HIDDEN MINORITIES IN KOSOVO: "WE FEEL LIKE GHOSTS IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY"

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COBISS 1.01

ABSTRACT

Hidden Minorities in Kosovo: "We Feel like Ghosts in our Own Community"

This article presents an analysis of the self-representation of the smaller (non-Serbian and non-Kosovo-Albanian) minorities in Kosovo. On the basis of in-depth interviews with representatives of different minorities living in Kosovo such as Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Gorani, Croats and Turks, we reveal the ways in which they express their perceptions of living in the "new" Kosovo. The main contention of the article is that while these minority groups openly express that they are subject to discrimination and acknowledge how Kosovo Albanians and Serbs frame them as the "Other", they want to remain "hidden".
Keywords: hidden minorities, nationalism, communication, Kosovo, former Yugoslavia

IZVLEČEK

Skrite manjšine na Kosovu – »V naši lastni skupnosti se počutimo kot duhovi«

Avtorici v članku predstavljata analizo (samo)reprezentacij majhnih, nesrbskih in nealbanskih manjšin na Kosovu. V poglobljenih intervjujih s predstavniki različnih manjšin na Kosovu (z Romi, Aškali, Egipčani, Bošnjaki, s Hrvati, Gorani in s Turki) razkrivata načine, s katerimi ti izražajo svoje razumevanje življenja na »novem« Kosovu. Njuna ključna ugotovitev je, da manjšinske skupine odprto razkrivajo diskriminacijo in prevladujočo uokvirjanje njihovih skupnosti kot »Drugih« s strani kosovskih Albancev in Srbov, obenem pa želijo ostati »skrite«.
Ključne besede: skrite manjšine, nacionalizem, komuniciranje, Kosovo, nekdanja Jugoslavija

INTRODUCTION

The majority population in Kosovo, Kosovo Albanians, proclaimed their independence from Serbia on the 17th of February, 2008. However, Kosovo is still under the control of the International Community (IC) that continues to attempt to build a multiethnic, tolerant state. About 14,000 NATO troops are on hand to keep the peace. The economy continues to be very weak, with the unemployment rate at 45 per cent (Palme 2009). The declaration of independence itself triggered the re-positioning of ethnic communities within Kosovo. Relations between the majority and minority communities are especially effected.

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Kosovo has a population of approximately 2 million, with roughly 87 per cent Albanians, 7 per cent Serbs, 3 per cent Muslims (Bosniaks and Gorani), 2 per cent Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians and 2 per cent Turks (Minority Rights Group International Report 2004). Rural Kosovo remains especially multiethnic because the people who live there remained throughout the turmoil of the last few decades.

Ethnic politics dominates political discourse and institutions in Kosovo, a point underscored by both politicians and scholars. However, they usually focus on the questions of whether and how Serbs in Kosovo remain at serious risk of death or injury, and on the "problem of guaranteeing the rights of Kosovo Serbs only, as if only Albanians and Serbs live in Kosovo". Many smaller non-Serb minorities live in Kosovo (the Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Bosniak, Gorani, Croatian and Turkish minorities), which are usually addressed and framed by Kosovo Albanians as "the Other" (Baldwin 2006; Mueller 2007; *Human Rights World Report 2009*; Stevens 2009). There are also complicated and sometime tense relations between the minorities themselves – for example, according to the Egyptians, the Ashkali are really Egyptians, who present themselves as a separate community only under Albanian pressure. According to the Ashkali, the Egyptians are trying to assimilate them. The Egyptians are trying to assimilate them. However, what these various groups have in common is the problematic treatment that they receive from the Kosovo Albanian majority: different minorities are targeted collectively and in a negative way (Cahn 2007). All the minorities have suffered expulsion from their homes, discrimination and violence, and restrictions on speaking their own language, and continue to do so (Baldwin 2006; Mueller 2007; *Human Rights World Report 2009*; Stevens 2009).

This study attempts to fill the research gap in the area of political minorities research in Kosovo through an analysis of the self-representation of these smaller (non-Serbian and non-Kosovo-Albanian) minorities. We want to contribute to an understanding of contemporary discourses about the situation of minorities in Kosovo. Our primary goal is to reveal how non-Serbian minorities in Kosovo perceive their position within Kosovo and respond to "Othering" by Kosovo Albanians. An ethnographic study of representatives of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Bosniak, Gorani, Croat and Turkish communities is used here to explore the ways in which members of these communities express the perception of living in Kosovo, and strategies of negotiation and opposition to their otherness. The main contention of the article is that while these minority groups express their discriminated situation, and acknowledge how Kosovo Albanians frame them as the "Other", they want to remain "hidden". Within the context of the continuing economic and political crisis, with a decline of domestic output, increasing unemployment and neglect, these groups do not want to become an active political subject, and we identify a general refusal to be politically engaged.

The first part of this article presents a theoretical background on the construction of national identity, otherness and hidden minorities. Then we focus on different interpretations of hidden minorities and their situation in Kosovo. Lastly, we introduce our methodology and data collection, and present our analysis of the study's findings.

NATIONAL IDENTITY, OTHERNESS AND HIDDEN MINORITIES

Every nation- and state-building project generates a self and "Others" in the course of the formation of a polity (Alonso 1994). Jan Penrose believes that "as individuals liken themselves to some people and distinguish themselves from others, bonds are formed between people who see themselves as similar" (Penrose 1995: 402). It is the task of a state and "nation-builders" (such as educational or media apparatuses) to ensure that inclusion and exclusion are codified and maintained (James 1996: 33). Without such markers a new national identity will not be created because it is only through confrontation with the "Other" that the community sees what it is and what it is not and what it lacks by recognizing its

"constitutive outside" (Hall 1996: 4-5). Thus, the construction of a national identity requires the use of a constituting "Other" to create external difference. Otherness and national identity are closely related as they both define who the "we" and "they" are (Eriksen 1993). "They" are the "Others" who are not regarded as a part of the political community, the nation, or as citizens of the state (ibid.). Identity cannot be understood except in relation to "Others" – without "Others" a unified in-group will be difficult to construct.

Because most of the states in the Balkan region are based on the idea of the nation-state of one dominant (or "constituent", i.e. eponymous) nation (under whose banner the nations fought against the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century), the idea of expelling ethnically "foreign" populations had already emerged at the beginning of the formation of these states.

