

Storytelling, identities and reconciliation

*Oral heritage and its influence in reconciliation
among young people in Kosovo*

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Oral heritage and its influence in reconciliation among young
people in Kosovo

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Abstract

This research studies reconciliation between Albanian and Serbian young people in Kosovo in the aftermath of the Kosovo conflict in 1999. It aims to explore how the narratives the young people receive from their parents affect their perceptions of each other. Subsequently, the research studies the implications these narratives have for reconciliation between Albanian and Serbian young people. Furthermore, this study aims to reveal areas of interventions for reconciliation across generations in Kosovo based on the findings. The underlying assumptions are that ethnic primordialist considerations are still prevalent in Kosovo, and the salience of ethnicity could be reduced through a process of social categorisation. The data has been collected utilising autoethnographic research method, where the researcher's own experiences in growing up in a post-conflict country and reconciling with the other have been taken into account.

Keywords: Kosovo, reconciliation, storytelling, identity, ethnic primordialism, social categorisation, autoethnography

Foreword

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1 Introduction

Kosovo is a small landlocked country in the centre of Balkan peninsula, bordered by Albania, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, holding a population of approximately 1,5 million. Declaring its independence in 2008 from being a province of Serbia after tumultuous periods of ethnic conflicts and sociopolitical struggles, Kosovo is still undergoing a process of addressing its past and establishing its status as a newly founded state. This research looks into aftermath of the Kosovo conflict in 1999, a culmination of the rise of Albanian nationalism and Serbian oppressive regime implemented in Kosovo, and contemporary challenges and opportunities for reconciliation within the young Kosovars, a generation born during or soon after the conflict.



Figure 1: Map of Kosovo. Names written bold are in Serbian, italic in Albanian. Source: Statistical Office of Kosovo

This study has been conducted by using the autoethnographic qualitative research method, where the researcher's personal experiences are taken into consideration and reflected upon during the research process. The data has been collected during an extensive fieldwork in Kosovo, where representatives of the young people from Albanian and Serbian communities

were interviewed. The collected data is analysed through critical approach to ethnic primordialism to explain the salience of ethnicity in identity building in Kosovo; and social categorisation theory, to uncover potential opportunities and areas of intervention for reconciliatory initiatives.

1.1 Background

To begin with, it is essential to understand the course of the events leading to the major conflict in 1999. Although the roots of the dispute over Kosovo can be traced back further in history, the conflict in 1999 was essentially waged during the late eighties and early nineties under Slobodan Milosevic's, then Serbian president's, regime oppressing the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo. Albanian nationalism had been on the rise throughout the existence of Yugoslavia – general Josip Tito's creation to unify the Slavic nations under one singular state – and the power vacuum followed by the death of general Tito further escalated tensions. Muslim Albanians prevailed as the ethnic majority in Kosovo, but Milosevic refused to recognise their majority rights due to what he saw as Kosovo's role as a sacred territory vital to the existence and identity of the Serbian nation. Milosevic began an extensive regime aiming to replace Albanian language and culture with Serbian institutions, depriving Albanians, among other things, their right to education in their mother tongue. Ethnic Albanians formed a paramilitary Kosovo Liberation Army (hereinafter KLA) in 1996, whose sporadic attacks on Serbian officials steadily escalated, until in 1998 the KLA's actions reached the level of an armed uprising. Violence intensified as Serbian and later Yugoslavian armed forces responded by attempting to re-establish control over Kosovo (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018).

As the international community failed to address the growing tensions between ethnic groups in Kosovo, violence escalated between the KLA and government forces, forcing a significant number of people to leave their homes and to seek refuge. Waves of refugees heading towards Western Europe finally caught international attention. As a result, an informal coalition of the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, and Russia – the Contact Group – demanded a cease-fire, the withdrawal of Yugoslav and Serbian forces from Kosovo, the return of refugees, and access for international monitors. Slobodan Milosevic became the president of Yugoslavia in 1997, and agreed to majority of the demands yet failed

to implement them. During the cease-fire, KLA reassembled and new attacks commenced. The Yugoslav and Serbian forces responded by engaging in what the United Nations classified as an ethnic cleansing of Kosovo Albanians. Unsuccessful diplomatic negotiations were undertaken in February 1999 in France, failing to provide resolutions. Consequently, NATO intervened in March 24 by launching air strikes against Serbian military targets. As a response, all Kosovo's ethnic Albanians were driven out by the Yugoslav and Serbian forces, causing displacement of hundreds of thousands of people into neighbouring countries. Eventually the 11 week long NATO bombing campaign expanded to Belgrade resulting in significant damage to the Serbian infrastructure. A peace accord was ultimately signed between NATO and Yugoslavia in June 1999, demarcating withdrawal of troops and the return of the displaced Albanians. Most Serbians fled from Kosovo, in fear of vengeance from Albanian communities. UN peacekeeping forces were deployed in Kosovo to retain stability and dissolve any efforts of retaliation, and Kosovo was brought under the United Nations administration (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018).

Interethnic violence and vindictiveness overshadowed peace process attempts across Kosovo. Widespread anti-Serbian violence broke out in March 2004 across several cities and towns, claiming several lives and resulting in displacement of over 4000 Kosovo Serbians and other minorities. The final collapse of Yugoslavia and dissolution of the Serbia-Montenegro federation in 2006 paved way for Kosovo Albanians' urge for independence, which they finally declared in February 2008. Kosovo's independence was recognised by several Western powers including the United States of America and majority of the European Union member states (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2018). However until this day Serbia has not recognised Kosovo's statehood, and Kosovo's final status has remained under debate. While the Brussels Agreement in 2013 – an agreement reached between Serbian and Kosovan governments for the normalisation of relations with the support of the international community – has ultimately failed in its implementation, the ethnic tensions have remained between the Albanian and Serbian communities in Kosovo as well. The repercussions of the war and the complex underpinnings behind the conflict have an impact to the ethno-political relations until this day. This study attempts to understand the attitudes and perceptions of the youth born either during or right after this conflict by examining the stories and narratives their parents have transferred to them across generations, and hence determine whether there is potential for reconciliation within the new generation of Serbians and Albanians in Kosovo.

1.2 Relevance of the study

Scholars have for long attempted to explain the conflicts in the Balkans with varying success and several conclusions. Some researchers have only reinforced the "otherness" of the Balkan nations in relation to the Western Europe (Todorova 1997) and doomed the region to remain in eternal state of conflict. Objective explanations of Balkan history have not always been as objective as they claim (Zdravkovic-Zonta 2009), falling for one-sided views or demanding inaccurate accountability. The complexity of Balkan histories lies in the difficulty to determine what actually is Balkan history, as the Balkan truths arise not only from documented historical accounts and research but also from collective memories and stories told across generations. This complexity accounts as one of the fundamental reasons for the eruption of Kosovo conflict in 1999. After nineteen years from the conflict, Kosovo Albanian and Serbian communities can not be declared to have reconciled. In southern Kosovo the communities have established a form of non-violent coexistence, however in northern Kosovo the lives of both communities are overshadowed by provocation (BBC, 18th Jan 2017) and at times with outbursts of interethnic violence and even homicide (BBC, 16th Jan 2018) (Burema 2013). Effective initiatives for reconciliation in Kosovo have not been undertaken, and the situation can be described as stalled at best.

As a society and a newly founded state Kosovo has only very recently undergone remarkable demographic changes. The median age of Kosovars is roughly 29 years (CIA World Factbook) which makes for the youngest nation in Europe. While Kosovo struggles with its socioeconomical development and high level of corruption paralysing the government and its functions, it still has huge potential, and challenge, in its young population. Kosovo has several social, economical and political issues to consider, and speaking about reconciliation without discussing the other societal issues would provide merely a superficial understanding about the challenges Kosovo is facing. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to approach these struggles by addressing the relevance and significance of reconciliation; in the contemporary discourse in Kosovo, the societal issues are being overshadowed by elaborated attentiveness in ethnicity and ethnic relations. Ideally, in promoting cooperation and partnership across the peoples instead of replicating the divisive, destructive models of society from the past, the

social, economical and political struggles would be given the attention and effort they require.

It needs to be addressed that the population of Kosovo consists of the majority of ethnic Albanians as well as Serbian, Bosnian, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian minorities. Whereas I do acknowledge the importance and issues the other minorities have faced due to Kosovo's difficult past and contemporary challenges, this study will exclusively focus on the relations between ethnic Albanian and Serbian communities. I do, however, recommend further research highlighting the impact of the conflict to Kosovo's other minorities and their status within present Kosovo.

1.3 Research language

Kosovo has two official languages, Serbian and Albanian, and in official maps and documents location names are always presented in both languages. In this research I will refer the territory of Kosovo with its official English name, Kosovo, instead of using the Serbian "Kosovo" and Albanian "Kosova" in parallel. In regards to the names of cities and other geographical locations, I will use both the Albanian and Serbian names simultaneously as official English translations are hardly available. In cases where an official English language translation is available for names of establishments or functions, such as "University of Pristina", I shall use the official English translation.

All references to Albanians or Serbians in this study describe ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbians residing in the territory of Kosovo. Any exceptions will be mentioned within the context. In several academic papers and other publications ethnic Serbians in Kosovo are referred simply as "Serbs", however while residing in Kosovo myself I learned that this term is sometimes used in derogatory context, which is why I have chosen to settle for the term "Serbian" to address ethnic Serbians.

This research and the research material has been conducted completely in English language, which is unfortunate as analysing both Serbian and Albanian language literature would have been fruitful and offered fascinating insights on intergroup researchers' results. I was lucky enough to obtain a book "Multiculturalism in Kosovo" published by the Youth Initiative for

Human Rights in Belgrade, which was a collection of studies written by both Albanian and Serbian researchers, and then translated from their original language to all three languages. Nevertheless, as a polyglot myself, I acknowledge that a lot of culture specific information can get lost in the linguistic jungle, which is unfortunate as I have tried to conduct this research by positioning myself with my personal experiences among my research subjects.

1.4 Research questions

The data has been collected in order to seek answers to the two main research questions. To begin with this study aims to explore:

What are the narratives told to the young people from their parents about the war and the "other"?

The "other" refers to different ethnicity of the interviewees own, however in the interview situation I avoided using vocabulary which would have insinuated said "otherness"; I would only mention Serbians or Albanians as necessary, and prefer to talk about Kosovo and Kosovar peoples instead.

Based on the first research question, I aim to find out how the stories of the young people's parents about Kosovo conflict, history and ethnic relations have impacted to the attitudes of their children; and how do the young people understand Kosovo's history based on what they have learned from their parents.

The main goal of this study, however, is to focus on exploring the direction of the reconciliation within the research participants themselves, and how it differentiates or resonates to what they have learnt from their parents. Hence, the second research question is worded as follows:

What potential is there, in the young people's subjective perception of these narratives and their own identities, for reconciliation through bottom-up development?

Authors have not specifically found a consensus in defining the term "reconciliation", despite its frequent presence in modern peace studies and conflict resolution research. Reconciliation, nevertheless, is agreed by scholars to be necessary to build stable and lasting peace. It can often be accounted as a more prominent result of conflict resolution than a formal peace agreement, which may only be abided by the leaders who negotiated the agreement, or just a small part of the society, sometimes merely the narrow strata around them (Bar-Tal & Bennik 2004). Reconciliation, however, "goes beyond the agenda of formal conflict resolution to changing the motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes and emotions by the great majority of the society members regarding the conflict, the nature of the relationship between the parties, and the parties themselves" (Bar-Tal & Bennik 2004, p 3). Reconciliation as such should therefore be the outcome of a peace process.

But what constitutes a successful reconciliation still remains open for discussion. For example, Mendelhoff (2004) considers a "non-lethal coexistence" as a sufficient definition for reconciliation, meaning merely a negative peace characterized by absence of violence. This definition nonetheless does not satisfy me. For some reconciliation would go as far as involving forgiveness of the perpetrators (Tutu 1999). Despite possibly being a desirable outcome, the achievability of forgiveness is questionable (Burema 2013). Furthermore, it is not certain whether forgiveness can be morally desirable, as Andrieu (2010) points out. She continues by explaining that "contrary to what many people would think, it is not always morally appropriate to forgive, and that the crimes should not be made easier to forget" (Andrieu 2010, p 14). Indeed, it would not be morally sound to demand victims of severe atrocities to forgive the perpetrators, nor can I see this being a possibility between the parties of Kosovo conflict. Choosing a satisfying middle ground from the jungle of definitions, I have determined to use the framework from Bar-Tal & Bennik and Strapacova. Strapacova defines reconciliation as "the process of addressing the legacy of past violence and rebuilding the relationships it has shattered" (Strapacova 2016, p 56), emphasising the crucial role of reconciliation for future conflict prevention. Bar-Tal & Bennik establish that reconciliation as an outcome consists of "mutual recognition and acceptance, invested interests and goals in developing peaceful relations, mutual trust, positive attitudes as well as sensitivity and consideration of other party's needs and interests" (Bar-Tal & Bennik 2004, p 6). In conclusion, reconciliation in this study shall be discussed as both the process of rebuilding relationship and thus reconstructing problematic identities, and as an outcome of then

building upon newly established relations with mutual respect and working towards common interests.

2 Theoretical Framework

This section presents the two chosen theoretical frameworks utilised for the research data interpretation. These theoretical frameworks aim to provide sufficient answers to the research questions stated in the introduction chapter. The first approach is a critical understanding of ethnic primordialism. This is used as a framework to understand the construction of identities in Kosovo, and also as a framework to understand the identity politics and attitudes passed to the research participants from their parents. In the second section I discuss how social categorisation theory could be used in order to transform the ideas of identity among the Kosovo communities, resulting in reconstructing identities in a way that reconciliation and new ideas of belonging could be achieved.

2.1 Ethnic primordialism

Not particularly the most popular academic discourse and often considered obsolete, (Eller & Coughlan concluded that the term is "unsociological, unanalytical and vacuous. We advocate dropping it from the sociological lexicon" (2010, abstract)) ethnic primordialist narrative still holds power with many societies; its commonsensical nature and simplicity "offer a narrative of convenience in framing ethnic struggles" (Strapacova 2016, p 59). The advocates of primordialism claim ethnicity is comparable to race or gender, unchangeable and something one is born with. Ethnicity is considered as a natural, objective feature of human identity, traceable to indelible genetic bonds. Hence, primordialists imply a conflict between different ethnic groups is solely the outcome of their essentially dissimilar ways of living (Strapacova 2016). Despite its ever descending popularity, ethnic primordialism has remained present in Kosovo as politicians, public actors and the media reinforce the view of the self and the others through primordialist manipulation. Consequently, ethnic primordialism remains as an important factor in the contemporary reconciliation process in societies where primordial models can be detected (Strapacova 2016). In Kosovo, these models concerning the transmission of ethnic statuses have remained prevalent in vernacular discourses and identity narratives, providing a simplified explanation to complex conflicts.

In analysing the data of this study, I am using a critical approach to the primordialist theory. Hence, it is important to have a clear understanding of how the primordialist factors have very little to do with the actual reality or how primordialist thinking hardly has much rationale behind it. However, despite its scientific inaccuracy, ethnic primordialism can still have everything to do with building one's identity:

"Any inquiry into primordialism must start by precisely operationalizing the concept and clarifying how it relates to everyday processes of identity building. Implicated in the sense of identity are two seemingly counterpoised factors. One is the person's sense of being a unique self. The other is the sense of sameness—the essential sharing of common mental constructions that occurs when we are co-members of a social category. Social identity is constituted in the relations between the individual and the social environment that arise from different categories. Social identities possess a multifaceted, deeply contextual character and are defined by referring to those who lie outside the identity group: females vs. males, Serbs vs. Albanians. In consequence, social categories are mutually exclusive, but this does not mean antagonism or conflict need arise between them. Such conflict comes into being when categories are perceived to be incompatible and groups that share a unitary identity are perceived to be clashing over it" (Strapacova 2016, p 58; also Erikson 1993, p 10; and Demmers 2012, pp 19-22)

Alternatively, ethnicity and nationalism could be studied using constructivism, which has remained as the dominant paradigm in the field. Constructivist discourse suggests that "ethnicity is socially imagined and is reconstructed when changes occur in the subjective identification of individuals or in the entry rules for belonging to a community. Thus, individuals can change their identities and cross or redefine ethnic boundaries" (Strapacova 2016, p 59). Constructing and deconstructing ethnic identities certainly should be utilised in terms of rebuilding identities in Kosovar society, and I will return to this topic in the following chapter. Instrumentalism takes a step further from constructivism, asserting that "ethnicity largely depends upon political power, in which elites seize on the symbolism and emotion generated by ethnic bonds as a crucial tool for expanding their own gains" (Strapacova 2016, p 71; Barth 1969). Looking at the interplay between Kosovo and Serbia politics as a whole, it would be tempting to apply instrumentalism as the primary theory. Instrumentalist considerations are certainly taken into account within the study as some further sections will point out; however, this research focuses on informal learning, specifically cross-generational storytelling, where it makes more sense to explore the primordialist thinking of common peoples behind the stories told.

Whereas I do not agree with the fundamental assumptions of primordialism and the belief that ethnicity is inherent and comparable to race or gender, the use of primordial manipulation in different functions of society is strongly present in contemporary Kosovo (Strapacova 2016). These models effectively hinder any chances for reconciliation between the Kosovo communities. Constructivism, instrumentalism and primordialism are distinctive approaches to explain ethnic conflicts, and in their distinctiveness they make for fundamentally different approaches to the reconciliation process. Hence they all suggest distinct paths to developing policies addressing interethnic cooperation (Strapacova 2016). Therefore, in the context of this study and as a result of the data collection, interpreting the results through the critical approach to ethnic primordialism and its function in constructing identity is appropriate and can provide new outlooks or areas of intervention for reconciliatory actions in Kosovo, or uncover questions worth further research.

2.2 Identity, reconciliation and social categorisation

If ethnic primordialism is the dominant ideology and one of the predominant factors building one's identity, what is there to do to introduce the idea of peaceful coexistence and reconciliation? As the second theory to help interpret the data of this study, I introduce social categorisation theory by Schwegler and Smith (2012). Schwegler and Smith (2012) conclude that for Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbians learning to live together is clearly challenging. In their study of the ethnopolitical situation in Kosovo they cite Kelman's (2008) explanation arguing that the essence of reconciliation is the transformation of the relationship between the former enemies; they need to change the way they think about each other, feel about each other, and act towards each other. As Schwegler and Smith discover, reconciliation can be described as a process "that reflects *identity changes* that each of the adversaries undergoes" (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008, p 40). Harris (2004) further states that diminishing the nature of "otherness" is vital to deconstruct enemy images and re-build one's identity to reflect something else than the hostile "other". As an outcome, rebuilding these identities and ideas of the other, mutual recognition and acceptance could be reached, leading to investing in interests and goals in developing peaceful relations, build mutual trust, and apply sensitivity and consideration of other party's needs and interests (Bar-Tal & Bennik 2004, p 6). This would allow each party to work together towards common goals, rather than

amplify differences and by doing so, diminishing any opportunity for reconciliation or societal developments.

