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Examining the Cycle of Violence
through the lens of Epistemic Injustice
The Case of Kosovo

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Abstract: The present study will concentrate on the case of Kosovo, where the Kosovo-Albanian population endured significant violence from the Serb government during the war in the 90s, with allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Following the Declaration of Independence in 2008, the government of Kosovo has exhibited indications of reverting to behaviors that have the potential to be considered as dangerous, as they pertain to the minority Serb population of the country. This population has been diminishing in number in recent years, arguably a result of discrimination. Moreover, a decline in fundamental democratic rights including freedom of media and parliamentary plurality have been observed in recent times.

The Cycle of Violence, a concept of significant interest in the fields of psychology and peacekeeping politics, posits that victims of physical and psychological abuse or discrimination can perpetuate similar actions against their offspring or other groups. This thesis examines how the perspective of the “other” can be silenced as a result of prejudice, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence, through the theoretical framework of Epistemic Injustice. It will be argued that taking notice of these signs early on can prevent conflict from reappearing in territories like Kosovo.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Theoretical Concepts

The thesis examines the case of Kosovo through the theoretical concepts of the Cycle of Violence and Epistemic Injustice. Firstly, the two concepts under discussion will be explained. Subsequently, claims pertaining to the potential recurrence of the Cycle of Violence in Kosovo will be substantiated by reports from multiple international institutions responsible for the monitoring of human rights within the region, in addition to reports from civil society actors who have denounced discriminatory practices. Finally, an examination of potential solutions to the situation and a conclusion with all the facts taken into account. The two notions will be separately defined at first, to then see how both intertwine and the rationale behind their relevance to Kosovo. The Cycle of Violence part will include both a general definition of the concept and how it applies to post-conflict societies. There will be an explanation as to why the propagation of the Cycle of Violence cannot be understood without understanding how prejudice silences the voices of the so-called “Other”, paving the way for dehumanization.

The Cycle of Violence

The term “Cycle of Violence” is generally used in psychology to describe the phenomenon of past victims of abuse exerting the same type of violence towards other individuals. According to Wright et. al. (2019), it has been observed that such individuals tend to target adolescents and young adults, as it is probable that they themselves experienced their respective traumas during those formative years. The explanations of why this happens are varied, as are the factors that impact it. One of the hypotheses revolves around how the type of abuse and the frequency of it can increase or decrease the likelihood of a past victim of engaging in the same behaviors. Sexual and physical abuse seem to be especially relevant to it. Individual characteristics like the resilience, self-control, education or inner intelligence of the person can influence too. Nonetheless, they emphasize how having a higher intelligence may not be enough of a protective factor against the cycle repeating if the children are experiencing multiple forms of stress. Moreover, several studies highlight (Dumont et. al., 2007) that resilience may vary in a person depending on their age; even individuals that seem to be resilient in their adolescence are not safe from exerting the same type of violence once they reach adulthood.

Wright et al. (2019) posits that the salient point in this work is that the cycle can be prevented, and indeed, it is not the common denominator. In the aforementioned sample, the authors state that a mere 29% of children who had been subjected to abuse subsequently obtained a criminal record as adults. Furthermore, of these individuals, less than half engaged in violent behavior. They note how the research behind the protective factors has often focused too much on ones that cannot be addressed or intervened, like the ethnic origin of the person. Their sample shows how external protective factors, like being married or attending and graduating college seem to be especially useful for victims of high physical abuse. There is also a possibility protective factors may vary depending on gender, as men are more prone to perpetrate violent offenses than women in the same situation. The authors conclude by saying creating the correct environment to build self-control seems to be one of the possibilities of breaking the cycle, as this factor seems to be the most consistent and strongest one amongst victims of abuse that didn't engage in violence after.

The Cycle of Violence in conflicted societies

Nonetheless, this work will not be focused on the Cycle of Violence as a psychological circumstance of individual people, but as a political phenomenon between societies and/or ethnicities. The thesis of this work will revolve around the idea that there's still a resentment between two ethnic groups, Serb and Albanian, that, if not tackled correctly, could lead to the Cycle of Violence repeating in Kosovo. As seen in the work of Malvern Lumsden, *Breaking the Cycle of Violence* (1997), in conflicts like Kosovo, Rwanda and Bosnia for example, signs of the Cycle of Violence happening on a collective, societal scope have been observed. These signs involve the targeting of specific ethnic or social groups in activities like mass rape and massacres, on the basis of revenge against them for exerting violence and discrimination in the past. These acts are often perpetrated by a small minority that adopts a militaristic strategy and that in return create the conditions for a new wave of violence against them to occur should socioeconomic and political conditions change, creating a non-ending cycle of hatred and violence between the groups. There also seems to be a correlation between members of the violent minority having suffered abuse in their childhood. The work mentions the case of two Bosnian Serb generals involved in war crimes in Bosnia that were themselves child survivors of WW2 massacres that wiped their entire villages and families.