In the process of forming national identities, the states, such as Kosovo, have to assert their national identity and sovereignty vis-à-vis the former metropolis, now defined as the "Other" (Alonso 1994). In recent decades, especially after 1981, Kosovo Albanians were involved in an intense national-identity-building process. In 1981 they demanded that Kosovo become a full republic in former Yugoslavia (at the time, it only had the status of an autonomous province, precisely because of the high number of different minorities in Kosovo). In 1989, after the removal of their political autonomy, systematic, ethnically motivated discrimination was perpetrated against Kosovo Albanians by the Milosevic regime (Ramet 2005). At that time, the Serbs, accused of war crimes against Kosovo Albanians, became Kosovo Albanians' Other (Graczyk and Giannakos 2006).

Similarly, as many scholars point out, Kosovo Albanians represent the Other for the Serbs (Blagojevic 2000). There were many historical events that contributed to this image. One of the most important is that the official Serbian narrative has actively started to remember and interpret specific historical events. According to this narrative, the Battle of Kosovo, a battle fought between Serbian and Turkish forces on June 28, 1389, ultimately resulted in Serbian sacrifice, which elevated them to the status of a heavenly and chosen people. This myth was generalized and focused on well-established Jewish imagery in such a way that Kosovo became the "Serbian Jerusalem." Serbian politicians started to represent Albanians as colonizers and persecutors, pointing to the massive migration of Serbs from Kosovo in the 1980s that has been the cause and the consequence of the change in Kosovo's ethnic structure. On one hand, according to the Serbs, the Kosovo Serbs had a historical right to continue their rule of Kosovo (for more see Ramet 2005). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Kosovo Albanians were represented in the mainstream Serbian media as second-class citizens, barbarians, criminals, drug-dealers, and uncivilized traitors (for more see Andrejevich 1997; Markovic 2003; Petrovic 2008). And because of discrimination and even war crimes against Serbs by Kosovo Albanians during and after the Kosovo war (1999) (Ramet 2005), Kosovo Albanians became the national enemy for Serbs in the Republic of Serbia (Erjavec and Volcic 2007) and Kosovo (Duijzings 2000; Petrovic 2008).

On the other hand, the Albanian claims for Kosovo are based on ethnic grounds, i.e. on the fact that the population is now predominantly Albanian. Thus, Albanians and Serbs are each other's Others.

Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo share one more unified feature in the building of their national identities. They both frame smaller minorities, such as Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Gorani, Croats and Turks, as the Other (Mladenovic 2004; Baldwin 2006; Mueller 2007; *Human Rights World Report 2009*; Stevens 2009). If Kosovo Serbs and Albanians are "undeniably other" to each other, they both perceive these small minorities as even "a lesser other" (Petrovic 2008: 69). These minorities are not seen as threatening either the Serb or Albanian Kosovo core identity, but they are understood as dangerous enough to frame them as enemies. This "Otherness" from the Serbian side is mostly based on the linguistic (for more see Greenberg 2004) and religious difference (for more see Markovic 2003).

With the gradual development of the Kosovo "parallel system" that was created by Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs in the 1990s, the minorities were caught in a gap between the (Albanian) power of numbers and the (Serbian) power of government. This situation left them hardly any choice but to opt for one of the two societies. Individual decisions on "to whom to belong and express loyalty" de-

pended on many issues. Thus, some opted for the Albanian shadow society, others for the Serbian official society. Neither decision, however, meant that they were fully accepted and integrated into the specific society of their choice.

For Kosovo Albanians, the difference from minorities is not necessarily religious (since they share three different religions) (for more see Duijzings 2000, Petrovic 2005) but is based on a so-called "feeling" of betrayal: namely, some small minorities supported the Milosevic regime during the Kosovo war (1999) (Baldwin 2006; Mueller 2007; *Human Rights World Report 2009*; Stevens 2009). This similar logic, when a majority proclaims minorities as "traitors" if they do not act according to their expectations, is observable in many cases in the Balkans, for example in the Serbian attitude towards Slavophone Muslims. Slavophone Muslims are supposedly Serbs that "betrayed Serbhood" while adopting Islam instead of Orthodoxy as the main religion. Milica Bakic-Hayden defines this as a "betrayal syndrome" (Bakic-Hayden 1995; see also, Petrovic 2008). The consequences of the relationship between the Kosovo Albanians and smaller non-Serbian minorities are shown in the form of exclusion from institutional policy-making and different kinds of discrimination of small minorities (Baldwin 2006; Mueller 2007; *Human Rights World Report 2009*; Stevens 2009).

Promitzer calls such small minorities "hidden minorities", because they are institutionally unrecognized, publicly invisible and absent from policy-making institutions (Promitzer 2004: 11). Their members share an idea of a common origin and the importance of that origin for their identity (ibid.: 23). According to Promitzer, hidden minorities do not want to identify themselves as ethnically different from their surrounding population in public and/or there is no intention to recognise them as ethnic minorities within the state in which they are subjects. We argue that the Kosovo hidden minorities are different from other minorities – for example, Orthodox Serbs in Bela Krajina, Slovenia, who automatically reject the argument that they are marginalized in a national sense (Promitzer 2003) – they clearly reveal their otherness and discrimination, but they want to retain their "hiddenness".

THE SITUATION OF HIDDEN MINORITIES IN KOSOVO

Following the NATO bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in June 1999 and the return of ethnic Albanians from abroad, approximately four fifths of Kosovo's pre-1999 minorities – an estimated 100,000 people – have been expelled from their homes. The ethnic structure in Kosovo was significantly changed in 1999, when Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali refugees left the province, mostly because of "not feeling safe".