Schwegler and Smith conclude that Albanian and Serbian Kosovars need to change the misperceptions of one another; "to understand the role of ethnic identities and to reach the objective of harmonious coexistence between antagonistic groups in Kosovo, it is important to understand the causes and consequences of social categorisation processes" (Schwegler & Smith, 2012, p 362). Belonging to an ingroup necessarily implies that the representatives of the other groups are excluded. When the self-image and identity has been constructed by primordial ideas of oneself, the challenge is to deconstruct the identity relying on primordialist idea of belonging to an ethnic ingroup, and reconstruct the idea of identity to be more inclusive in other aspects constructing the identity. From this perspective, a key issue that needs to be addressed is how intergroup contact, specifically interethnic contact in post-conflict Kosovo, could be structured to modify cognitive representations of group boundaries (Schwegler & Smith, 2012, p 363), much alike as within the constructivist discourse where ethnicity is considered as a socially imagined boundary, and belonging to groups can be consciously redefined. As Schwegler & Smith (2012) conclude, "interventions must address these ethnic divisions by reducing their salience if national healing is ever to be achieved" (Schwegler & Smith 2012, p 375).

3 Literature Review

This section discusses the previous literature and research conducted over the subject of reconciliation in Kosovo. The section begins with discussing the complexity of histories and understanding of Kosovo's role for both Serbian and Albanian identities, and the impact of collective memories to the present interethnic relations in Kosovo. The section begins by exploring the formal education and educational institutions' role for reconciliation and issues in implementing peace education initiatives in the public education. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the role of storytelling as a form of education and areas of intervention storytelling provides for reconciliatory actions. The last chapter examines the contemporary ethnic relations in Kosovo, and the current challenges for reconciliation within Kosovo. The literature has been gathered through a systematic approach to studies over Kosovo's history and contemporary issues, both academic publication and the reports provided by international organisations. I have aimed to emphasise academic studies conducted by Balkan researchers, as they would potentially provide insights a Western researcher would not observe or might overlook. Information about current events has been gathered by utilising international and local media outlets, in order to obtain as objective and informative outlook as possible. Factual statements over numbers and remarkable historical events I have collected from the data provided by the international observers, as I deemed this data the most objective for the study purposes.

3.1 Kosovo's complex histories

Silber & Little summarise how working in former Yugoslavia "is to enter a world of parallel truths. Wherever you go, you encounter the same resolute conviction that everything that had befallen the region is always someone else's fault, except one's own side. Each nation has embraced a separate orthodoxy in which it is uniquely the victim and never the perpetrator" (Silber & Little 1995, pp 390-91). In nowhere else than in Kosovo is this form of thinking more prevalent. Ramet summarises the dispute over Kosovo as "two ethnic communities with distinct languages and religious traditions lay claims to the same historical territory with competing historical arguments as evidence" (Ramet 2002, p 174). At its most simplified form, the dispute over Kosovo can be argued to be a territorial dispute in which both ethnic

groups are claiming their warranted and exclusive possession of the land, while simultaneously attempting to delegitimise the rivalling group's claims (Vojvodic 2012). As a result, contemporary Kosovo has two histories, often mutually exclusive and frequently antagonistic (Bieber 2003), where the territory of Kosovo plays an irreplaceable, undeniable part in constructing both Albanian and Serbian identities, and both groups are using myth and memory as their evidence for the first, and as such, legitimate ownership over the land (Vojvodic 2012). Hence, the Albanian and Serbian communities hold two parallel yet competing truths justifying their rights to Kosovo, which ensues friction between the two groups and impeding reconciliation efforts within the region.

The self-interpretation of the Kosovan ethnicities is not only bound to competing truths, but also to the interplay of "fictiveness", such as national epics and myths, and "fact". (Bakic-Hayden, 2004). In Kosovo, each of these dimensions are present and influence the people's self-interpretation, resulting in "ignoring of the presentness of the present and pastness of the past", as Bakhtin (1992, p 14) argues. Bakic-Hayden explores Serbian national identity by studying human self-interpretation through literature, specifically, national self-interpretation through epic literature, exploring the interplay between peoples and their narratives. According to Bakic-Hayden, this relationship generally reflects not only how peoples narrate themselves through time, what images of themselves and their "other" they project in narratives, but also how they read themselves from their narratives from specific times. In this approach, her objective is to enhance the understanding of the role that Kosovo played in the construction of Serbian cultural and national identity, both as a historical reality and as a metaphor. Bakic-Hayden argues that "to dismiss the 'fictiveness' of the Kosovo theme as something reserved solely for 'representation' (epic, myth), and isolated from 'fact' (history) is to undermine the power of its popular understanding in which resides its mobilising potential" (2004, p 25). Conclusively, she argues that both of these dimensions of the experience should be taken into consideration in discussions on Kosovo, which tend to take place in context of highly strained "we"/"they" relations (Bakic-Hayden, 2004). Bakic-Hayden illustrates this misconception of fact and fictiveness well when she ends her paper by quoting an anecdote coming from Belgrade under NATO bombs: "One reason for being a Serb is that you can fight 600-year-old battles against the Turks and their domestic collaborators, be convinced that it is happening now, and not be entirely wrong" (Bakic-Hayden 2004, p 40).

3.1.1 Building identities on different narratives

Mertus' book "Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War" studies in depth how Serbians and Albanians have had drastically different views about major events leading to the war in Kosovo in 1999, such as the Albanian demonstrations in 1981, the Martinović case in 1986, the Paraćin massacre and the alleged poisoning of school children (Mertus 1999). She argues furthermore how the problem is that local political leaders were effectively manipulating particularly harmful strains of one's national truths, or as later explained identity narratives, supported with inaccurate media reporting and deteriorating economic and social conditions (Mertus 1999). There is a conflicting understanding of the past and thus the present between Albanians and Serbians, yet both ethnicities have built their identities to reflect on what they believe is the "truth". Mertus summarizes how these subjective truths are closely linked to Albanian and Serbian identities by stating that "Serbians and Albanians structure their lives around truths that are closely linked to their identity but that may have nothing (or everything) to do with factual truth or lies. In this context, the opposite of truth is not necessarily a lie; it is a competing truth linked to an alternative self-image" (Mertus 1999, p 4). What has followed is that Serbian and Albanian identities are linked to two different historical narratives consisting of two competing national truths, antagonising ethnic relations between Albanians and Serbians.

Bakic-Hayden (2004) discusses how historical events have been elevated from epic to the religious, or mythological dimension, which have shaped the ideal of Kosovo in Serbian identity narrative. As Anscombe states, "Serbian nationalism draws its strength and passion from tales of Kosovo" (Anscombe 2006, p 761). Schwegler & Smith (2011) identify three major events that have shaped the Serbian national narrative. Firstly, the battle of Kosovo Polje and the Serbian defeat to Sultan Murad I of the Ottoman Empire constructed an identity of national resistance and perseverance. The story of King Lazar giving his life in an attempt to defend "Old Serbia" rather than losing his homeland marked the end of the Serbian state in Serbian national identity narrative (Schwegler & Smith 2011, p 352). According to some scholars, Lazar's tale has been seen as "the defining moment in Serbian national history" (Anscombe 2006, p 760), although the historical validity of the story remains contentious (Anscombe 2006). The second defining narrative Schwegler & Smith recognise was constructed around the narrative of the Serbian Orthodox Church's Patriarchate relocated in

1346 to Pejë/Pec, a city in the western border of Kosovo. The patriarchate was argued to preserve the Serbian national identity through the Ottoman rule, and as a result of this narrative Kosovo is referred as "Metohija" or the "monastic lands" by many present-day Serbians (Schwegler & Smith 2011, p 352; Anscombe 2006, pp 760-761; Rogel 2003, p 169). The impact of biblical overtones and orthodox religion in constructing Serbian identities is vital to understand the Serbian ideal of Kosovo (Bakic-Hayden 2004). These two narratives explain much why Kosovo is considered as Serbia's former cultural and religious "heartland" by most Serbians. While I was in Serbia in early September 2016, a Serbian tour guide on a walking tour around Belgrade insisted same, telling me how "Kosovo presents so much for our identity, it is like the cradle of our culture, that is why it has been so difficult to give it up. To us, it is like Jerusalem". The third narrative describes an event called "The Great Migration of 1690" where arguably the majority of Serbians were forced to emigrate from Kosovo to Hungary, "only to be replaced with Albanian Muslims by the Ottoman Turks" (Schwegler & Smith 2011, p 352), reinforcing the experience of stolen lands. These three narratives, or "myths of Kosovo", are suggested to have formed the foundation of Serbian nationalism, lying at the root of the conflicts (Anscombe 2006).

Kosovo Albanian identity narrative can also be traced back to ancient times, connecting the Albanian heritage to the Illyrian people who migrated to the Balkan Peninsula long before Serbians arrived in the sixth century AD (Rogel 2003). During my time in Kosovo, the references to the Illyrian heritage were fairly common; I would hear stories of Illyrian heroes and meet people with names tracing back to Illyrian kings and queens. Nevertheless, despite the stories of the honoured predecessors, the Albanian identity narrative has been characterised by invisibility, lack of recognition, and statelessness followed by oppression of foreign rule; "the Kosovars (Kosovo Albanians) were continually victimised and subjected to assimilation tactics by imperial powers beginning with the Bulgarians and the Byzantine empire in the seventh century to the Ottoman empire and most recently Serbia" (Schwegler & Smith 2012, p 353). As opposed to Serbian identity narrative, complemented by heroes and orthodox religion, Albanians did not have a common religion or church to unite them – instead, they relied on the Kanun of Dukagjin (Kanuni i Leke Dukagjinit), a common legal and moral code structured in the 1400s. The Kanun of Dukagjin emphasised personal honor, courage, and integrity in a set of traditional Albanian laws (Schwegler & Smith 2012; Rogel 2003). Nowadays some of the material in the Kanun would seem archaic and rather uncivilised, yet some of its traditions are still present and exercised in Kosovo (see Morina

2016; "Kosovo's Reconciliation Councils Struggle to End Blood Feuds"). Nonetheless, historically the Kanun of Dukagjin has united ethnic Albanians in Kosovo while a religious common identifier has been absent (Schwegler & Smith 2012). The historical victimisation and legacy of the Kanun emphasising personal honor have remained fundamental elements in the Albanian identity narrative (Schwegler & Smith 2012), and the Milosevic regime in the nineties, resistance to oppression and the struggle for freedom further reinforced the victim narrative (Strapacova 2016).

3.1.2 Ethnic primordialism in collective memories

With the identity narratives closely tied to ethnicities and their collective struggle and survival, ethnicity remains a notable factor in constructing identities. Regarded archaic in most academic discourses, primordialist thinking still holds some power among Balkan societies and has an impact in their collective memories, where ethnicity has remained as a determining factor to maintain conflict. Strapacova (2016) analyses primordialism in relation to national collective memories among Kosovo Albanians and Serbians, reminding that neither of the collective narratives would withstand closer scrutiny as their historical accuracy is debatable and futile. Nevertheless, these collective memories are bond to the identities and as such, to the territory of Kosovo and the national struggle over its status (Strapacova 2016). Neither community is willing to submit under the governance of the other, and these mindsets in turn prevent "each of these communities from internally democratising its approach to Kosovo narratives" (Strapacova 2016, p 61).

Zdravkovic-Zonta analyses the complex nature of primordial narratives around Kosovo's past and their impact on contemporary discourse from the perspective of claiming historical victimage warranted by primordial attitudes. By juxtaposing official histories and collective memories she points out how the "narratives of historical victimage provide a rationale for hating the other group perpetuating a vicious cycle of violence" (Zdravkovic-Zonta 2009, p 666) by analysing narratives regarded as competing vernacular memories representative of Serbians and Albanians in Kosovo, and how personal and collective memories together with official national histories can be used to legitimise their national and political claims, as well as to justify violence against the other group (Zdravkovic-Zonta 2009). She emphasises the negative impact of historical victimage discourse to contemporary interethnic relations, and

calls for the need to "move away from simplistic understandings of the conflict and primordial explanations of the motivations of the groups involved, and the necessity of efforts that look at the ideologies that sustain and perpetuate conflict, namely those based on hatred toward the Other and continuous and historical suffering of the in-group" (Zdravkovic-Zonta 2009, p 682). She further argues, "victimhood narratives are great cultural capital in conflict, and as such are an essential resource and point of competition and contestation. If the conflict dynamic is to be transformed all of these narratives must be voiced, respected and included in public discourse; in order for groups to move from feeling hatred toward the Other to feeling empathy and implicature, they must first learn to listen to the Other's narratives, respect them, own them and see their complicity and responsibility in them" (Zdravkovic-Zonta 2009, p 682).

Beneath the official and elite rhetoric, primordialist mindsets are still determining ethnic relations in Kosovo. From the underlying structures of vernacular discourse, Zdravkovic-Zonta identifies "the interplay of multiple memories and rhetorical strategies in establishing the Other as the source of all tragedies" (Zdravkovic-Zonta 2009, p 681). Rather than an inherent persuasive power, the relations between Albanians and Serbians are dictated by a persistent fear of the opposing group (Strapacova 2016). Furthermore, in these national rhetorics the existence of both ethnic groups is tied to the territory of Kosovo and its ownership. Toft (2009) points out that the "control over the territory has a direct correlation with the physical survival of an ethnic group; if both groups determine that possession over the same land is essential for their continued existence, violence will likely ensue" (Toft 2009; p 84 in Vojvodic 2012). Ultimately, a primordialist approach to the national struggle and the ownership of the land has diminished any opportunity to construct identities based on cooperation and inclusiveness instead of divisive, competing narratives.

These identity narratives and the nationalist struggle revolving as the central determining factor also bring up another issue motivating the contemporary Kosovo conflict; the problem of nationally "mismatched" peoples (Vojvodic 2012). Brubaker (1996) observes the impact of nationalisation of space in Eastern Europe resulting in the "mismatch" between cultural and political boundaries as millions of peoples had been left outside the national territory that had been considered "theirs" (Brubaker 1996). Hence, according to Brubaker and Vojvodic, this mismatch had inscribed the almost two million Albanians living in Serbia - whose ethnic and national affinity with neighbouring Albania had been steadily increasing - into

precariously "linking the minority communities with themselves, the state in which they live, and their external national homeland" (Brubaker 1996, p 55; in Vojvodic 2012). Nevertheless, although this ethnic mismatch of former Yugoslav nationalities laid the foundations for ethnic tensions, what ultimately truly radicalised ethnic relations between Albanians and Serbians was the exploitation of fear and politicisation of ethnic identities during the collapse of Yugoslavia (Vojvodic 2012) advancing conflict through primordialist manipulation of ethnic relations. The conclusive aim for both identity narratives is seeking to liberate Kosovo from its oppressors; for Albanians, the independency of Kosovo ultimately meant liberation, whereas for the Serbian narrative it was merely another seal to their national fate as victims (Vojvodic 2012). Vojvodic concludes that "ultimately, the 'true' liberation of Kosovo can occur only when the peoples who inhibit it are able to liberate themselves from the nationalist mythology that has justified the prolonged and senseless violence within this region, leaving it in a perennial state of stagnancy, denial and fear which has no foreseeable end" (Vojvodic 2012, p 9).

3.2 Reconciliation, peace and education

Peace education as a single subject is complicated to define. Contents of traditional subjects are easy to distinguish from one another, whereas peace education is of wider scope and less defined (Bar-Tal 2002; p 22). Peace education is related to specific conditions of the society, to which the educational mission is carried out to respond, or according to Bar-Tal, "the nature of peace education is dictated by the issues, which preoccupy a specific society because it has to be perceived as being relevant and functional to the societal needs, goals and concerns" (Bar-Tal 2002; p 5). Harris (2004) refers to peace education as teachers teaching about peace; what it is, why does it not exist and how to achieve it. Harris' definition would require peace education being incorporated to the existing education as a singular subject or as a part of traditional subjects. In Kosovo, the education system is based on division and segregation exercising two parallel education systems, which have been significantly impacted by the primordialist discourse transmitting the antagonistic collective ethnic memories (Strapacova 2016). Hence, the formal education provides very few potential areas of intervention for peace education initiatives. This chapter explores the contemporary issues in Kosovo's formal education and its downfalls in implementing peace education initiatives, and alternative opportunities for intervention within the scope of informal education.

3.2.1 Divided education systems

Long before the conflict of the late nineties, education in Kosovo had undergone a tumultuous period reflecting wider socioeconomical and political challenges across the region, contributing in feeding the growth of Albanian and Serbian nationalistic ideologies. On paper, Kosovo is to provide education at all levels with each community's mother tongue, with consistent content of study. When pertaining to primary and secondary education, the legislation addresses that education needs to be provided in both official languages, Albanian and Serbian, at all levels. It must be noted that there are further regulations in regards to other linguistic minorities than the Serbians, however this study focuses exclusively on the Albanian and Serbian communities in Kosovo. Nevertheless, the reality is quite different. In practice there are two competing formal education systems in Kosovo, functioning parallel to each other. Kosovo Albanian students follow a curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo, with no instruction in Serbian language included. Meanwhile Kosovo Serbian students follow a curriculum provided by Serbia's ministry of education and used in Serbian schools. The Serbian students do not receive instruction in Albanian (OSCE Mission in Kosovo 2009). In addition to the harmful effects of segregation for interethnic relations, this system is "leaving a whole new generation without a common language, except sometimes english" (Burema 2013, p 17).

Within higher education, the division further continues. Kosovo has nine public universities, none of them which offers degree studies in Serbian language (Bailey 2017). The only opportunity to obtain a Serbian language degree in Kosovo is to attend the University of Prishtina with a Temporary Seat in North Mitrovica, which has remained under the administration of Belgrade officials. Furthermore, the Albanian University of Pristina in the capital and the Serbian University of Pristina in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica refuse to acknowledge one another. Both universities are claiming the name "University of Pristina" and diploma recognition has remained as an issue between Kosovo and Serbia, leaving Serbian graduates' diplomas unaccredited within the Kosovo system (Bailey 2017). United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) attempted to integrate Kosovo's public higher education under one administration with a disheartening lack of success; each internationally led initiative faced resistance from local elites as the Albanian administrators rejected Serbian language

programmes at University of Pristina, and their Serbian peers refused to work under Albanian rectorate and within Albanian language programmes (Selenica 2017).

