# ABSTRACT

MULAJ, DENIZA. Navigating the Bridge: An Ethnographic Study of Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian Youth Living in the Divided City of Mitrovica, Kosova (Under the guidance of Dr. Shea McManus).


This study shows that the daily challenges experienced by the Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth are a result of the discord between the projected and real conditions in which they live. The living conditions as projected by international peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives portray Mitrovica as a post-war society. In contrast, the real conditions experienced by youth render their society a space that produces the same psychological and physical effects of the Kosova-Serbia war. Nonetheless, this study argues that a minority of Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth overcome the social barriers of living divided by using NGO projects to escape and create impartial spaces to socialize. While the youth stand as the center of my research, the goal of this paper is not only to show the challenges they go through, but to first and foremost address and analyze the source of these struggles. Standing in a particular historical and temporal frame, it is the Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth that display the challenges of living in a divided society, together with the limitations of reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives. My findings show that fear of ethnic conflict is reproduced by initiatives that physically divide people, namely the militarization of the Ibër Bridge. Further, it demonstrates that despite the willingness of youth to socialize, memories of war cultivated and upheld by their respective communities further strengthen the fear of inter-ethnic conflicts. While the non-governmental organizations remain the only safe way for the youth to socialize, they are based on inaccurate assumptions about the youth's attitude towards reconciliation. In spite of such complex situation, a minority of the divided youth manage to creatively subvert social reconciliation initiatives and create neutral spaces to socialize.

Navigating the Bridge: An Ethnographic Study of Kosovar and Serbian Youth Living in the Divided
City of Mitrovica, Kosova

by
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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Masters of Arts

Anthropology

Raleigh, North Carolina

2017

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# DEDICATION

To Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth in Mitrovica,

and to my parents.

**BIOGRAPHY**

Deniza Mulaj is from Peja, Kosova. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Public Policy & Economics at Rochester Institute of Technology in Kosova. In 2015, she received the Fulbright scholarship and enrolled at North Carolina State University as a graduate student in cultural anthropology. Her main expertise is in sociocultural and political anthropology, with an interest in post-war divided societies, human rights, public policies, international interventions, peacebuilding and reconciliation, and development and globalization.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to express my gratitude to my adviser Dr. Shea McManus whose expertise, understanding, and support, highly contributed to the success of my work. I want to thank the committee members, Dr. Nora Haenn and Dr. Mark Nance for their insightful academic feedback that allowed me to complete my Master's Thesis.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my sisters Jeta Mulaj, my brother in law Hugh Trimble, and my friends Sarah Mills and Pamela Nikole Kelly, whose knowledge in philosophy, anthropology, and political science, guided stimulating discussions and challenging questions that represent the brightest colors of this study.

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**EU:** European Union
**EULEX:** European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
**FDCD:** Forum for Development, Culture, and Dialogue
**HDZ:** Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina
**KFOR:** Kosovo Peacekeeping Force
**KLA:** Kosovo LIbëration Army
**NATO:** North Atlantic Treaty Organization
**NDI:** National Democratic Institute
**OSCE:** Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
**OHR:** Office of High Representative
**UN:** United Nations
**UNDP:** United Nations Development Program
**UNHCR:** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
**UNICEF:** United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
**UNMIK:** United Nations Mission in Kosovo

**CHAPTER 1**
Introduction


On a Tuesday in June 2016, I traveled on a minivan from Prishtina north to Mitrovica, Kosova, a partially recognized Ex-Yugoslavian country in southeastern Europe. At a corner across from the bus station, old minivans were lined with drivers outside shouting "this is the line for Mitrovica" [Hajde për Mitrovicë, Mitrovicë]. I entered the first red minivan in line and waited for it to fill up. Ten passengers got in, including myself. The minivan was small and body contact unavoidable. The forced intimacy made eye contact uncomfortable. The smells of old iron, dust, and sweat, together with the squeaking of the old automobile, made me enervated. The minivan was as debilitated as the passengers in it. With old clothes, some even torn, their faces wore veils of sadness shown by their eyes and wrinkles. Unlike the elders who spent their journey glancing outside the windows, the young were looking at simulated worlds on their phones. The music in the background coming from an old radio was a hip-hop song celebrating money, drugs, and alcohol. The elements that the young singer praised as the essence of happiness seemed to be missing for the passengers to whom the music was almost non-existent. Numb from the heat and toxic scents, I fell asleep, and woke up to find myself in Mitrovica.

After passing the main square of the city, I went straight to the Selfie café to meet Ben, a young Kosovar-Albanian. We walked together towards the Ibër Bridge to meet Lejla, my Bosnian informant from the north. Ben and Lejla have been friends since high school. Lejla is one of the few young people who has close relationships with people from both sides; such is the case of her friendship with Ben. As we walked on the bridge that divides Kosovar-Albanians in the south, and

Serbians in the north, Lejla teased Ben: "you are a little bit afraid aren't you?" she says sarcastically, "yeah you know me, my knees are shaking," he responded. Despite his response, I noticed Ben's fidgeting and shifting eyes that exposed his nervousness. A characteristic of the youths' conversations regarding the fear of being on the other side of the bridge is the belief that everyone knows what fear they are haunted by. From my earlier conversations with youth from both sides of the city, I was informed that youth perpetuated the fear of ethnic conflict, cultivated by their families and communities. While walking, Lejla turns around facing us; "Listen, as long as you guys are with me, no one will dare to lay a finger on you ok? I know everyone here, don't worry." Being with someone you know is not only a safe way to get around on the other side of the city, but also serves as support for those who fear interactions with the people from the other ethnicity.

The Ibër Bridge that we walked through is famous, though not because of its rich history or architectural beauty. The bridge is the barricade that divides Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians along ethnic and territorial lines in the wake of Kosova-Serbia war. It is the symbol of the challenges faced by a post-war divided society. The walk across the bridge is pervaded by an air of pandemonium between the locals, youth, communities, governance, states, and the international community, all of which contribute to the hardships of inhabiting the same space while living divided. By ethnographically analyzing the case of Mitrovica, this study concerns the challenges of living in post-war divided societies. Kosova is a country with a very young population, and the youth in Mitrovica are often times seen as agents of change (Schwartz 2010) from reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives. Hence, this ethnographic work investigates how Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth perceive and experience the division in their city.

Youth in Mitrovica struggle to endure the hardships of overcoming divisions. Their position illuminates the puzzle of the failure of reconciliation initivatives where they are designed to mitigate assuage ethnic conflict. It is particularly the youth due to their specific position in history that give this study a unique angle into questions of peacebuilding and reconciliation. That is, though they have not themselves experienced war they live with memories of war kept alive by families, friends, the media, and international organizations. In this study I argue that the challenges of living in a divided society that the youth face result from the current material conditions in the society. The social and infrastructural setup of Mitrovica divides people along ethnic and territorial lines. This division recalls memories of war and strengthens the fear of ethnic tension, showing that people in Mitrovica still live amidst violence. Memories of war together with the segregation of people expose the real conditions of youth in Mitrovica: being kept apart from prior enemies, living in fear of the eruption of ethnic conflict, fallin pray to physical and psychological abuse, and living in constant preparation for future disputes. All of this is accompanied by the constant narrative about "Kosovars against Serbs" and "Serbs against Kosovars" spout by the media. The international community, on the other hand, sent peacekeepers and initiated peacebuilding efforts to maintain supposes "peace," because they regard Mitrovica as a post-war society (See Gusic, ESI, IICK, BBC). Reports on how the international peacebuilding community refers to Mitrovica are not consistent. Interestingly, reports on the status of Mitrovica whose audience is mainly the Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian populations, reserve themselves from calling it a post-war (See PRGC and UN). Nonetheless, documents that concern people who work, or will potentially work for these institutions, such as job openings, require experience on societies at conflict (See UN Careers). This serves as an example that even the

international peacebuilding community know that Mitrovica is not a post-war society. Although reconciliation is highly encouraged (see EWB) the projected conditions as analyzed by the international community are people who are struggling from post-war economic difficulties, losses, and governance difficulties, that paralyze the conception of unification (See UN). This is not a simple matter of perspective. Rather, the way in which the situation of Mitrovica is understood directly effects the way in which peacebuilding and reconcilitaiton initiatives function. The argument that we are dealing with a post-war situation leads to managament techniques for maintaining supposed peace and not techniques for developing Mitrovica and settling disputes. The assumption is that the war settled disputes, we now simply maintain the status quo.

The sentiment of the majority of youth from the south and north of Mitrovica is married to that of their families and communities, whose distrust towards the other ethnicity defines the fear of social cohesion. However, unlike the older generations that experienced the war, and unlike the distant international community, youth seem to be able to conceptualize and contextualize the critique of post-war issues through their lived experiences. Although most peace and reconciliation initiatives see youth as agents of change (UN 2016), Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth in Mitrovica show otherwise. This is not to say that youth are not political agents, rather, they do not have the power to change their situation. Thus, the only way for them to overcome the struggles of being divided is to escape from the place and society that causes them. The outbreak from a divided society is done through NGO projects where youth are able to test out genuine ways of socializing which are inaccesible in Mitrovica.

To understand the difficulty that the youth face to break such strong cycles that constantly reproduce fear of ethnic conflict, it is important to pause for a moment and analyze the role and influence of the actors that maintain the division. To do so, I will trace the background of the war, and reframe my meeting with Ben and Lejla within the historical background of the war and post-war situation.

The Kosova-Serbia war started with the death of the Yugoslavian President Josip Broz Tito, and the refusal of Serbia to recognize Kosova as an independent republic. Unsatisfied with their position as a province during the 1980s, Kosovar movements emerged calling for equal status among the other republics of Yugoslavia, and for independence. Serbians rejected any additional rights for Kosovar Albanians, which led to a fierce civil war between the Serbian forces and the Kosova LIbëration Army (KLA). The war ended in 1999 with NATO bombings against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Roberts 1999). A quarter million were killed, thousands displaced, and much of the region ruined (IICK 2000). After 1999 more than half of the Serbian population in Kosova left (IICK 2000). The majority of those remaining were located in the city of Mitrovica. The aftermath of war saw the arrival of a great number of international organizations aiming at rehabilitation, socio-political stability, and economic development for Kosovar population. Two principal international actors assisting people and securing Kosova were the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Kosova Force (KFOR). The UNHCR, which was later to be known as UNMIK, governed Kosova, comprising the police and judicial bodies/processes, civil administration, democratization and institution building.

In November 2005, the former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari was appointed envoy of the UN Secretary-General and prepared the proposal for the future status of Kosova (Caruso 2008). The Ahtisari plan stipulated that Kosova be autonomous within Serbia and was rejected by Serbia. January 2008 was characterized by continuous unpromising meetings between the Kosovar and Serbian presidents. The UN and UN Security Council nonetheless believed that a solution should be found despite the opposition of a few European countries. As a result, Kosova declared its independence on 17th of February 2008. After the declaration of independence, the government's top priority became membership in the European Union (EU). One of the main requisites for this membership is the normalization of relations with Serbia (Deda and Mustafa 2013). The EU, therefore, started mediating negotiations between Belgrade and Prishtina on September 2010. Known as the "Brussels Agreement," these negotiations included different objectives for the integration of Kosovar Serbians in Kosova, and the political and economic relations between the two states. During the years of 2010-2016, neither nation's citizens were satisfied with the content of the agreement. Kosovars were particularly sensitive to the second panel negotiations, which introduced the establishment of a Serbian Municipality Association that Kosovar-Albanians refer to as Zajednica. The rationale behind the establishment of this association is to promote inter-municipal cooperation for greater management effectiveness. Although under the Kosova law, and while the association incorporates of Serbian municipalities, it is eligible to receive financial and technical support from Belgrade, Serbia (Zeqiri, Troch, Kabashi, 2016). Because Prishtina wanted to dismantle Serbian institutions and Belgrade wanted to preserve them (Seesox 2014), the negotiations have not, to this day, reached any conclusion.

Policies regarding the normalization of relations between Kosova and Serbia largely discuss the case of Mitrovica and the integration of Serbians in Kosova. However, a walk through the south and north of the city reveals an impoverished and fatigued society, not a supported population. On that very quiet Tuesday, on my way to meet Ben in the south, I passed mostly men walking on the roads and sitting in teahouses smoking cigarettes. Dust covered the roads, the windows of small family markets and restaurants, CD shops, and the clothes advertised outside boutiques. I saw numerous unfinished houses and buildings, in front of which there were lines of private taxi drivers loudly soliciting fares. I arrived at the main square of Mitrovica, both sides of which are filled with restaurants and cafes. A few historical monuments, large printed pictures of national heroes, and a sign saying "Jo Zajdenica," meaning "No to Zajednica" covered every wall on the streets. "Zajdenica" is the Serbian word for "community," but as it refers to the debated association for Serbian municipalities, the word has negative connotations. To go from the south to the north, one has to cross the Ibër Bridge. Considering that Mitrovica is still divided, the Ibër Bridge is also a project of the EU, aiming to be opened soon for the unification of Mitrovica and its people. While Ben and I walked to meet Lejla, we saw the Ibër Bridge guarded by troops wearing dark blue uniforms:   Italian "Carabinieri" peacekeepers of KFOR, a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This barricade was placed as an emergent solution after the war. Because of post-war tensions, the international community erected a physical barrier that divided the city and made it impossible for Kosovars and Serbians to cross the bridge to the other side. Although today the bridge is open for pedestrians, and technically the freedom of movement is enforced, the people of Mitrovica remain divided for the territorial and ethnic divides are militarized and not only imagined.

All attempts to open the Ibër Bridge have been shown to fail. For example, the last initiative to open the bridge occurred before my fieldwork in 2014, with the construction of the "Park of Peace" on the bridge itself. The fact that building a park was not the same as opening the bridge sent conflicting signals to Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians who opposed the project by protesting. The park was soon closed, for the people believed it was a newly erected barricade. The failed attempt to unify the south and north of Mitrovica is explained by this construction through which the political authority is not only surveilling but also controlling the function of bodies/persons. The park of peace is now surrounded by a corrugated metal, which the youth have converted into a wall of entertainment, hanging posters of live music events and film festivals to cover the EU logo. It has become an art piece that reflects rebellious yet strategic attempts to transform the barricade, leaving the peacekeepers as the only obstacle to their unification and beyond the control of inhabitants. Sixteen years after the war, neither the international institutions nor the government of Kosova and Serbia have managed to achieve reconciliation.

When Ben, Lejla, and I were walking the bridge to go to the north side of Mitrovica, Ben showed signs of fear that are common among the youth. This is the fear of ethnic-conflict that is passed to new generations by their families and communities who have experienced the war. Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian families in Mitrovica continue to be haunted by memories of war, which are not simply a result of war trauma. Rather, they are a result of fear of ethnic conflicts evoked by the division of the city, which informs and then alters the interpretation of the past. The physical setup of the city resembles conditions of war. That is, the militarization of the bridge that divides these two communities resembles the past when the military power was used for ethnic

cleansing (Blum et al.2007) to separate these two respective societies. The fear of ethnic conflict is passed to youth, like in the case of Ben, as a way to protect them from conflict with prior enemies. Before our visit to the north, Ben told me that his parents were not aware of this visit. Based on Ben's explanation, his parents always panic from the fear of their son getting hurt. This fear is perpetuated by the youth and is further reinforced by the presence of the international mission of peacekeepers that adversely effects the people. In the context of Mitrovica, these peacekeepers do not differ as much from a military presence because both of these troops aim to protect one group of people from the other.

For the inhabitants of Mitrovica, the militarization of their division recreates the past relations of war. During the war, Kosovars and Serbians were fighting for different goals: Serbians aimed to occupy the territory of Kosova, and Kosovar aimed to preserve the integrity of their borders. Today, this ethnic tension is still present and both populations hold distinct desires for what is to happen with their city. Serbia is still committed to preserving the North of Mitrovica as a part of their country. This is clear by their efforts to build their institutions, encourage Serbians to remain in Mitrovica, send financial assistance, and use Serbian Dinar as their currency. On the other hand, Kosova wants to dismantle Serbian institutions within Mitrovica and to unify the city and bring it under its own rule of law. There is no objective stance on who truly is the enemy; both were enemies and obstacles to the other party's goals. This confusing and unresolved situation is further perpetuated by the supposed "neutral" position that all institutions mediating negotiatins must maintain.