Other examples of this phenomenon can be seen in African countries like South Africa. According to Khosa and Abdulkareem (2024), violent tensions in the country followed the post-apartheid period. They identify ethnicity and the colonial legacy as two of the contributing factors for the persistence of violence in the region, which has in turn created a feeling between parts of the population that violence is the only path forward. Other factors include natural response to repression, external encouragement from vested interests (which in the case of Kosovo is particularly relevant, as we'll see with Serbia's influence on the northern regions), and the oversimplification of complex situations as depicted in the military ideologies of conflict organizers and the moral judgements of those involved. It also highlighted the psychological aspect of the conflict, with group identity and perceived grievances as two important elements for the triggering of conflict. Even so, they assert that violence isn't necessarily predetermined even in these cases, and that it depends on the type of policies and strategies implemented. The study is based on the concept of Conflict Transformation, which according to the authors, aim to foster relationships and facilitate reconciliation processes in the society (Khosa and Abdulkareem, 2024).

To that end, grassroot initiatives and the involvement of political leaders are necessary, to bring together in the same table both government and community stakeholders. The authors mention practices such as forming safety forums, conducting safety audits, addressing historical injustices and prioritizing concerns and the participation of the community can also help prevent the perpetuation of conflict to continue ad infinitum. Education in school seems to be also important in fostering social cohesion and mitigate violent conflict. The apartheid system created historical inequalities in the population regarding this, leaving uneducated black individuals vulnerable to exploitation and low wages. Additionally, the legacy of apartheid affected also the unfavorable situation of women, contributing to high rates of gender-based violence, with the female homicide rate five times superior to the average worldwide. For them, the root of the problems in South Africa is the insufficient knowledge of political leaders on the underlying causes of the violent dynamics. They mention an empirical study made in the Northwest province of Matlosana, that showed that increased public engagement helped identify community challenges and promote effective development planning. They also mention institutional transparency as key for conflict management, and the insufficiency of having a strong legal framework without the willingness or ways to put it into practice, especially relevant for Kosovo. The role of governments like the South African or the Kosovar should be, following this view, ensuring community security through collaboration with social agents and the media. The ways to prevent violent extremism should focus on reducing the vulnerability of potential victims rather than just targeting potential perpetrators. The authors mention one initiative key for them: the Diepsloot Reconciliation Project that promotes dialogue and shared

activities to rebuild trust between locals and foreign nationals (Khosa and Abdulkareem, 2024). These types of practices are painfully absent in Kosovo's case.

On the other hand, Rwanda and Congo exemplify the dangers of not tackling post genocide agreements correctly. The fallout of the genocide in Rwanda in the 90s was one of the main causes of the war in the Congo, as many people from the Hutu ethnicity were forced to fly there in fear of reprisals after the Rwandan Patriotic Front took control of the country following the genocide. Since then, a culture of hatred between the Tutsi and Hutu communities and the lack of any political dialogue has guaranteed ethnic strife for the foreseeable future. Back in the early 2010s, there continued to be in the Congo remnants of the Hutu genocidaires FDLR that killed Tutsis and launched attacks into Rwanda decades after the genocide. In addition to this, the way Congolese see ethnicity as a second identity is interesting, as has made it difficult the blend with other groups (Moffet, 2012). There is a similar sentiment regarding ethnicities in Kosovo.

Moreover, peacekeeping operations led by the UN in regions like Africa or Kosovo are starting to be put into question for its apparent lack of success. Tull (2023) accuses the UN of being still attuned to old-established precepts and practices, leading to a struggle to implement their mandates. While it remarks that peacekeeping operations have had a more positive impact historically when deployed in the regions for lowering the rates of violence and civilian casualties and increasing the likelihood of peace after the aftermath of violence, he shows that in the last decade several operations have faced stagnation and even backsliding, as currently the four largest operations in Africa are considered ineffective. He critiques the apparent hypocrisy of the organization for seemingly accepting overly ambitious objectives impossible to obtain. The future prospect seems dangerous, as the declining use of UN peacekeepers is expected to continue, together with the stabilization missions, with less costly and risky operations remaining the most appealing option (Tull, 2023).

