The Serbs describe their conflict with the Albanians as a struggle of “people with nonpeople.”

Dehumanizing Albanians is a process that is not always messaged subtly. Serbian diplomat Vuk Jeremic, who served as Serbian Minister of Foreign Affairs from 2007 to 2012, and subsequently as President of the United Nations General Assembly, referred to Tolkien's *The Hobbit* when he stated that Kosovo Albanians reminded him of evil Orcs, who had stolen Serbian native land.³⁴⁴

Enemy images have also been repeated in media coverage of the Serbia-Kosovo conflict. Newspapers have emphasized the acts of violence committed by Albanians, and repeatedly accused Albanian leaders of war crimes, while they have defended their own leaders against similar accusations. For example, in May 2017 the Serbian tabloid *Informer* ran a cover with the headline “We Will Kill Serbian Children” above an image of Kosovo Albanian leader Ramush Haradinaj. Other media outlets have similarly depicted Kosovo Albanians as threatening. This anti-Albanian media coverage has fuelled distrust between Serbs and Albanians.³⁴⁵ Although Batakovic has not in such strong words dehumanized Albanians, his depiction of the Albanian as a primitive, threatening Other, does follow the same pattern.

³⁴³ Serbian Government. 2003. *Albanian Terrorism and Organized Crime in Kosovo-Metohija*. Belgrade: Serbian Government. p.26.

³⁴⁴ Barlovac, B. 2012. *Jeremic Likens Kosovars to 'Hobbit's' Evil Orcs*. *Balkan Insight*. <https://balkaninsight.com/2012/12/19/jeremic-compares-kosovo-issue-with-hobbit-movie/>. retrieved on: 28-07-2020.

³⁴⁵ Rudic, F. 2017. *Rabid Anti-Albanian Sentiment Grips Serbian Media*. *Balkan Insight*. <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/05/16/rabid-anti-albanian-sentiments-grip-serbian-media-05-16-2017/>. retrieved on: 28-07-2020.

In Serbian public opinion, the belief that the Albanian is a hostile enemy can be found as well, and so can its consequences. The national identities of Serbs and Albanians are “defined in opposition to each other: stereotypically, Serbs see themselves as “cultured” compared to the “primitive” Albanians.” Serbian nationalism is shaped by “the glorious struggle for Orthodox purity against the primitive, traitorous other, the Albanian, the Slavic Muslim and so forth.”³⁴⁶ The same enemy images that Batakovic invokes, i.e. that of innocent Serbs and aggressive Albanians, are similarly widespread.³⁴⁷ These beliefs and prejudgements may also inflict the attitudes Serbs hold against Albanians: a 2019 survey found that 75,8% of Serbs would not accept an Albanian to be a teacher to his or her (grand)children, while 81,5% would not accept an Albanian marrying into his or her family.³⁴⁸

Batakovic: praised or discredited?

Batakovic has adhered to the national myths surrounding Kosovo. For him, this has resulted in several government functions as well as high positions within the Serbian academical world. Because his views are roughly in line with the opinions of the Serbian government and public, this certainly may have played a role in his assumption to these functions. Similarly, through holding these functions, he has also managed to influence the debate on Serbia’s history. Internationally, however, this position has led to criticism. Western observers argued that Batakovic “[...] presented the whole history of the Serbs in Kosovo as an unending chronicle of ethnic martyrdom.”³⁴⁹ Similarly, “the characterization of the conflict [as a clash of civilizations by Batakovic] ignores the fact that Kosovo Albanians are both Muslim and Christian and that Kosovo Albanians have never identified themselves in terms of religious identity.”³⁵⁰ Others have also criticized Batakovic for depicting events in an inaccurate way.³⁵¹ While internationally Batakovic is a largely forgotten historian, his views have led to critical acclaim within Serbia. His views do also have their consequences: his reinforcement of myths surrounding Kosovo have helped shape Serbian political culture and national identity in a way that has complicated reconciliation.

³⁴⁶ Mertus, J.A. 1999. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.233.

³⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.676.

³⁴⁸ United States Embassy in Serbia; Center for Social Dialog and Regional Initiatives. 2019.

Normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina from Citizens Perspective: What We Know and Feel? Belgrade: CSDRI. p.11.

³⁴⁹ Malcolm, N. 1998. *Kosovo: A Short History*. London: Macmillan. p.338.

³⁵⁰ Mertus, J.A. 1999. *Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p.34.

³⁵¹ Detrez, R. 1999. *Kosovo: De Uitgestelde Oorlog*. Baarn: Houtekiet. pp.

Conclusion

The subject of this thesis has been national historiography and myth forming. To investigate this subject, the works and statements of Serb historian Dusan T. Batakovic have been researched. By discovering the overarching themes in his works, critically reflecting on the creation and consequences of these themes, and studying if and how these themes are reflected in Serbian national thinking on Kosovo, this thesis has attempted to formulate an answer to the question it started of with: how has Dusan T. Batakovic influenced Serbian thinking and myth forming on Kosovo?

National myths commonly feature three central themes: they attempt to prove the nation's longevity, emphasize national suffering, and attribute enemy images to groups perceived as threatening to the nation's existence. This thesis has found that these three themes are present in the works and statements of Batakovic.

First of all, Batakovic sees the origin of the modern Serbian state in medieval Kosovo. As he refutes the idea that Albanians are of Illyrian origin, it were the Serbs not Albanians that arrived first in Kosovo. Kosovo furthermore was pivotal for the development of the medieval Serbian state, which is seen as the direct predecessor of modern Serbia: as two Serbian dynasties came from Kosovo, and the region is the religious heart of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Batakovic argues that Kosovo was the central part of the Serbian Kingdom. Although Batakovic debunks some parts of the myth of the Battle of Kosovo Polje, this battle for Batakovic remains talismanic to the Serbian identity as it serves to connect medieval Serbia with modern Serbia. This makes Batakovic conclude that Kosovo is the cradle of Serbia. For this reason, independence for Kosovo is unthinkable; it should always remain Serbian.

Secondly, the history of Kosovo after Ottoman conquest is, in the eyes of Batakovic, one of agony for Kosovo Serbs. Initially it were the Ottomans that victimized Serbs: as the Ottoman Empire was an Islamic state which pursued the conversion of Christians to Islam, the Christian Orthodox Serbs were treated as second-rank citizens. However, Batakovic points out that it were the Albanians that became the major perpetrators of anti-Serb violence. As Albanians were more willing to convert, they managed to enter the ruling class and from this position repressed Serbs. Furthermore, Albanian outlaws attacked Serbs and plundered their lands. Anti-Serbian sentiment is, according to Batakovic, inherent to Albanian nationalism. Albanians furthermore had a clear goal to cleanse the Serbs from Kosovo.

Thirdly, the Albanian is depicted in Batakovic's works as a threatening Other. As they have been the perpetrators of violence for so long, they have become the arch-enemy of the

Serbian people. Throughout history, they have brutally attacked Serbs. To Albanians, powerful enemy images are attributed. Not only are they violent, they also are primitive, ignorant, opportunistic. Serbs, on the other hand, are depicted far more positively. Despite their suffering under the Serbs, they attempt to rule Kosovo with best intentions after they came into power. Nevertheless, the Albanian population ungratefully never accepted Serbian rule.

Batakovic's narrative of the history of Kosovo contains two major problems. The first problem is the selective invoking or leaving out of historical evidence by Batakovic. In his discussion of the medieval era, Batakovic does not critically reflect on the role Kosovo has played in the development of Serbia. While it is true that Kosovo was of major importance, the incorporation of Kosovo into the Serbian Kingdom was too late for it to be the birthplace of the Serbs. Cherry-picking of facts becomes more used when Batakovic reflects on the victimhood of Serbs, and the role Albanians played in the conflict. Batakovic continuously emphasizes Serb suffering, whereas Albanian suffering at the hands of Serbs is omitted or watered down. This becomes most apparent in his discussion of the twentieth century. Batakovic is quick to point out how in Albanian-dominated periods Serbs were victimized; during Serb-dominated periods, however, victimization of Albanians is ignored. By selectively using historical evidence, Batakovic provides a one-sided version of history. Kosovo is thus mythologized as a land of the greatest importance for, and the greatest suffering of, modern Serbs.