Today, the division of Kosovars and Serbians maintains and reproduces the relations of the Serbia-Kosovo war; the same enemies that took part in the war continue to be and live as enemies

today. Hence, the eighteen-year-long presence of military and peacekeepers in Mitrovica, which can be described by Michael Foucault's notion of biopower (2012). Foucault, a French philosopher, utilized this concept in order to address the extended power of political authorities over life. He argues that this control is not only physical—that is, it does not reach the subject as a heteronomous power—but it is also internalized by the subject. Foucault outlines two types of control in his work *History of Sexuality* Volume I. First, the control of people as species through the regulation of birth rates, life expectancies, or mortalities. Second, the control over people by disciplining the human body to act in certain ways that help the survival of political regimes. The case of Mitrovica mostly resembles the second form of control, where governing institutions manipulate bodies for political purposes through discipline.  What is unique about Foucault's conception of body politic is that it is not limited to physical oppression and manipulation; rather, his work allows us to conceptualize the ways in which systems of power make subjects control and surveil themselves. Hence, there is no longer simply a coercive, governing external power that violates the subject. The subjects themselves have internalized this coercive power and exercise it on themselves. In Mitrovica, KFOR peacekeepers, local police, or EULEX police, no longer have to use their power to keep people in check or in their respective sides of the bridge; rather, their image alone causes people to prohibit themselves from doing what would otherwise be seen as a potential conflict. This is perpetuated through the fact that the image of the "international" is portrayed as the savioir. That is, without international forces the war would not have ended and without international forces peace would not be possible. In other words,  Kosovars and Serbs are mere "savages" that cannot dicitate and maintain

their own history.  Unfortunately, for the divided people in Mitrovica this causes very low interaction among Albanians and Serbians.

When Ben, Lejla, and I reached the north, it became clearer to me how much the division affected life in Mitrovica. The Ibër Bridge does not only separate people, it also separates traditions, cultures, and lifestyles. In contrast to the south, characterized by the gray colors of construction sites and unfinished houses, the north was green. The lack of modern infrastructure gave light to the preserved historical buildings and old-fashioned houses. Although different, the unfinished buildings in the south and the old infrastructure in the north both shows signs of being discarded by the governments and international interventions. When we arrived in the north bank of the river, we saw that the international peacekeepers of KFOR were not as visible as they were in the south. There were only two local police officers on the bridge, sitting on a bench close to a Serbian memorial, under the Serbian flag. After we crossed the bridge, on my right, minivans were lined up with packages of vegetables and fruits on sale. To the right of the bridge, was the street that takes one to the Bosnian neighborhood, which consists of a few Kosovar-Albanian families as well. The first time I met the Serbian youth, they suggested that I take this road precisely. They claimed that this road was the safest way to prevent uncomfortable or contested interactions. After this day, Ben never went to the north again. From my later discussions with him, he told me that he did not feel comfortable, and felt constantly afraid that something might have happened.

It is therefore the daily challenges that youth face living in the divided societies of Mitovica that form the core of my argument and the goal of this study. The discrepancies between the real conditions faced by youth and the conditions projected by peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives,

allow us to see the real material conditions that lead to the challenges of overcoming division. Hence, the youth have no other choice but to subvert the system in order to overcome the struggle of division. By breaking down and analyzing this argument, I aim to use the voice of youth in order to place them in a larger umbrella of their struggle, the peacebuilding venture.

I will try to build my argument against this vignette which concerns the international institutions first and the families and communities second. In the next chapter, I will analyze the literature review used for this study. Chapter 3 concerns the methodology and limitations of this research. Chapters 4 explores how youth from the South and North of Mitrovica understand, experience, and cope with challenges of division. It concerns memories of war that push youth apart and the desire to explore "the other side" of the bridge that pulls them together. Chapter 5 presents how youth explain the persistence of the division, and addresses issues with regards to governance, international institutions, and NGOs work towards reconciliation and peacebuilding. Chapter 6 shows how youth interpret the situation as a whole, and how they manage to cope with and overcome barriers in order to socialize with one another. The analysis of these three chapters, contributed to the conclusion of this study shown in chapter 7. Here I argue that the fact that Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth in Mitrovica have to escape and subvert NGO projects in order to socialize, shows the limitation on peacebuilding initiatives.

Figure 1. Minivan for Mitrovica



Figure 2. "Jo Zajednica" Graffiti in the South



Figure 3. The enclosed "Park of Peace" as seen from the South



Figure 4. The militarization of the Ibër Bridge by KFOR

**CHAPTER 2**
Literature Review

Anthropological and political studies of post-war divided societies demonstrate that peacebuilding initiatives, have not yet managed to establish peaceful and democratic institutions in post-war divided societies. Instead, I argue that their strategies especially the divide of prior enemies by physical barriers, resurrects memories of war that further contribute to ethnic antagonism. Lastly, despite holding inaccurate assumption about the divided people regarding their abilities and will for reconciliation, non-governmental organizations remain as optimal way to be heard and receive answers. The next sections will analyze the nature of peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives and their impact on the divided people, the social challenges of the divided people, and the work and effects of NGOs for people in post-war divided societies.

**Assisting Post-War Societies through Reconciliation and Peacebuilding Initiatives**

Although international interventions are seen as crucial in post-war settings, anthropological and political studies show that interventions through power-sharing initiatives can be self-destructive. Since the end of the world wars, the international community has claimed responsibility for ethnic conflict resolution. Often institutions, such as the UN and OSCE, seek to ease tensions and prevent future conflict through the promotion of democratic institutions, self-governance, and peacebuilding initiatives. Most peacebuilding policies like state building and self-governance, democratic elections, or economic development, are based on the assumption that political stability of segregated societies is contingent on power sharing. Consociationalism, a policy recommendation introduced by Arend

Lijphart, a political scientist, is similarly grounded in such an argument. As a form of democracy, consociationalism aims to delegate state power to all diverse societies within a country, hence, it is highly recommended by peacebuilding institutions. Although this system promotes democratic values, it does not always result in the creation of democratic institutions.

Antithetical consequences of democratic initiatives can be seen in the case of post-war Bosnia, where shared-power was established under the supervision of international communities and enforced by the Dayton Agreement. Although the Siege of Mostar was fought by Bosnians and Croats against the Serbian forces, the Muslim population in Mostar did not believe that Croats fought for the wellbeing of all. Instead, they expected that Croats would turn around to fight against Bosnians once they sent their stronger enemy away. This fear increased tensions between Bosnians and Croats and lead to the second war, far more fierce than that against Serbians. Bosnians were expelled, imprisoned in concentration camps, and executed (Luchetta 2009). The war ended with the "Washington Agreement" dividing the city in two, with Croats in the West and Bosnians in the East. Division in Mostar was enforced by checkpoints, which were later removed by international initiatives for the sake of peacebuilding and freedom of movement. These initiatives started implementing power-sharing for the joined city council of Mostar under the Dayton Agreement. As Luccheta explains, the creation of a joined government was being established between political parties which had created within themselves "parallel networks of power", especially the Croatian party which was stronger than that of Bosnians. However, the city council rarely met, and the most important competencies were in the hand of the parallel networks.

After internationally supervised elections, the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ) kept posing constant threats to the political situation, by calling for the creation of an independent Croat entity. This was declared illegal by the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina (OHR). Initially, HDZ did not have the full support of Croats. However, in 2003, as Andrea Luchetta argues, the number of Croat registered voters was evidently higher, and the Croat opinion towards unification changed. A proportional representation was in their favor. Nevertheless, consociationalism was at risk of failing in Mostar if the majority of the city council representatives were Croatians. Thus, under the Office of High Representatives (OHR) coordination, the city council had to reserve fifteen representatives from each ethnic group of Bosnians and Croatians, four for Serbians, and one for the "others" (Luchetta 2009). Consociationalism thus, had to readjust its main ground in order to be reliable and meet its goal: peace through shared power. During the 2008 elections, consociational rules were violated. While this system required a switch of positions of mayor and presidency every election, in the year of 2008, the Croat officials refused to choose a Bosnian president and self-claimed their own member. The case in Bosnia shows that shared power did not reduce ethnic tension, not even in the parliament. Politics remains divided because both parties never recognized the shared-power; rather they continually violated it by strengthening the parallel networks. Hence, democracy and peace is yet to be restored in Mostar.

While consociationalism aims for peaceful and democratic societies through governmental unification of ethnicities, the reliance on ethnicity to prevent ethnic tension is a double-edged-sword. Besides the inability to produce positive results in the government, consequences of this system are also seen to deepen the division among people. To pursue the same ideology, other international

institutions such as OSCE have tried to establish mixed-ethnic academic curriculums in Mostar, Bosnia. The Mostar gymnasium consisted of classes in three languages Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, and was meant to create a unified class in order to provide the space and time for students of different ethnicities to socialize. This strategy was based on the assumption that students needed mediation in order to reconcile. This cultivated resentment among students forced to participate in the mixed classes. The joined classes ultimately required one language to be chosen, raising inter-ethnic tensions instead of unifying the youth. In her work on "Citizens of an Empty Nation," Azra Hromadzic argues that these initiatives did not succeed because they fostered the "ethnicization of the ordinary life" (2015) of youth in the gymnasium.

Lack of knowledge of where the students stood with regards to reconciliation was a result of the assumption that there is no organic tendency to socialize, and the lack of that tendency is coded as resentment between ethnic groups. Hromadzic shows that students already had spaces where they socialized. Bathrooms of the Mostar gymnasium were a common place for this, where jokes, flirting, and graffiti were self-created ways to socialize. This does not mean that there is no ethnic tension in Mostar. On the contrary, research shows that even after two decades after the war neither Bosnians nor Croatians show clear motivation to unify. However, the case of youth in Mostar shows that consociational initiatives are based on under-investigated and unfounded assumptions about people's attitude towards reconciliation. And it shows that consociational methods can deepen ethnic segregation, which otherwise might have been fading away from people themselves.

The lack of knowledge on the part of international institutions about local perspectives on reconciliation results in further exclusion of people from the peacebuilding processes. Western

influence in peacebuilding and reconciliation in Bosnia reflect an imagined state that does not align with the aspirations of either Bosnians or Croatians. In her work on Bosnia, Kimberley Coles argues that the practices of the international community to create a "Europeanized " Bosnia-Herzegovina excluded the citizens from the process of integration into the European Union. "Europeanization" is perceived to be a fundamental characteristic of a politically and economically progressive state, rendering Bosnia, by contrast, a "backward" state. From a Western perspective, "Europeanization" is equivalent to being a "modern" state, marked by diversity. The inability of the ethnic groups to reconcile and integrate in Bosnia, from the point of view of internationals, is perceived as a fundamental need to increase their role in politics. This was approached repeatedly based on the assumption that a European-like Bosnia would emancipate people, move them towards peacebuilding and reconciliation, and perhaps produce a young generation with a Western-European mindset. The attempt to establish a European Bosnia, which Coles shows to not have been their main concern, caused two types of exclusions: (i) the international community excluded themselves from the Bosnian state and society by building their own entity through the creation of international maps and re-naming of roads, and (ii) they excluded locals from the process of "Europeanization" believing that Bosnians are not equipped to self-govern as "Europeans." Law drafting and European standards of elections did not match up with the political parties, which were trying to maintain ethnic power and status quo. These two types of exclusions created the international-self and Bosnian-other that prevent the success of international peacebuilding efforts.

**Challenges in Post-War Divided Societies**

Anthropological studies demonstrate that one of the main challenges for people in post-war societies is living with memories of war that return as a result of their separation from peacebuilding initiatives. Memories of past violence are informed by the present. Or rather, the past, especially memories of violence, take over the present. People in post-war societies face many difficulties, among them the loss of family members, physical and mental trauma, and ever-present insecurity and distrust for the future. All these factors simultaneously inform how people interpret the past. Therefore, remembering is not exclusively the reproduction of memories. Rather, as Andreas Huyssen argues, people turn to memories because something in the present provokes it: "The turn toward memory is subliminally energized by the desire to anchor ourselves in a world characterized by an increasing instability of time and the fracturing of lived spaces" (2000). The recalling of memories is dependent on contemporaneity that makes this a process of selecting memories rather than simply remembering.

In post-war societies sharing memories of war is a common ritual that it is said to exercise different purposes. Nikolas Argenti and Katharina Schramm, argue that the existence of individual memories depends on communication with the other. In this line of thought, individuals share their memories of war, in order for their stories to be remembered. This view holds the belief that unspoken memories can be forgotten, and forgiveness is generally assumed to be a loss for people who identify themselves by their experiences. While memories are shared, they are re-constructed by the society and stored in the so called "collective memories (Argenti, Schramm, 2010), which are

placed in a distinct space and time (Halbwachs 1992). Another perspective contends that the ritual of sharing memories of war associates people with a distinct history, culture, and heritage (Teski, Climo, 1995). This is especially significant in divided societies, where the divided people are former enemies. To distinguish themselves from one's enemies, communities share memories of war where their position was that of victims Further, while memories of war are highly dependent on the present, Antonella Fabri argues that the narration of violent stories represent first, a cultural empowerment through unification around their experiences, and second, a political voice of that group on their standing in the present (1995). The past becomes part of the present community identity, and as a result, takes a central role in defining the future of the community. Thus, the future is a complex fusion of the past and present.

The act of remembering violent conflicts in divided societies takes on ethno-national dimensions that sometimes result in eternalizing past enemies. Distinct collective memories of the divided societies create what Elissa Helms calls "hierarchies of suffering", that is, the use of violent experiences to create new moral claims on the identity of the victim, and claims regarding the benefits of being victims of war. In addition, these claims create new definitions of justice (Bougarel, Helms, Duijzings, 2007), regarding who and what should be remembered and recognized. Such is the case of Bosnia, where commemorations for one ethnicity are perceived as offensive to the other. Inter-ethnic tensions in Bosnia between Muslims and Christian-Orthodox are still present, and memories of the Srebrenica massacre nourish the antagonism. Known as Europe's worst massacre since World War II, the Srebrenica war occurred in July 1995. The Bosnian Serbian army began the ethnic cleansing of all non-Serbian inhabitants, and managed to overrun the "safe area" placed by the United Nations to

terrorize the people (Bouckaert 2014). The Srebrenica genocide defined the inter-ethnic tensions between the Serbian and non-Serbian inhabitants in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thousands were killed, and the rest escaped from Bosnia. The aftermath of the war was marked by the search for family members, and the ones who did not return. Peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives from local and international institutions aimed at returning those who fled Bosnia, and restoring peace. Haunted by memories of war and violent experiences, people in Bosnia were offered tribute ceremonies for the ones lost and those never found. Monuments and commemorations built after the Srebrenica war did not satisfy either ethnic group.

Due to the embodied memories of war that created two distinct "victim" statuses, that of Bosnians and the Croatians, these monuments only deepened inter-ethnic tensions and worsened the image of the other ethnicity. Just days before the tenth anniversary of the war, at the genocide memorial known as Potočari, the Bosnian Serbian police found explosives near the memorial. Local and international media displayed billboards with images of the war in Serbia, Zagreb, and Croatia. The tenth anniversary of Srebrenica war was followed by groups of Bosnian Serbs commemorating their losses (Wagner 2008). The counter narratives brought by Serbian citizens show that distinct memories of war place Serbians and non-Serbians in different standpoints in history. These counter narratives of Bosnian Serbians reflect a tug-of-war for the status of "victim;" their actions mirror the actions of the non-violent. In doing so, both Bosnians and Croatians use memories of violence to make differing claims regarding justice. Remembering in post-war divided settings is therefore a strategic engagement of the past with the present, entailing moral and political claims that nurture the

divide between the victim and the aggressor. While for both sides the victims belong to their own respective communities, the aggressor is reciprocally eternalized.

While it is established that violent memories are provoked from the present, for divided societies, that is the physical separation of past enemies which deepens ethnic antagonism. Generally, ethnic conflicts end with a literal separation of the respective parties engaged in warfare. Cases of societies such as Christians and Muslims in Beirut, Catholics and Protestants in Belfast, Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem, Christians (Croatians) and Muslims (Bosniaks) in Mostar, and Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in Turkey (Calame, Charlesworth, 2009), are examples of efforts to isolate people based on their respective ethnicities. In such fragile settings, where societies are seen to not share the same war narratives, physical division eases tensions but can oftentimes deviate and evolve from the intended purpose of stability. Erecting barriers reinforces antagonistic images of the other and defines who belongs where by forcing physical and ideological divisions (Jones 2012). Since 1948, for example, Israel has established various borders to divide Jewish Israelis from Arabs. These policies have roots in the Zionist doctrines and movements to creating a Jewish state. Such movements initially started through checkpoints along the border in West Bank to surveil flows in and out of the Gaza Strip, and were followed by the construction of a wall in November 2000. The same years saw the rise of Palestinian groups against such division that blocked entry to Israel, as well as from their own lands. This occurred during the second intifada in September by Palestinian armed groups that caused hundreds of fatalities (Benmelech, Berrebi, 2007). This surge influenced the construction of a longer barrier of walls and fences that highly affected the everyday lives of the Palestinians (Saddiki 2005). Palestinians, whose homes are within the border, have to receive

permission for permanent residency. The decision to build the wall was justified by claiming that the state of Israel is providing security for its people against Palestinian militia groups. Palestinians, on the other hand, deny this justification, and believe that the barriers have political incentives.

