SUMMARY. The paper is aimed at complementing the research of historical memories and national narratives in Central and Eastern Europe by analysing the Serbian case in relation to the issue of Kosovo. Focusing on the historical memories of the Kosovo Serbs in the post-war years, the paper aims to find out the prevalent forms of memorialisation, identifying the events chosen by the Kosovo Serbs to remember and the mechanisms employed to shape, maintain and transmit memories. Drawing on ethnographic observations made during five years of field research all over Kosovo, national collective memory of the Kosovo Serbs is traced through the dominant historical images, publically displayed symbols and commemorative discourses related to the collective experiences of the post-war period. The second part of the paper analyses the competing Kosovo-related narratives in Serbia, identifying the main messages shaped by the narratives with regard to the relationships between the citizen, the nation and the state, the dichotomy between ethnocultural solidarity and the concept of civic nation, as well as the relationship between the citizen and the narrative itself.

KEYWORDS: historical memory, national narratives, national collective memory, the Kosovo Serbs, post-war Kosovo, Serbia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although comparable to other historical ethnoterritorial conflicts across Central and Eastern Europe, Kosovo stands out against the regional background due to its current irresolution, or the lack of political agreement on its status. During the first decade of the 21st century, Kosovo proved to be the most dangerous spot in Europe in terms of ethnic confrontation. Attempts at resolving its legal status have produced implications for international relations going far beyond the regional context1. At the

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1 The article is written according to the research project “Central and Eastern European Region: Research of the Construction of National Narratives and Politics of Memory (1989-2011)” – VP1-3.1-ŠMM-07-K-02-024 – sponsored by the Programme for Human Resources Development for 2007-2013 “Support to Research Activities of Scientists and Other Researchers (Global Grant)".
same time, Kosovo remains primarily a European problem. Within the comparative research of historical memories and national narratives existing in the wider region, Kosovo’s case is important for several reasons.

First, both Kosovo’s and Serbia’s governments are officially committed to become part of the same European political space that most neighbouring states have already joined. Second, strong involvement of the EU and its members in Kosovo makes it an acute European topic. News about the victims among the members of European missions serving in Kosovo reveal the proximity of seemingly far-away Balkan realities to Europe.

Attempting to delve into the current epicenter of the conflict, the present contribution focuses on the Kosovo Serb population. The Kosovo Serbs, having participated the least in determining the newest stage of Kosovo’s history, were nevertheless hit by the post-war developments in the most dramatic manner. Currently representing the primary motive for Serbia’s claims to Kosovo, this group by all means remains a hostage to the status-related dispute between Priština and Belgrade.

Any analysis of the Kosovo Serb memories is inseparably linked to the Kosovo-related narratives existing on the Serbia-wide scale. This is especially important in the complex context of European integration, where Belgrade appears to be conditioned by Kosovo-related issues to a much bigger extent than was Priština conditioned by Kosovo’s Serbian population in the process of lifting the international supervision of independence.

14 years that have passed since the end of the Kosovo war provide abundant material for tracing the main directions and motives of memories and narratives related to the turbulent post-war period (1999-2013).

In analysing the historical memory of the Kosovo Serbs, we focus on the prevalent forms of remembering and explaining post-war events on individual and collective levels. The ways in which historical memory is translated into national collective memory are explored by studying the representations of the state and the nation’s past that dominate the public space, symbols and discourse.

Empirical data draws on primary sources collected during the field research conducted in Serb-populated areas all over Kosovo between June 2009 and December 2013. In the said period, places and commemorative events were singled out for case study according to the following criteria: event attendance, event prominence (the object of commemoration, the degree of mass media coverage and the level of celebration officiality) and event recurrence (selecting the most regular commemorations). Besides, the research has been complemented by including places whose war and post-war experiences suggest particularly strong war traumas to
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Persist. Commemorative actions are analysed in their spatial and temporal context, considering the profiles of the main actors and participants.

Methods of data gathering include ethnographic (anthropological) observations with participation and interviews. The empirical data is conceptualized by applying the method of composite story construction borrowed from identity studies. The dominant story is identified from the prevalent symbols and discursive elements recurring in individual stories collected across the territory and persisting over time. The composite story includes events, relationships between actors, goals, actions taken, and actions advocated or lessons for the future2. The advantage of this method is its open-ended character and flexibility: it allows the subjects to express their own conceptions and enables the researcher to identify relevant cognitive variables.

The main questions for the present study include the prevalent forms of memorialisation, the events chosen by Kosovo Serbs to commemorate and the mechanisms employed to shape, maintain and transmit memories. The sources for studying historical memory include discourses pronounced during commemorations and interviews with key participants, complemented by messages of local art performed during commemorations and publicly displayed identity symbols. The sources for studying narratives include academic, political and church discourse.

2. Historical Memory of Kosovo Serbs in the Post-war Period

Over the post-war period, both temporal and territorial spaces for the manifestations of Serb collective memory in Kosovo shrunk considerably. Commemorations and celebrations can only take place in areas still populated by Serbs. Outside the Serb enclaves, commemorations happen only on certain days of remembrance and under the police escort. Vidovdan, the yearly commemoration of the Kosovo Battle (1389) and the most attended Serb manifestation in Kosovo, takes place on Gaziemestan, the historical site of the battle. These three types of commemorations are analysed successively in the following sections.

2.1. Memory of War and Post-war Victims

The two most commemorated events among Kosovo Serbs are related to the memory of the civilian victims of the two biggest post-war crimes: the killing of 14 reapers in Staro Gracko near Priština on 23 July 1999 and the killing of two children

in Goraždevac near Peć on 13 August 2003³. Both Staro Gracko and Goraždevac villages today are enclaves, or isolated Serb settlements inhabited by several hundreds of people. As the following paragraphs will show, the commemorations of these events, although held in different places and related to the events that happened with a distance of four years, nevertheless reveal similar discursive elements. Including memories of other Serb localities into our analysis allows us to speak of a general pattern of historical memory maintained among the Kosovo Serbs.

The Staro Gracko and Goraždevac commemorations are prominent events not only among Kosovo Serbs, but also on Serbia-wide scale, as shown by the extensive media coverages that consistently classify them among the key events of the respective days.

2.1.1. Commemoration of Staro Gracko

The tragedy of Staro Gracko refers to the murder of 14 farmers by unidentified members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). The crime happened on 23 July 1999 (after the end of the war and the introduction of international peace-keeping force), as the victims were returning to the village after harvesting wheat in the field.

Due to persisting insecurity, the commemoration of Staro Gracko is not held on the nearby cemetery located outside the enclave where the victims are buried. Bombs were planted on the cemetery several times since 1999; the last incident of this kind happened in April 2011, on the eve of Easter⁴. Commemorative ceremonies are held in the center of the enclave in front of the memorial tablet bearing the names of the victims.

In Staro Gracko, commemorations are organized by the local village community every year, according to the same pattern. The central event is the service for the victims, celebrated by the bishop of Raška and Prizren. The service is followed by speeches delivered by the leaders of the village community (working as teachers) and the relatives of the victims. Commemorative poems are recited by the local people. The guests include heads of Serbian local municipalities and representatives of the Ministry for Kosovo and Metohija that always deliver speeches. It is noteworthy that in five years of the present research, not a single case of a representative

³ Other major crimes include the bomb blast of the Niš Express bus in Livadice near Podujevo on 16 February 2001, when 12 passengers including a two-year-old child were killed and 40 people were injured, and the killing of the Stolić family in Obilić on 4 June 2003. The commemorations of these events are not held in Podujevo and Obilić, where no Serbian population is left and the places of the crimes are not marked. The commemorative service for the Podujevo victims is usually held in Laplje Selo.

of the international community or a Kosovo Albanian official attending the event was registered. The only representatives of international missions are soldiers that attend the event with the purpose of ensuring security, but never participate in the commemoration. Staro Gracko is a mixed Serbian-Albanian village, but the local Albanians never take part in the commemorations.

The commemorative plaque bears the names of 14 people killed by the Kosovo Liberation Army, as well as the names of the villagers killed earlier during the war by the NATO bombs, including a 4-year-old girl. In total, 21 victims in less than half a year are considered “too much for a state, let alone for a small village”. Staro Gracko claims an identity of a village that “encapsulates the fate of the whole Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija”. All the commemorations tend to link together in a single discourse the victims of the 1999 bombing, the post-war victims, the victims of March 2004 violence, as well as suffering in earlier historical periods (most notably, the Second World War). The purpose of killings and violent attacks are perceived as deliberate pressure upon the Serbs to leave Kosovo. Stressing that prior to the massacre the whole village was ready to emigrate, the tragedy is commonly interpreted as the event that inspired the people to stay.