The Yugoslav Wars involved the whole peninsula of the Balkans and, as such, what happened in Bosnia is interlinked to that of Kosovo. As we saw with the Bosnian Serb generals, there are also many child survivors of alleged attempted genocide against the ethnic Albanian population from the part of the Serb government there. They are now coexisting as adults with a Serb minority that in many cases still defend Kosovo as part of Serbia.

Epistemic Injustice

When trying to explain the reasons behind the current problems in Kosovo between ethnicities, the concept of Epistemic Injustice is key. According to Hutton and Capellini (2022), knowledge circulates within a “credibility economy”, in which some knowers are perceived as more or less valuable or credible than others. Epistemic injustice occurs when dominant structures of knowledge exclude, silence, invisibilize, and distort the contributions or opinions of those deemed as less knowledgeable. The reason for the marginalization could vary between prejudice towards the ethnicity, gender, identity or simply the research interests of the individuals or groups. It showcases failure to see in the hierarchy of knowledge “other ways of knowing” possessed by different kinds of people. In these cases, the view of the “Other” is often disregarded as “subjective, biased, emotional, political, non-empirical, impure and flawed” (Hutton; Capellini, 2002, pp. 157). The concept is not only interesting for moral or ethical reasons, but also for political studies, as it can help us clarify aspects of socioeconomic injustice concerning the exercise of power and the design of public institutions like schools, courts and even public discourse. Unfair communicative structures and institutions have the potential to exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities and societal discrimination (Fibieger, 2020), which is especially relevant when looking at a concept like the Cycle of Violence. Hutton identifies two paradigmatic forms of Epistemic Injustice: Testimonial injustice, where the credibility and knowledge of a person is put into question because of prejudice against its social identity; and Hermeneutical injustice, where constraints are imposed on disadvantaged groups that prevent them to show any form of disagreement with the dominant structure of the collective social understanding. Eventually, testimonial injustice leads to hermeneutical injustice, since testimonial injustice can affect what is included in the pool of collective knowledge that leads to an underrepresentation of the experiences of the marginalized individuals or groups, which at some point also affect their ability to understand their own experiences (Fibieger, 2020). In the case of Kosovo, there are major cases of testimonial injustice, but we can already find some cases of hermeneutical injustice, like the central government denying the access to journalists from Serbian media outlets to cover certain events.

The term was coined by Miranda Fricker in 1999. In her book *Epistemic Injustice*, she uses the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley* to show how testimonial injustice works. In it, the character Herbert Greenleaf uses a put-down to silence Marge Sherwood, who was going to marry his son before he disappeared. Greenleaf dismisses her saying: “Marge, there’s female intuition, and then there are facts”. A clear case of Epistemic Injustice based on gender. Here, a woman is seen as less credible solely because of a supposed

“femininity” that prevents her from seeing the situation objectively. Fricker calls this an exercise of identity power, which are operations of power dependent upon agents having shared conceptions of social identity that guides what we think means to be a man or a woman; or being black or Asian, and so on. In another setting, Greenleaf could have exercised its power without even talking. Fricker considers the possibility of the existence of a social context in which women are pressured to never speak up to a man. In that case, Marge would have remained silent, but the result would have been the same as the relations of power between genders are the same, just working passively. She identified two conditions for Epistemic Injustice to happen: the disadvantage position, in which the individuals or group subject of the injustice must be in order to be underrepresented; and the prejudice condition, that the individuals or group of the injustice has to be object of a series of preconceived notions about them by members of a dominant group. Fibieger (2020) identifies another one: the social justice condition; that in order for someone to be unjustifiably discriminated against as a knower, they must at the same time suffer from other social injustices. This means that 1) we cannot see epistemic injustice as an isolated fact, but a sign of a problematic social network; and 2) that by identifying the conditions for epistemic injustice we can see and evaluate claims of harm against knowers, perpetrated by individuals or institutions, and how these same individuals and institutions can avoid committing these mistakes and reproduce existing socioeconomic inequalities (Fibieger, 2020). It’s in this last point where we can see the relation between Epistemic Injustice and the Cycle of Violence. This thesis will also tackle how Kosovo can avoid the repeat of these issues by acknowledging the injustice, bringing together national institutions and civil society actors in a close network and engaging in an equal and fruitful dialogue with Serbia.