According to Reece Jones, the divide between Israel and Palestine shows that the physical division further strengthens the antagonistic images of the other. The Israeli government claimed to build a wall to distance their people from their enemies, the Palestinians who are reduced to terrorists. This results in the "dehumanization of people," (2012) as Jones claims that reduced Palestinians to that which is evil and a threat. The barriers set by the Israeli government represent Palestinians as threats to social order, for they are viewed as having certain violent behaviors. The wall in West Bank, therefore, cultivates dehumanizing narratives that treat the entire Palestinian population as having a higher propensity for terrorism. This conviction has spread throughout political declarations and propaganda, convincing people that eliminating Palestinians from Israel is a legitimate moral agenda. Many families and individuals in Palestine who formerly had good relations with Jewish people are today victims of this division for being identifies as Palestinians. The impact of physical barriers influenced the military to mistreat families, children, and occupy their homes (2012). By building physical barriers, the government of Israel is fomenting local disorder as a means to maintain Israel's national order and hierarchy.

Mary Douglas, a British anthropologist, argues that "dirt is a byproduct of systematic ordering and classification of matter" (2003). The case of the divide between Jewish and Palestinians reflects the same principle, where Palestinians are perceived as an anomaly to the Jewish civilization. By building walls the Israeli government created a very specific image of Palestinians as dangerous to

their social order. Thus, separation of people is a sign of oppression and violence as well as a political strategy to create disorder as a means to achieve bureaucratic goals. Walls and fences in Israel do not demonstrate an attempt at peace; rather, they are built to form a collective identity that will itself attempt to purify societies from those that are forced to be perceived as disordered.

Physical divisions such as walls and borders reinstate war roles of victims and aggressors and pressure the older generations to remind the youth of risks involved in living with enemies. Some anthropological research, such as that of Monika Palmberger, suggest that collective memories do not generate the same reactions for youth as they did for the generations that have experienced war. New generations, although highly impacted by post-war conditions and narratives of war, show contrasting reactions from those of their families. From this view, the interpretation of memories is based on the position of individuals and groups in a specific time and space that incorporates social, political, and economic factors. This difference is what Palmberger calls "generational positioning" (2016). She argues that multiple cases of youth in various cities in Bosnia illustrate distinct interpretations of collective memories. For example, Mostar, as all other places in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was highly transformed from the fall of Yugoslavia and the following conflicts. Before the war known as the Siege of Mostar, the city was known for its multiethnic identity composed of Bosnians, Croats, and Serbians. With the fall of Yugoslavia, and the creation of the new Republic of Serbia, Serbian intentions were to occupy Eastern Mostar and integrate it into their republic. The conflict became violent and the war was fought by Bosnian-Croat forces against those of Serbia (Luchetta 2009). The war ended with the triumph of Bosnians and Croats with the help of military forces sent by Zagreb.

Today, Mostar is socially divided between Bosnians, Croats, and a smaller minority of Serbians. Although not physically divided, almost all public and private institutions are divided along ethnic lines. Hence, the majority of youth interact almost only with their respective ethnicity. Despite the fact that youth are told disparate perspectives about the war, Palmberger argues that youth in Mostar distance themselves from past narratives. Bosnian and Croat youth struggle to detach themselves from the war and post-war Mostar, either by stating that they did not experience the war as their families did or simply by keeping silent. Dissatisfaction with the struggles of war and post-war situation in Mostar leads youth to avoid being a part of collective memories.

These examples manifest that the past is reproduced in the present by virtue of memory. However, memory is not independent of the present. While the present conditions of a divided society influence and inform memories of war, memories of war also inform the present. What is being produced and reproduced is not just speech; rather, what is being cultivated from the friction of the past and present is a society amidst violence.

**Assistance for Peace through the Civil Society**

The lack of adherence with and sometimes distrust towards the international institutions, leaves divided societies highly dependent on NGOs. Anthropological studies show that the work of NGOs frequently communicate the colonial view that divided peoples are disinclined toward peace, a pervasive and condescending sentiment which is acknowledged by the people who are nevertheless forced to adhere to these programs as their only means of support. Certain international institutions, such as the UN, argue that NGOs are crucial in segregated societies as they encourage local

participation and hold local institutions accountable (DESA 2009). NGOs are believed to be able to consider the specific nature of conflicts and unique cultures of post-war countries. And at the same time, they engage the local population in decision-making processes towards institutional efficiency and peace building. However, the estimated need to train people to become "peaceful" echoes a colonial ideology where one is superior to the other in their possession of civility. Superiority and inferiority, however, are co-existent. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the majority of divided populations are aware of such treatment, the following cases show that NGOs remain as the only and safest way to achieve post-war needs.

Unlike UN's argument above that claims to advocate for the people by holding certain institutions accountable, frequently peacebuilding institutions hold people accountable by judging their beliefs as the reason of disharmony. This framing of peacebuilding initiatives holds the victims of war accountable for human-made disasters that caused division. Their targets are the people diagnosed as needing to be "trained" to be peaceful, in other words the Balkan savages. Reconciliation and peacebuilding are therefore considered humanitarian processes that require "professionals" and "experts" to teach locals about compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peacebuilding.

The relevance of analyzing this phenomenon lies in the fact that, peacebuilding has become an industry on its own, and its survival depends on the ignorance of people. "Experts" and "professionals" can secure their vocations only with the existence of the "uneducated." For example, the case of Lebanon shows that practices of the civil society, which used to advocate for people by holding the state accountable, have changed. Instead of holding the state accountable, they now hold

people accountable. In his work, The Birth of the Workshop, Nikolas Kosmatopoulos argues that oftentimes missionaries and institutions that preach peacebuilding harbor dominant tendencies based on the assumption that a "civil society" is not a given. Rather, civility should be taught through training from "experts" (2014). Such a philosophy, Kosmatopoulos believes, is also the doctrine of the majority of conflict-resolution workshops provided by NGOs. Research on conflict resolutions skills encouraged my study towards an analysis of organizations that provide such trainings. None of these organizations including here UNDP, UNICEF, FDCD, and MDG Achievement Fund, define what these skills are. In general, however, all of these organizations argue that dialogue is key to reconciliation. This approach to reconciliation takes two dimensions. First, a psychological dimension, where "experts" train people in conflict or post-conflict situations to not let emotions and anger gain control of the situations. They teach them skills on how to manage anger, how to creatively and calmly respond, and how to be an active listener. Second, a business dimension, where reconciliation is stripped of its moral nature. Instead of continued fighting, people are taught to see reconciliation as a "win-win" solution, for which skills in willingness to resolve and negotiate are crucial. The existence of these skills as a part of reconciliation efforts points towards the treatment of people as "uncivilized" and in need of training for "civility". This treatment not only reproduces colonial logic but also blames people for the situation in which they find themselves by introducing conflict as a cause of "uncivility."

The other component of the conflict resolution workshops contains a social dimension which holds participants accountable for their struggles. During his fieldwork and participation in these workshops in Beirut, Kosmapotoulos showed how young participants are required to share stories of

struggles and violence as a way not only to relieve pain, but also as a part of the process of forgiving. Expecting individuals to share, forgive, and thus change, conflict resolution workshops are indirectly blaming people for their struggle. The burden of reconciliation and peacebuilding is put on the shoulders of people who were victims of political disputes. Practices of these workshops have crystallized division and inter-ethnic tensions. The religious format of sharing war stories categorizes individuals by their ethnicity. As the main target in Lebanon, youth resent the experts of these workshops for decontextualizing political violence and justice. The false narratives of "self-victimization" place the burden of peacebuilding unto the youth. However, promising career jobs in the field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding is a strong incentive for participation among youth. The general approach to peacebuilding and conflict resolution as a profession, rather than a movement, is an attempt that shows success based on the increased number of workshops and "experts."

The need for "experts" is further justified by treating people from post-war societies as too fragile to advocate for themselves. People in post-war Lebanon were gripped with sorrow and frustration over the disappearance of family members. The civil war in Lebanon ended in 1990 with the Taif Accord. Although peace was established, many issues, such as the return of the kidnapped and the missing, were left unresolved. The Committee of The Families of the Kidnapped and Missing in Lebanon spent decades demanding that the government release information about their disappeared relatives. The Committee eventually gained the support from national and international organizations such as Amnesty International, the International Center for Transnational Justice, the International Commission for the Red Cross, which are pursuing initiatives to hold the government accountable for

the missing. Nonetheless, Shea McManus, an American anthropologist, argues this brought on new challenges. Under international law, families of the disappeared are considered rights-endowed "victims." However, they are also assumed to be too tired and traumatized to fight an unresponsive government on their own. Hence, the international organizations assisted by sending "experts" to train these families on how best to demand their rights. As it happens in most post-war countries, an unreliable and often times corrupt government enhances and strengthens the relationship between the citizens and NGOs. In the case of Lebanon, no matter the distrust some felt with these organizations, they offered the families a potentially powerful way of demanding the right to know the fates of their loved ones. Being the only way to get responses, these NGOs reduced the families to the status of victims and depoliticized them by treating and presenting them as incapable of fighting their own battles. Although families in Beirut were aware that they were being disempowered, they were taking advantage of the NGOs as the only opportunity to get some answers.

In the case of Mitrovica, Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth reveal that both communities still resent reconciliation. Nevertheless, their resentment is not an innate ethnic antagonism but rather it is a result of local and international policies in Mitrovica. These policies in turn repeatedly raise and crystalize the divide between "self" as victims and "others" as aggressors. The case of Mitrovica shows that the militarized division reproduces violence and relations of war. This increases tensions and fears maintained by families, communities that make it difficult for youth to challenge the division rooted in such reified process. NGO's on the other hand, have a long history of inserting their "skills and expertise" into international conflicts as seen above; this method was no different in their approach to post-war Mitrovica. Similar to the case of Bosnia, using ethnicity to prevent ethnic

tension from escalating also fails in Mitrovica. What is unique about the case of Mitrovica, in comparison to the studies addressed in this section, is the ethnography of daily challenges of youth, which narrates detailed and intricate actions that limit peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. As will be further analyzed in the chapters to come, the discrepancy between the real and projected conditions of Mitrovica as a divided society is dangerous, especially for the minority of youth that try to overcome the division. These discrepancies deepen divisions, and the youth are encouraged to subvert them in order not to be victimized by them.

**CHAPTER 3**
Research Methods

To investigate how Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth understand and challenge their division in Mitrovica, my research was based on the following questions: i) How do Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth in Mitrovica experience the division? ii) What roles do governance actors have in Mitrovica and how do the youth understand and relate to them? iii) How do the youth interpret their situation and how do they envision life in Mitrovica? In this chapter, I will address the methods used to answer these questions, the limitations of the study, as well as the process of coding the information that lead to my findings.

To understand the challenges of living in a post-war divided society from the perspective of those effected by it, I carried out participant observations. Participant observation is a research method through which the researcher takes part in familiar and unfamiliar activities, rituals, and interactions of the people being studied. This method is important because, besides allowing the researcher to closely analyze, understand, and experience social phenomenon, it allows the researcher to analyze inside and outside factors which can easily be neglected from non-participatory research. Employing this method in my work enabled me to explore and understand different social dynamics, traditions, and beliefs in the South and North of Mitrovica. Most importantly, it enabled me to walk through the everyday experiences of youth, and their challenges of living divided. Participant observation as the initial stage of this work took place in the South and North of Mitrovica, and lasted for three months in the summer of 2016. In total, I spent 640 hours of participant observation with youth in both segments of the city. Initially, I approached non-governmental organizations as the

most accessible meeting point with the youth. My prior work in the Forum for Civic Initiatives (FIQ) in Prishtina enabled me to establish contacts with officials in the civil society. The NGO in the North, which I had been in contact with prior to my fieldwork, stopped contact with me without any explanation. The NGO in the South gathered five Albanian members who I met on my first day in Mitrovica. The participants were two women and three men. Discussions with these young people reflected learned reactions from NGOs. Their answers and feedback to social issues and youth's situation in Mitrovica were almost identical to those I received from their program coordinator. Concerned with the inability to investigate the situation of youth who are not a part of any NGOs, I decided not to rely on these organizations. Through an acquaintance in Mitrovica, I met Ben, my informant from the South, and Lejla, my informant from the North. Through these two people who remained my main informants, I was introduced to many people, fifty of which are an integral part of my research. From these, fifteen were female, and the rest male, between the age of eighteen to thirty years old.

The starting point of my participant observation in the South took place in cafes, as the main socializing venues in Kosova. I visited places such as the "Selfie," "Miner's Pub," and "Citizens" cafes, and the Business College in the south. My advent into research in Mitrovica was eased by my origin and prior familiarity. I am an Albanian Kosovar, born and grew up in Kosova, and my native language is Albanian. In the North, my first visits took place in the Business College in the north, in the patio which was used not only by the students but also youth in general. An advantage to my work was that, the majority of youth in the north spoke English. With time, my visits extended to more cafes such as "Soho" and "Inkognito" in the North, theatre plays in Prishtina, the Ibër Bridge,

restaurants, and the Business College in the South and North of the city. This part of my research was led by youth themselves. By only setting up the time I arrive in Mitrovica, my role as a researcher became that of a friend and a listener. Participants did not do anything outside their daily routines. Instead, I was the companion who listened and talked to them about their daily experiences in the divided city of Mitrovica. Youth in both segments had activities prepared for me to take part. During working days when the majority of them had to attend school, I was invited for coffee and lunch breaks. After working hours, I was invited for walks around the city, cafes and bars, theatre plays where youth took part as participants of NGO projects, and workshops organized by NGOs. My work with Albanian youth was strictly in the South, and with Serbians strictly in the North. Youth in their respective ethnicities simply organized their activities in their half of the city, and my work in Mitrovica did not disturb their ordinary days.

My ethnographic research in Mitrovica was characterized by informal discussions that consisted of topics relating to the youth's experiences of living in a divided city, their perspective of life and people on the other side of the bridge, their understanding of international interventions on peacebuilding, NGO initiatives towards conflict resolution, and their future aspirations. Lastly, my status as a student was the most evident advantage I had to gain the youth's trust. Albanian and Serbian youth in general show distrust for people who hold a paid institutional position, for they do not believe in their intentions. Recognizing me as a student who is curious to understand their situation and listen to their stories, youth in Mitrovica were not only welcoming, but eager to share their memoires of living in a post-war divided city.

After building a rapport with youth of the South and North of Mitrovica, in the second month of my field work I started conducting formal interviews. From the fifty regular participants with whom I worked, thirty agreed to an interview. Interviews took place in both segments of the city, either in the Business College or cafes. Although the structure of interviews was formal, most of the questions were open ended and participants were not given written consent forms. The interviews, which had the same questions for both Albanian and Serbian participants, consisted of thirty questions, but often times went to forty based on the responses and follow-up questions. The initial stage of the interview aimed at understanding the everyday challenges facing youth in a post-war divided city. This stage consisted of questions relating to their activities in Mitrovica; their experiences and reasons behind crossing/not crossing the bridge to the other side; gender roles concerning the youth's separation; their relationships with people from the other ethnicity; and the overall understandings and feelings of their situation. The second stage of the interview concerned the effects of families and communities in their everyday lives. This section was comprised of questions such as: the role of the society with regards to the division; the role and influence of their families towards the youth's aspirations; and stereotypes and prejudices for the opposite ethnicity. Lastly, the third stage of the interview examined the role of governance, international community, and NGOs in peacebuilding and reconciliation. This section of the interview consisted of questions on: their understanding on the permanence of division; their political stance with regards to division; their perspective towards the international community in Mitrovica; their understanding on peacebuilding and reconciliation; their understanding on peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives; their understanding with regards to NGO projects towards conflict resolution; and their future aspirations.

Responses to the informal discussions and formal interviews would often start with personal experiences and proceed with narrating stories of their families and friends. Most of the youth I worked with were either children during the war, or born after the war. Hence, their families and society at large played a crucial role on their perspective towards division. Further, the majority of the youth do not engage with politics either because they are unsatisfied with their current political state, unemployed, or live in extreme poverty. Their distrust of the media further resulted in the loss of interest in following news on political decisions for Mitrovica. Their main source of information is daily experiences with family, friends, municipality, government, military, international community, and non-governmental organizations. Political conversations together with the affirmation that most youth do not follow the news encouraged my archival research. This research concerned documents and annual reports from governmental and international institutions, as well as NGOs. Further, the confirmation of events and political developments in both segments of the city was done by consulting electronic newspapers.