The main discursive themes of the commemoration are impunity and the abandonment of the victims by those that were intended to protect them. In 14 years, the perpetrators of the crime are not found and brought to justice; the international community is thus not trusted unless it proves to care about the victims. The progress and efficiency of the international community’s help is evaluated in the light of restricted freedom of movement that persists: the local population still cannot move 50 meters from the village to visit the graves of the victims and to hold the commemoration at the cemetery.

The commemorations firmly established a peculiar identity of victims as “reapers” (Serb. žeteoci) that shed their blood while peacefully working on their fields. Wheat, harvest and the act of reaping appear as powerful symbols consistently invoked during commemorations. “Rodilo je žito” (“the wheat is ripe”), a recited poem reads. In the sermons, the blood of martyrs is likened to wheat grain that is buried to bring abundant harvest. The nearby field where the crime occurred is represented as a place where “the reapers of life” (the civilian villagers) encountered “the reapers of death” (the KLA). On 22-23 July, a commemorative football match in memory of the victims is held every year in the centre of the enclave, bringing

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5 This decision is commonly explained by “spiteful pride” (Serb. inat) as an inherent feature of Serbian national character.

6 Beside the villagers’ suspicions with regard to the identity of the killers, the names of the perpetrators became known to mass media earlier than the official investigation produced any results. “Sve se zna, samo pravde nema”. Politika, 24 July 2013, <www.politika.rs/rubrike/Drustvo/Sve-se-zna-samo-pravde-nema.sr.html>.
together the Serbian football teams from all over Kosovo. The name of the event in 2013 was “Don’t forget the bloody harvest!”.

2.1.2. COMMEMORATION OF GORAŽDEVAC

The comparative analysis of commemorative discourses in Staro Gracko and Goraždevac reveals a series of identical themes, often expressed by identical words.

On 13 August 2003, Pantelija Dakić (12) and Ivan Jovović (19) were killed and four other children were wounded in Goraždevac, as unidentified perpetrators hidden in bushes fired shots at a group of Serbian children spending their leisure time on the bank of the river Bistrica.

In Goraždevac, as in Staro Gracko, the UNMIK committed itself to “turn up every stone” in order to find the perpetrators. According to the relatives of the victims, the information collected by the investigation by the year 2007 was sufficient to identify the perpetrators; the documents mentioned concrete names. In 2011, the investigation was closed by the EULEX due to the lack of witnesses. In 10 years, the Bistrica killers have not been found.

Meanwhile, over the ten years, not a single inhabitant of Goraždevac was able to visit the place of the crime. The local Serbs can only move within a two-kilometer-long area, whereas every walk is risky due to frequent harassments. Today, about 750 Serbs live in Goraždevac, with more than 200 young unemployed people deprived of any prospects in the enclave. The only places to visit are the church, the school and the swimming pool built in order to compensate the local population for the impossibility to go to the nearby river. The Italian KFOR checkpoint guarded the village till 2011.

During the night of 20-21 January 2013, the cemetery and the monument to the killed children was shelled. As a sign of dissatisfaction with current political affairs, many other Serb places of memory all over Kosovo came under attack during the same night.

The commemorative discourses reveal that time has not healed wounds of what is remembered as “the most sorrowful and grievous days”. Deprived of the freedom of movement, regular water and electricity supply, the local people claim to be still living in fear. According to the prevalent discourse, in the ghetto-like conditions that marked the beginning of the 21st century, time looks to have stopped, and memories of the tragedy of 13 August 2003 continue to dominate the every-day life even a decade later. As one of the local inhabitants put it, “We have at least two

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7 The football ground and the nearby club are the only leisure facilities for the enclave’s youth.
8 The motive was the removal of the monument to the members of the Liberation Army of Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveda (UÇPMb) from the centre of Preševo by the Serbian government.
or three ‘August thirteens’ in a week, and nothing will ever erase these memories”. Alluding to this, the memorial monument in Goraždevac bears an inscription, “To be buried alive is more frightful than to die”.

In Goraždevac, too, the memorial monument bears both the names of the victims of the NATO bombing and those of the post-war victims. In Goraždevac, the local tragedy is always placed in a wider context of the overall situation of Kosovo Serbs in the post-war period. The ten-year commemoration of the Goraždevac killings, held on 13 August 2013, saw not a single representative of international missions present, although the event was attended by a far greater number of people than the local church could accommodate.

Post-war grievances are accompanied by the revival of religious traditions, contextualized in the actual settings and performing the consolidating function among the local population. Goraždevac is famous for the oldest wooden church in the Balkans, for the first time mentioned in 1223. The church is dedicated to saint prophet Jeremiah, venerated by the village’s inhabitants. Despite the abnormal life conditions, nowadays Jeremiah’s day (14 May) is celebrated in a more solemn and diversified fashion than it used to be before the war.

2.1.3. PEĆ AND ORAHOVAČ: IMPOSSIBILITY OF PUBLIC COMMEMORATIONS

The Goraždevac tragedy bears close resemblance to the saddest day in the history of the Serbian community of the nearby city of Peć. On 14 December 1998 (four months before the NATO intervention), six young Serbs were killed in the “Panda” coffee bar in front of the Peć gymnasium.

The announcement on the burial of the six youths, placed on the main gate of the Patriarchate of Peć in December 1998, today is still in place. The relevance of this commemorative act is strengthened by the exceptional significance of the Patriarchate of Peć for the Serbian Orthodox Church and for the Serbian state. A closer look at the wider context reveals that this symbolical act is intended to compensate for the impossibility of any public commemoration of the victims in the city of Peć.

Kosovo’s judicial system does not investigate the Panda case. Four of the six victims are buried on the Peć cemetery, but today their graves are impossible to find. The local Serbian cemetery is desecrated, overgrown with shrubs and turned into a dump, with hundreds of gravestones ruined and graves piled with garbage. In June 1999, the complete Serbian population left Peć. Out of 38,000 Serbs that lived in

9 Serb. “Nije toliko strašno umreti koliko je strašno biti živ sabranjen”.
the city before the war, only 5 families remain there today. Nowadays, Serbs come to Peć only to honour their dead and to visit the Patriarchate of Peć.

An even more striking example is represented by the Orahovac cemeteries. Since the end of the war, the Serb population of Orahovac cannot visit the cemetery left in the Albanian part of the city and to bury their relatives there. Some gravestones in the cemetery bear huge inscriptions “UÇK” (Alb. KLA). Meanwhile, throughout the post-war period, the Serbs use to be buried in a tiny churchyard in the Serbian part of the city.

Orahovac is known for being the first urban area conquered by the KLA in August 1998. The local Serb population retains memories of August 1998 as the most sorrowful time. In those days, local Serb civilians were taken hostages by the KLA in hospitals, while many others were kidnapped and their destiny is still unknown.

In June, 1999, NATO forces allowed the KLA to retake control of the city, and new crimes were committed. KFOR refused to guarantee security to the Serbs in the centre of the city, so the Serb population was forced to move to Upper Orahovac. With the help from the local population, the KFOR command figured out where the boundaries were between the Serb and the Albanian areas, and encircled the Serbian quarter with barricades. The period of the Dutch KFOR protection is remembered by the local people as a period of captivity, when sick people were starving to death. The Dutch soldiers did not have an order to protect the Serbs, openly confessing that they came to protect only the Albanians. The Serbs taken to Prizren for medical care did not return alive. At the same time, people remember the armed KLA fighters posing for pictures on a Dutch tank, aiming at the Serb houses. Throughout the first post-war decade, the Serbs’ freedom of movement was limited to some 300 m² of free territory, delineated by the three main streets of Upper Orahovac.

Meanwhile, the public space in the Orahovac area nowadays is marked by the official glorification of the KLA. Thus, the road connecting the nearby localities bears the name of the “KLA road”. Every August, huge banners commemorate the “KLA epopee”. Not only is public commemoration of the Serb victims impossible under the conditions of restricted freedom of movement. For a decade, the Serbian inhabitants of the Upper Orahovac enclave used to travel 80 kilometers to the Serb-populated North Mitrovica by KFOR-escorted buses just for buying basic foodstuffs (e.g., sugar).