The parallel systems trace back in the early nineties when ethnic divisions intensified in Kosovo, fuelled by several socioeconomical and educational issues. Nelles (2004) conducted a detailed study over the role of formal education in Kosovo conflict and how the developments of educational systems still impact on the ethnopolitical relations within Kosovo. Since the "battle of Kosovo" in 1389, Kosovo had remained as an area of interest for Christian Serbians and Muslim Ottomans, followed by several religious, ethnic and nationalist conflicts (Nelles 2004). The terrain of Kosovo remained contested until World War I, but it was the decision of reforming Yugoslavia in 1919 that ultimately planted the seeds of recent conflict; Kosovo was included to Yugoslavia, and a form of "internal colonialism" encouraged Serbian population to migrate to the Kosovan territory, who then would encounter the effect of Ottoman colonisation over the previous centuries (Nelles 2004). Kosovo remained as the most underdeveloped area in Yugoslavia after the World War II, and Cold War politics would further complicate its situation; Tito's idea of Slavic unity clashed with Albania's dictator Enver Hoxha's ideal for a strong Albania, which further fed the Kosovar nationalism (Nelles 2004). The bilateral relations of Yugoslavia and Albania, however, remained uncomplicated as they were based on mutual interests for regional stability and to improve the conditions of Albanians in Kosovo to appease dissent (Nelles 2004)

A few political advances were made for Albanians, such as the granting of Kosovo's autonomous status from Serbia in 1974, and establishment of the University of Pristina to provide higher education in Albanian, thus giving them access to better jobs and economic opportunities (Nelles 2004). These developments were not opposed by Belgrade, but uncovered some deeper social issues; Serbians held the most senior professional occupations, and Albanian graduates were left with high expectations yet very limited job opportunities causing student protests. The economic disparities further fuelled internal problems. Ultimately, following general Tito's death in 1980, the power vacuum allowed the exposure of underlying ethnic tensions and old conflicts. Nationalistic ideas from both Serbian and Albanian sides were highlighted by political advances and increased insecurity and alleged discrimination across Kosovo institutions. Albanians, as the majority in Kosovo, were accused of discriminatory actions and even harrassment, assault and vandalism provoked by

Serbians. The rise of Slobodan Milosevic as the leader of Serbia begun an era of repression, revoking Kosovo's autonomous status and imposing Serbian law. Albanian teachers and students were removed from schools and educating in Albanian became a subject of punishment. Thousands of Albanian professors and students were evicted from University of Pristina in 1991. This resulted in the establishment of a parallel underground education system (Nelles 2004). The separate system was one of the leading means used to contend for independence, and "education became the most important socioeconomic development challenge and political symbol for Albanians and Serbs" (Nelles 2004, p 73).

Until the present time, education system still portrays the political turbulence in Kosovo. University of Pristina has long represented resistance for Albanians and has been a subject to political accusations throughout its existence. This role, however, has complicated the university's functions as a higher education institution. An OECD report argued that "the University of Pristina was at the very core of the political conflict and the self esteem of Kosovar Albanians; it was one of the most highly politicized places in all of Kosovo" (OSCE 2001, p 35). When Kosovo students returned to University of Pristina in August 1999 it was now run by Albanians, leaving the Serbian teachers unsatisfied and resulting to the establishment of another "University of Pristina" which still remains functional in Northern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica. Essentially, this meant the return to the ethnically divided educational system of the 1990s (Nelles 2004). Hence, when discussing reconciliation in Kosovo it is relevant to address the issues of formal education. Its divisive nature leaves a lot to wish for, as Serbian and Albanian students will hardly ever be in contact with each other. Furthermore, the separate education systems are currently educating the students with fundamentally different and conflicting content, which reinforces the division of the society and maintains the ethnic tensions.

3.2.2 Content in formal education remains unscrutinized

The segregation of the education systems has had a drastic effect on the content taught as there is no coherence between the textbooks and material used between the Albanian and Serbian curricula. For reconciliatory purposes, this constitutes several problems. Gashi (2012) conducted an extensive research comparing the content of Albanian and Serbian language history books from Serbia, Kosovo and Albania, and how they depict the history of

Kosovo region. He found out marked discrepancies between the textbooks, starting from opposite perceptions of the possession of the territory, presenting one-sided views on the crimes committed during conflict, and exaggerating the aims of Albanian political and military organisations. What has been left out from all of the textbooks was any note of collaboration between Albanians and Serbians and efforts for peaceful development and conflict resolution (Gashi 2012).

Strapacova (2016) also notes the textbooks are misinterpreting and distorting the facts and misconstruing key events in Balkan history. In addition, both Albanian and Serbian textbooks contain hate speech, drastic allegations of state genocide, terrorist activities and fascism (Strapacova 2016). According to Strapacova, "the schools present history through the focus of Albanian or Serbian ethnicity, rather than concentrating on Kosovo as a whole. The desire to 'own' Kosovo, along with one-sided presentation of crimes of aggression in which the 'other' group is always the perpetrator, and silence about Serbian-Albanian cooperation is always maintained, shows that efforts to reconcile Kosovo society are missing from the education system" (Strapacova 2016, pp 68-69). The teaching methods hardly provide support for the reconciliation process. Group interviews have shown pupils have no idea about what happened during the Kosovo war; children in some regions had never heard that members of the other ethnicity had been victimised as well (Strapacova 2016). It is difficult to find literature about the attitudes and methods of the teachers, however it is noteworthy what one of my interviewees, an Albanian female, experienced: during history class she had questioned her teacher's lecturing about the Kosovo conflict in 1999, and found herself kicked out of the classroom. Reciting Strapacova, "primordialist simplifications and hate speech teach pupils nothing positive about each other. Instead, it becomes harder for them to work for peace and reconciliation, than they have never been taught they have things in common" (Strapacova 2016, p 69).

Learning is the key attribute for social change, but the initial conditions in Kosovo's formal education do not contribute to reconciliation, or include elements of peace education. An OSCE report states that "to a certain extent, the separate curricula in Kosovo satisfy the intra-cultural educational needs of specific communities, but fall short of promoting mutual respect, understanding and tolerance. Practices of the separate educational systems suggest the need of initiatives to promote integration within diversity and intercultural education" (OSCE 2009, p 24). Continually divided parallel systems are in no way integrated and the

segregated students may learn fundamentally different perspectives on Kosovo's and their peoples history without ever knowing there are two sides to the story (Strapacova 2016). Whereas the public education systems have remained as an issue deepening ethnic divisions within Kosovo, some private universities are offering alternatives for Kosovo's students; Kosovo holds some functional international universities providing education in English language. Two of these are International Business School of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and the American University of Kosovo in Prishtinë/Pristina. In these universities, students of different ethnicities (including Albanians and Serbians) and nationalities study in the same classrooms with constant exposure to one another. Seven of my interviewees were attending these international universities, which had impacted their views of the other. I will discuss this topic further in the findings section.

3.2.3 Storytelling, informal education and peace education

As the formal education does not exercise sufficient measures for peace education or reconciliation initiatives, it is worthwhile to consider the informal ways to potentially include peace education to the contemporary every day discourses. Storytelling can be effectively used both for and against peace processes between conflicted groups. Jessica Senehi (2002) addresses this double-edged nature of story telling in conflict resolution, arguing that intergroup conflicts are complex involving both objective and subjective components that interdepend. Complexity of a conflict contributes to conflict perpetuation and intractability, she continues, but at the same time it insinuates "multiple arenas for intervention, multiple agents of intervention, and multiple intervention tasks in a dynamic process of social change" (Senehi 2002, p 46; also Kriesberg, 1991).

Kosovo has a flourishing civil society with several non-governmental organisation activities addressing social, economical, as well as ethnic issues. Consequently, Kosovo holds a number of international and local initiatives providing reconciliatory programmes for young people through informal peace education, involving methods of constructive storytelling. To mention a few, Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) advocates transitional justice and reconciliation through campaigns and projects across the Balkans, and Mitrovica Rock School brings Albanian and Serbian youngsters together to make music and perform. These

NGO initiatives have great potential in promoting peace education in grassroots levels, however it is not enough as their impact is not as wide as the formal education's.

Social environments, such as family and relatives play significant part in informal learning by passing narratives across generations, contributing to the creation of one's cultural identity. Problems arise when some of the important stories of the societies are based on prejudice and discrimination against the other (Milojevic & Izgarjan 2013) and family storytelling becomes a means through which "inter-communal conflicts and identity-based prejudice are transmitted through the generations" (Senehi 2002, p 50). The intense love bonds children have towards their caregivers may create an emotional connection to the stories they learn, sometimes having a controversial impact in building their self-image. For instance, memories of cultural events attended with families portraying the images of the enemy and political information may be amalgamated with childhood affections and thus become difficult to question (Senehi 2002, p 50).

Mertus (2001) acknowledges how in Kosovo storytelling has been both unifying and fragmenting; the informal stories told in Albanian families had a strengthening effect in uniting the Albanian identity as a victim of Serbian oppression (Mertus 2001). Comparably, the Serbian stories about Albanians would conform their identity as the victims of Albanian aggression (Mertus 1999 & Mertus 2001). A core value for human rights and a foundation for reconciliation, respect for the other, was not addressed in either of the narratives (Mertus 2001). These of stories of supremacy and victimhood sustain a "dominator society model" in which priority is given to technologies of domination and destruction as a model for building human societies (Milojevic & Izgarjan 2013; Eisler 1997). The dominator model acquires its validity from "myths and stories honoring and sacralizing domination" (Milojevic & Izgarjan 2013, p 53), emphasising control, authoritarianism, violence, gender discrimination, and environmental degradation (Milojevic & Izgarjan 2013; Eisler 1997). The contemporary narratives in Kosovo reflect the aspiration of dominance and perseverance of one's own cultural identity mirrored with the "competing other", instead of providing ways that would promote cooperation and partnership.

These stories enshrine important elements constructing cultural identities, but to achieve reconciliation, they need to be transmitted in ways that offer visions of a just and equitable world (Milojevic & Izgarjan 2013). Constructive storytelling (Senehi 2002) aims for exactly

that, acting as a means of peace education in providing alternative visions of conflict resolution as opposed to the mainstream political discourses. Whereas destructive narratives rely on domination; coercive power, dehumanisation of the other, dishonesty and unawareness, constructive storytelling shifts the focus to processes of peace; shared power, mutual recognition, dialogue and openness, honesty and critical consciousness (Senehi 2002). Milojevic & Izgarjan (2013) juxtapose Senehi's constructive storytelling with Eisler's (1997) partnership model, the opposite end of domination. A partnership-oriented model organises human society based on principles enhancing and sustaining life: equity, environmental sustainability, multiculturalism and gender-fairness (Milojevic & Izgarjan 2013; Eisler 1997). However, a partnership model and constructive storytelling (as opposed to primordialist, simplified explanations of conflicts) do have their challenges in implementation; they do not mean merely placing a dominant narrative with another, but advocate on educating individuals to be able to critically evaluate the narratives that make the dominant model seem "inevitable, desirable, and even moral" (Milojevic & Izgarjan 2013, p 53). Furthermore, constructive storytelling and a partnership model aim to provide the young generation with alternative stories, thus alternative images of their future, and to point out that the dominant history does not mean the future is inevitably the same (Milojevic & Izgarjan 2013). As discussed in the previous chapters, the narratives within Kosovo have remained destructive and exclusive emphasising ethnicity as a primary factor defining identity, hence perpetuating the state of stalled conflict and prevailing interethnic distrust among Kosovo societies.

3.3 Contemporary measures for reconciliation in Kosovo

As defined earlier, in this study reconciliation is seen as "the process of addressing the legacy of past violence and rebuilding the relationships it has shattered" (Strapacova 2016, p 56), resulting in "mutual recognition and acceptance, invested interests and goals in developing peaceful relations, mutual trust, positive attitudes as well as sensitivity and consideration of other party's needs and interests" (Bar-Tal & Bennik 2004, p 6). This chapter looks into contemporary measures and factors laying the foundations for a reconciliatory process and sustainable peace. The first part explains the past and present quantitative measures for ethnic distance between Kosovo Serbians and Albanians. The following parts will discuss the reasons behind the ethnic distance, such as the complexity of dealing with the past, and the

prevailing interethnic distrust across peoples and institutions. The last chapter concludes the implications of these factors and discusses the prospects for reconciliation in present Kosovo.

3.3.1 Ethnic distance

Ethnic, or social distance in other words, can be defined as "the levels of understanding and intimacy which characterise pre-social and social relations in general" (in Gligorijevic 2015; Bogardus 1925, p 216). To expand Bogardus' and Gligorijevic's definition, in Kosovo ethnic distance could perhaps be better defined as the extent to which understanding and intimacy are lacking in social relationships. Ethnic distance as such was identified by a survey conducted in 2014 in northern and central Kosovo, revealing substantial lack of social relationships between Albanians and Serbians. According to the research, a significant factor causing the ethnic distance were found to be the place of residence. The respondents from North and South Mitrovicë/Mitrovica recorded lesser ethnic distance to one another as opposed to the respondents living in the territory of Prishtinë/Pristina and Gracanicë/Gracanica. Subsequently, the research observed that when contacts between the members of the two ethnic communities increased and became more frequent and intensive, the ethnic distance gradually declined. The most significant factor affecting the ethnic distance, however, was shown to be the level of the respondents' formal education. The respondents with higher level of education would to a great extent express less ethnic distance to one another (Jovic 2015).

Research suggests that the ethnic relations discussed have modified throughout the developments of Yugoslavia and Balkan societies. Gligorijevic (2015) conducted a comparative study reviewing past and recent surveys of ethnic distance between ethnic Serbians and Albanians. Her study includes ethnic distance surveys from different periods in the former Yugoslavia beginning from the 1960s until the aforementioned survey carried out in 2014, aiming to determine whether the ethnic relations between the two groups have changed during the course of time, having undergone the conflict of 1999 in Kosovo and the political turbulence of the nineties and post-war. She observed that the ethnic distance of the Yugoslav nations during the 1960s was recorded to be generally low, although it already differed in the distribution and the intensity when considering the national affiliation of the respondents. The highest ethnic distances were registered in Slovenia and Kosovo, Albanians

being the nation towards which all other Yugoslav nations felt the most distanced to. During the mid-1980s the ethnic distance remained low, yet Albanians prevailed as the group considered the most distanced from other Yugoslav nations. Gligorićević notes that during this period Albanians themselves, too, showed the lowest measure of ethnic distance towards other Yugoslav nations. However, she notes that this survey was carried out after a break out of mass demonstrations of Albanians in Kosovo in 1981. Thus the measures of low distance can be explained by their refrain from the expression due to the pressures and sanctions they were exposed to for their nationalist aspirations (Gligorićević 2015). Nevertheless, already in the late 1980s changes in the ethnic distance and intensity of expression were observed, especially between young Serbians and Albanians. In this period, not only were Albanians the nation towards which the highest ethnic distance was expressed, but at the same time they distanced themselves to the highest measure from the other Yugoslavian nations. Gligorićević further argues the open conflicts between the Albanian nationalists and the political elite of Serbia in 1989 and the growing tensions in interethnic relations in Kosovo had a significant impact to the increase of the ethnic distance in particular between Albanians and Serbians. This trend was further substantiated in a survey carried out in the eve of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia; the strongest distance was found out to prevail between the Serbians and the Albanians from Kosovo. Constitutional amendments adopted in 1989 and the passing of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia in 1990 reducing Kosovo's status as an autonomous province on the basis of the 1974 Constitution contributed further to the growing animosity between the two ethnicities (Gligorićević 2015).

Despite a quarter of a century having passed after the last survey carried out in the former Yugoslavian territory, the ethnic distance in Kosovo has not indicated a decrease. Understandably so, as the civil war in former Yugoslavia, followed by armed conflicts in Kosovo's territory during the second half of the 1990s, the NATO bombing of former Yugoslavia in 1999, as well as Kosovo's declaration for independence in 2008 have significantly influenced the Serbian-Albanian interethnic relations over the last few decades. The survey conducted in 2014, however, does provide some encouraging pieces of data. Albeit indicating both Serbian and Albanian communities exceedingly disapproving the closest mutual relations such as marriage and close kinship through children's marriage between the two ethnicities, friendship with a member of the other ethnicity is deemed acceptable for the absolute majority of both ethnic groups (Gligorićević 2015).

3.3.2 Dealing with the past

Strapacova's (2016) definition on reconciliation process calls for addressing the unjust actions of the past in order to rebuild relationships. Kosovo has not managed to establish a comprehensive approach to the issue of resolving the past grievances, which has remained as a major impediment for reconciliation between Albanians and Serbians (Burema 2013). Whereas there are several challenges for both communities affecting their ability or willingness to manage the past, a couple of matters are often pointed out as the predominant hurdles to address the history.

Amongst one of the most pressing concerns, the issue of missing persons is raised frequently by both Serbian and Albanian communities (Burema 2013). According to the International Commission on Missing Persons, it has been estimated that by the end of the Kosovo conflict in 1999 June 4,400 to 4,500 persons were missing. To date, approximately 1,700 persons have remained unaccounted for (ICMP). Numbers of families have been left with a lifetime of struggle and anxiety, waiting for the truth about their missing family members and relatives to be found. Despite international plea (Morina 2017), the governments of Kosovo and Serbia have done little in ascertaining the fate of the remaining missing persons. Lack of information causes families of the missing persons to remain in an eternal state of disbelief, unable to manage their trauma and mourn for their missing loved ones. As Clark argued in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the uncertainty of their fates leaves affected families "locked in the past" and "unable to move on with their lives" (Clark 2010, p 430). In turn, this contributes to the ethnic tensions and hence, impedes efforts for reconciliation (Burema 2013).

Another repressing issues is the inefficiency of the judicial institutions' in prosecuting war crimes. The international community has mostly been responsible for justice in Kosovo, as the Kosovo court system was under UNMIK authority until the declaration of independence in 2008, when executive responsibility for war crimes was taken over by EULEX (Burema 2013, p 14). Inadequacies arose as UNMIK failed to establish a coherent strategy for the justice sector after the rule of law became absent when Serbian institutions fled Kosovo in the aftermath of the conflict (Burema 2013; Judah 2008). Although EULEX has performed better, number of war crimes have remained uninvestigated (Burema 2013). Judicial failings,

combined with the issues in perception of the past and insufficient efforts in resolving the fates of the missing persons, have had critical consequences for the reconciliation process; both communities have been left with the sense of injustice, or according to Burema (2013), "with a sense that many of the atrocities committed during the conflict have gone unpunished and resulted in a feeling on both sides that, in the persecution of war crimes, the 'other side' was accorded preferential treatment" (Burema 2013, p 15).

Primordialist assumptions have remained in characterising the opposing ethnicity as guilty while simultaneously claiming the victimhood of one's own community. Primordial differences are fed by the lack of will or readiness to confront one's own responsibility of the past, nurturing the idea of the virtual impossibility of sharing common lives due to the other's intolerable hostile actions. The interethnic relations are characterised by punishing the guilt of the other group, rather than attempting to re-establish ethnic relations building on equity and respect (Strapacova 2015). As for now, neither Serbian or Albanian communities are willing to recognise the significance of the other's suffering (Burema 2013). To transform the dynamic of the conflict, narratives of each sides should be included in public discourse, acknowledging the trauma of all groups involved, leading to experiencing empathy and implicature towards the other rather than hatred (Zdravkovic-Zonta 2009).