The ratio of male to female participants is the main limitation of my research. There are a few factors that caused this unproportioned participation. First, the initial month of my fieldwork took place during Ramadan, the month of fasting for the Islamic religion. As a religious society, the majority of people in Mitrovica fast during Ramadan, hence, social interactions are limited. Because the fasting schedule is long, physical activities are constrained. Second, even after Iftar, which is the eating time, it's mostly men who go back to social interactions. Cafes, restaurants, and streets in the afternoon after Iftar are crowded mostly by men. My second month of fieldwork post-Ramadan showed that religious and patriarchal traditions dominate daily interactions, restraining socializing

and public representation of women. As a concrete example, I met most of the male participants through different settings such as cafes, streets, schools, and parks, whereas I met most of the women through educational institutions. As a different social issue that deserves a separate analysis, gender inequality is not covered by this work. However, women participants were vocal about their limitations when it comes to public appearances and activities. Even if not strictly prohibited, the need to belong in a religious and patriarchal society is in itself a restraining sacrifice.

A distinctive element of the nature of my work is the fact that I have studied a social phenomenon with the people of my culture. Ethnographies, as James Clifford argues in his work on "Partial Truths," are the interpretations of other people's lives (1986). It is the ethnographer who choses what to include, and what is important for the research. A common belief is that studying another culture allows the researcher to be objective. However, as Clifford states, there are only partial truths. And, as Roy Wagner argues in his work on "The Invention of Culture," in the representation of a culture, absolute objectivity should be given up in favor for relative objectivity (2016). Hence, this work can be criticized by anthropologists who strive for an absolute objectivity, which means that anthropologists should not study their own cultures. This is one of the main reasons why feminist and "halfie" - people whose cultural identity is mixed- anthropologists face challenges within their discipline (Abu-Lughod 1996). For they could not be categorized as "others" or "outsiders" of the cultures they study. This is, however, a colonial ideology which reinforces cultural supremacy. This study does not treat "self" and "other" as givens. A researcher can never fully stand as an outsider; their work is defined by their relationship to the others. Hence, this study is based on the belief that challenges of analyzing and interpreting a culture are the same for anthropologists. The

difficulties faced to engage in the others experiences, can be equal to the difficulties to maintain a distance when studying their own culture.

During participant observation, most of the notes were recorded in a notebook. The other part was recoded through the phone, specifically in cases where an issue was being discussed in a group of people. Formal interviews were recorded on a voice recorder, transcribed, and locked on my personal computer. Identification of the participants is enclosed by using fictitious names on this research. During the coding of field notes, three files were categorized for the South, North, and Fusion of both. Findings from this research were initially based on coding key terms used from the participants during our discussions or formal interviews. Through line by line coding of all field work data, I gathered the terms that were used the most when covering a specific issue. For example, when Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth talked about their daily activities in Mitrovica, the key terms used the most were: us and them, this side and that side, mafia, the bridge, border, problems, afraid, south and north, family, and community. When discussing about the division, some key terms were: European Union, EULEX, KFOR, corruption, poverty, inequality, and mafia, among others. Or when discussing the work of NGOs, the main terms used were: opportunities, projects, travel, fun, misunderstandings, tolerance, and reconciliation. I determined the relation between these key terms depending in the context in which they were used in discussions or interviews. The analysis and grouping of these key terms, lead to the main themes such as: family and fear, society and threats, governance and illegality, international institutions and division, as well as NGOs and the future. Because my fieldwork is characterized by extensive conversations and long interview answers, I did not use any software coding program. Instead, I coded everything on word documents by highlighting

with colors and adding comments for repeated terms, added new files for the analysis, and categorized everything in folders. The final version of my categorized data consisted of three folders/themes that make chapters four, five, and six of the research. Chapter four discusses themes on families and communities with regards to the fear and ethnic-tension they cultivate and pass on to the youth. Chapter five concerns the themes on governance which includes the international institutions, the governments of Kosova and Serbia, and the illegal market in the north of Mitrovica. Lastly, chapter six discusses the themes on the work of the civil society towards ethnic conflict resolution and the youth.



Figure 5. The Business College in the South



Figure 6. The Business College in the North

**CHAPTER 4**
City in Context; "We Live in a Lie, That's Our Reality"


Youth in Mitrovica believe that the authorities governing the city are the creators and backbone of their division. Continuous struggles for sixteen years after the war brought no changes in Mitrovica. For the youth, this is a manifestation of a hidden political agenda of International institutions and governments of Kosova and Serbia. By analyzing the roles and effects of the governing bodies, this chapter demonstrates how, instead of providing support through peacebuilding efforts, youth view these governance entities as the source of the division.

**From The Safety Zone to the Zone of Exclusion**

The presence of the international community aiming peacebuilding and reconciliation, as voiced by the youth, hinders their lives. The separation of Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians was initially seen, from the international community as a necessary step to stop and prevent ethnic conflicts. However, the daily experiences of youth, especially Kosovar-Albanians, with FOR/Carabinieri, EULEX, and other international institutions lead them to believe the international community created and now continues to maintain the division.

Interactions with the international institutions, especially KFOR and EULEX, have caused the Kosovar-Albanians to distrust the institution's missions. Glauk and Besnik, who I met through the BMC organization in Mitrovica, were founders of a recent NGO aiming to address sociopolitical issues through art. Because their one-room office in an apartment in the center of South Mitrovica was under renovation, they took me to a cafe called "Citizens". We discussed how their lives have

changed due to international interventions which, in their perspective, should have stopped long ago. Besnik, a twenty-six-year-old Albanian was eight years old during the war. His house was in the north; hence, he had to go back to the north after the war. Until they moved back South due to political and social instabilities, Besnik experienced hardships with KFOR:

> It was KFOR who divided us. I don't know who ordered them, but I know for certain that it was them. When I was young, I initially lived in the North. Everyone in that side had to have a tag with their identification information. KFOR distributed those to us. If you ever forgot the tag, KFOR would keep you at their compounds until they verified your identity. You had one tag and you were allowed to bring two people in as guests. I have suffered way more from KFOR than I did from Serbians. KFOR broke our doors to inspect our families for weapons. They treated us like caged animals. There is this memory I have which is my nightmare. I was little and I threw my ball close to their compound, they took it and tore it apart. That was the only ball I had, it was my favorite thing to play with as a kid.

This is one of many examples which show the hostile relationship between the citizens of Mitrovica and the international officials there. The youth's understanding is that the mission of international institutions, in the case the peacekeepers, is not peacebuilding. Having been psychologically mistreated and deceived for bringing peace, Kosovar-Albanian youth on the whole do not trust the international community.

In general, youth in Mitrovica feel betrayed by internationals who do not understand or consider the needs of their communities while leading peacebuilding initiatives. One day Ben wanted to show me the other bridges on the Ibër River, so we walked through an entertainment center with many restaurants, bars, and children's games that were usually empty. In contrast to the Ibër Bridge, this bridge, which connects the North and South, was not seen as a threat for it does not embody

feelings of fear or trauma caused from war conflicts, as is the case with the Ibër Bridge. Talking about the presence of KFOR and EULEX, Ben told me that the internationals ignorance towards the locals makes it easier for them not to help:

> Internationals don't understand us; they don't know what we feel. But I also believe that they do not want to know what we feel. For them it's like visiting any other city in Kosova. They see what happens, they are not blind, they decide not to talk to us and understand us. Ignorance is their purpose.

There is a widespread belief that the international troops do not show any signs of compassion towards the divided youth. Rather, in their eyes, the troops are simply following instructions that lead them, as any other person with a regular job, to a decent and guaranteed payment. The international troops therefore have a professional identity that for the youth has disabled their ability to care about people in Mitrovica. The ethical dilemma how close aid workers should be to the people they assist has never resulted in a unified response. Some believe that the motivation of work matters depending on the job one has in the international aid (Malkki 2015). If one for example is a surgeon, the motivation might not matter because the job is very technical. However, if one's job requires establishing and maintaining social relations, then one might not want to detach themselves and be uncaring. For some, it might be difficult to place the peacekeepers in one of these groups. However, both Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth expected that the international troops know the people they are assisting.

During my fieldwork, another manifestation that showed indifference towards the society in Mitrovica, is unfamiliarity of peacekeepers with the Albanian and Serbian languages. For sixteen

years, the majority of soldiers were unable to learn either Albanian or Serbian. Their lack of interest in approaching the communities they are supposed to protect is a sign of exclusion which prevents locals from participating in a process crucial to them, peace. My desire to understand the lack of attention towards the locals, which I encountered every day while crossing the bridge in Mitrovica, lead me to communicate with them. On July 12th, I traveled to Mitrovica to take pictures of the city and the graffiti on the bridge. On the south side of the bridge, there is a restaurant called "Ura" which means "the bridge." This restaurant is frequented by internationals who work in various institutions and a very good lunch spot for the Carabinieri soldiers that guard the Ibër Bridge. While having an espresso and preparing my notes for the day, I saw that the number of the KFOR jeeps was greater than any other day, so I decided to go talk to them. I approached one of the cars with two soldiers standing outside and I greeted them. They smiled and nodded their heads. I started inquiring about the number of jeeps present that day. One of the soldiers looked at me and said "I no speak English." I asked if they speak Serbian, and he shooked his head to say no and laughed. I therefore continued walking, took my camera out, and stayed in the southern part of the bridge to take pictures. Minutes after I shot a few pictures I see that another, older, Carabinieri has been watching me. For the following twenty minutes, this solider followed me until I left for the north of Mitrovica. Besides being surprised that a young woman who approached them is seen as a suspect, I also understood why young people in Mitrovica do not communicate with the peacemakers. They have truly excluded citizens from their lives and work. The lack of knowledge about two languages, with which they interacted for years, shows signs of disrespect towards the Albanian and Serbian culture. Most importantly, it shows disinterest with regards to understanding the needs, requirements, or questions

of the citizens.  Hence, their only interaction with the citizens of Mitrovica, is surveillance and control of potential suspects. Such controversial role of peacekeepers is a manifestation of tasks ordered by higher institutions, which claim to work towards the normalization of relations between Serbians and Kosovar-Albanians.

The feeling of being ignored and deceived by the international community is common in both segments, but less evident in the North side. Youth in the Northern segment did not share their personal experiences with the international community, but neither did they share the same attitude and feelings towards them. One of the reasons is that the presence of peacekeepers is much lower than it is in the South.  This fact leads Kosovar-Albanians to believe that Serbia has more authority than Kosova in the EU. There is a general sense that international institutions tend to treat citizens of North better than the citizens of the South. It is believed that Serbians in particular have more freedom than Kosovar-Albanians because the internationals give them more freedom. When asked what freedom they are talking about, Donjeta told me that after the construction of the "park of peace", the Serbian community destroyed the road in front of the bridge and no one stopped them; whereas when Kosovar-Albanians tried to stop such activity, they were arrested by KFOR. Donjeta's argument displays three issues cultivated by the work of the international community. First, their lower intervention in the north, at least in the eyes of the citizens, addresses the concern that the north is more powerful. Second, the south is weak for being highly dependent in the international institutions. Third, the unequal treatment from the international officials comes as a response of them either being less powerful than the north itself, or a result of hidden political agendas that prefer the north instead of the south.

Mistrust towards the international community goes beyond blaming them for the existence of the division to holding them accountable for maintaining it. Crossing the bridge to the South, Lejla and I passed the peacekeepers of The Rule of Law Mission in Kosova (EULEX), which different from KFOR oftentimes stay in their offices in the north and south. Frustrated at seeing them she said:

> EULEX are the biggest problem. One day we gather and decide to fake a problem in the bridge just to see what the EULEX police would do. My friends and I start fighting, while the EULEX officials were just watching. I run to them and say help, they turn to me and say 'look over there those guys are your police' talking for the local police on the Serbian side. Of course, they won't help me, I am not the reason why they are here.

Youth's attitude and perception towards the international community is created through experiences and provocations. Youth do not evaluate peacekeepers work through the policies that emanate headquarters; rather their evaluation is based on how the international community treats the youth and the readiness with which they protect and support the youth. Distrust towards their mission sometimes led to vicious expressions due to the frustration at being victims of situations that they cannot change. Donjeta, who lives in the North told me that she doesn't expect the troops to protect her for that is not the reason what they are in Mitrovica. From her perspective, even if their mission is peacebuilding their actions state the opposite:

> They do not care about keeping us safe! You know what keeps us safe? The shotguns! The shotguns that families secretly keep in their houses in the North, and maybe even in the South. This is how we cope with being divided by them.

Donjeta's argument reiterates two reasons why youth resent the international community. First, international institutions including the peacekeepers do not aim peace because they have divided the people. And they cannot guarantee peace because that is not their mission. There is therefore, an

evident distrust in the mission of international institutions. More importantly, the peacekeepers are a part of a larger problem that emphasized the limitations of peacebuilding mission through the use of military. They view Mitrovica as a post-war society, with peace being a result of their presence. This justifies their long-term presence. Further, the threat of future violence coming from the fact that the division is reinforcing war-relations stems current violence. Lastly, while perceiving the government of Kosova as weak to address the needs of the citizens, and instead, become a pray of both the international community and the north; youth in Mitrovica, especially Kosovar-Albanians, feel neglected by their state.

**The Forgotten Part**

While Kosova lacks authority in the North and is entirely focused on getting the EU membership, youth feel they are abandoned by their state that is supposed to protect them. The EU's mediation of the process of negotiations led to the loss of Kosova's sovereignty over the city of Mitrovica. Youth on both sides believe politicians of Kosova gave up their power over Mitrovica for personal gain. From their perspective, the city of Mitrovica has been forgotten. The normalization of relations between the states does not necessarily mean normalization of relations between Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians in Mitrovica. All initiatives of reconciliation and cooperation are perceived as strictly political and elitist by the youth. This influences young people in Mitrovica to distance themselves from following the news or trusting the current politics in Kosova or Serbia.

The fact that Kosova has no authority to intervene in Mitrovica is manifested in economic conditions. Poverty and unemployment reign throughout Kosova but this is especially the case in

Mitrovica. Mitrovica inhabitants maintain that the government of Kosova has no say in the conditions of Mitrovica as they are strictly focused on becoming members of the EU. While having coffee with Ben and Ylber at the Selfie cafe, Ylber told me that: "The main problem with Mitrovica is that our country (Kosova) will never be able to self-govern. They have no say in the most important policies and that is the legal framework." Ylber's concern was legitimate because since after the war, the state of Kosova, was not able to make decisions in their territory. Further, negotiations between Kosova and Serbia are never fully transparent for the citizens. Youth in Mitrovica are never fully aware of the policies being implemented in their city, as Lejla told me while discussing the normalization of relations between Kosova and Serbia.

> It is extremely difficult to get to the right information. Serbs explain what's convenient to them, Kosova does the same. Usually the reports are vague and not complete, and there are no reports or declarations from the EU that elaborate on what is going on. They always say 'we are under discussion' and we never know what those discussions are.

The normalization of relations between the states is disclosed to the people but it is translated differently depending on what the states want their citizens to believe. The citizens of Mitrovica are the last group to be involved in these negotiations. Not only is the government of Kosova absent from the city, but all political decisions are made in Prishtina, the capital. Young people from both segments feel frustrated dealing with policies that never meet their needs, as Jeta explains it to me:

> All decision making happens in Prishtina and that is nonsense because Mitrovica is a different city. People do not understand how much this place and the people have changed. Most of the politicians who write and establish laws and policies for us are never here. Their foot has never stepped in this ground and yet they are confident to decide for us. Mitrovica is used for things that Kosova political elites need, not what we need. I have met many people young and old who have no idea what goes on here. I am not surprised, because even if Mitrovica is on the news, the media does not

> show the reality of how we live. What they show is what they want to make a big deal. Propaganda! They show issues of Trepça in a very broad way, but never how those affect our lives.

According to Jeta, like most youth in both sides of the city, the governments and the international institutions are not aware that the city is caught up on bigger political and social struggles. While the discussions on Trepça [mines in Mitrovica which were divided with the division of the city] are important, they do not necessarily address the daily challenges that the citizens in Mitrovica face every day. The fact that they feel forgotten, shows that they hold their countries accountable for their struggles. Further, while their sociopolitical and economic situation is only getting worse, they truly believe that politicians are benefiting from their hardships.

The lack of Kosova's concern for the situation in Mitrovica is not just due to an inability to govern; rather, it is believed that politicians, especially Albanian politicians, benefit from following international orders. Youth in the South expressed frustration with corrupt politicians who do not care about the youth, while the Serbian government appears to fulfill all the needs of their citizens. While in Prishtina, I met with Bora and Donjeta for coffee in a very famous cafe known as "Dit' e Nat'". Both of them were explaining to me why they are hesitant to communicate and build relationships with Serbians in the North. When asked about the government, Bora started tears of anger and said:

> If the smallest incident happens in the North, the whole government in Belgrade goes crazy. They make everything a big deal in order to provide their people with all they need. I am so tired! I am happy I'm not living in Mitrovica anymore. I have a house in the north and it's still burnt from the war. I could never go back there. Our politicians are completely blind to what is happening to us, but even if you shout it out in their faces they don't care about you.