Orahovac and the nearby Velika Hoča is home to “Metohijski žubori”, an autochthonous local ensemble of children. The ensemble performs songs written by the poet from Orahovac, Gavrilo Kujundžić. Popular both among the local Serbs and
beyond Kosovo, the texts document the national collective memory of the Serbs living in the Orahovac region. In 1998, Velika Hoča was shelled 17 times by the KLA; the war sufferings of children are commemorated through the song “Dečiji prkos” (“Child’s Obstinciacy”). The song “Denerale” (“General”) draws parallels between the KLA and the Ottoman conquerors. Another parallel is drawn between the Serbian historical hero Hajduk Veljko that fought the Turks and the general Veljko Radenović who liberated the civilian hostages from the KLA in 1998. The old Kujundžić tower memorial in Velika Hoca has become reactualized nowadays. On that site, a group of Serbian insurgents led by Lazar Kujundžić were killed by the Ottoman soldiers in 1905.

A common practice of Kosovo Serb commemorations is to have names of victims inscribed on commemorative plaques placed in the central areas. Among the biggest ones, one such memorial is located in Velika Hoča, dedicated to the memory of killed and kidnapped Serbs of the Orahovac Municipality in the period of 1998-2000. Another memorial is near the main bridge at the Northern (Serbian) side of Kosovska Mitrovica.

2.1.4. 17 March 2004: “The Second Vidovdan”

The 17th of March, 2004 stands out as the most tragic date in the post-war collective experience of the Kosovo Serbs. On that day, a mass violence campaign directed against the civilian Serb population started all over Kosovo. As a result, 8 Serbs were killed, 143 were injured and two disappeared; 35 churches were destroyed, set on fire or otherwise damaged; along with 935 houses, 10 schools, ambulance stations and post offices. The complete Serbian population left six major cities and nine villages, where entire residential areas were also set on fire in order to prevent the Serbs from returning. The events of March 17-19 irreversibly weakened the Serb community and can be regarded as a point of no return for the Kosovo Serbs’ sustainable life in Kosovo. Although the number of participants in the campaign is estimated at over 50,000, the investigation did not disclose the organizers, while only secondary actors were prosecuted10.

March 2004, a disaster dubbed “the second Vidovdan”11, is often placed in a historical context of earlier waves of exodus, much wider than the events triggered by the 1999 war. Thus, at a political commemoration held on 17 March 2013 in Mitrovica, the whole history starting from the Battle of Kosovo onwards was


presented as a generator of numerous waves of Serb exodus from Kosovo: the First Serbian exodus led by the Patriarch Arsenije III Čarnojević in 1690, the Second Serbian exodus led by the Patriarch Arsenije IV Jovanović in 1739, the period of 1878-1912 and the Prizren League, the retreat of the Serbian army through the mountains of Albania and Montenegro in winter 1915-1916; the prohibition of return to the displaced Serbs to Kosovo by the communist authorities; and the construction of the lake Gazivode in 1977 that displaced about 8,000 Serbs.

It has to be noted that 17 March is not commemorated in the Kosovo Albanian public space neither by the official institutions nor by mass media. Meanwhile, services are held in most Serbian churches all over Kosovo, not least because churches were a special target in March riots, with numerous medieval monasteries ruined or set on fire (Dević, St. Archangels Monastery and “Our Lady of Ljeviš” church in Prizren, etc.). The March events are considered an even bigger disaster compared to the end of the war in 1999. Failure to protect is an essential part of the commemorative discourse: “Those committed to defend them turned their back upon the Serbs”. Due to persisting fear and insecurity, March events did not lose their up-to-date significance, “as if it happened yesterday”: after having “suffered for their Serbian names and the God’s truth”, the Serbs are “still living in ghetto”, while over 4000 displaced people did not return home12.

In the prevalent discourse, apart from the chronological distance, no other difference is made between the Ottoman violence, waves of exodus, destructions and turning monasteries into horse stables, burning down relics of saints starting from the late 15 century, and violence, arsons, cemetery desecrations and destruction of churches happening in the beginning of the 21 century.

Among the churches burnt down in March 2003, St. Nicholas church in Priština, built in 1830, had been deliberately projected as a simple house without a dome, so as not to incur Turkish repressions. Nowadays, ringing church bell from time to time becomes an object of provocations. In Visoki Dečani Monastery, klepalo is still often used instead of the bell. Klepalo is a wooden stick used for summoning people for the church service by the rhythmical knocking of the church walls. Historically, this ritual was used in the Ottoman times, when ringing church bells was prohibited. Nowadays, heavily guarded by the Italian KFOR, the monastery has experienced eight grenade attacks during the post-war years.

It is notable that all Kosovo Serb commemorations are necessarily accompanied by the participation of the clergy. Both Vidovdan and the commemorations of the post-war victims, as well as traditional feasts and commemorations, are necessarily

12 Quotes are from the sermon of bishop Teodosije pronounced at the commemoration held on 17 March 2013 in Priština.
religious ceremonies. A special role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in coordinat-
ing the national collective memory and shaping the national narrative requires
additional explanation.

First, after the withdrawal of the Serbian army and state institutions from
Kosovo, the Serbian Orthodox Church (Diocese of Raška and Prizren) remained
the only Serbian institution to be fully present on Kosovo’s territory alongside of
the Serbian population. The major monasteries became centers of Serb gravitation
in the post-war period; these nuclei are also better protected. The concentration of
the Kosovo Serbs’ life around the religious sites contributes to the amalgamation of
the local Serbian population and the Church.

Second, the Church fully shared the collective experiences of the Kosovo Serbs
in the post-war period\textsuperscript{13}. Mass destruction of its shrines gave the Church a particu-
lar legitimacy and social capital to coordinate and to guide the collective memories
of the Kosovo Serbs. Coinciding with the Church’s primary functions, engagement
with post-war sufferings provided it with an especially prominent space in the life
of the Serbian population.

Third, the Church’s influence in the region is historically rooted. The main bulk
of Serbia’s spiritual heritage is located in Kosovo and Metohija (the latter name is
entrenched in Serbia’s current constitution; where Metohija refers to one-half of
the province, or the Church possessions in the medieval period and an area cur-
cently characterized by a stronger degree of religiousness as well)\textsuperscript{14}. Historically,
when there was no Serbian state, the Church has been playing a role of the national
institution for the Serbs\textsuperscript{15}.

The Church has been particularly active in calling upon the Kosovo Serbs to
stay in Kosovo (the bishop Artemije likening those that are selling their houses
and leaving for Serbia to the “followers of Vuk Branković”\textsuperscript{16}). The preservation

\textsuperscript{13} In this context, church initiatives for the canonization of monk Hariton Lukić, kidnapped in Prizren by the
KLA on 16 June 1999 and later decapitated, and of 3-year-old Milica Rakić killed by the NATO bomb in
Batajnica, should be mentioned.

\textsuperscript{14} Testimony of the local priests.

\textsuperscript{15} The role of the Church as a key actor of national liberation struggle is aptly presented in: Vivian, Herbert.
glasnik, 2010, pp. 103-129, esp. p. 110-111. In the wider context of retraditionalization, the Serbian Or-
thodox Church has been the most trusted institution in Serbia over the past years. In 2005, it was claimed to
be the most trusted institution by 54,2% of Serbia’s inhabitants. In 2010-2011, this percentage was as high
as 60,8% (followed by the educational system (49,2%), the army (42,9%) and the health care institutions
(36%)). Naumović, Slobodan. Upotreba tradicije u političkom i javnom životu Srbije na kraju 20. i početkom
21. veka. Beograd: Filip Višnjić, 2009; Radisavljević-Ćiparizović, Dragana. Religioznost grada na Srbije i nji-
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odnos prema procesu europskih integracija. Beograd: Hrišćanski kulturni centar, Centar za evropske studije,
Fondacija Konrad Adenauer, 2011.

\textsuperscript{16} Radisavljević, Artemije. Sa Kosovom u srcu. Gračanica, Beograd: Eparhija raško-prizrenska i kosovsko-meto-
of Kosovo within Serbia and opposition to separatism is another prominent goal in the discourse. The Church remained strongly opposed to the Belgrade-Priština agreement, as shown by the official statement, admitting nevertheless that “the land also belongs to those Albanians that peacefully cohabit there with the Serbs for ages”17.