3.3.3 Interethnic distrust

As per the previous definition, reconciliation as an outcome should build to mutual trust, among other aspects included in the definition (Bar-Tal & Bennik 2004). De Greiff (2007) discusses the concept of *trust* and how civic trust relates to reconciliation by arguing that minimally, reconciliation results in citizens being able to trust one another as citizens again or anew. De Greiff argues this civic trust occurs when the citizens are committed to the norms and values motivating their ruling institutions, confident that the citizens operating in these institutions are also doing so based on these norms and values, and may feel secure that their fellow citizens' are committed to abide by these basic norms and values. De Greiff then recognises two levels of trust; "horizontal", referring to the trust among citizens, and "vertical", the trust between the citizens and the institutions governing them (De Greiff 2007). Citizens trusting each other, and thus the institution, then binds the citizens to the common values which form the basis of the institutions' functions.

Burema (2013) examines the concepts of horizontal and vertical trust in the context of Serbian-Albanian ethnic relations in Kosovo. Horizontal trust between communities have seen gradual improvements, especially in southern Kosovo, where a steady decline can be observed in interethnic incidents, and freedom of movement of Serbian communities has seen improvements (Burema 2013). Movement between Prishtinë/Pristina and a Serbian community nearby, Graçanicë/Graçanica, has increased as well, mainly for business reasons. Serbians come to work in the capital for both international organisations and Kosovo administration (Burema 2013, p 20), which indicates some levels of improvements in vertical trust and willingness to take part in Kosovo institutions.

Despite the positive developments, interethnic relations remain fragile. Horizontal trust also reflects on the feeling of security; admittedly many Serbians still have felt unsafe in predominantly Albanian areas, especially in regions that were significantly impacted by the conflict, for instance the city of Gjakovë/Djakovica (Burema 2013). Some recent interethnic incidents have caused friction and increased the feeling of insecurity among Serbians, for instance the Serbian "propaganda train" sent for its maiden voyage from Belgrade to Prishtinë/Pristina carrying some of the Serbian political elite, painted with the colors of Serbian flag and with the sentence "Kosovo is Serbia" written in over twenty languages all over the carriages (Delauney, BBC 18th Jan 2017) (Zaba & Morina, Balkan Insight 19th Jan 2017). Zaba & Morina (2017) reported on the implications of the train row among Serbian communities in Kosovo; interviewees in their article would emphasise how amplifying tensions between Prishtinë/Pristina and Belgrade were only increasing their feeling of insecurity. Furthermore, lack of economic security increased; Kosovo Serbians are dependant on Belgrade's rule, and without its support they feel they can not survive financially (Zaba & Morina, Balkan Insight 19th Jan 2017). Therefore Belgrade's attitude towards Kosovo Serbians produces huge anxiety among them. Furthermore, the Serbians in the north of Kosovo would feel as they are used as tools of a power game between Serbian and Kosovan politics, and that the tensions of Serbians and Albanians were a result of political amplification rather than bad relations of the peoples. Sanja Sovrlic, a Mitrovica-based journalist from TV Mir concluded by saying: "People in Kosovo do not want conflicts, but the same things as everyone in the world - to live in peace in their homes, to have decent salaries and to live normally" (Zaba & Morina, Balkan Insight 19th Jan 2017). The pattern in the political game notable, as the election themes in Kosovo and Serbia tend to revolve

around territorial and ethnic issues. For instance, the main topic in the latest Kosovo elections was not Kosovo's basic education ranked as the worst in Europe in PISA 2016 assessment, nor the ineffective healthcare or one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Europe, but a border demarcation dispute between Kosovo and Montenegro, and the autonomy of Serbian enclaves in Kosovo (Qirezi, Balkan Insight 9th Jun 2017).

Until the present, the coexistence of Albanians and Serbians is marked by segregation. Serbians and Albanians live in geographically different locations, attending in different schools, having different healthcare and sometimes watching and reading different medias (Burema 2013). Furthermore, potentially ethnically motivated incidents are not unheard of in Kosovo. European Center for Minority Issues (ECMI) addressed this issue in their report "Potentially Ethnically Motivated Incidents: Challenges in Defining and Reporting" in 2015. The report argues that the politicised nature of potentially ethnically motivated crime poses a special threat to national security and political stability if not handled correctly. The report states that sometimes the police has a tendency to downplay ethnic elements in crimes reported to avoid escalation. In addition, vertical distrust poses another issue; interethnic crime has remained underreported as minorities lack trust to the Kosovan institutions and authorities. The report furthermore addresses the issue of defining potentially ethnically motivated crime; in some cases, the crime may have had for instance material gain as a motivation rather than ethnic, but the courts record cases that were motivated entirely by ethnic bias. In other cases, ethnic bias may have been a fragment of the motivating factors, however these cases are hard to prove. The media is also quick to exploit potentially ethnically motivated incidents; the report mentions the tendency of Kosovar Albanian and Serbian medias to exarcebate ethnic bias by using sources only from their respective communities to report ethnically motivated incidents. For instance, ethnic bias in media reporting contributed in rioting after a single incident in March 2004 (Nilsson & Olinger 2015; Wilkinson 2016).

The prevailing ethnic tensions have made it difficult for the Kosovo societies to integrate, and building horizontal trust is fractured by political objectives exarcebatating division. Positive signs can still be observed while wandering the streets of major Kosovan urban areas. In cities mixing of ethnicities tends to happen more as Serbians would go shopping, working or studying in universities in the predominantly Albanian areas. This, for instance, is the case with the American University of Kosovo in Prishtinë/Pristina, having students from the

Serbian enclaves attending courses. Some of my interviewees from north of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica would tell me they would go south to the Albanian neighbourhoods for shopping and meeting friends. However, the situation is hardly the same in smaller villages and the countryside.

The high level of interethnic distrust can be argued to effectively serve the political aims for both Albanian and Serbian political elites. As discussed in the previous sections, Kosovo is struggling with several social and economical challenges. These issues are continuously overshadowed by the political leaders amplifying ethnic division, which furthermore decreases vertical trust among Kosovo communities. Whereas some degree of horizontal trust can be observed, the lack of trust towards institutions prevails and impedes reconciliation. An Albanian journalist based in Prishtinë/Pristina illustrated the situation in Kosovo to me over a cup of coffee in November 2016. He explained that the politicians of both Kosovo and Serbia are politicians from the nineties, and often were affiliated with military and paramilitary troops during the war, and have likely faced one another in a battlefield. Now, the same individuals are expected to build peace between the two countries, but how can this be expected from the men who were also responsible of the atrocities in the Kosovo conflict.

3.3.4 Foundations for sustainable peace

As the previous chapters have described, the foundations for reconciliation between ethnic Serbians and Albanians in Kosovo are fragile. The division between the two ethnicities is maintained through several channels, one of the major one being the parallel education systems raising Kosovar children in believing fundamentally different and contradicting histories and truths. Furthermore, these histories remain as a factor in creating their identities and self-image. The fragmented and exclusive realities have made it close to impossible to appropriately address Kosovo's difficult past and to seek justice for wrongdoings of both sides. Additionally, the political elite are using ideals of ethnic division for political gains, further exacerbating the role of ethnicity to one's identity. At the same time, they turn a blind eye to the complicated social and economical struggles the citizens of Kosovo are battling with. Thus, the identities of the peoples of Kosovo are built on division and reflecting the "other", rather than attempting to build a Kosovan identity, or working towards common social and economical goals. The social and economical challenges between both

communities are similar, and cooperation would provide a more fruitful framework in resolving these issues. As a result, the Albanian and Serbian peoples in Kosovo have been fed with the idea that they have nothing in common, and left to believe destructive narratives of dominance and victimage as the truth.

As the Kosovan (and Serbian, for that matter) institutions remain insufficient for building sustainable peace, formal ways for intervention remain cumbersome. Kosovan and Serbian civil societies are active in both the field of informal peace education as well as addressing the social and economical issues, however their impact is not enough as they can not reach as many people as, for instance, formal education institutions could. Large international organisations functioning in Kosovo, such as European Union Office and the United Nation, are bound to support and cooperate with the government to set an example in supporting democracy and democratically chosen governance, albeit the said government remaining dysfunctional, under constant scrutiny over corruption allegations and sometimes controversial backgrounds of the state leaders. Primordialist manipulation pertains, effectively utilised by media and the political elite to maintain the ethnic tensions within Kosovo. For future generations primordialist approaches are harmful, as their future prospects are painted with eternal state of conflict, whether it remains stalled or results in another open conflict. In the following chapters of this study I will discuss the worrisome observations on how conflict and war have become the normal state of affairs for the peoples in Kosovo.

Additionally, Kosovo has failed to offer its youth sufficient education to succeed in finding employment, contributing to social and economical challenges Kosovo's young population have to face. Young people are encouraged to attend universities, however they graduate with unsuitable degrees not responding to the needs of the job market, nor with skills that would adequately prepare them for modern job markets (Morina 2018). Additionally, the labor markets within Kosovo are riddled with corrupt procedures and non merit-based hiring practices, such as abundant nepotism and bribery, to mention a few (Morina 2018). Combining the ethnic primordialist manipulation within the state leadership and media to maintain turbulence instead of cooperation, unstable views for the future, and economic uncertainty, the fate of young Kosovars, both Albanian and Serbian, leaves a lot to wish for. In an atmosphere as such, where reliance for ethnic primordialist manipulation is an uncomplicated approach used to overlook the deeper societal issues, it is difficult to see how

reconciliatory measures could be applied. Furthermore, these attitudes transfer across generations sustaining the stalled conflict and impeding the opportunities to build Kosovo as a prosperous, peaceful, and inclusive society.

4 Methodology

This section explains the methodology behind the chosen research model stemming from the research questions, introducing qualitative research model and in specific, an autoethnographic approach to the data collection and analysis. The research design will be explained and justified. Further on, the research site is justified and sampling methods explained. Data collection methods are presented and explained, and finally, the reliability and validity of the study is discussed through the framework of autoethnographic research method.

4.1 Qualitative Research Method & Autoethnography

Qualitative research method differs from quantitative most significantly due to the methods of producing knowledge; according to Bryman (2012) the relationship between theory and research is inductive, meaning the theory is produced from the outcomes of the research. Moreover, it is relevant to highlight the importance of understanding the differences between the natural and the social world, as human beings are capable to attribute meaning to events and their environment, as opposed to the objects of natural sciences (Bryman, 2012).

Qualitative research in the context of this study is justified in its place, as the narratives and specifically the perceptions of the narratives learnt by the research participants are considered as products of their social environment; more precisely, family environment, and the individual participants are capable of processing and analysing the information they have learnt, modifying their understanding of the social environment they live in. These perceptions generate the grounds for understanding the social phenomena of reconciliation among the individuals being studied. Whereas I have used some quantitative data in my literature review (see chapter 3.3.1. Ethnic distance), the social phenomena I am researching would be inappropriate to set in the framework of quantitative social research.

4.1.1 Autoethnographic research method in social research

I chose to approach my subjects of study and the data collected through autoethnographic qualitative approach taking the researcher's personal experiences into account. The word "autoethnography" refers to systematically analysing (graphy) personal experience (auto) and thus understanding a cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). I was introduced to autoethnographic approach to qualitative research by Brock-Utne (2016), who discusses the use of autoethnography in her work in southern African universities. She uses the definition of Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) explaining that autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that aims "to describe and systematically analyse personal experiences in order to understand cultural experience" (Brock-Utne 2016, p 2), Hence, autoethnography combines characteristics from autobiography and ethnography (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003) identify the notion of self-reflexivity, in which my own experiences of growing up in a post-conflict country become essential. They observe that:

"Autoethnographers-as-authors frame their accounts with personal reflexive views of the self. Their ethnographic data are situated within their personal experience and sense making. They themselves form part of the representational processes in which they are engaging and are part of the story they are telling." (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003, p 62)

Autoethnographic approach thus requires the researcher to hold relevant personal experiences with the social settings and groups studied, with commitment to explicit and reflective self-observation (Brock-Utne 2016). Hence, the personal experiences I have obtained through my upbringing are reflected in the representations of the experiences of the research participants, and thus add wider understanding and interpretation of the participants' narratives and reformation of their identities.

Autoethnography, as any method, has some limitations to it. For instance, autoethnographic method has been argued for not being scientific enough, as it has been held accountable to criteria normally applied to traditional ethnographic research (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). Autoethnography has thus become criticed for being too artful and not scientific enough; as a part of ethnography, autoethnography is "dismissed for social standards as being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and analytical, and too aesthetic, emotional, and

therapeutic” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011, p 283). Another criticism arises from the strong emphasis on the self; autoethnographers have been accused of being self-indulgent, narcissistic, and individualised (Mendez 2013). Criticism is essential to address, however in the context of my study, I politely disagree with the aforementioned critique of the method. Although I am approaching my research subjects through an autoethnographic approach, the tools used for data collection and analysis are appropriate for other qualitative social research methods. I did find myself reflecting my own experiences to the participants’ stories, as the research participants were often curious about my motivation to study this particular topic. Telling my story turned out to be an incredibly fruitful tool to gather data; in each of my interviews, I would explain my personal motivation to undertake this research project. As a result, the interview became more engaging for the research participants. I believe telling my story allowed the participants to find me, the researcher, to be in a relatable position, hence being willing to engage in fruitful conversations as the participants reflected their stories on mine and I reflected mine on theirs.

4.1.2 About choosing autoethnography

Although the research focuses on participants and their stories, the researcher’s words, thoughts, and feelings are also considered, for instance the personal motivation for doing a project (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011). Therefore I shall explain the backgrounds of my personal experiences of national oral heritage and narratives to place context for the research. The interest to conduct a study of a post-conflict nation and reconciliation across generations stems from my own experiences over reconciliation processes within my family. As a native of Finland, my national narratives are not new to stories about occupation, oppression, war and a rocky road to sovereignty and independence. Finland has risen from the occupation of both Swedish Kingdom and Russian then Tsardom to independence. Finland first declared herself independent from Russia in 1917. The Winter War followed by the Soviet ambition to expand the Union to further west broke out in 1939 lasting until 1940, when agreement was reached through Moscow Peace Treaty. Having defended the land from the Soviet Union, maintaining its sovereignty and building a society from a scratch after being torn apart by conflict, Finland indeed did not walk the easiest path to become what it is this day.

What incited my interest the most, was the generational gap between my grandmother, my mother, and me in the reconciliation process from a national trauma of the Winter War with Soviet Union forces. My grandmother was only five years old at the time, but her siblings were called for national service. Three of her five brothers were sent to the battlefield during the Winter War, and her two elder sisters were employed as "lotta", a term used for women serving during the war in different supportive positions such as nurses and aid workers. The family encountered a tragic loss, when one of the sons was reported to have been killed by the Soviet troops. The trauma followed by the war had a significant impact to my grandmother's perceptions towards Russia and Russians throughout her life. Whereas I myself would not describe the Finnish people as an "ethnicity" or even, a "race" of our own, my grandmother would at times use these terms and insinuate the superiority of the Finnish people from the Russians. My grandmother's only daughter, my own mother, was born in 1962, and was raised with historical narratives to the perspective of my grandmother's. My mother recalls stories from her mother including extremely derogatory descriptions of Russian people, dehumanisation, and direct hostility towards Russia and Russians. Despite growing up to these narratives from her parents, her attitudes towards Russia were significantly softer in nature.

What I remember from the narratives of my mother, there were no notions of hatred or open hostility. My mother always encouraged open-mindedness, but when pertaining to Russians she would still express certain cautiousness and distrust. Nevertheless, I remember her emphasising that she hardly ever encountered Russians in social interactions, so she struggled to determine how to feel about them. The attitudes of my mother reflected in my upbringing, creating a certain kind of distant yet in a way neutral relationship with Russia and Russians. Later on, however, I have established my social circles in multinational environments including interactions with Russian nationals. For instance, I have studied my Bachelor's Degree in Tallinn, Estonia, at a university that was famed for its attractiveness to international students and my class held approximately seven different nationalities, including a Russian student. Because of the geographical location of Estonia, as well as historical reasons, my university had lots of Russian students. I do remember having a degree of doubt and cautiousness towards Russians at first, but through several interactions and building relationships through working with them in student projects and spending time at student gatherings, these doubts were long gone.

Indeed, the most significant transition of mindsets from my family's, I have observed, is that I have managed to create friendly social relationships with Russians and even became close friends with few of them, both at the university and later on at work place or during my travels. It would feel silly not to interact with someone, just because their nationality, even if the shared history of our countries would not be that rosy. But for my grandmother the trauma is still too big. She still finds it painful to accept my subjective perceptions of Russia and Russian people. For instance, some years ago after telling her about a Russian friend of mine she got very upset, and I have not mentioned the topic since. Curiosity about these generational transitions in mentalities lead me to choose the autoethnographic qualitative research method for my study. I felt that using my personal experience of a reconciliation process, I could add a certain depth to my analysis. Whereas I can not say that I have experienced a civil war or a conflict first hand myself, as my Kosovan interviewees have, I can provide an input on reconciliation process with my own experiences and perceptions. To add to the critique pointed out of autoethnography, although telling my story became an essential part of the research project, the data collected is focused solely on the research participants. While analysing the data, I would however at times reflect on my personal experiences to reflect and compare our stories.

4.2 Research Design

Research design can be defined as the plan of action aiming to frame and answer the research questions. According to Bryman, a research design "provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. A choice of research design reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions in of the reserach process" (Bryman 2012, p 46). Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter described research design as "a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research" (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006, p 34). Thus research design determines the steps taken throughout the research process, defining the type of data that needs to be collected, from whom it needs to be collected, how and when it is going to be collected and finally how the data can be organised and analysed in accordance to the study questions (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter 2006). The study questions themselves, presenting as the goal of the study, may determine the research design, however further exploration of the site and participants can be helpful as well (Bryman 2012).

Consequently, the research design needs to be chosen carefully and accordingly. Essentially, this research consists of the researcher aiming to immerse themselves in a community and through formal interviews, discussions, and listening to conversations gather data for further analysis. This type of research refers heavily towards ethnographic research design (Bryman 2012). Whereas this research has many features common to ethnographic research, due to the limitations of time and resources it should be acknowledged that the study is not pure ethnography. Hence, the research design has been narrowed down to analyse the data as comparative cases. Bryman introduces the comparative design, which "embodies the logic of comparison, in that it implies that we can understand social phenomena better when they are compared in relation to two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations" (Bryman 2012, p 72). Comparative design is applied to this research by identifying several units of comparison. These units of comparison were identified during the coding of data, where I sought for reoccurring patterns among the interview results. The first comparative aspect arises from exploring the different ways history is asserted between the Serbian and Albanian youth and the narratives of their parents. Secondly, a comparison is made between the narratives of mothers and fathers, and thereupon between the male and female respondents and whether the gender can be considered having an impact to the narratives. The third comparative unit arises between the generational differences, and the perceptions between the children and their parents. The final comparison discusses the differences between the Serbian and Albanian interviewees' perceptions of each other, exploring the factors determining these perceptions. I will also reflect the stories of the research participants to my own story as appropriate. Throughout the analysis, gender is kept in mind observing the perceptions of the male and female respondents and whether the data would reveal gender specific implications about the research topic.