There are two main contradictory views on the current situation of hidden minorities (or, as they are defined by Kosovo's legal system, "communities"). The Kosovo government (The IMG report is factually not accurate 2009) and the international community, for example the EU Commission (Conclusions of the EU's general affairs and external relations council 2008), argue that non-Serbian minorities possess all rights guaranteed by the new Kosovo Constitution, especially in the fields of political participation, language use, and access to education. The Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development, for example, claims that the Kosovo Assembly allocates 20 seats for members of minority groups (10 Serbs, 3 Bosniaks, 2 Turks, 1 Gorani, 1 Roma, 1 Ashkali, and 1 Egyptian) – this is supposed to serve as proof that no minorities in Europe are represented to this degree (Administration and Governance in Kosovo 2005). But reports by various human rights organizations reveal that in practice the hidden minorities are absent from policy-making practice. The Kosovo Constitution prescribes that any decision-making process which directly affects minorities' interests, such as the amendment or adoption of laws on certain issues of direct concern to minority groups, must be approved by both a majority of the Assembly and a majority of the parliamentary members representing non-majority communities present and voting (Baldwin 2006; Mueller 2007; *Human Rights World Report 2009*; Stevens 2009). Thus, the political practice shows that any acceptance of minorities' demands in the Kosovo Assembly is precluded in

practice because the Serb representatives boycott the Assembly (Mueller 2007). The right to politically participate is defined in the Kosovo Constitution and national laws in a way that can be achieved only on paper. In reality, there is no consensus among the many different minorities on one hand (especially among the Serbs, who demand a special status, and the hidden minorities), and the majority (ibid.). Furthermore, at the municipal level, guaranteed representation for non-majority members in the municipal executive exists only where residents from minority groups exceed 10 per cent of the population (Law on Local Self Government 2008). Human rights organizations caution that for hidden minorities not representing at least 10 per cent of the population in any given municipality, this system fails to ensure their representation or protect their constitutional rights at the municipal level (Baldwin 2006; Mueller 2007; *Human Rights World Report 2009*; Stevens 2009).

Mueller (2007) also provides data on the minority population of each Kosovo municipality and shows that there is not a single resident belonging to an ethnic minority in South Mitrovica/Mitrovice. This municipality is in fact home to more than 800 Roma and Ashkali as well as a few hundred Turks and Bosniaks. The same is said of Mamusha, where several Roma live (ibid.). He also claims that, in many other municipalities with sizable non-Serb minority groups, the number of ethnic minorities is considerably undercounted (ibid.). Such omission or reduction of minority numbers makes it difficult to facilitate an adequate allocation of resources for those groups.

All ethnic groups in Kosovo also have the constitutional right to education in their own language (Kosovo Constitution, Article IV), but there is a shortage of textbooks for primary and secondary education and official education documentation published in their own languages (Stevens 2009). The university in Prishtine/Pristina now only offers courses taught in Albanian (ibid.). The new Kosovo Constitution only guarantees Albanian and Serbian as official national languages (Kosovo Constitution, Article IV), but the decision of whether to recognize the Bosnian, Roma and Turkish languages at the municipal level is left to the discretion of the municipalities (ibid.).

Human rights reports conclude that neither the new Kosovo Constitution nor the new statutes properly protect and promote smaller minorities' needs and concerns, and in some cases have served to worsen their legal situation (Baldwin 2006; Mueller 2007; *Human Rights World Report 2009*; Stevens 2009). The hidden minorities in Kosovo have yet to see resolution or redress for oppression and human rights violations since the late 1990s, such as attacks and occupation of the homes of Bosniaks, Croats and Gorani, and an inability to exercise their language rights in public for fear of harassment. The situation today has improved, for example, in including minority languages in schools, but the lack of security, limited access to the education system, health care and employment, and very limited inclusion in the various reconstruction programmes are still characteristic of the minorities' situation. Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians who were displaced from their homes have faced severe difficulties in returning. Returning is not sustainable as there is no clear framework for resettlement, no housing to replace destroyed homes, and no reintegration policies. Even where houses are rebuilt, such as after the March 2004 attacks, many Roma do not return due to fear of further attacks. Their lack of documentation affects their ability to access basic economic, social and legal rights such as health insurance, social assistance, education and access to courts. The majority of hidden minorities suffer from lack of access to information or to tertiary education in their own languages, and discrimination due to association with the former Serbian majority. This combined with tough economic conditions means that some members of minority communities, including Croats, Bosniaks and Turks, are starting to leave the new Kosovo altogether (ibid.).

Lantschner (2008), who analyzed a new legislative framework for the protection of minority groups in Kosovo, developed some conclusions based on a strategic compromise. She claims that in Kosovo, there is an advanced law that in many respects fits perfectly in line with or even ahead of the standards applied in other European countries. But there is also a significant discrepancy between law and practice, between the lip service paid by many politicians and the priorities they set in their political agenda, between institutional frameworks and their proper functioning (ibid.). She concludes that, "there remain an enormous number of structural and legal challenges ahead of Kosovo" (Lantschner 2008: 490).

DATA COLLECTION AND METHOD

The purpose of the study is to present an insight into how younger members of hidden minorities express, negotiate and oppose Kosovo Albanians' otherness and discrimination. Despite Promitzer's assertion that in order to understand the hidden minorities' identities one should focus on members of older generations (Promitzer 2004), we want to study younger generations and their articulations and narratives about their identity. Younger generations are the most vulnerable to assimilation and are confronted by exclusion and discrimination in the fields of education and work.

The data include 42 problem-centred, qualitative interviews with hidden minorities aged 18–35, nearly split along gender lines (18 women and 24 men). Two main thematic questions were asked: (a) how do hidden minority groups perceive themselves and their position within Kosovo society and (b) how do they explain this position and where do they find causes for it. Young members of minorities were drawn from a sample composed of Roma (6), Ashkali (6), Egyptians (6), Bosniaks (6) Gorani (6), Croats (6), and Turks (6). Roughly speaking, it can be stated that Roma can be found all over Kosovo, while Egyptians, currently, can be found predominantly on the Dukagjin Plain (i.e. Metohija, in the western part of Kosovo) and Ashkali on the Kosovo Plain (in the eastern part of Kosovo). Numerically, the largest population of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians live in the municipality of Gjakovë/Djakovica. Approximately 7000 Egyptians and Roma live in this municipality, of whom the vast majority declare themselves as Egyptians. Large communities can be found in Prizren (4500, predominantly Roma), Ferizaj/Uroshevac (4000, mostly Ashkali, a few hundred Roma), Peja/Pec (4000, Egyptians and Roma), Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje (2300, majority Ashkali), Lipljan (1700, majority Roma and Ashkali), Obilic/Obiliq (1500 Roma and Ashkali), Klina (1200 Roma and Egyptians), Podujevo (1000, majority Ashkali), Istog/Istok (800, Egyptians and Roma). In the Serbian enclave of Grachanica and the surrounding villages, which belong to the municipality of Prishtinë/Prishtina, there are 1000 Roma. In the town of Prishtina there are approximately 140 Ashkali.