The cyclical representation of history permeates the traditional church narrative on Kosovo: “The reality in Kosovo is a constant Great Friday (Veliki Petak) and an incessant Feast of the Cross (Krstovdan) which lasts from one Easter to another, for centuries from Kosovo till Kosovo”18. Parallels to earlier phases of the conflict are frequent, mainly due to the fact that in various phases of the conflict throughout history, the same sacred objects used to be repeatedly attacked by actors that were perceived as having historical continuity. A case in point is the Devič Convent located in the Drenica forest. The convent was looted by the Austro-Hungarian troops in 1915, by Albanian ballists in 1941, by the KLA in presence of the French KFOR troops in late June 1999, to be burnt down again by the KLA in March 2004. As a sign of historical continuity, a big carved cross located in the monastery church bears the inscription of the two years, 1941 and 2004. A similar continuity can be traced in the history of Prizren’s shrines, notably, the Holy Archangels Monastery. Ruined in 1615 by the Ottoman Turks, it was revived in 1998, to be ruined again in 1999 and in March 2004 in presence of the German KFOR.

On 17 March 2013, the commemorative office held in the church of Kosovo Polje mentioned specifically the memory of those who suffered “from Kosovo until Kosovo all over Kosovo and until today” (Serb. “od Kosova do Kosova po Kosovu i do dana njeg dana”). Put differently, the service was dedicated to all martyrs that suffered from the first Kosovo disaster until the second Kosovo disaster, all over Kosovo and whose sufferings continue up to the present day. Experience of everyday life, revealing historical path dependency, is translated into commemorative practices. In this pattern of national collective memory, direct connections between earlier historical periods are apparent.

2.2. TRADITIONAL COMMEMORATIONS AND CELEBRATIONS: POST-WAR CONNOTATIONS

This section presents commemorations and celebrations whose primary purpose is unrelated to the war and post-war events. The war and the post-war context gave all Serb celebrations and commemorations in Kosovo an important additional

meaning that determines patterns of historical and national collective memory in powerful ways. Due to specific conditions, common celebrations have taken on a dimension of the post-war victimhood\textsuperscript{19}.

Most frequently the displaced Serbs return to their abandoned places during Zadušnice (All Souls’ Day). Commemorated on the first Saturday of November and in March before the Easter lent, Zadušnice are the only days when the Serbian language can be heard at the abandoned cemeteries in Kosovo. For such visits, military or police escort is needed; persisting security treats or the failure of the state to provide transport often render Zadušnice visits impossible\textsuperscript{20}. On 16 February 2001, a bus bringing people from Niš to Gračanica to visit cemeteries for Zadušnice was blown up near Podujevo. In Mušitište near Suva Reka, a group visit on Zadušnice of 1 November 2010 was interrupted by bursts of gunfire from shrubs surrounding the cemetery\textsuperscript{21}.

In June-July 2010, the OESC Mission in Kosovo evaluated 392 Orthodox cemeteries in Kosovo\textsuperscript{22}. The very number of desecrated cemeteries left without care reveals the scale of displacement of the Serbs from Kosovo. The report lists 229 cemeteries in bad or very bad condition (58%), 46 cemetery in very good condition (12%), 83 are in good condition (21%), and 24 (9%) cemetery in a satisfactory condition. Groups of relatives that visit cemeteries are often unable to raise the gravestones that are brought down, let alone to put the cemetery in order. According to the available testimonies, every new visit to cemetery is more painful than the earlier ones, as vandals are continuously desecrating what has been earlier destroyed. The Christian symbols are the object of especially fierce attacks.

Cemetery desecrations last continuously from mid-1999. The fiercest waves of destruction occurred in 1999 and in March 2004. In January 2013, cemeteries all over Kosovo became target to a new wave of violence, reminiscent of March 2004. The latter development shows how ordinary commemorations have become inseparably linked to the overall political context: the destruction of cemeteries in Kosovo manifests itself as part of identity politics\textsuperscript{23}.


\textsuperscript{21} “Pucnji na zadušnice”. Politika, 7 November 2010.


\textsuperscript{23} The leaflets distributed in returnee localities, calling for the Serb exodus, are explicitly framed in terms of collective responsibility: “Because you all are criminals, directly or indirectly”, “KFOR zabrinut,
In March 2013, piles of garbage were located at the entrance to the Peć cemetery, one of the biggest Christian cemeteries in Kosovo. In the same period, there was a garbage pile on the entrance to the cemetery in Kosovo Polje and almost no gravestones left intact at the Gnjilane cemetery. Cemetery in Istok (with only several Serb families left) was in a similar situation, with over 100 gravestones damaged or ruined. In Samodreža, there exists a church reconstructed on the site where, according to the legend, the army of prince Lazar received communion before the Kosovo Battle in 1389. Nowadays, the church’s roof is destroyed, and its interior is permanently filled with garbage. Due to security risks, group visits to the church cannot last more than half an hour. On the Serbian cemetery of South Mitrovica, about 90% of gravestones are ruined, and from 1999 there are no new burials there. It is noteworthy that, as part of its commemorative discourse related to cemeteries, the Serbian population of North Mitrovica consistently stresses its efforts to preserve the local Albanian cemetery intact.

Most local municipalities in Kosovo have not foreseen special budgetary funds for the maintenance of Orthodox cemeteries. Maintenance works, if occur, use to be of ad hoc nature and are carried out on a minor number of cemeteries. Cemeteries do not have the status of memorial sites and are thus not protected from further desecration. The major activist Serbian NGO that advocates the protection of cemeteries gives an allegorical representation of the national collective memory. In this interpretation, the whole Kosovo Serb nation is currently experiencing the destiny of Planinka from Priština, a Serb woman married to Albanian, buried without any identification mark, as if she never lived.

In 2013, the paths at the Priština cemetery still remain turned up by bombs fallen in the 1999 war. Back in 1999, during the NATO bombing campaign, world news agencies disseminated a letter of 11-year-old Simondra Maksimović, whose mother’s tomb on the Priština cemetery was hit by the NATO bomb. In the letter written in the style of Anna Frank’s diary, the girl writes: “Now I don’t have where to take the flowers. The graves of my mother and my grandfather are gone. They’ve been destroyed by those evil people, with their air planes, that are destroying my Priština every night. [...] Now I’m crying much more than when my mother died. Now I don’t know where my mother and my grand father are. They are not at the cemetery. There is a huge crater”. In another letter addressed to the NATO commander Michael Jackson, mentioning the ongoing killings of civilians, desecration

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24 Todić Vuličević, op.cit., p. 94.
of cemeteries by bombs, usurpation of flats, violence and exodus, the girl wrote: “You took our happiness and our childhood away from us”26.

In the context of post-war realities, traditional religious feasts also acquire an additional connotation. In Kosovska Mitrovica, an ethnically divided city, the Serbian church of St. Sava has remained in the Albanian-populated part. The church was set on fire in March 2004, and no Serb inhabitants are left there. Meanwhile, in the Serbian part of the city, the location for the new church was carefully selected27: it is visible from astride the river Ibar and dominates the panorama of the city. The location of the church on the top of the hill and open manifestations of identity in the Serbian part of Kosovo stand in sharp contrast to the impossibility of holding open celebrations south of the river Ibar. These two patterns are apparently interrelated, the former being intended to compensate for the latter.

In the church that remained in the southern part, only major celebrations are held. On Christmas, Easter and the feast of St. Sava, a small part of the city’s population, mostly those displaced from the south, cross the bridge, escorted by the Kosovo police. In 2013, the Christmas liturgy in Southern Mitrovica was short, as the Kosovo police strictly limited its duration due to security reasons. Among other peculiarities of the post-war settings that impact on the course of the celebrations, electricity stoppages that happen during the Badnji dan (Christmas Eve) service from year to year can be mentioned.

Memory of the war occupies a key place in traditional celebrations. With regard to South Mitrovica, the discourse of the clergy emphasizes the duty to remember and “to visit what our grandfathers and forefathers did not build for themselves, but for future generations”. “We have no right to forget what is ours, because otherwise God’s right hand will forget us”28.