4.3 Research Site

Deciding the research site was a result of the following thought process. The interviews were to be conducted within the Kosovo territory with participants who were actually residing there. Ideally, I wanted to study a particular region in Kosovo, the city of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica in the north of Kosovo, due to the contemporary geographical division remaining between the Albanian and Serbian communities in the area; Mitrovicë/Mitrovica

has remained as the last divided city in the former Yugoslavian area, where the Albanian community lives in the south and the Serbian in the north, physically divided by the river Ibar. However due to a number of practical constraints the research site was determined to be the capital of Kosovo, Prishtinë/Pristina and surroundings, and Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.

Within the data collection, I observed not only where the participants were from, but also the migration routes of their families during the time of the conflict within and outside Kosovo as well as their families relocating in Kosovo after the conflict. It is important to acknowledge the migration and emigration during the conflict as these factors would affect to what kind of information the parents would share about the conflict and how directly were they involved. A few respondents would speak about their fathers or uncles being directly involved within the conflict, such as members of the KLA, a paramilitary Albanian troop, or paramilitary Serbian groups formed in their home villages. Oftentimes, their families were living in smaller villages with their extended families and relatives, however the escalation of the conflict forced several families to flee, Albanians more often south towards Albania and Macedonia or further abroad, and Serbians north towards Serbia proper. Some of the interviewees were born abroad as their parents were on exile; one of the interviewees was born in the UK, one in Germany. Family members would depart from each other as well, as fathers would stay in the conflict zone acting in different roles, for instance deployed with paramilitary groups or as in one case, the father who was a doctor stayed to treat people in a hospital in Gjakovë/Djakovica when the rest of the family was sent to Albania for refuge. Some would describe the journey of their families during the conflict within Kosovo or out of Kosovo, and the migration after the immediate conflict. Some of the Serbian respondents for instance would describe how their families used to live in the southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and other areas together neighboring Albanians, but during and after the conflict they had to emigrate to the north of river Ibar, in the areas of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica nowadays inhabited by only Serbians. When pertaining to their Albanian counterparts, they would more often migrate due to socioeconomical reasons within Kosovo, whereas the Serbian families would relocate to Serbian enclaves due to security issues followed by the period of the open conflict.

4.4 Sampling

The group of participants consists of young Kosovars who were between the age of 18 to 25 when the field work was conducted. At the time of the interviews, they were either living in the capital Prishtinë/Pristina or North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and Gracanicë/Gracanica. Fifteen participants altogether were interviewed; 10 ethnic Albanians, of which 6 were females and 4 were males, and 5 ethnic Serbians, of which 2 were females and 3 were males. The biggest age groups were 18 year olds (4) and 19 year olds (7), and the rest were 20, 21, 24 and 25. The imbalance between the participant ethnicities can not be considered ideal, however to reach the Serbian communities turned out to be relatively complex due to the low numbers of Serbians residing in Kosovo as well as the isolated status of primarily Serbian communities within Kosovo. According to the statistics retrieved from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS, population count based on mother tongue, conducted in 2011) Serbian population makes up 1,6 per cent of the Kosovo population, as opposed to the Albanians making up to 94,5 per cent.

Due to the lack of an interpretator, the interviewees were required to hold a decent command of the English language, affecting the sampling. The interviewees were chosen from a pool of young people using snowballing; they were found through local acquaintances and social media, such as local Facebook groups. All of the interviewees were either finishing their secondary education or were attending to higher education in their respective cities; 4 of the participants were attending formal education in a secondary education institution during the time of the field work and 11 were enrolled in a university. I recognise that this affects to the ability of the interviewees to search information and therefore draw a wider picture around what they learn from their families, and hence the conclusions of this study should not be generalised to, for instance, the young people in rural Kosovo, but rather only to youth attaining formal education and who have at least gained secondary level education. As it appears from the answers, some of the interviewees were enrolled in international universities with great exposure to the other ethnicity, however the effect of this will be discussed more in depth in the findings section.

I recognise that Kosovo holds remarkable minorities other than only Serbian, such as the Bosnian, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian population. Whereas the conflict of Kosovo and the

events of the late 1980s and throughout 1990s affected significantly to these minorities as well, this study focuses exclusively to the relations between the Albanian and Serbian population in Kosovo.

4.5 Data Collection Methods

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews (see appendices for the interview guide). I wanted to keep the interview event as open as possible, but still go through the essential topics. I had a list of questions about the specific topics I wanted to discuss and aimed to finish the interview only after having an answer to each of the topical questions. However, in many cases the discussion became more fruitful after the questions had been discussed; in many of my interviews, it turns out the questions would work as something thought-provoking and thus lead to further discussions after the initial interview. These discussions were not always about the specific topics I outlined during the interview, but a more relaxed conversation. During these conversations though, I felt like I did eventually learn more about the young people's life in Kosovo.

A couple of my interviews were conducted as group interviews, which in fact contributed in a positive way to the outcomes. In a group discussion, the topics were discussed not just between me and the interviewee, but they would spark an interesting conversation between the other interviewees as well. The disadvantage of group interviews however I found to be that sometimes the interviewee would be hesitant with their answers, and seemed to rather agree on their peers' opinions than their own. In these cases, it was challenging to distinguish the interviewee's individual opinion from the group opinion. In contrast, in each of the interviews conducted individually the interviewee would speak more freely without the impact of a group, and have the whole space and time for themselves to speak. Furthermore, a risk emerged whether one or two participants of the group interview would have been dominant, leaving the other participants' stories less recognised. In my interviews, however, I believe I managed to give each of the participants an equal opportunity to speak.

Part of my data was not collected through set interviews. Throughout my time in Kosovo I took an advantage of every opportunity to discuss about Kosovo's multiethnic status and contemporary affairs. These discussions would include, to mention a few, having a coffee

with a Kosovan Albanian journalist while discussing politics, speaking with internationals and locals working at well-known international organisations in Kosovo, people working for the government of Kosovo, talks with my friend working as a journalist in Kosovo for the past couple of years, talks with my local and foreign friends, a dinner with our Albanian landlord's family, an hour long chat with a Serbian student from Kosovo in a bus, and talking with my Serbian friends in Serbia. My concern was whether using this type of data would be deemed unscientific, however as I am exercising the autoethnographic approach I believe these additional discussions have provided me more depth to understand what life is in Kosovo, both through a local Kosovan's eyes as well as an international's.

4.6 Reliability and Validity

To define reliability and validity for a qualitative research is more challenging than for a quantitative one. Indeed, reliability and validity are significant criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research for the quantitative researcher (Bryman 2012). When pertaining to qualitative research, there has been some discussion concerning the relevance of criteria for qualitative research's reliability. Upon deciding whether the criteria are relevant, the meanings of the terms would likely require altering from their representation within quantitative research (Bryman 2012). Bryman uses the term "measurement validity" from quantitative research criteria as an example to point out how difficult making the direct transfer of terms would be; "measurement validity" carries the connotation of measurement in itself yet measurement is not a major preoccupation among qualitative researchers (Bryman 2012).

Hence the definitions for reliability and validity have remained under scrutiny and several possible definitions persist. Mason (1996) adapts reliability and validity for qualitative research by arguing that reliability, validity, and measurability "are different kind of measures of the quality, rigour and wider potential of research, which are achieved according to certain methodological and disciplinary conventions and principles" (Mason 1996, p 21), lessening the importance of measurement issues. Therefore validity refers to whether "you are observing, identifying, or 'measuring' what you say you are" (Mason 1996, p 24). Utilising Mason's definition to determine reliability and validity for this study points out the importance of setting the research questions, moreover, asking the right questions to find out

answers to the issues you say you are researching. Kirk and Miller agree by arguing that "asking the wrong questions actually is the source of most validity errors. Devices to guard against asking the wrong questions are critically important to the researcher" (Kirk & Miller 1986, p 30). When planning the interview guide for my field work, I paid high attention to the quality of my interview questions. In addition to obtaining the data I was looking for, the questions would also need to be easy enough to understand and to hold the interest of the interviewee. To be sure, I tested the interview guide through a couple of mock interviews to have an idea of the outcomes. After the fieldwork I can conclusively argue that the questions I asked produced results I was looking for; they evoked pertinent responses and stimulated further discussion. Moreover, they were of interest to people away from an academic environment, as the informal discussions I had would point out, hence resulting in potentially useful and though provoking findings.

Brock-Utne (1996) discusses the reliability and validity in the context of qualitative education research in Africa, providing several examples from on how the experience and cultural knowledge of the researcher should rather add to the reliability and validity of the research than make it unscientific. She recites Stordahl (1994), a Sami researcher studying the indigenous Sami population in northern Norway, who speaks about *culture blindness*. This refers to "a phenomenon which has to do with the fact that you may become blind to what you experience every day. It is difficult to go from being a participant to being an observer. And if you succeed in becoming an observer it may also be difficult to 'switch off'" (Brock-Utne 1996, p 610).

It is worthwhile addressing Brock-Utne's observations in relation to the Balkans. Firstly, the work in the area of qualitative research can be said to have been shaped by Eurocentric biases (Stanfield II in Denzin & Lincoln 1994). Secondly, this matters because, just like Africa to the West, the Balkans have been seen as the "other", revealing a Western Eurocentric bias. Maria Todorova, a Bulgarian author has conducted an extensive and fascinating research over the othering of the Balkans, and in her book "Imagining the Balkans", she discusses how the West has invented the Balkans as another "other", somewhat parallel to Said's Orient (Said 1978). Todorova's Balkan, however, is distinctive to the Orient as it is geographically and historically concrete existence whereas Said's Orient is an idea of the Orient constructed by Western biases (Todorova 1997). Also distinctive to the exotic and feminine depiction of the Orient, the Balkans have been imagined as "dysfunctional", "uncivilized" and "barbarian"

and traditionally masculine by Western accounts (Todorova 1997). And the "othering" prevails until today. Ghekiere (2017) studied whether the othering is still distinguishable in the language that the European Union discusses about Balkan states. According to Ghekiere's findings, they indeed show that the otherising of the Balkans states not yet members of the Union persists, although she mentions that they do this in a way that ensures the Balkans can one day become European (Ghekiere 2017).

The Balkans have a rich history and cultural heritage which has contributed to the knowledge of the Balkan societies today. Neglecting the Balkan heritage and Balkan knowledge in research would result in rather biased and Eurocentric results furthering the notions of otherness. Understanding Balkan in the way a Balkan person does could contribute to a more fruitful research over the Balkan societies. Similar to how some African educational traditions or subjective experiences would be dismissed by researchers as irrelevant or unscientific (Brock-Utne 1996), certainly there are cultural knowledge and understanding only a Balkan person could have that could provide perfectly valid and reliable perspectives to research over Balkan matters. While conducting her essay over reliability and validity over qualitative education research in education in Africa, Brock-Utne states that "even though I shall strive to write from an Afro-centric viewpoint I am well aware of the fact that even my love for Africa, my knowledge of the Swahili language and many years of living in Africa do not make me an African" (Brock-Utne 1996, p 607). Likewise, I shall aim to construct this study with a Balkan perspective in mind, acknowledging that although I might have experiences similar to my subjects of study, I can not be seen as Balkan myself.

5 Findings

In this section I will present the findings of the extensive fieldwork conducted in Kosovo during autumn 2016 and spring 2017. To begin with, I will explore the ways how the research participants have first learned and created memories of the conflict in 1999, and how would their parents explain the war to them. I wanted to find out how the parents would speak about the "other", how an Albanian would describe Serbian and vice versa, and what kind of attitudes and perspectives were passed on to the next generation. I will proceed in analysing the respondents' personal perceptions of what they have learned from their parents, how they reflect these stories to their own realities and in what position do they see themselves, the conflict and the future of Kosovo.

The data was coded by looking for both reoccurring patterns and correlating relationships. Method of constant comparison was exercised throughout the analysis. I identified several items from the data classifying them under the ethnicity and the gender of the respondent. Subsequently, I compared these items between generation, ethnicity and gender. The data has been analysed by utilising the two chosen theoretical frameworks explained in chapter 2; critical approach to primordialism and social categorisation theory. As highlighted in previous chapters, the interviewees were from larger urban areas in Kosovo, and hence the results and data of this study should not be generalised to cover the whole of Kosovo.

5.1 Parents' narratives

This chapter responds to my first research question in exploring the narratives and attitudes the interviewees have received from their parents about the conflict and the "other". The interview began by discussing about the conflict in 1999 and parents' stories. Further on, I wanted to discuss about the attitudes and thoughts the parents had about the other ethnicity, to further explore how these narratives have impacted the youth's perceptions of the other and themselves.

5.1.1 Learning about the conflict

To begin with, I wanted to understand how the interviewees learnt about the conflict of 1999 in the first place. I approached the topic by asking them what was their first memory of the conflict, or when did they think they first learnt about it. Older interviewees could recall memories of their own from the conflict period, such as playing outside while being supervised by their parents or in some cases, they would remember bombarding, stress of their parents and journeys away from their homes. Although, even if they would have concrete memories, they would admit they were too young to understand the events around them.

One of the respondents, a 19 –year old Albanian female, would remember the returning to Kosovo after returning from exile in Albania, reflecting on how as a child the state of conflict felt like the normal state of affairs, and how at the time she wouldn't understand how unusual her childhood would be compared to growing up in peaceful environment:

"-- it (war) has always been present in Kosovo, I never realised how strange it was, it was like a normal part of living. Even as a kid, it seems strange, I just assume everyone goes to war." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

A 19 –year old Serbian female respondent would describe similarly how her mother had become accustomed to the state of war and the stress, and how for her the state of conflict was just something normal, and now it was happening again. She further described how she grew up among the ideas how Albanians would be dangerous, not to trust to and might hurt you.

The older respondents, both Albanian and Serbian, would have memories of the exile from Kosovo, and memories of leaving their houses behind seeking for refuge. Some of the Serbian respondents who lived in the north, closer to Serbian border, would remember the sounds of war, planes and bombs. They would also describe how their early childhood was painted by their parents warning them from going out and constantly living with a degree of fear. Another Serbian respondent described how his parents would tell him there would be no school anymore, as there are issues with the Albanians.

"I was six years old, and I don't remember a lot of that period, mostly I remember of my parents telling me don't go out and don't go play far away from home. So that was the, maybe the first memory, and when they said the school is like, finished, you can not go to school because it's a problem with Albanian people and that's it." (Serbian, male, 24 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

"-- during the war the first couple of days we were in Gracanica and after we went to Leposavic, we spent some days there and after also we were in Gracanica because I live - you know it's a really good neighbourhood, we were all in just one place, because now just to hide, just to survive the war and everything and the bombs and I have some pictures in my head of people just screaming and yelling because we were just three and a half years old I think. Now my sister were two and one year old so it was really crazy I can't really remember fully the picture but just some scenes, I can remember the screaming, it was really awful. Because we were here and war happened and just bombs and we just try to survive, so we were under the basement, all our families, except for our dads, they were I think trying to fight the battles." (Serbian, female, 20 years, from Gracanica/Gracanica)

"my memory of the war was -- well, I'm 19 years old so, it was like, it started in July, I was like one and a half years old then. And I was like in my crib or in my bed or something and NATO plane went over my house. And it like, lowered really, really low, near the ground, and it like, made some noises, I have no idea, and all the glasses in my house shattered. And as I was in my bed, glass sharps were on me, on my bed, bla bla bla. But I didn't get hurt, just some scars I guess." (Serbian, male, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

An Albanian female from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica described her first memory as the return to their home in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and the confusion of seeing everything shattered and the international militia staying at their house.

"The first memory was when we came back from Albania after the whole dispute was settled, and we went back to our house in Mitrovica, it was all burnt, we had nothing left there, so we had to build everything from scratch and we had some foreign people from missions, like UNMIK, living upstairs because we were granted we can build the house again, it was very strange for me, I kept asking my parents why are these foreign people living in our house. I couldn't understand what their mission in Kosovo was about. I didn't really understand what had happened even though I saw the house burnt down. It was like a tradition to wave at the helicopters that passed by our neighbourhood because they gave us chocolates and stuff. We grew up like in the aftershock of the war. Just like small details I noticed as a kid that had happened." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

While the youngest interviewees weren't yet born during the time of the conflict, they recalled watching TV or listening to radio and seeing reports from the conflict, and then asking their parents what was the news they saw about.

"I remember seeing when I was 6 or 7 i was seeing from TV that a weird guy, white hair, was prosecuted about the crimes he committed in the region, and I asked my parents who is this person and they explained to me, I was too young to understand but they told me he doesn't like us at all and he waged war with us and he was a, before the war he was stepping down people, he was mistreating people, until the war happened and during the war he gave out orders to kill as many Albanians they could, and he was not a great man, so I'm talking about Milosevic, and that's when I first understood what really happened here and why this country is a mess, a lot of destroyed homes and houses, you know they took a lot of the houses and buildings." (Albanian, male, 18 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

An Albanian male would describe how he was included into discussions with his male relatives about the topic of war, and his relatives' experiences.

"I think it (the first memory) was from my family. Usually I have a lot of uncles, you know and almost every time they get together, somehow they start talking about the war. Between Kosovo and Serbia. So I kinda got involved in those conversations, got interested. They told the story of our family during the war, they talked about what they, basically, everything they know about the war, all their knowledge, they expressed it when they talked to each other. So then when I got interested I started reading about it, also in school we took history classes, a lot of professors like to talk about the war, you know, some of them are really nationalist -- they love their country, so they like to talk about it." (Albanian, male, 19 years, from Gjakovë/Djakovica)

It was not always the conflict of the late nineties itself that became the first memory, or first point of contact to learn about it. One of the Serbian respondents recalled a memory from March 2004, when a suspicious drowning of three ethnic Albanian boys culminated to anti-Serbian violence and Albanian mobs attacking Serbian enclaves, leaving nineteen people killed and hundreds of homes torched (Reuters 2008, HRW), and her family sought refuge from Serbia:

"Maybe I can't remember the first memory but the most, one of the most effective is 17th March of 2004, that was when conflict was also repeating, and in that period I know that I went with my mother and my family to Kraljevo. Kraljevo is a city two hours from here in central Serbia. So it was like, I was knowing that something is happening, father stayed in here so I was like confused, is he alright, why is he not calling so, from time to time, it was like upsetting and pretty -- as a child I was confused what's going on and I just wanted to come home, I was like a first grade of primary school." (Serbian, female, 19 years, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

In conclusion, regardless if the respondents had their own memories or not, they would be primarily learning about the conflict from their parents first, after reflecting on a personal

experience or exposure to some sort of coverage about the conflict. They would also admit they did not understand much about the events at the time. In contrast, the parents of the youngest interviewees would only speak about the conflict if specifically asked, keeping the children somewhat protected from it.