Fricker (1999) defends that epistemic injustice had a lot to do with power dynamics, and that this could operate actively or passively. Even when no social agent or agency prevents a social group from voting, for example, if they tend not to do it for complex social reasons, their exclusion still marks an operation of social power. This exact example happened in Kosovo these in 2021, where the leading ethnic Serb party, the Serb List, boycotted local elections, which resulted in the central government in Pristina being able to install four Albanian majors in Serb areas. This fact is key to understand what sparked violent tensions in Kosovo in 2023.

For Fricker, it is always a social group that is properly described as controlled by structural operations of power that are formed to preserve a social given order. The “Other” is often bad-mouthed to ostracize it; adjectives like “delinquent” or “ignorant” are ascribed as to create a negative social image for them.

This work will provide a detailed analysis on how the Cycle of Violence in Kosovo is backed by similar operations of Epistemic Injustice being used against the Serb ethnic minority, with their denouncements of discrimination being silenced using examples of testimonial injustice.

Final Remarks: The concept of the Cycle of Violence has its origin in psychology and explains how past victims of trauma can enact the same violent actions towards others, especially the next generation. But the phenomenon has been seen occur on a larger scale in post-conflict societies, where discriminated communities commit violence against members of the dominant community once those roles switch up. Examples of this include targeted mass rape cases and massacres. While resentment between communities may be inevitable, there are activities that can alleviate the situation before arriving at a breaking point. These include actively engaging local governments with ethnic and social communities. For that, support from actors like the UN is essential, but the effectiveness of the peacekeeping operations of this and other international organizations has been put into question this last decade.

The term Epistemic Injustice refers to the situation of a group of people being seen systematically as less knowledgeable or less credible than others just because of prejudice against them. This group can be the target of acts like silencing, invisibilization and or having their views and beliefs distorted. For Epistemic Injustice to happen it needs to be targeted towards a group that is in a disadvantage position and also suffer from other social injustices. When we think about the concept, we normally visualize it working actively, but Epistemic Injustice can also be passive, when no one specifically negates the right of that community to express, but they decide not to do it out of fear of being misrepresented or not being heard. Epistemic Injustice can happen in a relatively peaceful society too, but when that society is affected by a Cycle of Violence, it is always there, as it's a useful tool for dehumanizing the enemy, labelling it as less valuable and therefore, justify the violence towards it. That's why its presence in a post-conflict society like Kosovo is worrying.

Chapter 2: The Case of Kosovo

This chapter will feature an overview of Kosovo's case. The first entry will be dedicated to the history of the Kosovo war and its repercussions for its society nowadays. It will include an explanation of Kosovo's Constitution and legal framework, the general dissatisfaction of the Serb ethnic minority on the applicability of said framework and the parallel system that still ties northern Kosovo with Serbia. The second part will be centered on the perceived epistemic injustice towards the Serb community, with data regarding the electoral boycott led by the biggest Serb political party in the region and the unrest consequences it had, in addition to cases of Kosovo official institutions and politicians seemingly trying to discriminate, silence and belittle Serb civilians and organizations. To back these claims, the third part will explore the vision of International Organizations and civil society actors regarding the general situation of ethnic minorities in Kosovo. Finally, the last two parts will focus on the situation of media in Kosovo, with the first one addressing general human rights violations claims in the sector, and the last one centered on the comparatively even more unfair and epistemically unjust situation of Serbian media outlets. It will be argued that the Epistemic Injustice present is one of the catalysators for the current rise of ethnic tensions in the country. The timeframe used, except when explaining the facts of the war, will be the last decade of the country.