As Bora states, youth are frustrated by the fact that politicians in Kosova are not just blind to their local context, rather, they are not interested to know for they do not benefit anything from helping them. Instead, by addressing local concerns first, which can potentially be different from the priorities set by negotiations in Brussels, the politicians together with the government of Kosova might incur political losses. Especially the risk of not being a member of the European Union. In addition, while living with their past enemies, it is painful for Kosovar-Albanian youth to see that the government of Serbia shows readiness to address all the local needs in the North. This fact, not only cultivates pain, but also strengthens ethnic tension as a form of competition about which ethnicity is more powerful.

Some youth from the North, especially Bosnians, were very vocal on their belief that Serbia is always alert and ready to provide the people with what they need in order to keep the North under control. Serbian youth remain silent when it comes to whether they agree with their government's decisions and priorities. Reluctance of youth in the North to talk about Serbian politicians seemed to be from the fear of losing their benefits. From all of the youth I met, there were several who showed mistrust towards the politicians and implied that the Serbian government is dependent on the North of Mitrovica. In Goran's words: "Whatever happens here is because of the politicians. I have a decent life, better than many people in the South. But I know that the government needs me more than they love me." Hence, in general youth of both segments understand the government's lack of interest with the loss of sovereignty and corrupt politicians in both governments. Interactions with youth continued even after I left Mitrovica. A number of them from the South and North texted me while I was in Prishtina. Trusting me as someone with whom they could express their feelings, often times I have

received texts and phone calls to discuss various issues. Lejla and I were chatting online and she was telling me why both communities believe that politicians are corrupt, the following was her text:

> Double salaries, pensions and other benefits. Easier trade, excluding taxes, excise duties. Shop banned substances, weapons, drugs - anarchy is the best. Therefore everyone fits this situation.

These descriptions from the youth might sound as general statements, but they do not differ much from statements given in parliamentary meetings from deputies. Just like Lejla, the Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian citizens are witness to many parliamentary hearings where deputies judge each other for corruption and personal gains from working with Serbia or with Kosova.

As a result of mistrust towards the governments and politicians, Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth oppose their policies and the society as a whole does not count on them. Viewing their governments as barriers rather than assistance, youth distanced themselves from political activities. The lack of sovereignty to rule a disputed territory caused the hijacking of governance by illegal entities which continue to maintain the division.

**Everybody Knows [Krejt E dinë]**

As legal structures exist but are not enforced due to the contested status of Mitrovica, people do not recognize the authority of the legal actors. As a result of a lack of law enforcement, there is a widespread tax evasion, corruption, and unregistered businesses, all of which contribute to the establishment of the black market. The black market is the informal authority whose establishment was facilitated by the status of the north of Mitrovica. Studies show that tax evasion is common especially among big businesses, due to their connections that allows them to not be caught

(Gashi,Mehmeti,Hyseni, 2015). The fact that businesses in the north have higher profits by avoiding taxes is seen as an opportunity for others who can profit similarly. People engaged in the illegal market are believed to be business persons, politicians, as well as international officials, which the youth refer to as "the mafia". Profits of black market are not equally distributed. It is known among the youth in both segments that political and business elites in and outside of the city are the main beneficiaries. Since no negotiation has been reached for Kosova to control the northern segment, the division continues to allow the continuation of the illegal market. While the north continues to hold an instable and perhaps impugned status, and inefficient courts, incentives for such illegality will remain.

From the youth's perspective, the status of the north of Mitrovica is highly dependent on the division. With the unification of the city the north would have to be under the same legal framework and enforcements as the south. Thus, unification presents large challenges for the black market. Being dependent on the division, the youth explain how the mafia surveils and controls both segments. Discussions of the mafia were the most difficult, and the youth were never fully confident to talk about details. On the South, people held the same belief and attitude towards those engaged in the illegal market. After some desk research, mainly analysis of the news in media, I came to understand that the youth were talking about smugglers who benefit from tax evasion in the North. Smugglers as mentioned before could be anyone, but the ones who profit the most are the political and business elites, as Maya told me:

> There are a lot of people who participate in the black market here, Albanians, Serbians, and I am sure many internationals as well. I have never heard anything

about it in the news, but all people here know about it. They sell and buy different products like food and drinks. I have heard that a lot of people deal weapons as well.

Conversations with the youth, as well as their knowledge about who belongs to the mafia showed how confident they are about the mafia's existence.

In a society dependent on illegal activities, recognizing the underworld is safer than overlooking it. On the way to meet Lejla in the North, I stopped to wait for her at a cafe in the left corner in front of the bridge. Lejla decided to show me around the North. During that one hour walk with Lejla, for the first time, I felt afraid of being in the north. She knew almost everyone that we passed by, and others that were familiar to her for she knew their stories: "He has a high rank position in the police office but he is a big mafia" she was telling me while pointing at a middle-aged man smoking a cigarette in the corner of an apartment. "See that skinny girl with a kid there? She is one of the biggest female mafias in here. She deals arms, and does a lot of drugs. That is why she is that skinny." Sensing that I might have started to feel uncomfortable, she looked at me and said: "Oh don't be surprised, everyone here is a mafia. Even I can be a mafia if I want. See? I know everyone, including the mafias; doesn't that make me a mafia?" Lejla's attitude is not because of the excitement of living among mafias. On the contrary, this fearless attitude shared by many young people in the north, is a result of having to cope with living in such dangerous environment.

The problem for the youth is not only the existence of the mafia, but the power that these people have to convert their activities into underground governance recognized by the society. A common fear amongst the youth with regards to the mafia is that the black market has its doors open to whoever wanted to participate. Often times, that means that war criminals could be not only

participating but also running the black market. Another belief shared by youth from both segments was that the mafia runs everything in the North. Although institutions operate independently from the market, it is believed that due to "the mafia's" power, they could hire anyone in any institution, as Vigan told me:

> The smugglers can be anybody, inside or outside the market. The smugglers are the rich guys, and they can do anything, and they do. They are the power, the governance in Mitrovica. They control not only the market but all institutions. War "chetniks" are now commanders in the police. You know how they got there? They did not get elected or applied for a position. Powerful people put them there, and that's the smugglers. If you participate in contraband you get everything here.

*Chetniks* were Serbian guerrillas of the Yugoslav Army, now a word used in Albanian to refer to Serbian war criminals during the Kosova-Serbia war. Youth in the South and North shared with me stories of people they knew personally entangled in such illegal activities. Those stories however are kept confidential and were not used for this research.

Considering that such activities are entirely dependent on the division, the mafia need to ensure that the city remains divided. The youth in both sides state that there are two groups of men that safeguard the division: an informal police created in the North and groups of young men paid to initiate conflicts in both sides. Although their identities are unknown, youth, especially from the South, believe that Serbia pays men from the North to surveil movements in and out of their segment, as Ylber told me:

> They have the illegal police which are paid from Serbia. They are everywhere, mostly in the entrance right when you cross the bridge. They are not supposed to be seen, that is why they are called the bridge guardians.

Like the existence of the mafia, the existence of the bridge guardians is confirmed by folklore.

Everyone believes that Serbia has established an illegal police in the North to be the guardians of the

division and the benefits it creates. On the other hand, young men paid either in cash or by trade are

believed to be ordered to occasionally initiate conflicts in order to alarm people that inter-ethnic

tension is still present. Even the youth who were victims of such crimes believe that the aggressors

were paid by the mafia. In my conversation with Jeta about youth's participation in the illegal market,

she told me that poverty is one of the main reasons why they do not question such participation:

> Young people have no jobs here, and most of their families are very poor. In this
> situation they can be paid with a sandwich, and I have heard of such cases. They get
> paid occasionally but mostly right after political announcements about Mitrovica or
> something that has to do with the relations between Kosova and Serbia. If something
> gets decided in the government and the Ibër Bridge is mentioned for whatever reason,
> something happens here. They do this in order to prevent people from supporting
> governmental decision towards unification.

This brings us back to the ways in which young male citizens incite ethnic conflicts in both sides of

the city. This research does not deny the existence of nationalistic ideologies in either north or south;

however, it addresses incentives that force some of the youth to be victims of physical and

psychological abuse. It seems therefore, that, some of these young people are victims of "the mafia"

whose existence depends on ethnic conflicts. The tragedy therefore, stands in the fact that, one way

that the division in Mitrovica is maintained, is by sacrificing the lives of young Kosovar-Albanian

and Serbian men.

As a city with no official governance, the North of Mitrovica is immersed in a social chaos

that it is often times incomprehensible and even not known from the outside. Life in a place where the

law cannot protect people or prevent crimes, results in the creation of many realities that cannot be

understood by foreigners. The illegal market, the mafia, the bridge guardians, and the corrupted

youth, all cause an unsafe and unusual life in Mitrovica. From the outside, Mitrovica is known as a

place with no law, and Lejla whose family is involved in the illegal market, explained to me why

people think this way:

> The north has no law because we can do whatever we want. If the police stop me I
> can say 'what do you want?' and go on doing my thing." The police have no power
> in the North. I can break a car right now and the police can't do anything to me
> because they know my father. And my father knows people in the south, and people
> in the south know people in the north, this is how it goes. Neglecting the law in the
> North benefits the elites and a few other people. The rest are very weak to do
> anything about it. Everyone knows what goes on in Mitrovica but in the North people
> don't say anything because if they do they will lose their benefits. In the South some
> will lose benefits as well and others don't want to put themselves in the risk to say
> that they know anything.

Such an exceptional status of Mitrovica is a result of a society where authority is unconventional and

where universally accepted regimes such as the police, rule of law, or the governments, remain

powerless. People outside of Mitrovica however, vaguely know about the abstruse nature of life of

Serbians and Kosovar-Albanians. My foreign self was introduced to existence of the mafia for the

first time only by the youth in Mitrovica. At the business college in the north, one day Maya

explained to me how their realities and what they go through is not portrayed or known to the others:

> It's obvious that something like "the mafia" or how we get paid to maintain the
> division will never be on the news. But that does not mean that it is not true.

The discussion with Maya testifies to the ways in which youth explain the persistence of division

from within, with one of the reasons being that some do not know their truths, and some others ignore

them. Thus, from the outside, Mitrovica is a city with no laws. But from within, it is a city controlled

by an unorthodox legislation whose survival seems to be in the sacrifice of youth's aspirations and lives. Mitrovica, as Jori called it one day, has become "a gray zone." A zone where authority is determined by illegal activities, and where regular citizens, especially youth, have to bear the burden of social disparities. The illegality for some has become a normal way to survive. For the youth of both segments, forced to live in two halves of a city that are drastically different from each other, caused the formation of many colorful realities of fear, prejudice, and secrets, which define their everyday lives in Mitrovica. Kosovar-Albanians and Serbian youth are aware that their realities are not easily understood from the outside. Thus, they do not rely or trust outsiders to solve their socio-political and economic issues. Rather, they either have to cope with the everyday struggles or escape from them.

Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth therefore, live amidst peacebuilding initiatives that aim to unify the city and the mafia that aim to preserve the division. However, as voiced by the youth, there is no clear divide between the peacebuilding and the mafia community. Rather, the three governing bodies, including here the international institutions, the governments of Kosova and Serbia, and the mafia, profit from the segregation of Mitrovica. Thus, the governance in Mitrovica is the source of challenges that the youth have to live through every day. Together, they create the first force that pushes the youth apart. Holding more physical and not necessarily intellectual power than the youth, they are the first barriers that the youth cannot directly challenge. Neglected by authorities who are seen as the heart of their division, families and respective communities reliving conditions of violence and fear of ethnic conflict, do not come to their help.

Figure 7. The identification tag from KFOR



Figure 8. Carabinieri peacekeepers at the Ibër Bridge



Figure 9. "North Side Mafia" Graffiti in the South



Figure 10. Graffiti in the North "Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava" meaning "Only unification saves the Serbs" as translated by one of the participants

**CHAPTER 5**
Life In The City of Mitrovica: "Friends During The Night, Enemies During The Day"


Youth in Mitrovica live in continuous struggle between fear of ethnic conflict and an attraction towards the other side. Fear comes as a response to the memories of war shared by their families and respective communities that establish an image of the other as evil and threatening. Attraction, caused by the unknown which sometimes becomes even more appealing to the minority of youth who manage to socialize. These two forces discourage and inspire socialization between Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth, and are the other challenges of living in the divided city of Mitrovica. The following sections based on my fieldwork in Mitrovica, demonstrate how the youth understand and challenge these barriers.

**In Between Times**

Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian families, who are still living with the fear of ethnic conflict, share memories of war as a way to prevent youth from potential ethnic disputes. This fear informs people's social beliefs and prejudice, which in turn dictates the ways in which they and their children live. As Andreas Huyssen argues, memories of the past are fomented by the fracturing of lived spaces, and so is the case in Mitrovica. The physical and militarized division of Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians preserves ethnic antagonism, and re-defines the past-war relations by holding both sides as the enemies of one another. As a result, memories of the past violence awaken as a defensive mechanism to prevent a violent present similar to the violent past. Families living in constant fear of being hurt communicate the past with the purpose to assure that youth understand the risks of the

other side. Dragan, a twenty five year old man, is a Serbian-Kosovar citizen living in the North of Mitrovica. He and his parents were born here, and he has other relatives who live in Serbian villages around Kosova. Discussing the role of families in the lives of youth, he told me that families are worried for the wellbeing of their children considering that the sociopolitical situation in Mitrovica is unstable. "Instability" as expressed in Mitrovica, is a very vague discussion, for the causes of it are apparently evident for everyone. Findings from my research shows that "instability" is caused by the fact that Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians are still divided, and both live with the fear from one another. The fear of ethnic confrontations, which for families seems to be inevitable, forces them to prevent their children to communicate with the other side, as Dragan told me:

> Stories of war start the moment they hear that something bad has happened. They come back, and fearing that I might get in trouble or get hurt, they advise me to never trust anyone. They tell me stories when they were expelled from their home, and they say that enemies often times remain enemies. There are good guys and bad guys in both sides; it is because of them ("bad guys") that our families remember the war.

Memories of war shared with Dragan reflect his family's fear of abuse towards their son. This worry comes as a result of the widespread belief from both Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians that they will always remain as opponents. Such convictions are not cultivated only because of the war; rather, families in Mitrovica are witness to the preserved war relations and motivations through the sociopolitical and areal divide in their city. Dragan's explanation shows that the current situation in Mitrovica keeps the memories of war alive and informs them in relation to their children. When he claims that war stories are shared when something bad happens, he is referring to everyday challenges of physical and psychological conflicts that happen in Mitorvica, such as fights, threats, and protests. Further, while the division of the city is still under supervision, any news from the negotiation

meetings between Kosova and Serbia cause various reactions in Mitrovica. For some families therefore, memories of war arise from the anxiety of being hurt in the present. This influences them to instruct their children on how to live and who to trust.

"The other side" is not only imagined as consisting of rivals but it is often perceived as evil. In my discussion with Glauk, a mid-twenties Kosovar-Albanian living in the south, he revealed a few expressions that families share with their children. As mentioned by Dragan, these instances are not families sitting down to share war stories with their children. Rather this happens occasionally when people feel instability in Mitrovica. In these cases relatives recall the past as a reminder to be mindful for the present. Glauk told me that although his family does not share war stories to stop him from socializing with Serbians, his friend's families do:

> My generation did not experience the war, but there are many families that prohibit their children of my generation to hang out with Serbs. Their judgments are pretty bad. Usually they say things like 'they killed us once and they will kill us again.' Or there is another thing that I hear every time, people say 'young generations of Serbs are raised to kill us.

These phrases display different effects that memories of war play for the youth. First, these phrases show the belief that the enemy and their motivations are eternal, as families/communities continuously teach the young generations to hold the same hatred and revenge. Recalling violent memories is a way of demonstrating that the enemies will always hold the motivation to eliminate their people. People in Mitrovica are not simply living in the past. Instead, their standing in history is much more complex. They live in between times; the present, which is highly informed by the past and the past, by virtue of being provoked by the present conditions, which is always present. The physical division of the people in Mitrovica therefore causes limitations to reconciliation as shown

from political and anthropological scholarship. As Recce Jones contends, the physical divide only deepens ethnic tension by dehumanizing the image of the others behind the fence. That is because the role of the military is to protect people from a disaster, which in this case are ethnic conflicts or perhaps a second war. Thus, families in Mitrovica are also forced to believe that they are under threat from the other. Further, such dehumanization of the others in Mitrovica merges all generations into one category, them versus others, victims versus enemies, and good versus evil, where societies as a whole are seen as perpetual rivals.