When pertaining to learning about the conflict, there were no identifiable differences between the answers of Serbian and Albanian respondents; first memories arose from either personal experience, parents' narratives or media exposure. An exception occurred, as one Serbian interviewee would remember the rioting in 2004 and recall that as the time she first learned about the conflict. At times it became apparent that male relatives were more active in bringing up the topic at certain male only settings, reflecting upon their memories and experiences during the conflict, as couple male interviewees were describing.

5.1.2 Understanding the conflict

When actually explaining more about the conflict and the events and reasons leading to it, the responses had more variety. A few patterns in specific could be identified from the data. For instance, families that were more directly involved in the conflict would speak more openly about their memories and experiences. One of the Albanian respondents highlighted how frank her parents would be in telling about the conflict to her. She further emphasised how her father and several other male relatives were closely associated with the KLA, the Albanian paramilitants:

"My parents were very straightforward. They said war happened, Serbia, and now we are free, stuff like that. They never tried to hide it from us especially because my family was really involved, political activists etc, my whole family was involved with the movement of liberation for Kosovo, they told us actually a lot of stories, what happened how we left Kosovo (as refugees to Albania)." (Albanian, female 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

A common theme among the ways the parents would describe the conflict period would be in focusing on subjective experiences. In several families, both Albanian and Serbian, fathers or other male relatives had been deployed to military or paramilitary troops. Therefore fathers would speak more about their life in deployment and other roles they undertook in the conflict. Mothers had either stayed at home with the children or were on the move, seeking for asylum and safety. Mothers would talk about their daily struggles in their lives, hardships

of traveling to safety, as well as the stress and fear they felt for their husbands and families. While the parents would be sharing their personal experiences, they would also emphasise the political nature of the conflict while explaining the events. In several cases the parents would remind their children how the conflict was about politics and a bigger picture, rather than a dispute between individuals.

For the younger Albanian respondents, parents would be rather reluctant to recollect their memories of the conflict, addressing that the conflict has been the issue of the past and in the past it should remain. Like one Albanian father would tell his son:

“He didn't tell me much about the war, because he likes to avoid that topic, because it's something that has passed and, it's just pulling off a bandaid off the wound and he doesn't like doing that.” (Albanian, male, 18 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

Another Albanian respondent, one of the youngest participants as well, admitted she could not remember her parents telling her much about the conflict, but before the interview she had asked them more about their experiences.

“During the war, my family wasn't in here, in Kosovo so they didn't really experience those things, the others did. Because of that they didn't really tell me anything, I mean, a bit but not really, so I really didn't know what actually happened here. I knew that I was going to have this kind of interview so I asked actually yesterday my parents about the war and to be honest, I really learnt new things I never heard before. Cause they didn't talk to me, they weren't interested, of course it was a bad memory for them, they didn't really want to remember all of it.” (Albanian, female, 18 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

Primordialist thinking could be identified behind some stories. One Serbian mother would explain the issues of the nineties by referring to the complex history over Kosovo's territory between Serbians and Albanians:

“She described me like, a conflict was, that's the oldest conflict on Balkan, from fourth century when the Albanian people came, like they were living before on the mountains and so on, it's called like Illyria or something like that from history, and so we have problems for the land and so on, we have a lot of wars, she told me like from the history how it was.” (Serbian, male, 24 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

Further down the interview, however, I learned that even though the primordialist assumption prevailed, the respondent admitted his mother had insisted him to grow up with an open

mind. Another account coinciding with a degree of primordialism was an Albanian female's recollection of her father's description in encountering Serbians:

"My dad would talk to me about confrontations on the street with Serbian soldiers, if they like stopped you and asked for something you couldn't even say anything even though, they were like talking to you like you were suspicious, even though you weren't, just had to sit there and wait and listen to them. Like basically during that time they were always like a superior figure, and they didn't know why. And still now they act very superior and I think that's all they think about" (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

The feeling of entitlement and superiority, and the unjust experiences would reflect on the Albanian parents' perceptions of Serbians in several accounts. The interviewee recalled further her parents' attitudes towards Serbians revealing deeper ethnic hatred:

"They don't like them, they actually hate them, I mean I could hear them talking about the difficulties they had going to school or just going out or how they tried to kill them, or like that kind of stuff. Of course they couldn't love them or anything, they just hated them they don't even want to talk about them or they just telling us about them. I mean, for example if we don't live in a country that we do deserve, everyone deserves freedom, so since their freedom was denied, they hated them. It just, I guess, by nature." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

Although the political considerations were very prevalent in the narratives, as the above accounts point out some of the comments that followed would reveal the deep interethnic distrust the parents still held. This was especially the case if their families had been severely affected during the conflict or they had been closely affiliated with paramilitary or resistance movements. One Albanian male from Gjakovë/Gjakovica, one of the most heavily bombed cities in Kosovo, explained how her mother would be very frank about her feelings towards Serbians:

"She was quite nationalist, so she really liked to call them names. Not good ones. They were called 'animals' -- It's like a, it's the name that's left for them; we use it when we want to somehow insult them. She really doesn't like them. My mother's brothers were both Kosovo Liberation Army fighters, warriors so, my family was pretty involved in the Kosovo-Serbia war." (Albanian, male, 19 years from Gjakovë/Djakovica)

An interesting account arose from one of the Serbian male respondents, while he described his family's fate during the conflict. They were the only Serbian family in the area they lived in, and when the conflict escalated and his family had to leave for their safety, their Albanian

neighbours would tell them to stay, and that they would be protected by the Albanian community. His family's story conforms how the ethnic relations had not been tense at all for a long period of time, and that there was high levels of trust amongst them in the past. In the following chapter, I will discuss about this notion of change in the ethnic relations the parents had experienced, and how it had affected to their accounts about the "other".

5.1.3 Post-war ethnic relations

All of the interviewees would admit there is still a lot of hatred, anger and distrust between the ethnicities in Kosovo. A 19 year old Albanian female from Mitrovica described how "never trust a Serbian" was a sentence of her childhood, another one telling me her father used to say "everytime a Serbian is asleep, they dream about taking Kosovo back". One Albanian female would describe the attitude of the whole village where she grew up; villagers would often describe the Serbians who stayed in Kosovo as "spies" and that they should not be trusted. Both Albanian and Serbian interviewees had come across derogatory language used about the other in their social environments. However, an interesting theme arose as we discussed further about the parents' relationships with the other communities.

A pattern that kept coming up in the stories of Serbian parents was the notion of change that happened in the society after the outburst of the conflict. In Serbian families, the parents would often mention how different life was before the war, even as far as during the times under Tito's rule in Yugoslavia. Before the 1999 conflict, Serbians and Albanians would live in the same neighborhoods, side by side, working and socialising together. However after the conflict, communication and connections between the Serbian and Albanian areas ended, and Serbian enclaves within Kosovo became more isolated.

"-- my parents told me that before the war they lived really good, with neighbors, school they had, being as their language also. Russian and Albanians had in their schools Serbian so they know each other's language and they could communicate with each other, they were in economic relations, they had really good economic relations. But after the war everything stopped, everything changed, all the generations died, when younger generations came, they starting to hate other people, they start to hate Serbians, they didn't want to learn Serbian anymore, and Serbs didn't want to learn Albanian so everything stopped, everything changed." (Serbian, female, 19 years, Gracanice/Gracanica)

Another Serbian interviewee, male, would describe how his father would talk about the times under Tito rule, and how quality of life was better back then:

“He used to talk about the life we had previously, before the war. Because elder people, they really talk about the old times, during Tito times, we used to have better salaries, to have better life; we were like that, like that. And also he told me that he also worked with Albanians because, also before the war many Albanians were already living here, and he also worked with them and they had this great like, relationship, before the war, now everything is changed. He did this comparing to things before and he also tried to explain me that period, like the advantages of that period, you know comparing this period now. So what is happening now and why” (Serbian, male, 25 years, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

Among most of the Serbian youth, their parents would speak about their Albanian peers in a rather positive light. Many of them had worked together, side by side, or attended universities together and had plenty of interethnic relations and even friendships before the escalation of the conflict. A Serbian male respondent provided an interesting insight when he described his father’s perception about the Albanians changing:

“My father like, worked from the eighties til 1999 in south of Mitrovica. He worked in, I mean he still works in a post office, but he was like in the most southern part of Mitrovica where like, all Albanians, just Turkish. And he was like, really good friends with Albanians, he went to have drinks with them in kafana, if you know what that is? And he had a really positive opinion of them. And after the war, I was told by my father that Albanians are bad people, that they are like cynical, arrogant, all of those like, negative types of person. And I didn't -- it was like, til 2009 I didn't know that Albanians were called Albanians, I thought they were called "shqiptar". Because everybody call them, I mean it's their name in Albanian, shqiptar, but it's derogatory term in Serbian, like shqiptar, it's "albanac". And when we were in the city, to buy some stuff, my father would like point at the bridge in the south part of Mitrovica and he would say like "never go there, that's the 'land of shqiptar' so never go in there.” (Serbian, male, 19 years, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

In addition, he points out how long it took for him to learn the offensive nature of the everyday language that had been used about the “other”, which reflects well on the type of narrative and language the youth had grown with. As discussed in the literature review, the vernacular discourses have a tendency to maintain a degree of division between Serbians and Albanians. It shows that growing up among the discourses as such can not be considered fruitful for reconciliation, and hence the contemporary language is an important observation and should potentially be studied further.

Interestingly, the notion of change in ethnic relations was not that apparent among the Albanian parents' narratives. Rather, they would recollect their experiences and hardships they went through during the conflict. Two Albanian female respondents recalled their fathers not particularly talking about the conflict, but reminiscing the bravery of the Albanian fighters, and sustaining nationalist pride for overcoming such hardships. On the contrary, in few Albanian accounts the feelings of disbelief and fear came across, as homes had been raided by Serbian militia and their families struggled to understand why all this was happening. In almost all of the accounts from Albanian interviewees, the feelings of disbelief and thus distrust towards Serbia and Serbians were a dominant theme. One Albanian male respondent recounted his father's prevailing distrust towards Serbians due to his experiences during the conflict:

"He doesn't like Serbians, but he doesn't have an active hatred towards them but if I would marry a Serbian girl he would be so unhappy, he would hate her, he does not like Serbian people. And I cannot blame him from that, he saw a lot during the war. They were here until 3 months before the war ended, until they were somehow kicked out of their house by the Serbian forces." (Albanian, male, 18 years old, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

Whereas the change in ethnic relations was not identifiable from the stories of the Albanian parents, one account pointed out the attitudes towards Serbians were not all that negative. Another Albanian interviewee emphasised how his parents would speak about Serbia and Serbians in a derogatory manner but only when pertaining to the conflict:

"In general they (Serbians) had a very modern culture. However when it came to the war, they were (albanian word meaning "animals"). So every time we talk about the war, the Serbians are, usually, called animals. Well basically that's what they call them. But when it's not about the war then the Serbians are, you know, they talk about their culture, sometimes they really look up to them. They think they have modern culture, they are developed country, moderately, you know." (Albanian, male, 19 years, from Gjakovë/Djakovica)

When analysing these attitudes against the historical underpinnings and the periods of systematic oppression in late 1980's and 1990's the ethnic Albanians experienced through several Serbian-led reformatations diminishing rights and withdrawing the Albanian language education, it is understandable the Albanian parents would likely have had a different experience. Possibly, the changing attitudes could be seen as the effect of oppressive policies and the rise of Albanian nationalism to oppose this regime. At the same time, the parents of

the Serbian youth had changed their perception of the Albanian people, despite having been in friendly ties with them before, the consideration of "otherness" of the other ethnicity became more insinuated during and after the times of conflict. Yet still, the answers reveal that their parents did live during a time where ethnicity wasn't a drastic divider and peaceful coexistence was possible. I discussed the topic over dinner with my then landlord in Pristinë/Pristina in March 2017. He is a middle-aged Albanian male, and told me stories much alike of a time when interethnic friendships would occur and everyone lived side by side. He described the change in Kosovo to happen slowly, relationships would begin to gradually become distant and rumours would fly. In contrast, he recalled the time he lived in Sarajevo during early nineties, and how the ethnic relations changed drastically over night; one day everyone would be friends, the next they would persecute each other with no apparent reason other than ethnic differences and media/political propaganda thrown upon them.

5.2 Respondents' perceptions of the conflict and each other

My second research question explores the opinions of the youth themselves and their thoughts and perceptions about one another. Furthermore, we discussed what they had learnt from their parents, and how these narratives reflected in the youth's perceptions. In this section, I aim to look further in finding answers to the second study question, and to determine the direction opportunities for reconciliation. Additionally, this chapter identifies contemporary issues and challenges among the young people in Kosovo arising from the data. I begun my exploration fairly frankly by asking what do they think about each other, then further on finding out whether they have or have not formed social relationships with each other. I discussed whether they had ever had a conversation about the conflict with a representative of the other ethnicity, and if so, the results of this. My final question was aimed to understand what kind of oral heritage they would want to pass on their potential own children in the future, the next generation in Kosovo. I must, once again, however address that the sampling size was relatively small and limited to youth within either secondary or higher education, residing in the major urban areas of Kosovo. Without a doubt, the sampling has had a significant impact on the study results. Hence, the results analysed

should then not to be taken as a generalisation over the whole Kosovar youth, but rather as an insight into certain groups of young people in Kosovo.

5.2.1 The conflict and the aftermath

A common concept among the interviewees' memories and thoughts about the conflict and their upbringing would be characterised by feelings of confusion. Some of the Albanian respondents admitted the difficulty in finding out what happened during the conflict, as everyone's, especially elders', stories vary and are largely based on subjective experiences. One of the Albanian respondents openly doubted what she knew about the Kosovo conflict, feeling confused of what was true and what was not. Several of the Albanian respondents acknowledged they felt like there would be another side to the story. Furthermore, in many accounts, especially among respondents attending universities, they would address the political nature of the conflict rather than accusing the peoples. An Albanian female respondent addressed these issues while describing her feelings towards Serbian peoples and Serbia as a state:

"I think that the Serbians living in Kosovo have a clear view of what the reality is, because in Serbia and Kosovo the way history is taught is really different. A lot of Serbians who live in Serbia believe that -- I mean they have the right to believe -- Kosovo was historically part of Serbia and stuff like that. I don't wanna call them brainwashed cause I'm sure not everything that we are taught is true either, but the Serbians that live here, they see the reality. And in the media most of the time the situation is Kosovo has betrayed us, very hostile, like we tried to kill every Serbian that has lived in Kosovo while we actually live quite peacefully with each other. I think they just see the reality very differently, Serbians in Serbia. But at the same time, I think that Serbia has made life so much harder for the Serbians who live here, like through different political provocations, like the train or stuff like that. Then it just makes people angry and not want to cooperate. So they are really held back by their country's political lobbying or whatever you can call that." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

Being stuck with the past due to media's and political leaders' one-sided and exclusive representation on ethnic relations was a common and reoccurring theme. On the more encouraging side, the interviewees seemed to be well aware of the bits of information they were not told of. As one of the Albanian female interviewee told me, when she found out about the Serbian victims of the KLA she felt struck and began to wonder, what else has she

never been taught about. In most Albanian accounts, the youth were interested in hearing what a Serbian peer of their age would have to say, and what would their perspective be.

"I have mixed emotions. I like to be open-minded. What happened has already happened, I'm sure not every Serbian wanted that to happen, it's politics. Every time I meet a Serbian person I try to keep an open mind. But now I think I feel good towards Serbians but not the country itself." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

Another reoccurring theme was somewhat bitterness in being held back by the history. Frustration was experienced due to how the political aims of both parties still revolved heavily around the past and its implications to the contemporary ethnic relations. This state of affairs, nevertheless, was not deemed ideal by any of the interviewees. An Albanian female implied the importance of understanding the pastness of the past, to not transfer the guilt and accusations from one generation to another, and allowing the peoples to move on eventually:

"That's not necessary for us to hate each other, and I do believe there are those evil Serbians because they did those things for no reason, that I heard, but the kids who were born now are not guilty, I think in maybe ten or twenty years the hate is going to fade eventually." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

One Albanian male emphasised further how the prevailing stalled state of conflict is rather political than anything else, and described how the issues of the past should have been resolved long ago:

"I think there is still a political conflict between Kosovo and Serbia. And it's quite a shame. It's been almost twenty years since the war and this should have, the conflict should and the disagreement should have disappeared by now. But they just can't seem to find a common ground. Serbians keep asking for more. Kosovo keeps asking it's rights to protect it's borders and it's, in my opinion it's all part of the greater picture, it's international politics, not just between Kosovo and Serbia." (Albanian, male, 19 years, from Gjakovë/Gjakovica)

During this particular interview, I was interviewing two Albanian males studying in the University of Pristina, and took the opportunity ask further about what they think about the international community's involvement to Kosovo's affairs, especially of European Union's. The other one of them told me he thinks that Kosovo is merely a token in a game between Europe/USA and Russia. The two further continued, telling me how they doubt Kosovo will ever become a part of European Union as its current role is too crucial for international

politics. Their accounts revealed remarkable vertical distrust, not only towards their respective government and institutions but also towards the international community and its efforts.