An overview on Kosovo past and present:

The Kosovo War was a conflict held between early 1998 until mid-1999 between the Federal Forces of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army, that sought independence. It left huge trauma in the region, with nearly 13500 deaths and around 1.4 million people displaced, the majority being of Albanian ethnic origin (Barre, 2024). Slobodan Milošević, commander of the Serbian forces, was accused of being responsible for several war crimes against the Kosovo-Albanian (he died during the trial). For that, international aid was sent to avoid situations like the ones lived in 1995 in Srebrenica, where 8000 Bosniaks were assassinated in an attempt of ethnic cleansing by the Bosnian Serb Army. NATO intervened in Kosovo with air strikes in 1999 that forced Serbian forces to withdraw. The organization is still present monitoring the region, with currently more than 4500 troops still stationed. The United Nations (UN) also deployed a mission, designated UNMIK (United Nations Mission in Kosovo), to oversee the situation and guarantee conditions conducive to a peaceful transition. Over 1600 persons are still considered missing from the conflict, with a current agreement between Kosovo and Serbia of cooperation to locate the missing people not being implemented due to the strained relations between the

two (Amesty International, 2024). The independence of Kosovo was achieved in 2008, following a pivotal meeting that was attended by 109 out of the 120 members of the Assembly of Kosovo. It is noteworthy that the 11 Serb representatives elected to boycott the event. The declaration has been disputed by Serbia, and to this day still does not recognize Kosovo as an independent country. Many ethnic Serbs living in Kosovo share this sentiment.

Before delving into the issues, it must be stated that the situation now is thankfully not as bad as in the 90s. Thanks to the continued monitoring of International Organizations like the UN and the EU, Kosovo must still maintain a certain level of respect for Human Rights if they want to enter eventually into institutions like the Council of Europe. This has led to undoubtedly positive developments in its legal framework and Constitution. The country has regular elections that have successfully fostered a democratic and vibrant civil society. Even if its implementation is problematic, the fact minority languages are legally protected marks a step in the right direction into preserving the ethnic and cultural heritage of the region, which has made it possible that today Kosovo society is significantly more inclusive than 25 years ago. International involvement has contributed to the improvement of several structures, like accessing justice proceedings and the promotion of minority rights. Several legal reforms, like the Law on Gender Equality, the Law for Protection from Discrimination and the implementation of the Kosovo Strategy and the Action Plan Against Domestic Violence have been indicated as pivotal for Kosovo to address fundamental rights related to the protection and promotion of Human Rights (Hoxha, 2019). In 2019, the Criminal Code was amended, and the definition of domestic violence was included as a separate criminal offence for the first time. That year marked also the first time a life sentence was handed down for the murder of a woman and her child by her former partner (Civil Society for Human Rights, 2019). On the matter of war crimes committed during the war, it is important to add that the accountability of what happened during the time has not relied solely on Serbia, as several members of the Kosovo Liberation Army have also been prosecuted for war crimes. Even as far as July of 2024, the Kosovo Specialist Chambers in the Hague sentenced former member Pjetër Shala to 18 years of imprisonment for arbitrary detention, torture and murder committed in 1999 (Amnesty International, 2024). Shala tortured at least 18 detainees in the Kukes Metal Factory in Kukes, Albania, and ended up murdering one of them (Human Rights Watch, 2024). In April of the same year, the Pristina Basic Court (PSC) acquitted Sylejman Selimi and Jahir Demaku for beating a prisoner in a Kosovo Liberation Army detention center in the village of Likovac in 1998, and (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Despite this progress, there are still multiple ethnic tensions in the region. The number of Serbs in Kosovo is quite hard to determine, as many have boycotted the attempts of the central government in Pristina to do a census, but it's calculated that they're approximately 5% of the total population (Barre, 2024), mainly concentrated in the northern regions where the border with Serbia is close. The Kosovo Agency of Statistics states that in the last census they have registered approximately 35 to 36 thousand Kosovo Serbs, but this mainly includes the ones living in the South, as the bulk of the boycott remains in the North, so the scope is quite limited. Regardless, Serbian media outlets expressed concern about the conditions of the census, as they considered the resources for it were limited and that relevant information was not always delivered in the Serbian language or it was poorly translated (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025).