A second problem arises with the consequences that Batakovic's narrative has on the national discourse. As Kosovo is, for Batakovic, the cradle of the Serbian nation, this has provided Serbia with a historical territorial claim over the region. This claim is based on the idea that there is continuity between the medieval Serbian kingdom and the modern Serbian state. However, the myth of Kosovo as the birthplace of Serbia is only a relatively recent invention: it is not an age-old given but rather a nineteenth-century concept. The claim of continuity also does not hold: the medieval Serbs are not the same group as the Serbs of today. The territorial claim is, therefore, not valid. Batakovic's adherence to the victim-perpetrator dynamic, combined with the depiction of the Albanian as the threatening arch-enemy, also has dangerous, problematic consequences. Steeped in the identity of the victim, the victimized group can legitimize themselves becoming perpetrators. The destruction of the enemy becomes justified and even honourable. Although victimhood in conflict situations needs to be understood, it may never serve to legitimize perpetrating crimes upon others. While Batakovic has not voiced support for the destruction of the

Albanian people, his rhetoric does legitimize Serbs becoming perpetrators by pointing out that they only reacted to Albanian violence.

The three themes discussed above are deeply embedded in Serbian political culture and national identity. The idea that Kosovo is the cradle of Serbdom, or even a Serbian Jerusalem, has made Serbs convulsively point out that they have a historical right to rule Kosovo, despite the fact that the majority of Kosovo wants independence. Furthermore he belief that Serbs are the eternal victims of violent Albanian repression has obstructed reconciliation. Yet, these three themes are a part of the Serbian national consciousness.

So who has influenced whom? Historians are products of their environment. They implement the general visions and beliefs of their surroundings into their works. It is possible to see Batakovic simply as a product of his surroundings.

However, this is just one side of the story. As put forward in the introduction, a nation without a history is a *contradictio in terminis*. The images of the national past the historian provides, influences the nation itself, the national consciousness and the national identity. His or her views shape the national paradigm, and are repeated in politics, in the media, and trickle down into society. As such, the historian determines the beliefs and values held within the respective nation. Thus, the historian not only has power over a nation's past, but also over its present.

In respect to national myths, the historian has two options. He or she can choose to adhere to existing national myths and reinforce them, making them more convincing by providing them with historical ammunition. On the other hand, the historian can also choose to provide a version of history that contradicts the national myth. If the historian chooses this path, it may change the historical discourse on the nation's past, and its identity, completely. Whatever the historian chooses to do, it will influence the nation's national and political culture.

Batakovic has chosen to adhere to national myths. In his discussion of Kosovo's history, he has accepted the Serbian perspective for true and build his narrative around it. He has carefully selected source material that supported Serbia's national mythology, and ignored historical evidence that did not fit his point of view. Similarly, Batakovic has not critically reflected on the source material he has used.

Considering all statements above, it is possible to formulate an answer to the central question of this thesis. *By depicting Kosovo as a Serbian holy land and, similarly, a land of great suffering for Serbs at the hands of Albanians, Batakovic has strengthened the myths surrounding the region in Serbian thinking, hereby impeding the possibility of a solution for the conflict.*

Finally, this thesis would like to offer three recommendations for future research. First of all, more research needs to be done on how historiography influences politics. This will further our knowledge of historical developments and politics in general. Secondly, the victim-perpetrator dynamic needs to be elaborated upon. Identity politics, which are rapidly becoming more important nowadays, are strongly connected to the identity of being the victim. Victimhood needs to be understood better in order to understand the political world of today. Thirdly and finally, historians need to be aware of their role in the national debate, in shaping national identity. This thesis recommends historians to critically study their own national histories and myths. If the toxicity of ethnic hatred is taken out of national myths, we can progress to a future in which coexistence becomes the new *modus vivendi* of nations, without nations losing their own uniqueness. However, if ethnic hatred is left in the national myth, history has proved that this may lead to ethnic violence and repression. If the national myth is left unaltered, this may very well happen again.

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