At the same time, whereas the aforementioned the Albanian respondents highlighted the relevance of understanding both sides of the story and were not keen to point fingers but rather find common grounds, some of the interviewees thought that the damage done in the past could be too much to ever overcome. An Albanian female interviewee recounted discussions with her girlfriends about the conflict and Serbians' atrocities:

"Whenever me and my friends, mostly girls, talk about the war, I remember different stories that we had, and we only hear stories that are really sad, really terrifying how they got killed or even worse things they did to women or young girls and hearing those stories we couldn't create the idea of peace." (Albanian, female, 18 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

Additionally, the interviewees from Gjakovë/Djakovica agreed there would be a long way to go for reconciliation, mentioning how several Albanian families living in Gjakovë/Djakovica were attempted to be demolished completely by the Serbian forces. An Albanian male interviewee from Gjakovë/Djakovica, who had lost his grandfather during the conflict, concluded how disappointed he was with the nature of the atrocities committed:

"I don't care about the conflict, I just care it involved women and children and they should have fought just men to men and not go into houses and kill everyone they saw. So I've heard a lot of stories in Gjakovë, not only my grandfather's and theirs." (Albanian, male, 19 years, from Gjakovë/Djakovica)

He further continued by telling the story of his cousin:

"I have a cousin of mine who is now abroad and they (Serbian militia) killed his entire family. Only his father was not there and they – they just went there and said you are with the KLA, the Kosova Liberation Army, and they didn't ask if they were or not, and they just – started firing to them." (Albanian, male, 19 years, from Gjakovë/Djakovica)

The Albanian respondents also discussed about their disappointment with justice delivered after the conflict. Although they would tell me they considered the conflict to be predominantly only political, the Albanian interviewees had a lot of understanding and

empathy towards their parents and relatives who were affected. An Albanian female explained:

"You can never trust a Serbian" was told us a lot, and I really didn't like that, I thought it was really stupid to say that but then while growing up I understood what exactly had happened and why they (her parents) think such things." (Albanian, female, 19 years old, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

The Serbian respondents had less subjective experiences about the conflict and their parents' experiences revolved more around physical relocation from harm's way to safety and asylum. According to the statistics, the number of Albanian victims were significantly higher than Serbian, which likely impacts the probability to encounter an as highly affected family from the Serbian community than from the Albanian. Arguably, this is why the stories of the Serbian youth in regards to the conflict involved mainly stories of seeking asylum. Additionally, they would remember minor conflicts and potentially ethnically motivated incidents happening afterwards in their villages and hometowns. This was especially prevalent among Serbian respondents from northern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and other areas from northern Kosovo, bordering Serbia. A Serbian female respondent from Gracanicë/Gracanica, a Serbian enclave south of Prishtinë/Pristina, would however have a slightly different story, about hiding in their homes in Gracanicë/Gracanica before seeking safety from the town of Leposavic/Leposaviq:

"During the war the first couple of days we were in Gracanica and after we went to Leposavic (a town in northern Kosovo near Serbia), we spent some days there and after also we were in Gracanica because I live -- you know it's a really good neighbourhood, we were all in just one place, because now just to hide, just to survive the war and everything and the bombs and I have some pictures in my head of people just screaming and yelling because we were just three and a half years old I think. Now my sister were two and one year old so it was really crazy I can't really remember fully the picture but just some scenes, I can remember the screaming, it was really awful. Because we were here and war happened and just bombs and we just try to survive, so we were under the basement, all our families, except for our dads, they were I think trying to fight the battles and -- that's it." (Serbian, female, 19 years, from Gracanicë/Gracanica)

Similarly though to the Albanian youth's accounts, the Serbian interviewees would emphasise the politicised aspects of the conflict. Whereas they were fearing for their families' fates, the interviewees also would address that this conflict was about politics rather

than bad relations between the peoples in Kosovo. The tensions were agreed to be further exacerbated by media.

An interesting observation was made from the data; the Serbians in Serbia feel very differently about Kosovo than the ones actually residing in Kosovo. A Serbian female respondent further addressed the difference between Serbians in Serbia and Serbians in Kosovo. According to her, the Serbians in Serbia had a completely opposing view of the reality of living in Kosovo:

“When I have a contact with my relatives (in Serbia), they are taking the same like, it's so dangerous there (in Kosovo). I don't see the dangerous side. I grow up with that. With that thought that, there's Albanians who can hurt you or something like that but -- I don't care even now. I know that people from south of Serbia, my cousins there, they care and are like afraid something's going to happen, and I'm like, it's an ordinary thing for me.” (Serbian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

Previously in this chapter, an Albanian female interviewee had pointed out similar implying she thinks the Serbians in Serbia most probably think quite differently about the reality in Kosovo, mostly due to media's representation of the situation. In contrast, while staying in Belgrade for a few days in September 2016, I asked a Serbian friend of mine what does she know about Kosovo. She explained to me that for the young Serbians, as herself, Kosovo represents something like *“the wild wild west. No one ever really goes there, and we don't really know what is going on over there”*. Another Serbian girl in the conversation agreed, further telling me that all she knows about Kosovo is based on occasionally listening to her father *“murmuring while watching the news how their country is being stolen again”*. During a second trip to Belgrade in April 2017, I caught an interesting account reflecting on the otherising and the division of West and East within the Balkans. I was chatting with a young Serbian who had family members living in the northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë. She told me she'd been visiting them a few times but would never go to the south, as *“they're all just Americans there”*. In further research, I would suggest to study the perceptions of Serbian youth in Serbia over Kosovo, as these results would provide an interesting overlook on the significance of Kosovo for the future generations in Serbia, and hence, could provide new areas of intervention for reconciliation initiatives.

The Serbian interviewees would, much like they said their parents did, describe how life in Kosovo had changed after the war and point out the differences between peoples' attitudes towards each other since the conflict. A Serbian female respondent would, despite never living during that era, reminisce what had been in Kosovo before the war, and compare it to her contemporary life:

“The new generations, that was the generations in my school, we just learn based on Serbian, like translating everything. But we didn't have (Albanian language) we just had English and Russian in our schools. We learn Serbian history, we didn't have any connections with Albanians and before coming here (international university in Prishtinë/Pristina) I didn't have any connections with Pristina, I just visited once a month just to buy something, but it was just stopping to buy something and that's it. I don't know, I have the freedom to walk here, I mean, no one's gonna say anything but you can feel in everything that everything changed after the war because before the war, we had our Serbian hospitals, rules, Serbian university, one of the biggest, one of the best universities, even in that time was better than Belgrade university.” (Serbian, female, 19 years, from Gracanice/Gracanica)

In conclusion, it can be argued that several stories and attitudes have been passed over the generations and they have had a significant impact on the youths' perceptions and understanding of the war. Furthermore, in several accounts both Albanian and Serbian they interviewees had sought information about the conflict and the history of Kosovo from other sources than their social environment and education as well, which is encouraging and implies the participants of this study have exercised critical approaches while discussing the conflict. Almost every interviewee, except from the three youngest Albanians, admitted they had their doubts on what they had been taught about the conflict and the “other” in the past. The fact that the rest of the interviewees had attended universities may have been the major factor determining this observation, as arguably, university level education is supposed to equip students with abilities to find and critically assess information. On another note, the students attending international universities had had several contacts with the other community's youth, which may have had resulted in discussions or sparked an interest to find out more about the other side of their truth.

5.2.2 Effect of exposure

After each interview, the predominant feeling I was left with was, what I would call, *careful curiosity* expressed both by Albanian and Serbian youth towards each other; neither party was unwilling to socialise with each other per se, and in some cases they had formed interethnic friendships. Many of the Serbian respondents acknowledged had been left with feelings of confusion, arising from the ideas learnt domestic upbringing colliding with what they came to learn at later stages in higher education and within their new social circles, also involving ethnic Albanians. The Albanians who had had contacts with Serbians shared similar experiences of confusion. According to the data gathered, the main factor among the youth that had formed strong social relationships with the representatives of the other community was *exposure* to one another, especially exposure in some sort of functional environments such as in university or at work.

Every Serbian interviewee said that they grew up with "mixed feelings" towards ethnic Albanians due to their parents' narratives. For example, a Serbian male respondent had learned opposing narratives from his mother and father; his mother had never had a negative word to say about Albanians as she used to study and work together with them and had several interethnic friendships, whereas his father would describe Albanians with derogatory terms. His father had worked together with Albanians but had never formed deeper friendships or other type of social relations with them, and the conflict had ultimately destroyed the existing relationships. Despite the confusion, the interviewee himself had formed his own opinion based on the encounters he had after enrolling an international university:

"I never really got in contact with someone who's Albanian until I was like maybe seventeen, I guess, like two years ago. Before that, because of the society because of my friends, they all had negative opinions about them so I guess I had a negative opinion about them. I didn't want to learn the language, the people, to meet them, stuff like that. And after NGO meeting with the Serb side and Albanian side I met really great people. I finally got out of my shell, started to learn about them, that history is not just one-side, like they attacked us, it's war so everyone is bad. And after that I often go to the south side, to Prishtina, sometimes to Prizren. And I met really good people so, really great people, so I guess I have like maybe thirty Albanian friends right now. Acquaintances and stuff like that." (Serbian, male, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

Another Serbian interviewee explained how he got in contact with Albanian people through his work, and admitted he did not have much contact with them before the job:

"I didn't have any Albanian friends before. I am now working with Albanians. They are my colleagues. I have also, let's say, few friends other than colleagues, but before that, before this job, I don't have much chance to speak with Albanians, to talk about them in some higher stand." (Serbian, male, 25 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

Throughout the interviews it became clear that the more exposure the youth had had with one another the more positive, or neutral, their opinion about each other would be. In some accounts it also seemed that they were managing to discuss about the conflict relatively objectively and with some distance, as one Serbian interviewee pointed out by saying that him and his friends would perhaps speak about the Albanians and their ways before the war, but other than that they would feel neutral about them. Another Serbian interviewee emphasised how nowadays things have changed and Serbians and Albanians are working and interacting more than right after the conflict:

"Well it used to be like, negative attitude because of the war and conflict, obviously. But I can say that now, situation is slightly changed, because many Serbs are now, came around Albanians, working with them, through many activities, in many organisations, they employ both nations, so I think it creates like, better attitude, than it used to be, regarding Albanians and Serbs. Mostly we talk about the situation itself, rather than Albanians as a people." (Serbian, male, 25 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

A Serbian female respondent from Mitrovica/Mitrovicë further emphasised how the politics don't, and shouldn't matter anymore so much in interethnic relations, or any human relations for the matter:

"I have Albanian friends. I can say that there are bad people but there are also good people. People who do not care so much about politics, who are not like, living what others are saying and they have their own minds, they have their own personalities or their own difficulties and only their own successes, so they are the human, they have their -- as I mentioned in life they're having the bad moments, and the good moments, and I usually know that the people who are younger and and who are not afraid to speak with me, they are usually, I can say, versatile and they are open, and they're trying to see and develop other picture. Maybe it's that person that I come across, but I know that there is also people who are affected by the loss in the family, during the war, and I know that those kind of people can not be friends with someone, because they usually have some kind of fears." (Serbian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

She further addressed the younger people and their potential to be more open towards each other, and also acknowledged the suffering and losses of the Albanian community during the war which does provide an encouraging example on how the younger population in Kosovo could potentially manage the past with a more inclusive and empathetic approach, hence laying foundations for reconciliation.

Nevertheless, before making further assumptions, a Serbian female from Gracanica provided a little less optimistic account:

"I can talk, be friendly, really friendly because I was raised to be friendly, and I can talk and they want my help, but nothing close because, as I said, after the war it was raised that we are not good, no that we are, that we were killing them, and we used to kill our friends and that they suffered and, you know, that they're the only victims, so yeah, look like you see in their eyes and their attitudes "oh it's me" that they're not so friendly. But the policy here is that you have to be. I mean I don't have any conflicts or anything but, you can see that they're not so -- we also have the differences between the Serbs and Albanians, and we're raised to respect each other because we work together, we live together, but to love each other. I think it's not gonna happen." (Serbian, female, 20 years, from Gracanicë/Gracanica)

Whereas she believed in the importance of mutual respect, her final sentence was telling. In contrast to the other accounts from the Serbian interviewees, she studied in an international university in Pristina/Prishtinë but admitted she did not have close friendships with any Albanians.

"To be honest I don't have a friend, a real friend here. I can talk, be friendly, really friendly, because I was raised to be friendly, and I can talk, they want my help, but nothing close." (Serbian, female, 20 years, from Gracanicë/Gracanica)

The other Serbian respondents had formed friendships during their studies at an international university in Mitrovica/Mitrovicë and also at work. These type of functional social relationships could help in reconstructing identities and lessening the salience of ethnicity, as the former "other" is now seen not just as an opposing ethnicity but as a colleague, fellow student or even, a friend. The primordial manipulation exercised by the political elite could then not be adopted by the future generations in Kosovo, as they would see one another as more than merely as a part of a competing ethnic identity narrative.

Again, however, I must emphasise these results cannot be generalised to represent the Serbian community or youth in Kosovo as a whole. I asked the interviewees whether they thought there was still a lot of negative opinions about Albanians among their communities. All of them said yes, definitely. One Serbian interviewee said he thinks that due to him having Albanian friends and studying Albanian in the university he probably has more "Serbian enemies than Albanians", and that most of his friends tend to have a rather negative perception of the Albanian peoples:

"They're (his Serbian friends) like really – they're not supportive of me. Of course I mean I have some friends who are supporting me because I'm learning Albanian and stuff, but most of my friends are saying that – that I shouldn't do that, they did that and that, they're bad people, they – they don't belong here, even though they're ninety percent of Kosovo – but mostly like, mostly negative opinions of my friends. But because I'm cynical I always talk in Albanian with them." (Serbian, male, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

He furthermore stated how important it was for him to overcome his negative prejudices, and fears, towards the other and "get out of his shell", whereas most of his Serbian peers never had, or never would push themselves through similar experiences. He addressed the significance of the international university he had enrolled with, providing him an opportunity to learn subjects such as history from another perspective, outside the bubble in which his Serbian friends would study and learn their version of history. Similar to many Albanians too, he added, stating that this is why they see Serbians in a negative light.

The Albanian respondents seemed to have far less direct contact or social relationships with the Serbians. They would, however, express some curiosity and openness of getting in touch with a Serbian of their age, with a degree of cautiousness. Out of the eleven Albanian interviewees, only one acknowledged they had ethnic Serbian friends; she had met them in her university, another private international university but in Prishtinë/Pristina. Nevertheless, aside from the friendships she had she had plenty of uncomfortable encounters with Serbians as well:

"I have Serbian friends who live in Kosovo, who go to my university, I'm actually really good friends with them. But sometimes, when I was living in the US, whenever I would meet Serbian people it was pretty, I don't know, I think I developed a negative attitude towards Serbians while I was living there, cause every time I would meet someone from Serbia they would not like to talk to me, or say stuff like "Kosovo is Serbia" and make me really mad. But now I'm – I think I'm – I feel good towards Serbians but not the country itself" (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

Even among friends, talking about the conflict was not advisable. When I asked whether the topic had ever been brought up among her and her Serbian peers, she further explained how a discussion at a class had carried on revealing wide gaps in understanding the conflict and Kosovo's history:

"Well, we try to avoid it (talking about the conflict) as much as possible. One time it had to be – because we were in class on public policy, and we had to have a debate on – I don't even remember what it was, but I have a friend (Albanian), he's a guy in this class and he's very nationalistic, whatever we're talking about, Serbia comes up by him, like even if we're talking about trade, it's coming up like "oh but Serbia blah blah blah". So I had my Serbian friend in this class also, and she got really fed up with his comments and she started like, debating with him and talking back, then after class we were having coffee with that Serbian friend, and I was like "oh don't mind him, he's just overly nationalistic you know, it's not personal", stuff like that. And then uhm – and then, I don't know, I noticed she kinda – she really like, believed in the "Kosovo is Serbia" whole idea, concept, and then - I don't know I noticed that her opinions were, very different from what I assumed, because we had never talked about the war, we had tried to avoid it. And then I realised that actually – like by avoiding the conversation we found we have very different opinions about the war. But we never bring it up really, and we try not to. Unless it's like, for a job or something. But not really. Cause it just makes things more tense." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

Nevertheless, she emphasised throughout the interview that her general attitude towards Serbian people was positive, and addressed that the issue more than anything, is politics. After all, she found Balkan people very similar to each other and was struggling to find a reason to maintain the contention:

"Like we are prone to not like each other, even though like, Kosovo people and Serbians are very similar. The whole Balkans people, we're very similar in cultures, like I noticed while I was living in the US, two of my roommates were Serbian, and like – our sense of humor was exactly the same and sometimes we wouldn't even understand each other but like, we would die laughing together, it was really fun. But like – there would still be a moment, like if you were eating together and there would still be a moment like, his family might have killed my family. So I think like it's – very political, even one-on-one relationships with – between the entities. It's very political, and especially what is going on between Kosovo and Serbia right now, it's not really – any big progress. It's very tense and that kind of – fuels people with anger. So I really do believe that if politics would, like, calm down and some sort of agreement could be reached or apology, then people would be like, willing to, I don't know, for reconciliation, something like that. It's too political." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

The remaining ten out of the eleven Albanian interviewees had hardly had any contact with ethnic Serbians, or if they had, it had remained relatively superficial. Two of the female interviewees had attended events where they had spent time with Serbian peers. Both had only positive experiences, although the topic of Kosovo conflict never came about. One of them described her experience of meeting Serbian students in a summer course in Prishtinë/Pristina:

“There were like two girls, one was from Belgrade, and the other was from Novi Sad, and they came to Prishtina for a summer course, at UP, so we would eat pizza actually, we’ve had some mutual friends and there were some words that I couldn’t describe in English, so I tried to say them in Albanian, and they were exactly the same in Serbian. And I’m talking about like then words or something, and it made our communication a lot more fun and more, we laughed a lot about those. And also I met with some people over Balkans in general like someone from Macedonia, Greece, and Serbia as well during a festival in Prizren, and I don’t know we kind of had like the same humour; we kind of clicked together a lot. But we, I mean I didn’t talk about politics with any of them, so I’m still not sure how they feel about that.” (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

From both of these accounts, it is brightening to see that they have found common grounds with representatives of the “other”, overcoming the limitations that primordialist thinking sets for ethnic identities. Yet still, as mentioned before, these contacts were sparse among the Albanian interviewees, compared to the Serbian respondents. All of the Albanian interviewees would nonetheless be interested in engaging a conversation with a Serbian. Most of them addressed that it would be interesting and potentially fruitful to discuss about the conflict, and to understand the other side of the story. With a grain of salt, that is, as one of the female respondents stated, saying that she would be willing to discuss if the other party would be honest in their account. Honesty, and addressing the truth however can be incredibly difficult in the Balkans, as explained in the previous chapters. For what has been true for one community, may not present as such for the other at all.