As has been stated, the legal framework of the Kosovo Constitution is considered generally as quite multi-ethnic oriented and centered around maintaining rights for minorities. On paper, it institutionalized mechanisms for minority representation, giving them a portion of the Parliament representatives regardless of who's governing. It was majorly influenced by UN Security Council Resolution 1244, that served as the base document from a period starting in June 1999. Nonetheless, general dissatisfaction between the Serb community is rampant, as its implementation has been wildly inconsistent. The Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo of 2024 lists several instances of this. For example, one of the requirements of the Constitution is having a representation of non-majority communities in Kosovo Courts. In 2024, the Kosovo Judicial Council recommended 3 Serb candidates for 5 judgeships, but only one was appointed in the end. Similar discrimination has been observed in other systems, such as the recruitment of the notary positions across the country, where in theory 8 positions are reserved to be filled out by Kosovo-Serbs, but in fact not a single applicant from Serb origin was appointed in 2024, leaving the region with almost no notaries from this community. Additionally, legislative framework on civil registration is seemingly interpreted differently depending on the municipalities and civil registration offices, which makes significantly more difficult for members of non-majority communities the registration and the acquisition of citizenship in the country. This not only affects the Serb community, but also members of the Roma, Ashkali and ethnic Egyptian communities are in a comparatively great disadvantage as they lack knowledge in civil registration procedures and appeals to defend their rights when they are violated by local and central authorities (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025).

It must be stated that Serbia still maintains a certain degree of control over the Kosovar regions populated by Serb majority, providing funding for essential public services such as education or health care, with teachers and doctors being directly paid by the Serbian government. This was possible thanks to the initial dismissal of Kosovo Serbs of the UNMIK administration after the NATO bombing campaign in 1999. UNMIK police was generally considered by them as an occupational force, with recorded clashes between 1999 and 2001 with the civilian population in North Mitrovica, severely minimizing their ability to undertake their activities. This provided Belgrade with the opportunity to still control *de facto* the northern municipalities, with even having parallel courts operating in Kosovo. According to numbers recorded at that time, 34 judges were working under the Serb system in the northern municipalities, with the district court for these municipalities being based in Kraljevo, Serbia proper. UNMIK never accepted these institutions and tried to eliminate them with some initiatives like opening municipal and minor offences in some municipalities like Zubin Potok, but this did not have complete effect, with even some jurisdictions in Serbia in the beginning of the 2000s having proper jurisdiction over the Kosovo municipalities. The administrative parallel institutions also had control of property rights, with municipal directorates of urbanism and cadaster offices in Kosovo functioning under the authority of Belgrade. The extent to this authority can be exemplified by the Municipal Assembly of Leposavić in 2003, where they issued a document listing the illegally constructed objects and establishing the conditions for their legalization. The document bore the stamp of the Republic of Serbia and referred to former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia laws from 1940. Although the UNMIK Municipal Legal Officer was present at the Municipal Assembly, he didn't intervene to contest the application of this legislation, and the President of the Assembly at the time stated that they would apply both the legal frameworks of the UNMIK and of Serbia. The educational divide occurred thanks to the mutual mistrust between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians, that didn't want to put their children in the other's educational system, also due to a perceived threat to their security. Primary schools were even established in some cases in private homes and other substandard facilities. At the time, all schools allocated where the Kosovo Serbs represented the majority population used the curriculum of the Serbian Ministry of Education and Sports, that provided these schools with textbooks, diplomas and stamps. This institution provided teachers with their salaries. There was no recognition by the Serb schools of certificates of diplomas issued by the Kosovan institutions, and vice versa. The Serbian Ministry of Internal Affairs had several offices located throughout Kosovo, managing activities like administering passports, drivers' licenses, identification cards and vehicle registration plates. Many citizens relied on these offices, even Kosovo Albanians that wanted to travel to Serbia, as UNMIK documents were generally treated as not valid there, which in turn

then created a new problem when these same citizens wanted to return to Kosovo, with cases of convictions for forgery or possession of invalid documents (OSCE, 2003). This parallel system has deepened tensions with Kosovo's government since then (Barre, 2024).