Abounding in symbolics and rhetoric of individual and group identification with religious and ethnic tradition, religious celebrations prove to be a key factor of consolidation, homogenization, social and cultural integration of the local Serbian

26 “Ubili su mi mrtvu majku”. Narodne novine, 4-5.9.1999. In public representations of historical memory of Kosovo Serbs, children letters and performances play a particularly prominent role. Letters and poems “My Sky Has Been Wrapped in Barbed Wire” (Serb. “Moje su nebo vezali žicom”) by 11-year-old Jovana Radovanović from Orahovac brought fame to the author, attracting visitors coming from all over Serbia and from abroad to visit her in the enclave.

27 According to the widespread belief of the inhabitants of Mitrovica, a church dedicated to St. Demetrius existed on this place in older times. Mitrovica is believed to be named after the holy protector of the city, St. Demetrius of Thessaloniki, an antique military commander who suffered for spreading Christianity. These details complement the overall symbolism of the local collective identity.

community and its memory. Feasts of holy protectors of the cities (St. Demetrius in Mitrovica, St. George in Zvečan, St. Basil in Leposavić, revered as the protectors of the entire local Serbian community) contribute to uniting the people into a collectivity. Mass attendance of the events testifies to the strong sense of collectivity in the context of persisting ethnic tensions, uncertainty and fears for the future in the divided city located on the “frontline”.

All religious and commemorative events are massively attended by the young Serbian population: the events are considered “not to be missed”, used for meeting and communicating.

Comparable motives can be traced in church celebrations across Kosovo, as memory-related messages connect the traditional church feasts to the historical Kosovo suffering, reactualized in the actual settings. Thus, in January 2010, during the Christmas Eve service celebrated by the bishop Artemije in Gračanica, the song “Boj na Kosovu” (Battle of Kosovo) was sung during the key moment of taking the badnjak log out of the church before setting it on fire.

2.3. NATIONAL COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE KOSOVO BATTLE

Gazimestan and the celebration of Vidovdan stands out against the background as the most attended Kosovo Serb celebration, held on the historical site of the Kosovo Battle, where currently no Serb inhabitants are left.

The day of the Kosovo Battle is celebrated on the 28th of June. The central events are the liturgical service held by the Serbian patriarch in Gračanica and an office in memory of the Kosovo heroes held on Gazimestan, the memorial complex built on the Field of Kosovo. On 28 June 2012, the Vidovdan commemoration was attended by 10,000 people, mostly youth.

In order to delineate the object of commemoration among the people celebrating Vidovdan, as in the previous sections, we apply the method of composite story, identifying the prevalent motives within the following categories: the meaning and representations of Kosovo; the interpretation of the situation of Kosovo Serbs after the end of the war in 1999 onwards; the classification of the event that is commemorated; main actors and relationships between them; actions advocated, visions

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29 ibid., p. 123.
30 The representation of the river Ibar as the “Serbian Rubicon” can be seen in the graffito “Kosovska Mitrovica: because there is no way back” (“Kosovska Mitrovica: jer odavde nema nazad”), often replicated in media coverages from Mitrovica, as well as on locally sold souvenirs intended to represent the city. Similar symbolism accompanied mass gatherings on the barricades in North Kosovo in 2011-2012.
31 The song ends with the lines: “Nobody returned from the battle. The mothers did not want to bewail, raising instead young falcons. Today, the Serbs act in the same way, too” (“Iz boja se niko ne povrati. Ne htedoše majke naticati, već podižu sokoliće mlade. Još i danas Srbi tako rade”). Similarly, a sermon in the Draganac monastery on 17 March 2013 paraphrased the poet Petar Petrović Njegoš, “on the tombs, flowers will arise for some young generations”, alluding to a hope that children will be born despite all grievances.
and lessons for the future. The analysis draws on the on site observations of the Vidovdan celebration on 28 June from 2009 till 2013. The target group is ordinary participants present at the celebration, while sources include observed rhetoric, imagery, slogans, symbols displayed and the most frequently invoked poetry, music and films.

Not only does the interpretation of Kosovo as the cradle of the Serbian statehood and nationhood remain unchanged, but this kind of territorial identity strengthens through the interpretation of the events of the past 14 years. The prevalent rhetoric of commemorations, publicly displayed symbols and songs abound in references to Kosovo as the land of historical heroes Lazar, prince Milo and tsar Dušan. Kosovo is commonly referred to as “the heart of Serbia”, “the holy land”, “the Serbian land” and “the Serbian Jerusalem”. The sacral understanding of Kosovo is further strengthened by martyrdom and representations of Kosovo as “the crucified land soaked in the blood of martyrs”. The underlying logic of the Vidovdan commemorations thus implies inseparable bonds between the territory and a particular group defined in ethnocultural terms.

The most common designations used to denote the situation of Kosovo Serbs after 1999 refer to a new period of slavery and foreign occupation. Direct parallels are drawn between the centuries spent under the Ottoman occupation and the newest period of international administration followed by the declaration of Kosovo’s independence in 2008. The historical term “zulum”, denoting Ottoman repressions of the local population, is abundantly used with regard to the contemporary grievances.

Vidovdan is classified as the day of the historical disaster that was followed by the centuries-long occupation of Serbia by the Ottoman Empire. The event is most frequently interpreted as the military debacle that paved the way to the victory of the Serbian nation in a long-term historical perspective. As prince Lazar puts it in the film “Battle of Kosovo” (commonly appreciated in the framework of the commemoration), “With my blood, I delineate the borders of Serbia.”33. The most prominent values are those of loyalty of an individual to the collectivity and readiness to sacrifice for the state and the nation.

The primary meaning of the event thus merges with the contemporary context, and the current loss of Kosovo to the internationally supported Albanians is

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32 Although the Vidovdan commemorations attract numerous groups representing political parties and organizations that prioritize ethnic identity in their political programs, the Vidovdan commemoration is a much wider popular event, as it is also massively attended by the people (mostly youth) coming from all over Kosovo and beyond.

33 The film “Battle of Kosovo” (1989) was directed by Zdravko Šotra and based on the drama by Ljubomir Simović. A famous quote of Milos Obilić from the same film reads: “Serbia is not a handful of rice to be pecked out by every crow brought by the wind”.

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likened to the past loss of Kosovo to the Ottomans. The contemporary celebrations of Vidovdan represent the interpretation of the current developments in Kosovo as a new phase of the same six-centuries-long historical cycle: a new historical defeat suffered from superior forces and collective martyrdom in a new unequal battle. The designation “Second Kosovo battle” is used with regard to the Battle of Košare fought on the Serbo-Albanian border between 9 April and 10 June 1999. The battle is famous for a huge disproportion in the strength of the belligerent sides, as 1,000 Serbian soldiers managed to repeal the attacks of 6,000-strong KLA insurgent army.

The cyclical perception of history is made up of a series of recurrent elements that can be considered cognitive shortcuts, massively employed in order to explain the reality. The 1999 Kosovo war are interpreted as the Second Kosovo Battle, the March 2004 campaign of mass expulsion of Serbs from Kosovo acquires the meaning of the Second Vidovdan; the NATO-led international military mission is understood as a successor to the Ottoman army; and Kosovo’s independence is commonly perceived as the return to pre-independence Ottoman-like yoke, with sufferings of the Serbian people and their shrines identical to those experienced under the Ottomans.

The main actors that can be distinguished in the narrative include the Serbian people opposed to other actors. The terrorist KLA is the most frequent perpetrator, followed by the NATO interveners. Given the failure of the international military mission to prevent the exodus of the Kosovo Serb population and mass destruction of its houses and churches, the KFOR is perceived as Priština’s ally. A distinction is made between those KFOR troops that managed to protect Serbian shrines and civilian population (the Italians in Peć and Dečani) and those who stood aside (the Germans in Prizren, the French in Devič). Kosovo is generally perceived as the KLA state, given a strong KLA core of most Kosovo Albanian political elite.

During yearly commemorations of Vidovdan, sporadic clashes with Kosovo Albanian police, occurring from year to year, culminated in 2012, when the police confiscated all Serbian insignia (T-shirts and flags). Happening on the Kosovo Field, this clash had a clear symbolic connotation of the Kosovo police acting as a successor of the Ottoman army and waging a war against Serbia over Kosovo.