We deliberately did not interview the political representatives of the selected groups, because some representatives of hidden minority groups cannot represent the concerns of the community (Stevens 2009: 16). We focused on "ordinary" people, of different professions and education, with unemployed prevailing (22 informants), with primary (20 informants) and secondary (13 informants) education. The empirical data is based on in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews conducted in different regions in Kosovo in 2009, one year after the declaration of independence. In methodological literature, it is widely recognized that if handled properly, in-depth interviews are the most likely way to get in-depth information about the feelings, experiences, and perceptions of research subjects (Schutt 2001). This research technique was used to gather data on the informants' perceptions beyond the official declarations of leaders as reported in the media, and thus to offer more in-depth information on perceptions than surveys generally show. Both researchers speak Serbian and Croatian, for other languages, predominantly Albanian, we relied on a research assistant. The interviews were conducted in different places – where informants wanted to meet – but mostly in their homes. They usually lasted an hour and a half per interview. The interviews were recorded, after the interviewees had given their consent. All tapes were transcribed and translated into English, and all the interview notes were written up. Each interview was analyzed by both researchers, with a help of a research assistant, when necessary. Because of the space limitation of this article, only the common characteristics and major differences of the discourses of the hidden minorities are analyzed. To ensure the respondents' anonymity, we labelled our informants by using only the name of their minority group and their age.

First, the self-perceptions of hidden minorities will be presented, followed by explanations for the causes of their position. Lastly, strategies used to oppose their otherness will be presented.

RESULTS

Hidden minorities' perception of themselves

All our informants share three dominant perceptions and explanations for their otherness. They see themselves as the "eternal other", as the "real enemy", and as "the worst [conditions] now, since we are the most discriminated against".

"We are the eternal other"

All the informants perceive themselves as "the eternal other" within either Serbian dominated or Kosovo Albanian dominated Kosovo. They share the feeling that they have always been "the other" – excluded, marginalized, and hated – in Kosovo because of the national conflict between the Serbs and Kosovo Albanians.

> Because the Serbs and Albanians are always fighting, are always in conflict, we are always the ones who are hated... whoever has power hates us. I tell you, we are always the ones who they beat up! (22-year-old male Bosniak)

They have also expressed the belief that the stronger nations have always, on the basis of their own ideological and political interests, forced a specific version of the future on them, and do not really allow the status of neutrality.

> The big nations look only after their own interests... however they feel and whoever has more power in the region... they decide regardless of any other concerns. They decide who we are and what we do. We have no power, we don't count. We can stand on our head, but in political terms, we cannot do anything. (19- year-old male Ashkali)

"We are the real enemy"

All informants also perceive themselves as "a real enemy" to Kosovo Albanians, who they call "Shiptars". They feel that "Shiptars" hate them, use violence against them, steal from them, and employ various types of discrimination against them. According to many, the Kosovo Albanians have, because of the international pressure during the independence events, replaced their hatred of the Serbs with hating them, the "hidden minorities".

> So what should I tell you... how do we live here. Very shortly: this is suffering to live here... Where to start? The Shiptars beat us up... my child, just going to school is regularly beaten, they steal things from her... she comes back home crying. They steal our cows. They steal our houses... the ones that belong to people who left for Germany, and they just come and steal, or they just move in... Here, look, my neighbour – he and his family left for Munich five months ago, and one weekend, I have no idea how many of them...came and they took doors, windows, even rugs with them... they just took everything. One could just go crazy, I tell you. They feel they have the power now, and because they can't really be mean to the Serbs anymore, they started to vent their anger at us... we remain the "bastard" who they want to hate, and rob. Basically, I think they just don't want us here... (27-year-old male Croat)

They see themselves as "a real enemy", because the Kosovo judicial and police system does not protect them and the members of the international community do not pay attention to their situation. Moreover, Kosovo law enforcement treats them in discriminatory way: the Kosovo judicial system does not prosecute criminal cases and ethnically motivated violence against them. The informants, for example, stated that not a single domestic war crimes case had been filed in which the victims were non-Albanians, despite well-known crimes against them, especially against Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians and Gorani. Due to the fear of harassment, and the experience of authorities not cooperating or not prosecuting crimes committed against them, these groups are reluctant to report instances of discrimination or crimes against them.

> Crimes that are committed against us are not even acknowledged. There are many examples... any family can tell you that there is a selective law here. And now you tell me... what that means. Any attacks on Albanians are detected, so you show the efficiency of police and courts, but about any attacks on non-Albanians you are silenced. That is pure injustice and hypocrisy and means that we are "the enemies". The Shiptars don't really say this aloud, because the international community controls the situation here... but also the internationals don't do anything to help us. The Shiptars basically hate us, this is also shown in the police and judicial discrimination... We don't even call the police anymore. Why would we? So that they will humiliate us, laugh at us, but do nothing? We are not people for them! (26-year-old female Roma)

These groups/communities also see themselves as "a real enemy" because Kosovo Albanians economically discriminate against them. They claim that Kosovo Albanians employ only "their own people", but not them. "There is not a lot of jobs but the Kosovo Albanians still present themselves as people who work hard, and present us as the lazy ones, who are basically guilty that the country is undeveloped."

> Look ... I can tell you my own situation. I am young, 21 years old, a mechanic, but the Shiptars will not employ me... because I am not one of "them". I was told that to my face. They will employ their own people, despite the fact that I might work harder and better... I understand the weak economy, and no jobs. But it's more than that. There are significant differences between us and them... look...my friends and neighbours, they just don't have a job, but all the Shiptars have. And they call us lazy! I would prefer to work ... instead of just waiting here, and sitting around... I think they hate us, they don't trust us, and they want us out. They want to show to themselves and the world... that they are the best, that they work... but that we are slow and lazy. The Serbs have it much better: some of them even get double pensions, from Kosovo and Serbia! (21-year-old male Ashkali)

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians from the Albanian part of Mitrovica/Mitrovice, South Mitrovice/Mitrovica, perceived themselves as "a real enemy" because the Kosovo Albanian institutions do not issue them personal ID documents in order to push them out of Kosovo. The lack of registered titles and documents also impedes their return to the informal settlements they occupied before the war. Non-documentation also affects their ability to access basic political freedoms, including the right to vote, to participate as a candidate in elections, economic, social and legal rights such as health insurance, social assistance, education and access to courts.