The resurrection of enemies from the past to the present is not a result of speech alone. These shared memories caused families to physically and psychologically limit the lives of youth. Donjeta is a twenty-six-year-old Kosovar-Albanian woman who lives in the North. Donjeta told me that she could count the times she has crossed the Ibër Bridge, because to do so she would have to pass through the Serbian neighborhoods. Donjeta is one of many young people who resent not only socialization, but also a unified life in the future:

> When they want us dead, how would I ever want to live with them? My parents told me of the times they have been betrayed by Serbians. They told me of how our relatives were killed. They share these stories with us, to emphasize how cruel they were being treated. My father does not let me cross the bridge; I go on a different way where I do not interact with Serbs. Because my father believes that I might be treated the same way as they were.

Donjeta's fear does not only concern her wellbeing, but also the shared sentiment with her family. Personalizing memories of war causes youth to feel stronger enmity towards the people who abused their relatives. This shows that sharing of war memories does not only effect antagonism through

communication but also alters and limits the youth's life. Besides the pressure not to cross the bridge and reach the other side due to safety issues, the war stories influence the young minds to completely change their lifestyle in order to neglect their enemies. Donjeta's attitude towards people from the north, and the situation of being divided is common for the majority of youth in Mitrovica. Ben, Vigan, Ylber, Jeta, Saranda, Edon, and Bora, are a few of the youth I worked with, who hold such stance due to the past violence experienced by their families.

Though perhaps incomprehensible for the youth, the fear shared by many Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian families through storytelling is altering youth's relationships by encouraging them to see the others with suspicion. Although socialization between Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth is rare, some of the youth have managed to create relationships by being students of the same college. The Business College, which has branches in the north and south, sometimes requires students take joint classes. For some, this system is very attractive and satisfying for it allows them to meet new people and learn about their neighboring culture. For others, this structure is stressful for they have to interact with youth that show insecurities towards relationships with people from the other side. One day at north campus of the college, Jovan and I were in the patio talking about how Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian students socialize. Jovan shared with me the fear of speaking in Albanian due to the instances when his accent was offensive to the Kosovar-Albanian students.

> When I say 'Shqiptar' I am afraid that Albanians will get offended because I have a Serbian accent. They are young so they do not think of the war. If we keep on thinking about the war, we cannot move ahead. Our problem is that old generations and the community is here to reminds us every day that Serbians and Albanians are not the same, and that they are enemies. I do not think you are my enemy Deniza, this is why I tell you this. When I say "Shqiptar" they are not supposed to be offended, or I am not supposed to be afraid to call someone that. When I do, I only do it as a

funny way to speak to my friends but I have realized that not the word itself, but the fact that a Serbian says it will actually hinder my relationships with them.

Jovan and his classmates are too young to have experienced the threat of being called "shka" or "shqiptar." However, their families' fear of present conditions has passed down to them, preventing them from fully trusting the others intentions. Hence, even for those that have managed to establish relationships, their accompaniment is full of uncertainties that maintain the ethnic tension among young generations. Jovan's concern on how limited he is to approaching his Kosovar-Albanian friends shows the deep impact of family influence in the everyday lives of the youth. For the students who hear two languages every day, language in itself is not as important as the way in which they address each other. Calling one another "Shqiptar" or "Shka" is offensive because it has certain negative connotations from the war. Although "shqiptar" means Kosovar-Albanian, and "shka" means Serbian, the use of these terms since before the war intended to categorize someone by his or her nationality. However, while not all youth experienced the war, it is the memories of war shared with them, and the present conditions of living divided, that influenced the lack of trust towards their new friends. Trust in cases where relationships are built, concern intentions towards the others arguments, approach, or actions. The case above shows doubt in the intention of approaching someone by calling out his or her nationality that raises ethnic tension.

For some young people who believe that the families' fear of ethnic tension is inevitable, forces them to keep their relationships secret. Youth like Jovan and Galdim who have Serbian and Kosovar-Albanian friend, feel anger towards those who cannot find reasons for tolerance. Galdim stated that the biggest problem in Mitrovica is the injustice done to the young people. In a society where fear of unification prevails, young generations are not given the space, time, or right to

construct their own thoughts and achieve their own aspirations. Their entire experience is colored by war conditions of the past that are being maintained in the present. This leads young people to hide the truth from their parents who would advise them not to socialize, in order to achieve what they see fit for their lives.

A characteristic feature of tradition in Kosova that prevents youth from taking matters into their own hands is the expectation of respect towards their families, especially their elderly fathers. Saying no to the elders in the house, especially the men, is considered wrong and immoral, and most significantly, a sign of disobedience. Growing up in Kosova, children who follow their desires and dreams at the expense of the family's demands are called "uncultured children." There is a clear correlation between the inability to obey hierarchical structures and inability to "contain" oneself; someone who does not respect their elders has no respect or care for themselves either. In such an environment, where the age of children has very little importance towards their decision-making, there is no strictly accepted age of maturity after which the child is free to live their life as they wish. Maja, a twenty six year old woman from the North of Mitrovica, told me that living with her parents made it difficult for her to interact with the people she wants: "My father tells me, you make decisions for yourself the day you leave my roof." Young people like Maja show that age does not define the agency of decision making in Kosovo. Instead, the ability to take care of themselves independently from their families is what provides agency. Considering that the economic situation in Mitrovica is characterized by high unemployment and extreme poverty, every young person is dependent on his or her family for income.

Yet, there is a very small number of youth that see family influence as inevitable and decide to find other ways to achieve their choices. Youth from both segments of the city already tend to keep their relationships secret. Many of them, like Dardan, conceal their daily lives from their families. In order to socialize with friends on the other side and prevent concerns from their families, youth have started to live a secret unified life:

> I just don't tell them anymore. I came to realize that no matter what I tell them, their mind is made up because they are traumatized and think about the war every time they see the bridge or the police. I know hiding from my family is wrong but it's the only way I can go and meet people in the North.

For some, like Dardan who make a minority of youth who seek to overcome the division and ethnic tension, being vocal about their aspirations does not help remove the perpetual fear of their families. This shows that to confront the division, youth in Mitrovica have to make big sacrifices. In this case that means to either be dishonest with their families, or risk their reputation and relations with the family. By analyzing the case of Mostar, Palmberger argues that young generations try to distance their personal experiences from the experience and memories of their families. This, however, does not mean that old and new generations show radical differences in how they react or experience memories of war. This only shows that one way that youth in Mostar challenge their division is either by remaining silent, and youth in Mitrovica do so by hiding their relationships by their families. It shows that Mostar, just like Mitrovica, is a society amidst violence that resembles conditions of Bosnia-Croat and Kosova-Serbia war. These conditions make memories of war real, because they are a continuation of the past in the present. Thus, young generations can be said to live the same war-time experiences as the older generations. The only difference between generations is that the youth

are trying to overcome their division by distancing themselves from the others who restrain themselves from these challenges.

Therefore, for families who experienced violent conflicts, the war conditions and relations to their enemies are being commemorated in the present conditions in Mitrovica. The fear of ethnic conflict shapes the need to protect their children making families the first social force that pushes Serbian and Kosovar-Albanian youth apart. Nonetheless, the fact that people in Mitrovica live in conditions of violence, poses many other forces that tend to separate Kosovar-Albanians from Serbians.

**"Our Freedom Is Taken Away"**

The Serbian and Kosovar-Albanian communities to which the youth belong are another informal authority that often times use threats and physical aggression to prevent youth from socializing. Thus, while for some of the youth leaving one's family home is a gateway to leaving the family pressure behind, for others it is simply a step towards other forces which prevent social interaction with people from the other side. While neither the Serbian nor Kosovar-Albanian communities are satisfied with their situation, the fear and insecurity within families is further passed to respective communities. Stories at home are shared with relatives, friends, and co-workers. As Galdim told me one day, stories of how Serbians, who used to work with Kosovar-Albanians in the Trepça mine, were recruited into the army that later fought against Kosovar-Albanians, are shared within the community. On the other side, stories of how the Kosovar-Albanians military removed Serbians from their homes are also shared with the Serbian community. Similar stories shared within

the respective society create a collective memory, which creates a nationalistic psyche. Remembering violent experiences of oneself, relatives, or the community, causes one to see their community member as a traitor if they establish relationships with their prior enemies.

In contrast to families that address, complain, and offer advice, Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian communities in Mitrovica can often times resort to physical violence. It is unknown who incites and leads these groups, but it is known that young male citizens are the ones to carry out actions of violence. Prior to and during my fieldwork, cases where young people have faced threats and physical assault occurred, perpetrated by youth of approximate age of eighteen to twenty five years old. These groups of young people exist in both segments, and are believed to be paid by the mafia. Those who are engaged in these groups harass people of the other ethnicity to show domination, or people of their own community to expose as traitors of ethnic and nationalistic pride. Although young, and in most cases much younger than their victims, these groups have been given the agency to control and limit the life of the min young people who are willing to socialize.

An instance which occurred a week before my fieldwork demonstrates the physical abuse of one community against the other. Dragan, a young male student from the north, was physically attacked by Kosovar-Albanian youth in the south. On the way to attend a class in the south, a Kosovar-Albanian friend of Dragan asked him to walk together and said "I would give my arm for you," an old Albanian saying to express a faithful promise. The attack happened on their way back to the North, right in front of the bridge in the presence of the Carabinieri and Kosovo Police. Dragan was stopped and asked of his nationality by some young Kosovar-Albanians who then physically abused him. Dragan later on told me that the college was compensating him for their failure in

preventing their student from walking to the South. As follows, Dragan's friend could not keep his promise for the risk of confronting his community would be disadvantageous. In my later discussions with Dragan, he spoke how that instance altered his relationship with his friend. Being a victim of violence, Dragan just like many other youth, face difficulties to trust their wellbeing to friends from the other side. Since the day of the conflict Dragan has not crossed to go south or into any other cities in Kosova. Thus, the confrontation amongst the communities can often times be severe.

One's own community can also carry out these attacks, as another case from the South shows. Youth who go against social norms are at the same time looked down upon from their communities. As children's images reflect the reputation of their families, families in Kosova constantly pressure their children to embrace their social norms. Understanding that the reputation of families highly depends on their children, youth in Kosova struggle to decide whether to follow their own desires, or to stay in line with the family and societal values. Being seen with Serbian friends who he brought in from the North, Adin was stopped one day and threatened by Kosovar-Albanian men. Adin could not leave his house for more than a week afterwards until the elders of a few families met to ease the tension. Afraid of future attacks and threats, Adin did not tell me what the threat was, but told me that his whole life has changed. Before, he had the community to worry about, and now his family was forcefully made to believe that their child is in real danger from both sides. In my interview with Adin he told me:

> It is a question that I ask myself every day and night, maybe sometimes 24 hours a day. What is bothering these people? Why do they hurt me? Why do I bother them? If they do not like Serbians, they can stop seeing them. No one has to force any one to be friends or enemies. By forcing me to do something, they are destroying my life because they are destroying my relationships. I love my friends; I have reasons to be

with them. People can have reasons not to like someone, and I can respect that. However, they cannot force me to hate my friends, or my potential friends. I will not stop; I know it is going to be hard but it is right so I will not stop. I am not doing anything bad to anyone. Actually, I am doing the opposite, I am making someone happy. Because we get happy when we get together. It is them who have to stop; they are coming uninvited to stop us from doing what we want.

 Threats from the community have major impacts for the youth, who then are unable to make their own decisions without taking into account community demands. Adin voices his complaint that these threats are not simply limiting his daily activities with friends. Rather, they affect him psychologically as well. For the majority of youth, relationships with their friends define their life. In the context of Mitrovica, as it is in Kosova as a whole, socialization is the biggest part of one's day. The majority of youth are unemployed, and some of them do not attend school, as was the case with a lot of youth I met in Mitrovica. In such environment, one's daily activities compromise of hanging around with friends and family. In this context youth blame their communities for restricting their ability to socialize freely and thus violating their right to happiness.

Confronting these challenges becomes even harder since the families reputation is depended on the social evaluation from communities. Even if youth want to ignore their communities, they have to face the concerns of their families. In addition, as in the case of Adin's experience, families can also get in conflicts with the wider society for their children's safety. As mentioned before, the reputation of families is highly dependent on their children's behavior and lifestyle. Therefore, in Mitrovica, as in the rest of Kosova, it is very difficult to behave in a certain way that is different for the society, and not be criticized from the community. Unfortunately, for ethnic issues in Mitrovica, it seems as if there is no room left for criticism. Rather, while living in conditions of violence, threats and physical abuse are understood to be the main ways to stop social disorder. Hence, both inside and

outside of their homes, youth constantly confront forces that reinforce the division between the Kosovar-Albanians and Serbs.

The case of Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth, and their struggles to overcome social barriers from their communities, are yet another force that opposes a diversified socialization among the youth. Although youth are the ones facing the most challenges of living divided, everyone, including families and communities are trying to find the safest ways to survive and not be hurt. This starts from families recalling memories of war as a defensive mechanism, and continues to society's accumulation of these memories and fears into nationalistic shields. All of these frameworks aim to defend people from pain and their respective communities from social disorder. Nevertheless, my discussions with Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth in Mitrovica show that they are not aware that their lives are similar to the generations of their respective communities that have experienced the war. Perhaps the lack of weapons in the hands of the citizens creates the image of a peaceful environment. With all initiatives to normalize the relations between Serbians and Kosovar-Albanians, and other initiatives for conflict-resolutions that I will analyze in the chapters to come, Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth face constant challenges for living in violent conditions that resemble the war but are being treated as post-war generations. No matter these challenges, a minority of youth in Mitrovica, have managed to find ways to socialize with one another. Which fortunate events become other barriers in themselves.

**The Other Planet**

Although the majority of Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth do not socialize with each other, for a small number of youth the cultural differences raise a curiosity and desire to explore the other side. The minority of youth that have been able to see the other side, or meet people from the other side, have created an image of what they want to explore. Generally, Kosovar-Albanian youth were more excited than Serbians about visiting their counterparts. For those like Dardan, Edona, Jori, Galdim, and many others who have visited the North, the other side was known for being a much more beautiful place than their own; in Jori's words the North was:

> A place where time has stopped since after the war, but the culture, music, art in general and opportunities for young people are infinite. The South is just so grey, the North is so green. When I first saw it, it looked like a different planet.

The availability of space and time of Serbian youth to engage in things other than politics is another attraction for Kosovar-Albanian youth. During my visits in the north, the youth did engage in more hobbies than the youth in the south who were mostly spending their times out in cafes. However, the problem is not participation, rather, recourses offered by their municipalities and governments. Although poverty is a widespread problem in the north as it is in the south, there is a belief that the north receives more benefits from Serbia than Kosovar-Albanians do from Kosova. As Jeta explains it:

> Their life's so much better than ours. They do not pay for anything, no electricity, no water, nothing. All the money they earn, and the money they receive from Serbia goes to luxuries and travels and music.

The majority of Kosovar-Albanian youth expressed envy for Serbian youth, who, apart from enjoying benefits that make life easier, have the means to organize their lives around entertainment. Serbians

are known as "sefali", a Turkish word borrowed from Albanians that means pleasure or fun. Being "sefali" means having entertainment as a priority, and being able to enjoy life. Edon, who went to the North with his parents a few times, told me that just by looking at the houses in the north one can tell the different lifestyle: "Serbians like to eat and drink; they like to sing and dance. This is why their houses are a disaster outside because all they want is to have a good life inside." Edon's observation comes from how different houses are in the South, where they are arranged, colored, and adorned with flowers. Nevertheless, those colors only hide the interiors of those houses are filled with economic problems.

Seeing the other side as better off but not being able to experience it fully, or at all, is devastating for youth who see the opportunities they could have if the city were not divided. Trying to explain the losses youth suffer from the division, Astrit, a twenty-six young man from the South asks me: "Deniza, you are from Prishtina. How would you feel if you could only see but never feel or experience the Sunny Hill?" The Sunny Hill is one of the largest districts in Prishtina, the capital of Kosova. It is home to some of the most important people in my life, and Astrit knew that already from our previous conversations. His question, and my assumed answer, shows how the division freezes not only hope, but also dreams, relationships, progress, life itself. Hence, a part of the attraction to explore the other planet is to seek potential opportunities, relationships, and events.

Youth from the North share the same perspective as those from the South that in general, life on their side is better. When asked if they want to visit the other side, the majority of youth mentioned that they have no interest to do so. As Amar said:

> My grandfather lives in the South, and I have more friends there than I do here.
> However, life in the South is very different, the night clubs shut down early because
> the law there is different. There is just not a lot you can do there. No activities, no
> nothing.