Drecun, Milovan. Drugi Kosovski boj. Beograd: Miba books, 2013. The song “Drugii Kosovski Boj” (“The Second Kosovo Battle”) appears at the end of the documentary “Pakao Košara” (“The Hell of Košare”) by Milovan Drecun. The poem links together in a single discourse the tombs of ancestors that defended Kosovo in the past and the readiness of the present generation to defend their homes that are in Kosovo, where the tombs of the fallen heroes are.

“Defiant Song” (Prkorna pesma), a poem by Dobrica Erić that is frequently recited at public commemorations in Kosovo, is specifically devoted to the international actors. The poem also mentions inat, mentioned above in the context of Staro Gracko.
Among the actions advocated and lessons for the future, the keywords dominating the narrative are the Kosovo pledge (zavet) not to give up Kosovo. Accordingly, most frequently invoked goal for the local Serbs is to survive in Kosovo in spite of all difficulties, to withstand the pressures and to ensure the perpetuation of the Serbian national culture on the land of Kosovo. Again, the narrative invokes ethnocultural solidarity and an individual’s commitment to the survival of the collectivity.

Table 1. The traditional national narrative about Kosovo: a historical continuity in Gazimestan commemorations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative values</th>
<th>Interpretation of 1389</th>
<th>Interpretation of 1999-2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“A clash of civilizations”: supremacy of the cultural concept</td>
<td>The expansion of Islam toward Christian Europe, slowed down on the Kosovo Field</td>
<td>The eradication of Christianity from Kosovo through mass destruction of churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The collectivity facing a superior enemy</td>
<td>The Serbian army versus the numerically superior Ottoman troops</td>
<td>Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) against the world’s strongest military alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of independence: the collectivity enslaved with the defeat of the state</td>
<td>The centuries-long occupation of Serbia by the Ottoman Empire</td>
<td>The loss of Kosovo: unfavorable international context (mass recognition of Kosovo); hopeless demographic imbalance in favor of Albanians; political domination by Albanians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An individual’s loyalty to the collectivity: “an existential choice”</td>
<td>Facing a superior enemy, choice between the Heavenly Kingdom and an earthly kingdom</td>
<td>A tradeoff between patriotism and the acceptance of Kosovo's independence for the sake of survival</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. SERBIAN NATIONAL NARRATIVES ABOUT KOSOVO

Kosovo remains the most complicated issue related to Serbia’s constitutional arrangement, political development and related national narratives. Put differently, the Serbian population of Kosovo is inseparably linked to the wider Serbian national narratives.

3.1. TRADITIONAL NARRATIVE: “THE KOSOVO MYTH” AND “THE KOSOVO PLEDGE”

According to the narrative represented by Serbia’s most political parties and a prominent part of the academic community, Kosovo constitutes a key marker of the historical identity of the Serbian nation36 and as such should be kept within

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Serbia. This narrative is in line with the above-presented motives of contemporary Gazimestan commemorations emphasizing the bonds of the entire ethnocultural group with Kosovo’s territory and the necessity of the individual’s loyalty to the supreme values of the collectivity. The legalistic and political version of the narrative emphasizes loyalty to the constitution, most actively defended by the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS). As of 2013, the newest developments within the narrative are threefold: sticking to the traditional interpretation; proposals for strengthening the narrative and providing responses to counternarratives.

The traditional narrative stresses Kosovo’s fundamental importance for the Serbian national identity, testified by an unique concentration of about 1300 objects of historical heritage on less than 11,000 km². Numerous court residences testify that key state affairs were managed by the ruling elite on this territory in the past ages (Hrebeljanović, Branković, Musić, Vojinović aristocratic families, Nemanjić dynasty)³⁷.

Dubbed “the most precious Serbian word”³⁸, Kosovo is something more than a mere state territory. The narrative regards the Kosovo battle as a “foundational”, “constitutive” and “constructive”³⁹ event of Serb popular tradition, memory and statehood. Kosovo is likened to Thermopylae (480 b.C), Poitiers/Tours (732), Kulikovo (1380)⁴⁰ and Orléans (1428-1429)⁴¹. Those that abandoned their Kosovo beyond their boundaries are doomed to become minor and irrelevant⁴². In line with the culturalist conceptions of ethnicity, Kosovo is a classical example of a particular attitude toward an ancestral land representing an identity base of a modern nation, becoming particularly strong when an ethnic group has a national religion if its own⁴³.

According to the narrative, Kosovo represents a myth (legend) transmitted and preserved through the popular creativity, the rich epic tradition and the elaborated Kosovo cycles of popular poetry. The myth emerged from the awareness of huge sacrifice of the whole generation (the developed Serbian medieval society) led by its

³⁷ Prizren is still oftener referred to as “the royal city” and “Dušan’s city” during commemorative events.
elite for the sake of supreme principles of freedom. As a key to understanding the message of history, this categorical imperative connects the nation’s present with its past and future aspirations.

According to other definitions, Kosovo is not a myth, but a memory and awareness that establishes link to the historical past. Imbued with meanings and interpretations given by the people themselves, the Kosovo myth is claimed to be the history that the nation itself selected to remember and to ground its values upon. The examples for the future generations include: heroism (prince Lazar, Miloš Obilić, Milan Toplica, Ivan Kosančić), readiness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of the collectivity’s survival (Banović Strainjka, Srđa Zlopogleda, Boško Jugović) and betrayal (the traitor Vuk Branković, giving up Kosovo for the sake of the earthly kingdom, or more prosperous life, as the contemporary discourse puts it). Inspired by the most widespread interpretations of the events, images created by the art strengthened their popular representations of events and contributed to their perpetuation (“Seobe” by Milo Crnjanski, representations of the Kosovo battle by the most prominent Serbian painters, motives of musical art, the film “The Battle of Kosovo”).

The military and political defeat thus immediately launched the struggle for freedom. The message of the Kosovo myth is related to cultural and identity strategy aimed at long-term strengthening national vitality in order to restore the lost statehood. The representation of the Kosovo battle as a central event of the Serbian history is perceived as a major incentive that guided the Serbs for ages, preparing them to live for the liberation, to keep together and not to crumble away.

Preserved and transmitted to future generations, the Kosovo values were aimed at the survival of the collectivity in the moments of danger. Preservation of cultural-psychological identity was aimed at surviving after the collapse of socio-political framework until more favourable conditions would enable its reestablish-

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46 In the Kosovo legend, as in the New Testament, the betrayal is discovered during the supper, on the eve of the death. This circumstance, like the overall juxtaposition of earthly and heavenly principles, testifies the predominant role of the Church in developing of the narrative.
47 A similar long-term identity strategy is apparent in the history of the Šmederevo fortress, built in 1428-1430s, where a big red cross was bricked into the white wall. Exposed to fierce attacks by the Ottomans advancing toward Belgrade and constantly hit by Turkish bullets, the cross increasingly reddened over time against the white background.
48 Vesković, op. cit., p. 52.
The motive of helping the community survive the critical emergency situation is prominent in the contemporary initiatives that bring humanitarian aid to the Kosovo enclaves.

The said form of collective self-perception became the main metaphor in later interpretations of key historical events in 19th and 20th centuries. The current developments are perceived as cyclic recurrence of Kosovo phenomenon in Serbian historical experience, passing the same stages repeatedly. In today’s Serbia, images of the “traitor Vuk Branković” are particularly frequently employed in the daily political discourse.

Among the most recent developments within this narrative, we may single out the proposals to abandon the designation of “myth”, proposing instead the term “Kosovo pledge”. Transmitting the moral message and value system, the Kosovo pledge is to be considered a moral imperative, not a narrative.

Responding to criticisms coming from the counternarrative, the authors adhering to the traditional narrative claim that demands for “demythologization” are tantamount to renouncing one’s identity, and, as a consequence, disarming and being defeated easier. Accompanied by proposals of alternative myths and being part of the clash itself, demythologization is perceived as aimed at destroying Serbia’s cultural resources in order to deprive it of Kosovo forever.

Invoking collective memory and victimization proved to be an efficient tool of collective mobilization, building ethnic cohesion and justifying political action. The newest versions of the narrative argue that by insisting on this single feature of the myth, all other positive features related to the perpetuation of ethnocultural collectivity are neglected.