> We all who live in the area of South Mitrovica and are not Shiptars are in reality their enemies. That's how they think of us, and that's how we have started to feel. They basically hate us, and want us to leave, so they can be alone in Kosovo... That's why we do not get papers. Even the Serbs have papers, but we don't. It's not clear to you, how is that possible, right? Let me tell you… When Shiptars bombed our Mahalla, we escaped from here, over the river Ibar, over there… into the northern part, where the Serbs live. Not so long ago, the city council still would help to re-build the houses and farms of people who don't have ID documents or ownership forms. UNMIK and some other international organizations donated money… and we came back to our land. Of course! Everyone wants to live on his land! But the problem now is that my family, and some other families… look, those

neighbours there, too…well, we cannot legally live here, because the Shiptars will not give us the documents. For three years now, we have had no papers. We have no citizenship, passports, no money… I have been waiting for these papers for more than three years, basically. Because we have no proof of ownership we can't prove that we had a house here, and a barn, and that we need some help to rebuild it all. But now, you tell me how could I have any papers? That's impossible... And if it's impossible, why are they doing this to us? I will tell you why: they want us out of Kosovo. For them, we are now the real enemies. The Serbs are over there, over the river, but we are still here, and they want to be alone, they want to have a clean Kosovo. They say I don't exist, but you see me, right? I exist... (35-year-old female Roma)

"It's the worst now"

Most informants would compare their current situation to the past. They would similarly express that their current conditions are the worst ever. They feel and perceive that they are the most discriminated against and that these days life is really hard, harder than ever before. They share the feeling that this is the worst time that they have ever experienced because of different reasons, but they all emphasize poverty connected to social marginalization – discrimination regarding employment – and economic conditions in Kosovo.

It hasn't been this hard for us, never. My mother likes to talk about the times when our families always had enough food and money to live. We haven't been rich, never, but we lived normal lives. Meat on the table, too. But now I am afraid that the day will come when I will literally not have enough food to feed my children. My mother never feared that. So the way we live now, it's not a life. It's hell... As you see, our economic situation is aggravated by the fact that our businesses are boycotted by the Albanians. So my husband can't get a job just because he is not Albanian. How do we survive? My husband's brother sends us money from Italy. If something happens to him…if he loses his job… I have no idea how we will survive. (34-year-old female Gorani)

Turks ironically claim that they had the best and most prosperous time during the times of socialist Yugoslavia. Now, they have less opportunity to speak, hear, be educated in and use their mother tongue in official capacities and at work than they did in the pre-Milosevic SFRY.

Under the Yugoslavian Constitution, the Turkish language enjoyed equal status with Serbo-Croatian and Albanian, but following the Law of 2007, Turkish is no longer recognized as an official language in some municipalities where we have been living for centuries. […] Unlike in the former Yugoslavia, identification cards are not produced in Turkish. […] And the government is no longer supporting our previously publicly funded newspaper… there are also no jobs in our language. (35-year-old male Turk)

The causes of Otherness

"They hate us because they think we were supporting the Serbs"

All the informants felt that the reason that Kosovo Albanians saw them as enemies was in their false idea that they sympathized, cooperated and collaborated with Milosevic's regime.

They think we are not good people. They hate us because they believe we supported the Serbs. But that's completely false! Everyone knows what the Serbs were doing to us in Bosnia! We would have never supported them... That's crazy to think we were supporting them... We speak the same language, that's why they think we were Serb supporters... (33-year-old male Bosniak)

The Kosovo Turks claim that they actually have the most rights among the hidden minorities. They explain that the official status of the Turkish language was taken away from them in 2007, but see the reason for this in previous Serbian manipulation against the Albanian minority. The Serbs favoured the Turks in order to minimize the position of the Albanians. The Turkish language was declared the third official language in Kosovo in the SFRY Constitution of 1974. The same policy continued even during Milosevic's regime, so that the Albanians considered the Turks his collaborators.

> You ask me what our situation is like in Kosovo... If I compare ourselves with the others, I have to admit that we somehow have an advantageous position. But our biggest problem is language. The Albanians took away the right to use the Turkish language. That happened because of historical political manipulation that we actually were not even a part of. Serbian nationalists used us in their political manipulations with Albanians. And Milosevic continued this policy, so now the Shiptars claim that we were his collaborators… That's not true! […] Now, we only want Turkish to be one of the official languages recognized in Kosovo, so that we can speak it… where we live, where we work, where we socialize. You know, the mother tongue is crucial for us and our children. (35-year-old male Turk)

Opposing the otherness

Comparing Kosovo Albanians with the Taliban, the Nazis, Islamists and Mafia

A major strategy employed by the informants to oppose the otherness is framing Kosovo Albanians as a negative and deceptive community. Each minority uses different comparisons that are specific to their own identity. Gorani, Turkish and Bosniak informants, who are, like the majority of Albanians, Muslims, have compared Kosovo Albanians to the Taliban, in order to justify their own distinctiveness from them. Generally, the Taliban is positioned within Islam as a fundamentalist group which continues to challenge peace efforts in Afghanistan, while aiding and sheltering Al-Qaeda (Sullivan 2007).

> Tell me whether it is normal to share love for the same God, to go to the same mosques, but they continue to hate us and see us as Serb lovers. These are not normal people, I tell you. They are the Taliban of the Balkans. Only people who are really radical are capable of this hatred, and they cannot see beyond their own borders. Some of our people say that Albanians are our brothers. But if we have learned anything from the Balkan story it is that there are no brothers here. (25-year-old male Bosniak)

Because religion is a crucial marker of identity for Croats, they have also focused on it as a comparator. They compare Kosovo Albanians with "radical Islamists". This comparison is used similarly by the Serbian minority in Kosovo (Petrovic 2008). At the same time the Muslims are positioned as "radical Islamists", "violent militants", or simply "terrorists", in the Western dominant discourses, especially after September 11, 2001 (Erjavec and Volcic 2007).