Although there is no motivation to visit the city per se, some Serbian youth were enthusiastic about hanging out with Kosovar-Albanians. Stories were shared with me that the best times they had with Kosovar-Albanian friends happened in places like Boge, Brezovice, or Rugove, which are tourist attractions. Hence, besides obligatory travel to attend classes in the South, Serbian youth spend most of their time in the north. Even their trips to other cities in Kosovo are limited. Since my fieldwork happened during summer, the majority of youth that traveled went to Serbia and places nearby.

While nuances of socialization exist, the majority of youth resent association from the fear or ethnic conflict or ethnic resentment that comes from their families influence. However, even for those that oppose socialization, women play a crucial role in defusing ethnic tension. Women's presence and status differs from the South to the North due to patriarchal and religious affiliates. These differences make women of the other ethnicity very attractive to heterosexual men. This attraction makes their presence powerful to ease tension and built rapport.

The patriarchal environment in the south of Mitrovica results in an exceptionally low engagement of women in activities outside their families, school, and sometimes work. Although women, especially young women, express discontent with such injustice and difficulties to live a free life, for men of the northern segment these features make Kosovar-Albanian women very attractive. Accompanying me to get the minivan back to Prishtina, Lejla was commenting on Goran who told me earlier that day that he would like to date an Kosovar-Albanian woman. Excited and smiling at the

topic we were discussing about in the patio, Goran expressed his desire to date a Kosovar-Albanian woman:

> I like Kosovar-Albanians girls; they are very pretty and mysterious. I do not have many Albanian women friends, because I do not meet them as much. However, I am always curious to know more about them when I meet them. In general they are quieter, and less crazy.

Their reserved behavior and confinement to the private sphere as a result of a conservative and patriarchal society is altered into something beautiful and attractive for Serbian men. Frustrated by such perception Lejla told me that Serbian women are more independent than Kosovar-Albanian women. Having the same social agency makes women and men equal, therefore less of an enigma for intimate attraction:

> They see Shkinat as easy to sleep with, and nothing more. If a Serbian woman wants to have a relationship with you, they will, they do not care. They have no one to be afraid or careful from. They are same as men! If you see an Albanian girl with a Serbian man, that is real love. Serbian men think that Albanian girls are good girls because they stay at home and are less teasing. They think that they are more trustworthy than Serbian women who do whatever they want to.

It is evident how different gender perspectives and awareness towards women's role in the society are. From a woman's perspective, "the craziness" of Serbian women is linked to their independence and ability to perform activities in the public sphere; "less crazy" therefore means less independent.

The North of Mitrovica is very different. My visits in the North always required me to pass through the South of Mitrovica, and the difference in women's representation and status was immediately evident. The streets and cafes in the north were frequented at least as much by women as

by men. Tables were occupied by mixed gender groups. Approaching someone by hugging or kissing them in the cheek is common. In the South such practices were common only amongst the same gender. Women I met and socialized with for two months in the North were very active. Besides being students or employees, they worked in cafes, participated in many entertaining sports, and traveled. When Lejla took me to many cafes in the North, the glances and greetings I got on the streets there showed that not only was my foreign self visible, but that people were interested in meeting an Kosovar-Albanian woman. Serbian women were very well informed but also preoccupied by the differences they had with Kosovar-Albanian women in the South. Having coffee in the Soho cafe in the North, Lena, a young woman I met at the college told me that she is lucky to be living in the North:

> I think the mentality of people is very different [North and South]. The people from the South are very traditional. What surprises me the most is the position of women in the culture. When I go to coffee shops or restaurants it is a rare situation to see men and women sitting at the same table, and that's just one example of how limited they are.

 Lena's argument on the limitations women face in the South of Mitrovica reflects not only compassion for the women of the other side, but also the distinct rights and lifestyles they enjoy. Being independent and unaffected by their communities, women of the north are seen as "carica" a Serbian word meaning "queen" or "tomboy." Having coffee at the Selfie cafe in the south with Beni, Edon, and Guri, Guri explains it to me why they like Serbian women:

> Men here are very attracted to Serbian and Bosnian women in the North. The majority says that they are free spirited; they work in cafes, which is something that women here would never do. I know a few men who are in relationships with Serbian women but they don't tell anybody, they keep it a secret.

It is the main differences between the status and role of women in the North and South that attracts the opposite ethnicity. Kosovar-Albanian women need to uphold patriarchal norms in order to belong. The different cultural traits of Serbian women make them very attractive to Kosovar-Albanian men.

Apart from their role on making socializing possible through intimate relationships, women in Mitrovica are also seen as peacemakers. That is precisely because it is either their absence in the inter-ethnic conflicts, or their passive socio-political presence, that results in such power. It is almost part of the folklore of both segments that women were never the aggressor, neither during nor after the war. The Kosovo-Serbia war is known to have been initiated and committed only by men. Women's absence in the conflict caused a different perspective towards them, where they are now not necessarily seen as enemies. Ylber, who I met through Ben at the "Selfie" cafe, is one of the young Kosovar-Albanian men who is not optimistic on reconciliation with Serbians. Everything including politics, economics, cultural and traditional differences was a part of his argument that peace and unification are not possible. Women on the other hand, were the only part of the society that he bears no resentment towards:

> We are very gentle when it comes to women; we have no problems with them whatsoever. Men (referring to Serbian men) have killed my uncle and I will never be able to create a good image about them. But not women, they didn't do anything to anybody.

Ben who was listening to this conversation said: "It is not their fault; there are no better women than Serbian women. They are not to blame for anything. We should learn Serbian and go see Ceca." Ceca, whose real name is Svetlana Ražnatović, is a famous Serbian singer. Seen as innocent in the eyes of the society, especially men, women remained among the very few social reasons for

communities to interact. Social or intimate relationships with women of the same or different ethnicity often times stopped clashes between men. Lejla informed me of a few occasions where her presence prevented her Kosovar-Albanian friends from getting into confrontations:

> Pff I don't know, they told me 'it's only because you are a woman. As if, if I were a man my friends and I would all be in deep trouble. I don't care, and if I can pull my gender to save my friends I will do it all the time, I can even do that as my job.

Lejla was laughing while she talked of working as the guardian of Kosovar-Albanian men, as if she did not quite understand why men back up when a woman is present.

Socializing with women from the same community also breaks social conflicts. One day, Adin's best friend and his sister were crossing the bridge to go to the North. They were immediately stopped by some Serbian men who spoke to them, but neither he nor his sister understood. Because he was in the presence of a woman, the men let them both go and no attack happened. When I asked Adin how he knows it was the woman who prevented them from fighting, he explained:

> I know, and I am certain because the other time when he was crossing to the North with his Bosnian friend, Serbians stopped him. This time they had knives, and did not care that the other Bosnian lived in the North. They stopped them and asked questions like 'do you know that you are crossing a border?' With the knife in their faces they told them to never ever come to the Serbian zone anymore.

Thus, it is not their political engagement, nor their stance on the division that makes women peacekeepers, but rather their informal status of innocents. This is one of the main reasons for establishing relationships between people who are still antagonized and in other situations ready to create inter-ethnic conflicts. Disclosed relationships are rare, and for privacy matters, I do not include those revealed to me during my fieldwork. This indicates that women's presence in the divided youth

is ameliorating and not necessarily increasing socialization between Serbian and Kosovar-Albanian youth.

While for some, difficult roads lead to beautiful destinations, for the youth in Mitrovica, the unknown and women who are the other two forces that pulls them together do not necessarily ease their struggles. Thus, there are real challenges involved in having intimate relations between Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians. Among the youth I met in Mitrovica, even those challenging these barriers are afraid when they hear of such interactions. In our discussion about women, Lejla told me of an instance when a Serbian man married a Kosovar-Albanian woman, and her reaction was full of laughter and stress:

> I told him, are you crazy? Your family is going to kill you. Your father is probably going to put you on a newspaper and declare that you are not his son. Or, your wives family is going to kill you both.

Lejla's reaction demonstrates that even though these interactions might express hope for a unified life, youth in Mitrovica are still aware of the challenges coming from their communities. Thus, while some youth are trying to break ethnic tensions, the fear of confronting their communities prohibits them from acting on their desires. Attraction either from the infrastructure, hobbies, or women, does not represent a group of youth that are willing to unite. Rather, it shows that in the midst of violence and division, people tend to find commonalities that attract them towards each other. While the majority of the youth do not act even if these emotions are present, a small number for whom these cultural commonalities and differences are compelling, influenced them to look up to NGO projects as a safe way to get around.

## CHAPTER 6
### Interactions across Division: Coffee, Weed, and Music

NGO projects are the only safe way for youth to socialize. However, they are sometimes perceived to perpetuate stereotypes of ethnic intolerance between Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth. To understand how youth interpret and react to the situation they are in, it is crucial to analyze their reactions to NGOs and their conflict resolution and reconciliation projects. It is within NGO projects that youth are the most vocal about the injustices done to them by living in a divided society. Analyzing how the work of NGOs is perceived by the youth, the following sections show how youth subvert the work of NGOs in order to socialize on their own terms.

### NGO's in Mitrovica

As a post-war society, Mitrovica consists of a great number of NGOs aimed at reconciliation and peacebuilding. During my fieldwork, I encountered three NGOs that work directly with youth. The first NGO I refer to as BMC aims to build peace and community through projects dealing with: cooperation between the government and civil society, women's startups, promotion of youth employment, language skills for youth, and transnational justice, among others. The goal of the projects is to include both Serbian and Kosovar-Albanian participants in order to facilitate communication between two ethnicities. The second NGO is NDI, an international nonprofit aiming to promote and support democratic institutions. In Kosova, the headquarters of this organization is in Prishtina. Specifically related to Mitrovica, this organization crafts art, culture, religious, and media projects to engage with diverse communities in Kosova. The aim of these projects is to provide

different ways of reaching ethnic conflict resolutions. The third organization I refer to as SDP, whose headquarter is also in Prishtina, is more of a philanthropic NGO/foundation. Their work is built around providing grants, preferably to youth, to promote and initiate entrepreneurship as a way to fight unemployment. They also provide grants on sustainable development that primarily consists of ventures in agriculture. Although their mission is not inter-ethnic conflict settlement, this organization promotes a diverse participation of all ethnicities in Kosova, especially a mix of Serbian and Albanian people.

Some of the youth from both segments of the city are grateful to NGO projects for managing to bring the youth together, especially those that have never met a Serbian or a Kosovar-Albanian before. Dardan told me one day that, these projects influenced young people to distance themselves from the fear and prejudice with regards to the other ethnicity:

> What managed to unity us are NGOs like NDI, AKIV, CBM, and some other organizations that aim to gather youth from different ethnicities. These projects have changed me as a person, and I think so is the case for some other people I know. I understood that it is not worth living with the thought that a society as a whole is bad. In these projects, we do not talk politics; we actually talk for us, and how to live a happier and healthier life. I think that, if it weren't for these projects, I would have been like other people who resent Serbians as well.

The ability to gather youth of various ethnicities and provide the chance to interact without having to debate politics is an attractive prospect for the youth. Further, what Dardan expresses as changes in personality, shows how simple and unobserved interactions can result in social cohesion, something they cannot experience outside these NGOs. Different from political oriented international initiatives, such as "Park of Peace" that raised ethnic hostility, these projects often times give youth the

opportunity to draft their own projects. As a result, most of these projects created by youth take a cultural, musical, arts, or sports character.

The most praised projects are those that give youth the opportunity that they themselves, find reasons to socialize. After two months of seeing me every day, youth from the north and south occasionally invited me to their events, classes, and games. While in the North, Vladimir told me that NDI organized a project to promote tolerance and reconciliation through art. The group of people that chose to do acting was performing that night in Prishtina. The NGO scheduled a big bus to bring the youth from Mitrovica to Prishtina and back. At 7 pm, I went at the "Dodona" theatre and youth from Mitrovica were already there. Many other young people and families came to watch the play. The director of the play was a famous female director in Prishtina. While waiting for the play to start, the power went out and the whole hallway and the stage of the theater got dark. Initially I heard reactions of disappointment and impatience, but a few minutes later the whole environment turned into something much more entertaining than when the power was on. Expecting people to address how the government fails to support young people, showed that I was wrong. Everyone got lively, louder, and happier. People jumped from one group to the other, laughing and sharing stories. The absence of light did not mask their differences, instead, it created an empty torrent, on which the young painted a common life by sharing stories and laughter's. Among these stories, a story about "Mitrovica Rock School" shared with me before from Glauk, became the center of the discussion. This time Goran and Vladimir were telling me about the "Mitrovica Rock School." This is a Netherlands project mentioned as the most successful project to unify youth of different ethnicities in Mitrovica. The

project offers regular rock music lessons, and has created bands consisting of Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian, and other ethnicities:

> We loved it, we love being there and we love listening to the music people make. They [youth] were alone and they heard something about music. One day they go there and they meet each other. The next day they shared their music. With music, they shared their interests, and this is how they became friends. No one interfered, and no one was there to teach them that how to be friends first in order to play music.

Gathering to play music, instead of to participate in trainings on how to be tolerant, gave youth tangible and realistic possibilities to cooperate, innovate, and most importantly get to know each other. Art unified youth more successfully than other peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives. As Glauk said to me: "When we made music, we found things in common. It felt good because we found it ourselves." This shows that youth use NGO projects for they offer them the space and time to test out different forms of socialization. Thus, NGOs become the safest means to get together, but also the only actors that allow the youth to take matter in their hands.

**"Am I Out of My Mind?"**

Regardless of the good intentions, some Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth that take part in NGO projects believe that initiatives of peace and reconciliation are based on inaccurate assumption about the youth. As Glauk said when discussing the Netherlands project, the youth found their reasons to interact. Unfortunately, most NGOs assume youth are incapable to do so. NGOs approach youth as if they need to be educated to be tolerant. Most of the projects drafted for young people are composed of two parts. First, various trainings are organized through round tables,

presentations, and educational games. These activities aim at primarily educating youth about the importance of tolerance, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. Often times these projects are followed with entertainment activities such as games or providing food and drinks, or take place in tourist places like Boge, Rugove, Brezovice or Prevalle. Hanging out with some of the Albanian youth in the South branch of the business college, Edona and the others were discussing a recent project involved with young people in Brezovice. Edona, who has been a part of many similar projects, decided that she no longer wants to be a part of them:

> Yes I participated in various projects, met a lot of Bosnian and Serbian friends but I don't talk to them now. I am so annoyed of the officials who tell me that I need to like Serbs. I like people, I like good people, I need to know Serbians and Bosnians for me to like them, am I out of my mind? Kuku!

"Kuku" is an Albanian expression people use in extreme reactions of anger or happiness. In this case, her frustration came as a result of NGOs approach towards youth as intellectually inferiors, as if the only problem is their disposition and attitude towards the others. Over my time in Mitrovica, youth constantly implied that they should not be taught who to like, and they should not be told that they should like Serbians and Albanians in specific. Youth's first resentment with NGOs therefore, is due to the ignorance with regards to the youth's capacity to understand tolerance and chose who to befriend. Similarly, Jeta told me that one of the main reasons she does not have friends from the North is because she is being forced to do so:

> I don't have Serbians friends and I do not think that's my fault. I do not want to make friends on how others tell me to. You put the police to remind us how dangerous our interactions can be, and then you come to show how people have to be tolerant and teach us the importance of forgiveness. Really? You only have to be human to know that, we are not stupid, we know. They don't know we know, because they do not care what we think.

Jeta's reaction to how NGOs approach the youth shows that unfounded assumptions can propagate indignation towards them. Resentment against NGOs decreases the number of participants, together with the chances of youth to gather and socialize. Further, an important perspective drawn from Jeta's claim is that, in general, youth tend to merge all interventions in one category. Often times, local and international, governmental and nongovernmental initiatives, are categorized as professionals with inconsistent behaviors. This is the reason why Jeta feels anger for the fact that the militarization of the bridge, which divides them, and reconciliation projects, are contradictory. Officials of these NGOs were often times referred to as the "professionals" who are more ignorant than the youth. The problem was not necessarily the inability to meet the youth's needs. Rather, the assumption that the problem with the divided city is not the poor living conditions of existence but the disposition and attitude people have with regards to one another.