In a similar vein, the narrative has also responded to the suggestions coming from political opponents that call for accepting “the new reality”, i.e. the impossibility to restore the Serbian rule over Kosovo. The narrative reminds that the new reality in Kosovo has been created by the means of forceful ethnic homogenization, tolerated by the international community. According to Oliver Ivanović, the state

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54 Bratina, op.cit.
55 Šljukić, op.cit.
56 Baščarević, op.cit., p. 182.
secretary for Kosovo and Metohija, the fact that the Serbs cannot give up Kosovo as part of their national identity is also a reality, regardless of legal and political forms it can take over history\textsuperscript{57}.

The degree of the narrative’s popularity can be reflected by the results of public opinion polls. In 2011, 59\% of respondents, if asked to choose between Kosovo and the membership in the EU, would opt for Kosovo\textsuperscript{58}.

The European dimension, nevertheless, constitutes an important part of the narrative. Europe’s attitude toward the Serbs is argued to reveal Europe’s self-abolition\textsuperscript{59}. Historically legitimized as an area of freedom, Europe is argued to have fallen below the level of its own values, whereas the Serbs, being attacked by Europe, proved again to be the protector and custodian of the values abandoned by Europe itself. Frequent references are also made to the Kosovo Battle that had slowed down the Turk advancement toward Europe by half century at least.

The “European” narrative is strong in the discourse of the Church as well. As several Kosovo Serbian shrines have a status of world heritage conferred by the UNESCO, the post-war destruction of churches happening in the presence of a huge European military mission was dubbed “the face of Europe”\textsuperscript{60}, reminiscent of a motive of the national song “Vostani Serbijе” (“Arise, Serbia”) reflected in the words, “Show Europe your delightful face”\textsuperscript{61}.

3.2. THE “NEW REALITY” COUNTERNARRATIVE: “KOSOVO AS A NEIGHBOUR”

The counternarrative has three versions, developed on the local (the Kosovo Serb), nation-wide (Serbia) and international levels, respectively. What unites them is the consensus on the harmful nature of the Kosovo myth and the conviction that Serbia’s claims to Kosovo are unrealistic, backward and self-destructive. The following section deals with the Serbian counternarrative in detail.

If the traditional narrative follows the lines of primordialist attitude to the nation and emphasizes the value of individual’s loyalty to the collectivity, the counternarrative is framed in terms of constructivism, and, hence, emphasizing the constructed nature of the Kosovo myth and prioritizing the individual values over

\textsuperscript{57} The statement of Oliver Ivanović on Gazimestan, aired by the Kosova Press news agency on 28 June 2013.
\textsuperscript{59} Bratina, op.cit., p. 166.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Kosovo i Metohija – lice Evrope. Multimedialna interaktivna enciklopedija}, <http://www.tipon.eu/p_kosovo.php>.
\textsuperscript{61} “Ode to the Uprising of the Serbs”, the national anthem written by Dositej Obradović during the First Serbian Uprising against the Ottoman Empire in 1804.
the collectivist ones. The counternarrative ascribes the authorship of the phrase “Kosovo is the heart of Serbia” to Milošević himself. The harmfulness of the myth is derived from its proved potential of becoming a powerful political arm, reviving the most sensitive stereotypes and hitting the most painful spots of collective memory. This is exactly how Slobodan Milošević instrumentalized the Kosovo issue in order to introduce centralism, to legitimize his political power, which in the long run led to the wars of the Yugoslav disintegration. This political instrumentalization is claimed to be still in place. According to anthropologist Ivan Čolović, the main hero of the myth remains the same: it is the Serbian nation that wages war with its enemies, kills and suffers, sacrifices itself and vengeates. Only circumstances change.

The Helsinki Committee of Serbia has been among the most consistent proponents of the reversal of Serbia’s Kosovo policies. Pragmatic proposals on the part of the academic community include suggestions to draw as many EU-related benefits as possible from the recognition of Kosovo.

The first political force to see the official Kosovo policies as the obstacle on Serbia’s path toward the EU was the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), followed by the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO, led by former minister of foreign affairs Vuk Drašković). Both parties are advocating “good neighbourly relations” with Kosovo. The keywords of this counternarrative include the “reversal of the unviable policy toward Kosovo”, “turning to the future” and “accelerating Serbia’s European path.” The counternarrative draws on the fact that, starting from the times of Yugoslavia, Europe has been incomparably more frequent travel destination for the Serbs than Kosovo.

According to the counternarrative, the traditional Kosovo policy is the reason of...
the actual Kosovo problem. The policy “Kosovo is Serbia” is seen as the continuation of irresponsible Milošević’s policy, while the Serbs in Kosovo are being sacrificed in the same manner they were sacrificed in Croatia and in Bosnia. The new strategy, instead, should accept Kosovo as a neighbour\(^{69}\) and to prioritize the cohabitation of the Serbs and the Albanians in Kosovo\(^{70}\). Any perpetuation of unviable Kosovo politics is seen as contrary to the development of Serbia in line with the values of civilized world, modern economy and education. The counternarrative thus clearly prioritizes the citizen and individual values over any collectivities.

In line with this counternarrative, the leaflets distributed on the streets of Belgrade read: “Today is 2013, not 1389”\(^{71}\). Kosovo is also likened to a noose around the nation’s neck that pulls the whole nation to the bottom of an abyss\(^{72}\). The essence of the “reversal narrative” is leaving the past behind and turning to the future, based on universal values that lead to prosperity.

In the same vein, on 24 April 2013, several days after the Belgrade-Priština agreement was signed in Brussels and on the eve of the Orthodox Easter, Nenad Čanak, the leader of the League of SocialDemocrats of Vojvodina, visited Gazimestan. Here, he placed a wreath bearing the inscription “In memory of fallen heroes”. According to the official announcement of the party, the visit was intended to symbolize “a victory of European, and defeat of hateful and divisive politics” and “another evidence that the European integration is the only way into the good future of Serbia which opens the doors and erases the borders”\(^{73}\). In other words, placing wreath on Gazimestan was intended to symbolize Serbia turning the page of history with regard to Kosovo policies.

Paradoxically, the current “pragmatic European” narrative has reproduced an exact logic of a tradeoff between the identity and existential issues which upheld the traditional narrative. This further contributed to the popularity of mythological characters (Prince Lazar and Vuk Branković) in the daily political discourse on both sides. According to the legend reproduced in the film “The Battle of Kosovo”, nobleman Vuk Branković attempts to discourage Lazar from fighting the Turks and in the long run betrays him, siding with the Turks. In so doing, Branković is guided


\(^{71}\) The leaflet emerged as a response to the posters of the “Serbian National Movement 1389”, a political youth organization that adopted the date of the Kosovo Battle as its official name and as the foundation of its political identity.


\(^{73}\) “Čanak na Gazimestanu”. Danas, 24 April 2013.
by “simple facts” and “pragmatic reasons”: “The serpent is venomous, the peach is sweet, ashes are bitter! The Serbs are few, the Turks are numerous”. A similar trade-off between “pragmatism” and “patriotism” underlies the current Kosovo-related cleavages in the Serbian politics after the declaration of independence in Priština.

Both the designation and the logic of the “New Reality” counternarrative is stunningly consonant with the principles of Realpolitik. In terms of Serbia’s internal politics, the counternarrative blames Serbia’s actual constitution for wishful thinking, making the whole nation eternal hostages of the Kosovo myth, putting it “in the very stomach of the Kosovo myth”, “celebrating the defeat” and “self-injuring running backwards”74, “perpetuating the Kosovo agony”, refusing to cut the Gordian knot, to drop the Kosovo burden and to stop poisoning Serbia by irresponsible politics.

On the level of the Kosovo Serb community, the counternarrative of “accepting the reality” has been prominent in the rhetoric of Slobodan Petrović, the leader of the biggest Serbian party represented in Kosovo’s parliament, the Independent Liberal Party (SLS)75. Nevertheless, the local counternarrative of the Serbs that chose to participate in Kosovo’s institutions is focused, first of all, on the need to solve existential issues. They argue that problems of return of displaced people, education, health care, housing, infrastructure and freedom of movement depend heavily on the local Serbs’ ability to build cooperative relations with Priština. The logic of being existentially conditioned by the Albanian community and Kosovo’s institutions permeates the narrative of integration of all Kosovo Serb parties: their future is seen as depending on the environment they are living in.