Interesting observations from the Albanian accounts came about when asked whether they would entertain an opportunity to get together and discuss with their Serbian peers about the conflict and Kosovo’s history. Nearly all of the respondents expressed eagerness to take part in such discussions. One of the female respondents addressed the importance on facing the reality, for both sides of the conflict:

"I would like to do that, I think that Serbians who live in Kosovo will have a lot to say, also I'm sure the war has made their lives harder, just like it has made our lives harder, so there's two sides of the war and I'm sure Albanians have committed crimes as well in the war, their families might have been affected. The same way my family was affected. I would like to share experiences and hear what their opinions are. It would be a bit uncomfortable, but yeah why not. We have to face the reality if we really want to make any progress at all." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

Another one even expressed she would be willing to enlighten and educate, if the opportunity came across:

"I would actually, I thought about that before like what if I meet a Serbian person, like my age, and I would talk to him and like what does he think about someone or a Serbian who's a bit more liberal, who's not - cause of course there's people my age who are very influenced by their parents and they probably don't even have any information to what happened, they didn't really look into it, and of course if they listen to their parents saying "Kosovo is Serbia" they're gonna think that too but I'm interested to talk about someone or even enlighten someone about what happened and I'm sure there are a lot of people my age, even a bit older, that know what happened and they acknowledge it, not all of them are people who are convinced that Kosovo is bad. I'm pretty sure there are more liberal, more open-minded people in Serbia. It's just that the majority, kind of overpowers them or something." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

One Albanian female respondent expressed interest for some type of functional event where the topic of conflict could be discussed among youth, and also addressed how important it was not to transform the grudge and anger the parents may have held to the new generations:

"If it was something I was interested in even like a debate group or something like that, it would be cool or even a place where you could talk to people about different subjects like even, maybe with Serbian youth about what happened and like, I think young people and other young people have an understanding, no matter what ethnicity or where they're from, so if I would be able or any person my age in Kosova would be able to really talk about it in a peaceful way and like, there's no need to hold grudge against people, the young people in Serbia, it's not their fault. Like as long as they don't still have those ideas of their parents or their people in their country, it's fine. And I think there are a lot of Serbian young people who know, understand, what has happened. They can be rational about it." (Albanian, female, 18 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

A male respondent addressed that this kind of discussions would be needed since government, the media and families have a tendency to further the negative perceptions and ethnic hatred. Another male respondent addressed the importance of connecting the youth through activities such as informal reconciliation programmes, and the dangers of isolation:

"I think that it's a great way to approach the youth, to try to connect them more because there are a lot of Serbians who live here, in Kosovo, and they shouldn't be left isolated, we should basically share a home, so we should also learn about each other's cultures and find ways to connect with each other." (Albanian, male, 19 years, from Gjakovë/Djakovica)

However, even if brought together, without the notion of a dialogue and responsiveness to the other one's narrative a discussion between the two sides could result in a destructive discourse where the stories from both sides would only strengthen the existing prejudices and interethnic distrust. The youngest Albanian male respondent was rather unwilling to bring up the topic of conflict with Serbian peers, claiming it would be pointless as each party would only stand on their grounds without coming to a conclusion. He also told me what he had learned about Serbian culture, revealing deep interethnic distrust still prevailing among even the youth:

"I know for a fact that when they come of certain age, they go to their church, they're not Christians by the way, I don't care about that but they are taught to hate on us, and we are not really taught on that on a young age and they tell them that Kosovo is heart of Serbia and they took it from us, we need to take it from them. They do that to all kids and they teach them hate about us and if that happens the other side of the border that could be really small progress for us and them bonding." (Albanian, male, 18 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

He himself had never been in contact with a Serbian person.

It could be assumed that being a part of the majority makes it easier to remain within one's own social group and hence avoid contact with minorities. In turn, the lack of direct contact contributes to increasing interethnic distrust and preventing opportunities to reconcile as the notions of otherness prevails. Therefore, based on the data explained above, interethnic contact can be argued to play an essential role in reconciling the youth in Kosovo and hence should be encouraged. Furthermore, providing the youth with an environment where they need to work towards common goals, such as studying in a university or having colleagues from the other community, would give them an opportunity to break away from the narrow identity narratives emphasising ethnicity and seeing them as peers.

5.2.3 The past and the politics

Across the interviews, the interviewees would quickly emphasise the role of the politics, not only in regards to the past conflict but the contemporary politics affecting their lives. A lot of frustration arose, especially among the Albanian university students studying in the University of Prishtina. While we discussed mostly about the conflict and their thoughts on the other, we eventually proceeded to talk about their futures. While the respondents studying in Kosovo's international universities were more positive about their futures, the Albanian respondents studying in the University of Prishtina were frustrated with many things, such as the landscapes of getting employment after graduation in Kosovo, and the quality of their education. As discussed in the previous chapters, University of Prishtina played a significant role in building the Albanian national identity, and the effects of that are reflected to the university until this day. Moreover the university has undergone several crisis' during the last couple of years, from political lobbying to the professors being employed while in fact being unqualified for their positions, and use of corruptive procedures among staff (Selenica 2017).

Furthermore as stated in the previous chapters the unemployment rates in Kosovo are extremely high, especially among youth. In addition to the lack of jobs matching their degrees, the employment procedures are riddled with nepotism and corrupt methods. Entering the job markets is extremely difficult for the young people, the Albanian interviewees told me. The two male interviewees addressed this, and emphasised that the only way for them to find livelihood is to move abroad. Which they can not do, as Kosovo citizens are still under strict visa requirements to enter European Union; their passports are as strong as North Korea's.

Whereas above I am describing the situation of the Albanians studying in the University of Prishtina, other interviewees agreed with everything in Kosovo remaining highly politicised, and how frustrating it was to be clinging in the past while they all wanted to move on, have opportunities in life and not be bound by the history.

"It's really holding us back. Like – I don't know, it's 2017 and we're still having meetings in Brussels about easing tensions and – I don't know we can't even leave our country without a visa. I think the youth is really fed up with the whole war thing, and we are more willing to just settle this whole thing and move on with different spheres of life."
(Albanian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

A Serbian interviewee implied the same, further saying that cooperation is going to be the only way to build better futures, and the past should have been overcome already:

"I mean I know the facts, you know, there's a difference between the facts and the things that you know from your own family, but we don't know the picture and we talk which we said, everything happened which is in the past so we don't talk like, just no, just be friends and forget about it. I mean you can't forget but everything is in the past, just the past. Work something, to build a better future, we must work together, stick together, that's the only solution." (Serbian, female, 20 years, from Gracanice/Gracanica)

Furthermore, several interviewees, both Albanian and Serbian expressed how annoyed they were from the constant provocation efforts by their own and the other community and government. It was deemed unnecessary and as something that would only nurture the anger among both sides.

When discussing about the opportunities for reconciliation, this aspect is essential to address. Without the opportunity to reflect their identities on something else than the ethnicity and the conflict, the Kosovan youth can be left in a limbo from where it can be easy to fall back to the narratives where everything is blamed by the "other", which would in turn hamper any progress made in the reconciliation front and maintain the conflict. It raises many questions on whether the government of Kosovo (and Serbia, for that matter) is doing enough to secure futures for its youth, or are the socioeconomical issues being continuously overshadowed by maintaining hostile images of the other, and accusing the other for the struggle of their own communities.

5.2.4 What might the future bring?

As my final question, I wanted to know what kind of stories would the youth pass for their own children sometime in the future, and how would they discuss about the conflict, the otherness, and Kosovo. I was curious about the narratives they would forward to the following generation, and how much they would – or would not – resemble the narratives of their own parents. A few reoccurring themes could be identified from their responses.

The majority of the interviewees explained they would emphasise that the conflict was in the past, part of history, and maintaining the negative emotions towards one another would not be fruitful for either of the parties. Furthermore, they wanted their children to grow up with the idea that ethnicity or nationality should not matter, but rather their attributes as an individual. Several accounts from the youth gave the impressions that humanity was an important value for them, and that further conflict was simply unnecessary. In turn, the youth seemed to hold less value for ethnicity rather than the previous generations, and primordialist assumptions over ethnicity were less prevalent among them; they admitted in most cases that the conflicts between the two groups had more to do with politics than anything, and that it was unlikely any individual wanted the conflict to happen at all.

Although each of them agreed that the past should remain in the past, they found it important to still discuss about the history with their future children as it still affected the contemporary Kosovo and its communities. They wanted their children to be aware, yet highlight it would not be fruitful to hang in the past.

“I would definitely tell them about the war. Because it's important to know the history of Kosovo and a lot of the mentality and everything surrounds us here, does derive from the war and what happened in Kosovo, so I think it would be very important for my children to be aware of what happened but I would not want to fuel any hatred in them for Serbian people or anything like that. It's just pointless. I'm not going fix anything by making them hate Serbians. But I would definitely tell them about the history of Kosovo. The history of Kosovo is really messed up, we've been fighting for since, we were on earth, but it would be important to tell them.” (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

“Hopefully when I have children it won't be a problem at all, it would be something that's forgotten, but I would tell them everything” – “I would tell them to not really think about it, it's not their problem. And they shouldn't hate anybody, not even Serbs, because if you hate them or go about your life with that hateful attitude you're being just like them. If you're positive and do your thing and you basically focus all your energy to making Kosovo a better place and like developing it, that's what's important, not really being hung up in the past because it's something that happened and we can't really change it.” (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

“I would tell them to know the story, to know who we were, what were they, why did they do to us, or maybe, what did we do to them, what kind of war was it, to know what our country has been through, to work for it, to not be hateful because we can not get anything good from it.” (Albanian, female, 18 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

“First of all I would tell them that (the conflict) happened a long time ago and they don't really have a reason to hate on them (Serbians) because by the time I'm going to have my own kids to tell the story, the generations that fought the war are going to be way too old and you know new generations will come. This place right here was ruled by the Turkish people for about 500 years and now all over TV they see that Turkish people are brothers so I think that after fifty or hundred years we're gonna have a better relationship with Serbians and I wouldn't try to stop that and tell my kids you have to hate them, you do not want to make friends with them. I think I would tell them that 50 years ago they massacred a whole lot of people here, they mistreated a lot of people, the war was unfair because we were so outnumbered and outcount compared to them, but now are different times. (That's what) I would probably tell them.” (Albanian, male, 18 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

“I would raise my children as in respect the law, appreciate other nations, no matter what, no matter fact, no matter about the history” – “But I will say that just leave that in the past and start building your own future.” (Serbian, female, 20 years, from Gracanice/Gracanica)

“I would like, get a perception of brotherhood and unity, like, that you should not judge a person by his nationality, and other stuff, race, religion, gender, anything. But their opinion of people should be based on them, like on those people, like if somebody is a good person, he's a good person and nevertheless of his other traits. And if he's a bad person, well, he is a bad person. Again, it doesn't matter his nationality.” (Serbian, male, 19 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

“I will try to explain what is my view of the situation and everything, and I will also try to, to tell them like about, as a human, we have nice people and we're people. It's not about like, any individual or something, it was mainly politics, so I'll try to say this in children's language or something, to explain it's politics, so they should not be, you know, getting to have this bad attitude towards any nation in the world.” (Serbian, male, 25 years, from Mitrovicë/Mitrovica)

In addition to explaining the history of Kosovo, some found it important to tell them the stories of their families. This tendency was prevalent within the two Albanian male interviewees whose families had been affected significantly by the conflict.

“I would start about telling about the history of my parents and then gradually what they encountered and what they suffered from. I would tell them which state caused the conflict and how it got started, based on the history books and everything.” (Albanian, male, 19 years, from Gjakovë/Djakovica)

“I would tell them the story of my family. I would tell them - I would suggest they read about it.” (Albanian, male, 19 years, from Gjakovë/Djakovica)

Two of the interviewees explained it would depend solely on what the situation will be in the future, in five to ten years. One of the Serbian male respondents addressed it was difficult to tell if there even would be Kosovo as we know it by that time. One of the Albanian female respondents expressed concerns of further violent conflict between Kosovo and Serbia, and explained that although she would not pass on any hatred to her children, she would probably tell them to be a bit cautious and careful, and to bear in mind anyone can have good or bad intentions, no matter who they are.

Conclusively, each of the interviewees were rather reluctant to pass on negative attitudes and considerations towards each other, and mostly addressed the importance of the "pastness of the past", encouraging the next generation to focus on their futures more than anything. A degree of cautiousness could be identified, and the interviewees with more exposure to each other had more positive views of each other and the future. Nevertheless, these results can be interpreted as somewhat positive development and potentially laying groundwork for future generations to reconcile. Yet again, it is important to address that the sampling for this study was rather small and that these results can not be generalised across the youth in Kosovo; the interviewees themselves addressed this as well, emphasising there are still lot of grudges and anger among both societies. Despite that, the results of this study do offer promising landscapes that through exposure with the "other" resulting in positive experiences, and also education, lessening interethnic distrust is possible.

As for my own experience, comparing these generational changes with my family, it took three generations to reconcile from the national trauma of the Winter War. In addition, similar to some of the interviewees, I also attended an international university allowing me to create social relationships with Russian nationals. If I were to jump to conclusions, I would argue the next generation in Kosovo should already show remarkable steps towards reconciliation, and that the ability to reconcile would reflect on the subjects' level of education as well as the exposure and positive encounters with each other. There are however a few significant differences between post-war Finland and Kosovo, addressing the role of the state. In contrast to Kosovo, Finland had to develop new industries due to the demands of war reparations for Russia which resulted in low unemployment rates and hence increasing economic stability among Finnish society. Furthermore the Finnish education system was reformed in the 1960s, contributing to the economic growth and diminishing social inequalities. Whereas these factors can not be argued to be the sole reason for the social and

economical developments in Finland, they certainly acted as key functions. However, similar developments were not prevalent in post-conflict Kosovo. Whereas it can partly be blamed for the lack of government institutions in the newlyfound state, it could also be argued that the heavy influence of international community impacted in rebuilding the economy and society in Kosovo. Although post-war Finland and Kosovo are not directly comparable to each other, I would argue focusing on resolving Kosovo's social and economical issues would contribute to the reconciliation between the communities, promoting cooperation rather than division. Nonetheless the political elite neither in Kosovo nor Serbia does not seem to prioritise these issues but to rather rely on enforcing the primordialist assumptions.

"I think Kosovo needs a lot of work and a lot of effort put into it and that's what we should work on, not the conflict. Because even though it was traumatic and everything but it won't get us anywhere, we keep thinking about it and we keep letting it influence us. But, yeah. I would tell them to look forward." (Albanian, female, 19 years, from Prishtinë/Pristina)

6 Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

While it is likely that there is still a long road ahead for reconciliation in Kosovo, the results of this study show some positive developments among the "second" generation since the Kosovo conflict. The narratives of the parents have had a significant impact on the thought processes of the young people, in both good and in bad, however the more educated the youth were the more critical they were in their thinking and interpreting the past. Moreover, the youth with high exposure to one another had significantly more neutral, and even positive, images of one another. The most immediate and burning issue addressed is the frustration of the youth and the lack of landscapes they have within Kosovo, due to the disheartening development in offering employment and sustainable future. As argued before, not only would efforts from the government to enhance Kosovo's social, educational and employment policies improve the quality of life and future for the youth, it would have positive impacts in offering gateways for them to work together across interethnic borders towards common goals. Hence, diminishing the significance of ethnicity and reflecting one's identity with other factors.

Furthermore, there is a need to reform the ways identities are built. The collective memories need to be approached with critique, transforming them from reinforcing the primordial attitudes to constructivist way of understanding identities. This could be achieved through social categorisation, where the reconciling parties could see each other beyond the ethnic borders of their identities. This could be achieved through increased exposure and creating positive experiences of one another. From the data it can be identified that effective ways for this development are through education and employment. Within these functions, the reconciling parties need to work together towards similar goals and hence, they see each other as fellow students and colleagues, reducing the significance of ethnicity. In other words, "their character has to be based on mutual socio-economic benefits" (Strapacova 2016, p 70). The identity is then reflected on other factors instead of the perception of otherness, such as cooperation and mutual wellbeing.

Nonetheless, it is not realistic to expect changes of this magnitude to happen quickly, and it will certainly require generations to come. A friend of mine who had resided in Kosovo for several years, summarised this issue well; *"Imagine having lived your whole life believing something so fundamental and important to your self and your identity, and it all comes crushing down, how would you deal with it?"*. The salience of the identity narratives seems to have been undermined in the international organisations' reconciliation efforts as well, offering third party solutions to issues that should be resolved among the peoples, when they are willing and ready for it. The local NGO initiatives have undertaken remarkable responsibility in implementing reconciliatory objectives, and although the international community can offer resources for reconciliation programmes, in the end the peoples within Kosovo should be given their space and ways to rebuild the society and reconcile as well. This also requires reforming the formal education system as a more inclusive institution; the examples from students in international universities were good examples on how functional cooperation can spark reconciliatory actions. This responsibility, however, needs to be undertaken by the government and so far the development has been minimal; relying on primordialist manipulation and ethnic division remains as an effective tool for the government of Kosovo to maintain power.

In further research, I would suggest to propose Schwegler & Smith's (2011) suggestion to intervene in addressing the ethnic divisions and attempt to reduce their salience in constructing identities. I would approach the issue by questioning what it means to be Albanian or Serbian, especially among the youth, and examine how dominant the ethnic identity in their self-interpretation. Ethnicity and historical identity narratives can not be discarded, but they can perhaps be discussed without intensity, addressing the historical evidence. I believe the coming generations, if given a chance, will have a more distant attitude to the conflict and will be able to discuss over Kosovo and Balkan history without amplified emotional aspect. As Strapacova states, "in order to deal with the centrifugal forces in Kosovar society it is necessary to accept individualised roles of people, rather than define their role on the basis of their ethnic affiliation" (Strapacova 2015, p 70). This, however, requires active interventions, preferably through local Kosovan and Serbian influencers whose example might be more relatable and powerful than an outside influence. As suggested, international interventions for peace building in Kosovo and the Balkans have had the tendency to overlook the identity narratives, epics and mythologies that have shaped the Balkan identities to what they have become. Furthermore, I would suggest researching

Serbian youth in Serbia, and what does Kosovo mean for them. Another important issue to address is media. According to the results of this study and the research subjects acknowledging how much media influences their views of the "other" and the conflict, it would be crucial to study further how do different medias depict the ethnicities and how does this affect to the populations' perceptions of each other, and the accessibility of the population to different medias as well as the variety of content in them.

While the sampling of this study was rather small and the results could only be generalised to a very narrow part of Kosovan society, it has demonstrated valuable areas for intervention in terms of future research. It is my ultimate desire to have contributed to the academic arena with an insight to the new generations of Kosovo and addressing issues in regards to their immediate futures, with an impact of providing new insights to the reconciliation objectives in Kosovo.

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Appendixes:

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Demography

Name?

Age?

Place of residence?

Tell me about yourself!

- Where do you come from, what do you do, backgrounds, family, nationality, ethnicity

Data Collection

In your own words, can you tell me about the conflict of Kosovo in 1999? How do you understand the conflict of Kosovo in 1999?

- According to your knowledge, what led to the conflict in 1999?
- According to your knowledge, what happened during the conflict?

How have you learnt about the conflict? (School, family, friends etc.)

- What have you learnt about the conflict from parents/family?
- What have you learnt about **Serbians / Albanians** from your family?

How do you personally characterise/define/describe **Serbians / Albanians** ?

- Have you been in personal contact with **Serbians / Albanians** of your own age?
- Do you have **Serbians / Albanians** as acquaintances?
- Do you have **Serbian / Albanian** friends?

If NOT,

- Would you make an attempt to make acquaintances or friends if given a chance?
- Would you be responsive if approached in a friendly manner by a **Serbian / Albanian**?
- There are projects that aim to bring Albanian and Serbian youth together to meet and talk and do activities. What do you think of these programs?
- Would you personally participate one if given a chance? Why/why not?
- Would you actively seek to participate?
- Would you want to get to know the other youth?
- Would you be curious to hear their thoughts on the same conflict? Why/Why not?

If YES,

- Have you ever talked about the conflict with a **Serbian / Albanian** friend?
- What was the result of the conversation?
- How do you discuss the conflict?

Imagine having your own family and kids. What would you tell your children about the conflict?

- What would you tell them about **Serbians / Albanians** ?