> The current situation in Kosovo is insecure for us. We feel threatened and we don't feel secure. There are only around 350 of us here, but even ten years ago, there were maybe ten times more of us... but everyone left! If the Albanians hadn't become and behave like radical Islamists, there would be more of us Croats in Janjevo. (29-year-old male Croat)

The Roma informants who live in the Cesmin Lug camp for displaced persons after their displacement and violent expulsion by Kosovo Albanians and the destruction of their traditional Mahalla (quarter) in Mitrovice/Mitrovica, compare Albanians with those groups which are responsible for the largest Roma genocide in European history (Trubeta 2003): the "Nazis". Specifically, the Cesmin Lug settlements sit

on land contaminated by toxic metals. And what was supposed to be temporary accommodation has turned permanent. Despite calls by the World Health Organization, Human Rights Watch, and others to evacuate Osterode and Cesmin Lug, some 450 Roma continue to live there.

> They are worse than the Nazis, because even the Nazis were more humane than the Albanians in [their] mass executions of Roma. Who can live and who can survive in such a context? This is not healthy...it is sick and dangerous... not normal. Really, it's impossible. (35-year-old female Roma)

All the Turkish informants, but also some Bosniaks, Gorani and Croats compared Kosovo Albanians with the Italian mafia. According to them, the whole government system works according to the mafia principles of clans, blackmail, fear, and illegal trade in cigarettes, oil, money, arms, drugs, and human organs. There is a political hypocrisy, Turkish informants claim, in how the main politicians and administrators behave towards the IC and the situation on the ground towards minority groups. Although the laws may be good on paper, they say, in practice these laws are not working and the minority groups are marginalized.

> Albanians work according to the mafia principle. Even worse, this state itself is a mafia state. You know, everything here functions only if you obey clans – you know, the principle of "ours" get jobs, but "theirs" don't. Then there is a lot of blackmailing, and illegal business... like trafficking in people, organs, and oil, anything... Look how many gas stations there are in Kosovo, every village has at least two... but they don't need even one... These are all money laundries. And furthermore, look how they know how to behave in front of the IC and how they know when to pass good laws in the parliament! But you have to understand, we don't benefit from this... that's all just on paper. In practice, all these laws don't work! On the outside, everything looks nice, but in reality, nothing functions. Well, it functions as they want it to function. Yes, and themselves, they function as a mafia. There is no unity among them, either – it's a clan-based community. But in front of the world, they mobilize and work as one. That is how they are. (35-year-old male Turk)

"The representatives of the IC are like a mafia"

Using the strategy of comparison, the informants also compared the members of the international community in Kosovo (previously UNMIK, now EULEX, ICR) with a "mafia", but they used different metaphors: they act in an arrogant and aggressive way; they don't work, just give orders; and they look only after their own interests.

> They don't work here. They don't do anything. All they do is they collect their money and tell everyone else what to do... it's like a mafia. You can see it yourself how they drive around in their big, luxurious cars. In the evenings, they enjoy life in cafes, which because of them have completely changed. The music that we used to listen to is not there anymore. Only Western music, and Western drinks... (30-year-old male Egyptian)

The informants also argue that the IC representatives are not familiar with the different cultures and languages in Kosovo, that they do not respect the inhabitants and their lifestyles. The informants claim that most of the "internationals" remain ignorant, but they still want their presence, because it assures some control of Albanian nationalism.

> Look... they don't even try to learn our languages or our habits. They are not interested in us. They don't respect us, our culture, nothing is sacred for them. When there is Ramadan, and they should follow the rules, they eat during the day...in front of us... as if they are making fun of us. They don't work at all, they order people around, what they want. It's like a mafia. They only do things that will benefit them, that will serve their interest. How-

ever, no matter what, it's still ok that they are here, because if they weren't, the Shiptars would go completely crazy and marginalize us even more. (22-year-old male Ashkali)

"We only want to be left alone, so we can live as our grandfathers did"

The second opposition to otherness was the escape into tradition by comparing themselves to their ancestors who also lived in hardship, but survived here in Kosovo.

Our people have lived here in Kosovo for centuries… this is our home. Our culture, our habits are here… every generation educates the next one about life here. If so many generations survived here, all the poverty and violence, well, so can we. They were strong and did not leave. Well, we have to be tough, too. They should just give us peace, so we can live the way we want. (24-year-old male Bosniak)

The informants want to live similarly to their ancestors – close to nature, in a traditional way. If they left now, they would understand this as a betrayal of their own community, family, and relatives, since they would reject and not fight for their own tradition. This is the connection that they have with Kosovo.

We think of leaving… of course we do. This situation is hard, and… many have left already. Especially the ones who go and study in Turkey, they don't come back. For now, we'll stay. We get strength from our ancestors; they were living here for centuries. If we left now, that would mean betraying them. It would mean that they haven't planted the seeds for us well and that they have sacrificed for nothing – so we don't want to leave. We also don't want to abandon our tradition, our way of life… Look, we were always very good citizens, and we don't want to cause trouble. Just leave us alone… so we can live as we did. We don't demand anything more and nothing less [than] what we had in the past: our language, our schools, and our media…well, television in our own language. (33-year-old male Turk)

Because of the strategy of escape into their tradition that keeps them alive, these informants feel it's very important to hide the crucial elements of their tradition from outsiders. This is also the main reason why they don't want to be politically active. They feel that with political participation they would allow foreigners/outsiders, i.e. Albanians and others, to enter their lives. That would allow the outsiders to regulate their lives, and that could seriously threaten their way of life (their internal cultural patterns), that they and their ancestors have led for centuries.

Please, dear God, don't let the Shiptars come here and to order us how to live our lives. We have to protect ourselves from them, we have to protect what our ancestors taught us is sacred… our language, our religion… our food… you know, we eat pork, which Shiptars generally do not, and we have other customs and habits. Our lives are different, and we don't want to lose this. (35-year-old female Croat)

The informants want to be "left alone" – they want to live in peace, with no conflicts. They also want to integrate – in order to live in a "hidden", invisible, and closed way, so that they can protect their traditions. They all claimed that they don't want to be necessarily recognized as a national minority, and they do not want to become a political subject and participate in political activities, because they feel that political participation might trigger further Albanian anger and hatred, and even more discrimination.