Finally, the Belgrade-Priština talks gave rise to a merged narrative on the state level. Prioritizing the Serbia’s European integration while renouncing to recognize Kosovo de jure, the Serbian government admitted the de facto existence of the “new reality”. In so doing, it approached the main keywords of the “new reality” counternarrative. Thus, Serbia’s first deputy prime minister Ivica Dačić in various occasions mentioned “the reality”, “the borders” and even called upon the defenders of the constitution to take it under their arms and to try to go for a walk to Kosovo76. Responding to the Synod of the Serbian Church, Dačić stressed that the Church’s appeal did not come from Peć, but from Belgrade77 (alluding that the Patriarchy is not located in Kosovo anymore).

76 “Zašto političari zbog Kosova relativizuju Ustav”. Politika, 18 April 2013.
77 “Dačić: Ovaj rat moramo dobiti, nećemo više voditi one koje gubimo”. Telegraf, 7 April 2013.
As Belgrade and Priština reached an agreement on the normalization of relations on 19 April 2013, a reversal of a decade-long policy of boycotting Kosovo elections was framed in line of a similar logic of pragmatism. Dačić (already serving as prime minister) explicitly mentioned that 7 millions of Serbs cannot remain hostages of 20,000 Serbs living in North Mitrovica. The call on the Kosovo Serbs to participate in Kosovo’s local elections was framed in terms of survival. Within this narrative, electing local authorities in the Serb-populated areas and the upcoming establishment of the Association of Serbian Municipalities acting within Kosovo’s institutional system are seen as the only way for the Serbian community to survive in Kosovo. The state narrative thus adopted significant motives from the counternarrative, with one important reservation. It continued to stress the value of individuals’ loyalty to the interests of the collectivity, changing only the means. As the Serbian government reversed its the previous policies of encouraging the Kosovo Serbs to boycott Kosovo’s institutions, the appeal coming from Belgrade to integrate into Kosovo’s system was likewise framed in terms of individual citizens’ loyalty to the redefined interests of the collectivity.

CONCLUSIONS

The historical memory of war and post-war victims constitutes a cornerstone of the contemporary Kosovo Serb identity. The analysis of commemorative practices across Kosovo reveals identical discursive themes and interpretations that allow us to establish the dominant pattern of historical memory. The key experiences that determine the dominant motives of historical memory include: the failure of the international military mission to protect civilians, post-war crimes against civilians, impunity of the perpetrators and continuing human insecurity. During the period of the present research, attacks on civilians and their places of memory have been still widely occurring in strong correlation with political dynamics.

The widespread mistrust of the Kosovo Serb community toward both the international community and the Kosovo institutions is fed by insufficient sensitivity of the international and Kosovo institutions to the Serbian collective memories. Throughout the research period, not a single case of a representative of international community participating actively at a Serb commemoration was registered.

Likewise, persisting huge ethnic distance and the lack of a shared space for the Serbian-Albanian dialogue on the most important issues of the historical memory of war and post-war events contributes to the maintenance of a considerably homogenized view of the majority out-group, strongly influenced by the KLA’s
violence against the civilians from 1998 onwards. Uncritical glorification of the KLA in Kosovo’s public space, coupled with the atmosphere of complete impunity, deprives the Kosovo Serbs of incentives to confront their own historical memory of victimhood with that of the Kosovo Albanians.

The commemorated grievances are always placed in a wider context of the overall situation of the Kosovo Serbs in the post-war period. All the analyzed commemorations tend to link together in a single discourse the pre-war civilian victims of the KLA, the victims of the 1999 bombing, the post-war victims and the victims of the March 2004 violence.

Experiences of every-day life, revealing historical path dependency, are translated into the commemorative practices. In this pattern of national collective memory, direct connections between the earlier historical periods are apparent. The analysis of the development of the national collective memory of the Kosovo Serbs over the past 14-year-long post-war period reveals continuing reactualization and revitalization of the 14-century historical and literary images, symbols and patterns as key cognitive shortcuts massively employed in the contemporary settings and interpretations of the contemporary actors’ actions. Political imagery is invoked vis-à-vis an imminent identity crisis. The powerful revitalization of the old historical narrative persists, as the group finds itself on historical crossroads characterized by continuous ethnic tensions and accompanied by accelerated social and political changes. Neomythical consciousness can thus be considered a form of adaptation of the community to the situation of insecurity and threat, a pre-set cognitive scheme that coordinates collective action.

That said, commemorative celebrations of all kinds (both those related to post-war sufferings and the traditional ones) perform integrative and homogenizing functions among the Kosovo Serbs all over Kosovo. A crucial role in maintaining and coordinating the evolution of their national collective memory belongs to the Serbian Orthodox Church. Consistent motives that persist over time can be traced in church celebrations across Kosovo. Memory-related messages connect the traditional church feasts to the motives of historical suffering, reactualized in the actual settings. Abounding in symbolics and rhetoric of individual and group identification with tradition, celebrations prove to be a key factor of uniting the people into a collectivity, consolidating and homogenizing it, maintaining social and cultural integration of the local Serbian community and its memory. Mass attendance of the commemorative events and celebrations testifies to the strong sense of collectivity in the context of persisting tensions, uncertainty and fears for the future.

The main messages of the traditional Serbian narrative with regard to Kosovo
HisT oriCaL MeMoriess oF KoSoVo serbs iN THe  PoSt-W ar P erioD anD CoNFLiCTinG serbian naTionaL narraTiVes aboUT KoSoVo presuppose primordial bonds between Kosovo as a historical territory and the Serbian nation defined in ethnocultural terms. The adherents of the narrative derive it from natural national collective memory, “such as the nation itself chose to remember”. The narrative invokes the values of ethnocultural solidarity, loyalty of an individual to the collectivity, an individual’s commitment to the survival of the collectivity and readiness to sacrifice individual interests for the sake of the state and of the nation. Apparent threats faced by Kosovo Serbs in the post-war period strengthen the narrative’s emphasis on the survival of the collectivity. There is also a clear link between Serbia’s current constitution, whose preamble considers Kosovo an integral part of Serbia, and the traditional Kosovo narrative. The crucial difference between the two is the existence of a clear long-term strategy in the “Kosovo myth” and lack of such strategy in the official policy.

The dominant counternarrative departs from an entirely different premise of an individual-centered relationship between the citizen, the ethnic collectivity and the state. The counternarrative stresses the constructed and manipulative nature of the dominant Serbian narrative on Kosovo, as well as the constructed nature of the concept of nation itself. Bringing the citizen in the forefront, it advocates the civic concept of nation and the global values which make ethnocultural particularities increasingly irrelevant for political organization. In practical terms, this implies the integration of Kosovo Serbs into the dominant political and institutional framework that has been established in Kosovo as part of “new reality”.

The most recent developments within the official state narrative are characterized both by unprecedented confusion and by allegiance to the key value of the traditional narrative. On the one hand, the state discourse has adopted significant discursive keywords from the counternarrative (“reality”, “borders” and relativization of the constitution). On the other hand, the state narratives continue to stress the value of individuals’ loyalty to the interests of the collectivity. As these interests are redefined, the individuals are still called upon to respect the (reversed) state policies. Like Belgrade’s earlier demand of the Kosovo Serbs boycotting Kosovo’s institutions, the current appeal coming from Belgrade to integrate into Kosovo’s system is also framed in terms of individual citizens’ loyalty to the redefined interests of the collectivity and of the state.
KOSOVO SERBU ISTORINE ATMINTIS POKARIO LAIKOTARPIU IR KONFLIKTUOJANTYS SERBIJOS NACIONALINIAI NARATYVAI APIE KOSOVĄ

SANTRAUKA. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama Kosovo serbų pokario istorinė atmintis, nustatant svarbiausius atmenus įvykius, vyraujančias atminimo jamžinimo formas ir atminties forma-vimo, palaikymo bei perdavimo mechanizmus. Remiantis etnografiniais stebėjimais, išskiriamis vyraujančias istorininiai vaizdinius, simboliai ir atminimo diskursai, atskleidžiantys nacionalinę kolektyvinę atmintį. Analizuojami konkursojantys naratyvai apie Kosovą, išskiriant jąnumeromus požiūrius į piliečio, tautos ir valstybės santykius, etnokultūrinio solidarumo ir piliečių tautos sampratų priešprieša į piliečio ir naratyvo santykį.

RAKTĄŽODŽIAI: istorinė atmintis, nacionalinis naratyvas, tautinė kolektyvinė atmintis, Kosovo serbai, pokario laikotarpis, Serbija.

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