It is generally believed that NGOS, just like other institutions claiming to work towards peacebuilding and reconciliation, are ignorant of the realities of youth. During my research process, in May of 2016, I went to the northern campus of the business school to meet up with some students. As usual, I would wait for them in the patio outside where everybody gathered to relax after classes. This day, SDP organized a presentation to introduce young people to a program, which was distributing grants. These grants were meant for youth to establish and implement projects under the NGOs management, which could potentially become startups. The director of the organization sent the information for the presentation a week earlier to the careers office, who responded by saying that they would invite their students to participate. However, that day, no one was in the presentation room. I called Leja and asked if they were aware that this presentation was taking place. She then

called everyone else, and in an hour, the presentation room had around fifteen students. The director of the organization was standing next to the black board together with her other two employees. Students, which I knew from my previous visits in the North, held a very formal attitude while greeting these employees. The way students were willing to engage with the NGO officials and I was evidently different. They tried to avoid interactions with the NGO officials, while welcoming conversation with me, as someone not associated with the NGO.

The director of the NGO explained the purpose of the project and claimed that their initiative extends to the region of Peja, Prizren, and South and North of Mitrovica in order to engage different ethnicities. After a thirty-minute speech from the director, Dragan sitting in the back of the classroom started moving continuously with his chair, and was ironically smiling at something. He raised his hand up and said: "You do understand how poorly Serbians are represented in these projects right? I am Serbian, and I do not trust that there will be other Serbians in this project." The director responded by saying that this is an open call to everyone, so everyone is able to apply. Lejla who came later in the class stood up to support Dragan who often becomes frustrated and is not able to clearly elaborate what he means:

> How did your organization reach out to Serbians in Peja and Prizren? You do know how discriminated they are right? Sure this is an open call, but I doubt that the call will ever be in the hands of young Serbians in these regions.

The director slowly explained the procedure, but youth were left unsatisfied and some of them were hesitant to listen. These reactions were a sign that youth have had long experiences with NGOs and have cultivated very low expectations.  In addition, it exposes that youth have detailed and reliable knowledge on the limitations of the work of these organizations. From their perspective, it is not that

the intentions of the NGO projects are wrong; rather, NGOs are attempting to help inhabitants whose experiences and realities they do not understand.

After the presentation, everyone walked out in the corridor absolutely ignoring the representatives of the NGO. While walking to talk to the director of the NGO, Amar approached me placing his arms around my shoulder and invited me to accompany everyone in the patio for chatting, coffee, and cigarettes. It was becoming clearer to me every day that having someone who listens to them was crucial. Never being heard lead them to resent opportunities they perceived to be grounded in false generalizations. Such is the case Dragan shared with me when an NGO official told Dragan, who was physically assaulted a few weeks before the presentation, that there are no physical conflicts in Mitrovica. It is therefore, the lack of interest to listen to what youth have to say, that leads to the wrong approach towards them. And, it is therefore, a humane reaction to feel offended and oppose projects that do not address someone's substantiality. I accompanied the youth after the presentation, to find Dragan shouting in the patio. He was frustrated and disappointed by having NGOs always come to the North to work with Serbians:

> They do not care for our opinions! That is my problem and that is why I do not want to see them anymore. They want diverse participation and they come to the North because it is easy to find Serbians here. What about other Serbians in other places? It is easy to say this is an open call. What are you even talking about, this is an open call? How can you rely on an open call for people who are discriminated and might never ever be able to have access to it? If they knew about us, about who we are, about what we think and what we need, and where we stand, and then I would participate. They are totally ignorant and yet have the confidence to come invite me in their stupid projects.

Everyone was silent and no one objected to what Dragan said. Although less traveled, unemployed, and divided, youth have more interesting and important insights to the way in which ethnic conflict

initiatives should operate. In contrast, the majority of organizations working towards ethnic conflict resolution hold false assumption of youth's reality and attitudes, which leads the youth to resent them. Nonetheless, in difference from political activities that youth tend not to comment on, NGO projects are a hot topic. This indicates that, besides resenting their objectives, youth also show anger for they believe that these projects could have better impacts.

**In Between Worlds with Coffee, Weed, and Cigarettes**

Since the youth in Mitrovica are dependent on the work of NGO's despite their resentment towards their approach, youth alter these projects into neutral spaces to socialize. Even though the majority of the youth that participate in NGO projects resent their missions, these institutions remain the only spaces that they can trust. NGOs are the safest and most immediate way for the youth to socialize. However, this is not the case because these organizations restore harmony amongst the Serbians and Albanians, but because they provide safe technical means for youth to interact. Because the south, especially, lacks activities for youth, young people use these opportunities to entertain themselves. Also, as the majority of youth is unemployed and cannot afford to pay for hobbies, entertainment through projects is another reason they do not refuse these activities. In the South, Adin, Galdim, Edona, and Lejla were next to the reception where Filip was working. They were discussing why they take part in these projects, and they all agreed that the main reason was traveling:

> You cannot change the situation with ten projects. No, especially not when they waste their money in things we do not need. Honestly, I only participate because I know what to expect. I close my ears during presentations most of the time. If I engage in conversations it is only because a participant said something interesting, I rarely talk about our situation with the NGO workers because I always feel like

fighting with them. For god's sake, everyone goes for the same reasons. They will take us to places and pay for everything; of course I won't miss it.

To benefit from these projects, youth are forced to keep silent about opinions they hold concerning the way in which they are being perceived by NGOs. During the SDP presentation in the North, with the exception of Dragan and Lejla who confronted the officials, the other participants were distracted by the prospect of places they could visit through the NGO project. To make the project more entertaining, the director asked where students suggest they should hold the project: "Somewhere far away, not in Mitrovica. We can go somewhere in the mountains and maybe even climb or something if we have time" Vladimir responded while secretly pinching Amars' leg under the table to make him laugh. Amar covered his face with his palms and was trying not to laugh. Their laughter was first a sign of joy for the opportunity to travel, and for being able to choose where they wanted to go. In addition, it shows how much young people need the support of these projects in order to escape from their daily challenges.

The youth's understanding is that a community cohort is only possible when they are given the opportunity to know each other in their own terms. For youth that is through entertaining and sometimes illegal activities. Vladimir, who seemed not to take NGO projects very seriously, told me:

> I have Albanian friends, I have Bosnian friends, I have Serbian friends, you are my friend and I do not care where you come from. I care that you are with me here for a good cause, I care that you want to be my friend. I want to hang out with you when we want to, and not when people tell us to. I like to cross the bridge with a bike, or running, or by car, depending on my mood. I want to have friends for fun not for projects. Everyone has friends for their own reasons, and those reasons will never be the same. Once you put a condition between us, you are not building a friendship.

Vladimir was counting the ways he desires to befriend people, which are not in the objectives of most initiatives claiming to unify Mitrovica. I heard these sentiments from many others. The conditions he mentions are the obligatory meetings youth must attend and the challenges they must overcome in order to be able to interact as they wish. While attending NGO projects, it is the lunch breaks, games, drinking after workshops, or smoking cigarettes outside through which the youth are actually able to get to know each other. In my conversation with Jori, who is the biggest admirer of these projects, he told me that often times doing something illegal is the most fun:

> To be honest, I am not sure if you want to put this on your research but what we shared with Serbians was the desire to smoke weed. We found out that we like smoking and once I called them, and we went to smoke. Since that day we are friends.

They knew how ironic being in a city they contend to have no law, smoking weed is their favorite thing to do, as Jori continues to say:

> It is funny because often times we feel like we can do anything in Mitrovica, but there is something about us wanting to do this ourselves. Also hiding to do it not just because it's illegal, but being alone you know? I say let's smoke weed, no one tells us to smoke weed.

For the youth in Mitrovica, social rituals such as smoking or drinking, remain the purest ways to socialize and establish trustworthy relationships. Thus, the need to participate in NGO projects in order to socialize displays two findings. First, Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth are not always intolerant; rather, they are seeking to find genuine ways to acknowledge each other. Second, NGOs have a crucial role for reconciliation which should be further investigated and improved. The case of Mitrovica shows that, youth do not expect them to be intermediaries. Rather, guarantors of neutral

spaces for concomitance, and advocators for the need to protect such socialization the analyzed barriers in the divided city of Mitrovica.

The role of NGOs therefore, is that of an actor that helps Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth escape from the zone of violence by guaranteeing spaces where socialization take common forms for both groups. Even though it is only the spaces of NGO's that are used from the youth, those taking advantage of these projects indicate willingness to reconciliation. These spaces distant from the everyday violent conditions, allow the youth not to be afraid of physical or psychological violence, fear of ethnic tension, fear of identity loss, cultural dominance, instable future, because self-interested motivations of governance actors, families, and societies are not present. Integration is not contested because it is not conditioned. Peace and reconciliation is not impossible because in contrast to the youth's role within the city of Mitrovica where they are seen as actors of change to speed up the process of peacebuilding; here within NGO projects, you are not just coexisting, rather they decide to be together. Lastly, socialization is not stripped out of its human and moral nature which the youth strive for, and have access to it only when they escape their society.

Although a minority, the outnumbered Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth that managed to socialize, indicate that post-war divided societies are a symptom of larger political agendas that paralyze possible desires towards peace and cohesion. In addition, it shows that Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth, even though of a microscopic number, act on more heroic and promising ventures, than peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives from institutions with the power to change the horrors of living in the divided city of Mitrovica.

Youth's attitude and understanding towards the work of non-governmental organizations is important, for it shows how crucial their role is and can be in post-war divided societies. From the previous chapters, it is established that the governing bodies and families and societies, are the forces which youth either have to ignore or escape. In difference, youth show patience and hope for NGO projects. Although such hope is not related to the objectives of the project, Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth view them as potential mediators towards a unified life.



Figure 11. Graffiti in the South

**CHAPTER 7**
Conclusion


The Ibër Bridge in Mitrovica is the main barricade that paralyzed reconciliation and peace. For the youth, this bridge is the symbol of divisions and hardships, while for the local and international institutions it is the image of potential unification. As it follows today, seven months after my fieldwork, the Ibër Bridge is still under discussion. In December 2016, citizens of Mitrovica woke up to a newly erected 2-meter wall in the north of Mitrovica. The wall built under the command of the Serbian authorities, caused frustration among Kosovar-Albanian citizens, and was later contested by the government of Kosova. With the mediation of the European Union, the wall was torn down in January 2017. However, while the bridge remains as the symbol of unification for peacebuilding initiatives, in February 2017, the municipal assembly of Mitrovica decided, through an extraordinary session, that another park would be built in the Ibër Bridge. Considering the first reactions towards the "Park of Peace," the new square cannot guarantee better responses, for again, the conditions in Mitrovica remain the same. Through follow-up discussions with Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth, I discovered that the latest events did not manage to ease the ethnic tension or fear of potential conflicts. Citizens in general, and youth in particular, continue to be suspicious of policies about the unification of Mitrovica. This is true especially because these initiatives do not seem to differ from the others that the youth deemed as failures, as Vladimir told me via Facebook:

> Things are not changing and everyone is acting as they were before. Nothing is new. They [The media] say that Mitrovica will have a new park on the bridge. People are going to protest just as they did for the last park. I do not understand how all of those people working for Mitrovica, come up with the same idea which failed at first place.

In the midst of these events, challenges, and tensions, youth continue to resent the peacekeeping initiatives of local and international institutions.

For the youth of Mitrovica, the international peacebuilding community has a hard time identifying with their struggles and reality. After my research it became clear why youth feel that they live in lies, for they are constantly misinformed by these institutions. When the wall was erected in the North, the media published numerous news sources that showed declarations from the government of Kosova, Serbia, and the European Union, none of which were consistent with the others. None of the young people I worked with knew why the wall was built, or whose decision it was. Rather, their reactions to the wall expressed strengthened fear of ethnic conflicts. In mid-December, Ben, my informant from the south of Mitrovica informed me about another occurrence. A train with nationalistic slogans was headed from Serbia to north of Mitrovica. The state of Kosova prohibited the entrance of the train, for it displayed hatred between the two states (Associated Press 2017). In our discussion about the latest events Ben argued that his family and friends are afraid of the possibility of another ethnic war: "How can these things happen while they [Peacebuilding missions] are here? If these things can happen while they are present, anything can happen. The wall and the train are signs of what is to come. I am afraid because it looks like another war can easily happen." Fear of ethnic conflicts continues to grow in Mitrovica. However, such fear is not a result of inherent ethnic hatred, rather it is being provoked by factors outside the society. Despite this, some youth continue to find ways of socializing while at once trying to escape the barriers of being divided.

As this study shows, the physical setup of the city dividing Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians into two separate enclaves, although a strategy of peacebuilding, in fact deepens ethnic antagonism.

That is because the ethnic and territorial divide replicates war relations where Kosovars-Albanians and Serbians remain as enemies. The present violence and social instability, is believed to be the cause of the governing bodies that divided Mitrovica, and the presence of peacekeepers reminds and perhaps indirectly forces people to doubt the other's intentions. The replicated war relations and the present physical and psychological violence revives memories of war which are being used as a defensive mechanism for respective ethnicities. These memories are shared with the youth as a reminder of the dangers from the other side. In the midst of such low-intensity-conflict, a minority of Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth strive to establish relations with one another because they unconsciously and materially have to break war relations that are still existent in their societies. For some young people who manage to see the other side or establish relationships through educational programs or NGO projects, diversified socialization is attractive. Although a minority, these young people try to find neutral spaces to socialize: spaces away from the struggles of living amidst forces that push them apart and pull them together. This study argues however, that youth in Mitrovica do not necessarily overcome the division. Rather, they escape the daily challenges and violence by participating and subverting NGO projects into spaces where they get to know each other through activities such as smoking cigarettes or drinking alcohol. This indicates that one of the main reasons why youth in Mitrovica, as is the case in Bosnia, hesitate to reconcile is the fact that genuine socialization common to humanity is inaccessible for them.

The perpetuation of contradictions and failures of local and international institutions to facilitate reconciliation and provide peace supports the larger argument of this research. That is, the youth living in violence have to escape their society in order to avoid being victimized by the

division. Peacebuilding initiatives such as the normalization of relations with the mediation of the European Union, the separation of people by the peacekeepers, or small-scale NGO conflict-resolution projects, are failing to: i) address the needs of youth and ii) provide any real change in the conditions of Mitrovica. This observation is highly important as it provides a strong groundwork for discussions and improvements on peacebuilding efforts with regards to post-war divided societies. While peacebuilding is entrusted to international powers, this is an opportunity for international peacebuilding organizations to work towards their adjustment. The evidence that youth are trying to escape this situation in order to create neutral spaces to know each other shows the limitations and contradictions within peacebuilding missions.

The first limitation of peacebuilding missions is that these institutions hold inaccurate assumptions that the divided people need mediation in order to restore peace. The youth in Bosnia as shown in Hromadzic, and youth in Mitrovica as shown in this study, either have found or strive to find ways to know each other. Ineffective peacebuilding missions therefore are a risk to those that have managed to accept the other's differences, and perhaps forget the past violence for the sake of a social cohesion. Second, the reaction of youth towards these initiatives shows that peacebuilding initiatives are not based on what the people need in order to reconcile. The goals of these institutions do not align with the goals of the divided people. While the goal of institutions such as the EU or UN is to mediate reconciliation and establish peacebuilding, for the youth, who are the center of my study, the goal is the availability of space and time to socialize without interventions. Further, while for the institutions the objectives are economic and political conditions, for the youth, the objectives are art, music, and entertainment. This difference in goals does not imply that young Kosovar-

Albanians and Serbians are not concerned about their economic and political conditions. Instead, it indicates that, reconciliation and peace are a priori to a good political and economic life.

Further, the case of Mitrovica unfolds a major contradiction of the peacebuilding community. That is, the peacekeepers assume that the only way to establish and maintain peace is by dividing people. The results of this presupposition as in the case of Mitrovica are: the rise in ethnic tension that could have been fading away, mistreatments of the people from the peacekeepers towards the divided people, and the establishment of an illegality facilitated by their presence which further violates human rights. While walls and borders have historically shown to produce violence and hatred, more research should be done on their use for peacebuilding or reconciliation initiatives. As the case of Mitrovica shows, the division of the society is dangerous as it is one of the ways through which war conditions are replicated.

The minority of Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth that subvert NGO projects and establish relations with one another are organized in a silent revolution against peacebuilding missions ignorant to their local context. However, this rebellion is primarily aimed at creating opportunities for association. As the literature concerned in this research shows, NGOs work is often times based on unfounded assumption about the people. One of the reasons why this is common can be the lack of analysis, and interpretation of changes occurring because of higher authorities. Working on reconciliation between people and neglecting the fact that ethnic tension is being reproduced from other actors results in the failure of reconciliation.

The fact that these observations come through an anthropological analysis, this perspective should assist in the future of the work of the civil society. Considering the field's preoccupation with the social organization of societies, anthropology has long been interested in socio-economic and socio-political changes. The importance of anthropologists' participation relies on the questions they ask, the roles they take, and the interpretation of the realities of others. Further, while this creates a new movement in the peacebuilding industry, anthropologists will hold an important role in mediating the communication between the international community, local governance, and the people.

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