Personally I wish that they would leave me alone – just so that we can have jobs, and live peacefully. I just want to look after my family, I have no other interests. As far as I know, we all just want to be left alone. We don't need or want any special rights, for which we need to fight against the Shiptars, because that would hurt us more. It always did. They would perceive it as a provocation, which triggers further conflicts and misery. I don't know

> whether you understand it… Nothing works here. Everything is written, but nothing works according to the laws or any political agreements. If you want something, they will write it for you… on paper. But that's it! At the same time, you might be punished for even asking – by not getting anything at all – no asphalt, no new school for the children in your community, no jobs… So it's better not to ask for anything! That's why we want to be left alone, so we can live like normal people, like our ancestors. We don't need politics; all we want is a new school and some money, so that our kids can survive here. (31-year-old male Croat)

The majority of informants argued against their own representatives in Kosovo's national and local political bodies, because they are being politically instrumentalized anyway: the representatives unveil the situation of the hidden minorities, but only to serve their own interests. The political representatives of hidden minorities, according to the informants, are not familiar with the wishes and needs of the communities. If they were, they wouldn't be politically active. They would be aware that any confrontations with Albanians bring the minorities even more otherness and discrimination.

> Our own politicians… they bring us only misery. They provoke the Shiptars, who have the majority, so you can't do anything, because they do what they like. Only we get more beaten up! They are there only to get the money, but they make fools of us, because they are disconnected from us. They don't understand the situation on the ground! We only want them to leave us alone, so we can live and work. (34-year-old male Bosniak)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to contribute, through self-representations of hidden minority groups in Kosovo, to an understanding of the contemporary discourses of hidden minorities. As we argued in the theoretical section, Albanians and Serbs alike build their states and sense of nation on exclusion and otherness. If Kosovo Serbs and Albanians represent "the other" to each other, the irony is that they both perceive hidden minorities as "the other". Those minority groups are a kind of a "collateral damage" within the politically dominant Serb-Albanian relationship. Kosovo Serbs and Albanians used hidden minorities to display their own power and (mis)used it for their own nationalistic interests.

The research has shown that the hidden minority groups perceive themselves as inferior and attempt to negotiate the "otherness" by withdrawing into private spaces. There are, of course, differences among the minorities themselves that would require greater space than is available here to elucidate. However, these minority groups all share some similar life experiences, especially in relation to the majority group and as victims of discrimination by the majority. Non-Serbian minority groups in Kosovo feel like hidden minorities, because they continue to be the eternal "other" to both Kosovo Albanians and Serbs. They differ from other hidden minorities in the Balkans, however (Promitzer 2004). Their rights are written in the Constitution and laws, but in such a way that it is not possible for these rights to be exercised in practice. Or, these rights are not being respected in reality (Lantschner 2008; Stevens 2009). Our informants perceive themselves as used and abused by both nations, and they don't feel protected by international organizations in Kosovo. Because of the pressures and focus of international community, which primarily emphasizes the rights of the Serbian minority in Kosovo, the informants feel like "the real other" of Kosovo Albanians. They feel that these have transferred anger, hatred, and different forms of discrimination onto them. They feel that they have never lived in such terrible conditions. And they do, compared to other minority groups, such as Serbs in Bela Krajina (Promitzer 2003), openly express their otherness. This can be explained by the fact that they felt safe and comfortable explaining their situation to "independent" observers, such as the present researchers.

We found that our informants used two strategies to oppose the majority. Firstly, they compared Kosovo Albanians with negative peoples: the Taliban, Nazis, Islamists and the mafia. The representatives of the international community were also compared to the mafia, since they don't "really work,

or achieve anything", are arrogant, and don't learn the language, while not respecting the local habits. According to the informants, they are in Kosovo only to serve their own interests and to make money.

The second strategy has been to withdraw into their own tradition and to preserve the hidden elements of their identity. To withdraw into tradition is a typical gesture of threatened communities in times of economic crisis and political instability, where they again try to find the security and the feeling of stability that tradition provides (Sharp 2003). Despite the fact that our informants feel more discriminated against than ever before, paradoxically, they do not want to participate in a political process of asserting their own rights, because they feel they could "lose" their own "hidden" identity, tradition, and culture. Political participation for them means – according to their own experiences – even more otherness, exposure, and discrimination. Thus, they express their otherness and discrimination, but they are convinced that they can't reduce these by political means. While being politically active, they believe, they could lose their identity, and worsen their situation. In a sense these minorities are closing their own space for active and meaningful political participation and opening up the space to other actors. This can have serious consequences. History shows that the majority of hidden minorities assimilate if they don't form political strategies and if they don't fight for their own rights (Promitzer 2004). But hidden minorities should be not forced into political participation, despite the good intentions of those who promote it. It is the responsibility of researchers and politicians to respect their voices and their arguments and to shape the politics of struggle on the basis of the local needs, and not from a top-down model.

Politically speaking, Kosovo Albanian politicians have to – despite or precisely because of discrimination and war crimes that they have experienced themselves – accept the fact that the social and political affairs in Kosovo will become even more complicated if they are not solved according to the social, political, and economic realities. The solution is not to close one's eyes and overlook the conditions in which the hidden minorities live in Kosovo. It's not enough just to frame political and social development discourses and accounts in terms of the needs and concerns of Albanians and Serbs. It's not enough just to write new constitutions and laws. As this article has shown, the formation of theoretically sound legal documents and institutions is insufficient to create political, legal and social equality. Kosovo currently has one of the world's most comprehensive and detailed domestic laws banning discrimination, including racial discrimination. The Anti-Discrimination Law (ADL) entered into force on 19 September 2004 (UNMIK Regulation on the Promulgation of the Anti-Discrimination Law adopted by the Assembly of Kosovo 2004).

However, discrimination against minorities in Kosovo is widespread and overwhelming. Unemployment in Kosovo is generally high. Although no adequate statistical data exists on unemployment among minorities, field research indicates that in many places for minorities it is close to 100%.

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POVZETEK

SKRITE MANJŠINE NA KOSOVU – »POČUTIMO SE KOT DUHOVI V NAŠI LASTNI SKUPNOSTI«

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Večinsko prebivalstvo Kosova, kosovski Albanci, so 17. februarja 2008 razglasili svojo neodvisnost. Danes je Kosovo še vedno pod nadzorom mednarodne skupnosti. Tako je na Kosovu še vedno 14.000 vojakov organizacije NATO, ki skušajo vzdrževati mir. Gospodarstvo je še vedno zelo šibko, saj je skoraj polovica prebivalcev brezposelnih. Razglasitev neodvisnosti Kosova je sprožila proces repozicioniranja etničnih skupnosti. Še zlasti se je nanovo vzpostavil odnos med večinskim prebivalstvom in majhnimi skupnostmi. Na Kosovu živi približno 2 milijona prebivalcev, od tega 87 odstotkov Albancev, 7 odstotkov Srbov, 3 odstotki Muslimanov (Bošnjakov in Goranov), 2 odstotka Romov, Aškalov in Egipčanov in 2 odstotka Turkov (Minority Rights Group International Report 2004). Večina mednarodne in domače politične javnosti največ pozornosti namenja dvema največjima etničnima skupinama, tj. Srbom in Albancem, majhne etnične skupine pa zanemarja, čeprav številni raziskovalci človekovih pravic (npr. Baldwin 2006; Mueller 2007; *Human Right World Report 2009* 2009; Stevens 2009) poročajo, da večinsko prebivalstvo majhne etnične skupine izganja iz domov, nad njimi izvaja fizično nasilje ter jih politično, ekonomsko in kulturno diskriminira.

Ker se večina znanstvenikov ukvarja s problemov odnosa med kosovskimi Srbi in Albanci, je področje nesrbskih manjšin slabo raziskano. Večina znanstvenikov ob obravnavi te teme analizira položaj posamičnih manjšin, zato skuša ta članek vsaj delno zapolniti raziskovalno vrzel. V članku je predstavljena analizo (samo)reprezentacij majhnih nesrbskih in nealbanskih manjšin na Kosovu. S pomočjo poglobljenih intervjujev s predstavniki različnih manjšin na Kosovu (z Romi, Aškali, Egipčani, Bošnjaki, s Hrvati, z Gorani in s Turki) razkriva načine, na katere ti izražajo svoje razumevanje življenja na »novem« Kosovu.

Raziskava je pokazala, da Albanci in Srbi gradijo svoji državi s strategijo izločitve drugih etničnih skupin in predstavljanjem teh skupin kot »drugih«. Ironično je, da kosovski Srbi in Albanci ne le da drug drugega predstavljajo kot »drugega«, kot »druge« predstavljajo tudi manjše etnične manjšin in jih hkrati zlorabljajo za svoje nacionalistične interese.

Promitzer opredeljuje »skrite manjšine« kot tiste majhne manjšine, ki so institucionalno neprepoznane, v javnosti nevidne in odsotne iz institucij družbenega odločanja (Promitzer 2004: 11). Raziskava je razkrila, da se nesrbske manjšinske skupine počutijo kot skrite manjšine, ker so večni in ključni »drugi« tako za kosovske Srbe kot za kosovske Albance. Čeprav se skrite manjšine na Kosovu med seboj razlikujejo, si delijo skupno življenjsko izkušnjo, da so žrtve diskriminacije večinskega prebivalstva. Od drugih skritih manjšin v tem delu Evrope se razlikujejo po tem, da so njihove pravice jasno zapisane v ustavi in zakonih, toda na v praksi neuresničljiv način ali pa večinsko prebivalstvo načrtno ne spoštuje njihovih političnih, ekonomskih in kulturnih pravic (Lantschner 2008; Stevens 2009). Informanti so poročali, da se počutijo zlorabljene ne le od kosovskih Srbov in Albancev, ampak tudi od mednarodne skupnosti, ki jih ne ščiti. Trdijo, da so prav oni »večni pravi drugi« na Kosovu. Vsi tudi menijo, da po drugi svetovni vojni njihov položaj še nikoli ni bila tako slab kot je sedaj.

Raziskava je pokazala, da so informanti uporabili dve strategiji upiranja položaju »drugosti«. Pr-

vič, kosovske Albance so primerjali s prevladujoče negativno označenimi družbenimi skupinami, kot so Talibani, nacisti, islamisti in mafijci. Ker njeni pripadniki na Kosovu niso pomagali izboljšati njihovega položaja in jih ne spoštujejo, so kot mafijo označili tudi mednarodno skupnost. Drugič, umaknili so se v okrilje svoje tradicije in v svoji identiteti skušajo ohranjati element skritosti. Čeprav se informanti počutijo zelo diskriminirani, se jih večina ne želi politično aktivirati in tako terjati svoje pravice, ker menijo, da bodo tako izgubili svojo »skrito« identiteto, tradicijo in kulturo. Po njihovih izkušnjah politična participacija prinaša še večjo »drugost«, izpostavljenost in diskriminacijo. Manjšinske skupine torej odprto razkrivajo diskriminacijo in prevladujočo uokvirjanje njihovih skupnosti kot »Drugih« s strani kosovskih Albancev, obenem pa želijo ostati »skrite«.

Toda zgodovina kaže, da se je večina skritih manjšin, če ni oblikovala političnih strategij in se borila za svoje pravice, asimilirala (Promitzer 2004). Vendar pa se skritih manjšin na Kosovu – kljub dobrim namenom – ne more prisiliti v politično participacijo; raziskovalci in politiki morajo spoštovati njihovo stališče.

Kosovski in mednarodni politiki bi morali sprejeti dejstvo, da so politične, gospodarske in družbene zadeve bolj zapletene, kot to priznavajo v svojem javnem diskurzu. Rešitev ni v zanikanju razmer, v katerih živijo skrite manjšine, in v oblikovanju vedno novih zakonov, ki so sami na sebi sicer dobri, a so v praksi neuresničljivi oz. se namenoma ne izvajajo. Rešitev je treba iskati v procesu spreminjanja opisanih razmer.