The Epistemic Injustice against the Serb Community

To understand the Epistemic Injustice present in Kosovo it would be useful to start acknowledging the causes of the Kosovo Serb electoral boycott, promoted by the biggest Serb political party in the region, the Serb List, and the unrest consequences it had for their community. The government of Pristina has historically accused the party of smuggling, money laundering and controlling its turf with authoritarian methods, and since Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti was elected in 2021 the Serb List decided to boycott local elections, which has led to a vacuum in Serb areas, allowing Kosovo's government to place ethnic Albanian officials in the administration and dismantle a lot of the parallel Serbian institutions left in Kosovo (Hajdari, 2025). In the town of Leposavić, the boycott resulted in a mere 3, 47 per cent turnout and the election of a Kosovar Albanian major. In May, Kosovo police move to install the major and took control of municipal buildings. In North Mitrovica, the New Municipal Assembly, formed in its majority by Kosovo Albanian representatives, allocated land that were used by institutions supported by the Government of Serbia to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo. Serb-led parties asked to revoke the decision and do a referendum on the matter, in accordance with the Law No. 03/L-040 on Local Self-Government, but the Municipal Assembly refused citing absence of municipal legislation on referendums (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). For civil society organizations like the NGO NSI, these attempts to unilaterally alter the situation in Serb majority areas by bypassing the dialogue with the municipalities and their citizens, have indeed created numerous challenges for the daily lives of the members of the community (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). In most of these cases, the new Albanian administrators and leaders don't know Serb language, which makes communication with its citizens very difficult. Even more, Serbs in the north, that as we saw relied until now on papers issued in Serbia, were given in 2024 3 months to obtain Kosovar documents, and after that were compelled to ask for a residence permit or be deported. Belgrade accused the Kosovar government of deliberately trying to get the Serb population out of the region, calling it an "ethnic cleansing by political means" (Dugalic, 2025).

After the EU sanctioned Kosovo for sending the new mayors elected with insignificant participation, the Deputy Prime Minister Besnik Beslimi openly called for their withdrawal and criticized the Serbian-issued passport labelling it as illegal, without any consideration for the fact that, for many citizens at the time, it was their only option for documentation. The sanctions of the EU mentioned included suspending projects amounting to 300 million euro, and significantly affected the civil society organizations in Kosovo and the potential of the region for economic and social development, with many voices inside the EU, like the High Representative, recommending the removal of them as they were “counter-productive”, “disbalanced” and “a blow for the country” (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025, pp.34). In February 2024, Besnik sparked controversy again for labelling a group of ethnic Serbian NGOs as nationalistic for allegedly opposing the integration of Serbian citizens into Kosovo’s economic and social life and framing them as harmful. The Working Group of the National Convention on the European Union responded condemning Besnik’s comments emphasizing that civil society organizations are independent institutions that operate separately from any state, making his comments damaging for the dialogue process and contrary to the European values and principles. They stressed the importance of supporting inclusivity and peacefulness between ethnic groups in Kosovo (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). Seeing the international response to these words, it is fair to assume that Besnik’s comments represent a case of epistemic injustice in which the Minister is assuming that the criticisms of the NGOs come from a place of being close to Serbia, and, therefore, don’t hold value.

Kurti’s government has defined itself by taking an assertive approach towards integrating the Serb community. His policies include confiscating Serbian-owned land, banning Serbian goods and taking out the Serbian Dinar in favor of the Euro. On this matter, prior to the enforcement date, Kosovo authorities were accused of not providing enough public explanations of the content and effect of the regulation, which contributed to interrupting payments to individuals employed by Serbian funded institutions and to pensioners that still relied on the parallel Serbian social security system (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). It also presumably affected small and medium scale businesses, and services in health, education and child-care. The solution Serbia offered, giving temporary mobile banks, was considered insufficient, as it forced Serbs living in the south of the region to travel great distances to access their finances. Additionally, the Government’s restriction on Serbian goods continued to affect the entrepreneurs and civilians’ socioeconomic rights in 2024. Although the highly disputed measure was lifted from some places like Merdare, it remained in effect in other crossings between Serbia and Kosovo. This directly impacts the funding for the development of the North, with civil society

organizations calling it against the framework of the Dialogue between the countries (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). That Dialogue, monitored by the EU, has been nearly paralyzed the last couple of years, and it marks a dangerous unwillingness to listen to what the other side has to say from both countries.

There have been also cases of national policeman treating unequally ethnic Serb citizens. In 2024, the NGO NSI affirmed that amongst the most threatened rights for Kosovo Serbs remains the right to peaceful protest. Politician Aleksandar Arsenijević, the president of the political party Serb Democracy, was arrested in seven different times during the year for participating in peaceful demonstrations, with the reasoning behind most of the detentions being “blowing a whistle” (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). One of the most alarming incidents was the charging of Arsenijević for harassment towards Visar Sylja, who was the chief of staff of the mayor of North Mitrovica at the time, only for using said whistle as a form of protest. Similar things happened to other members of Serb Democracy. The Human Rights Network (HRN) expressed concern about these cases regarding their perceived illegal detention, calling on Kosovo’s government and police to respect the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and initiate proceedings against those involved in the detentions of these individuals (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). Police presence was seemingly heavy in manifestations and other peaceful events of protesting, with in some cases deployment of large contingents of special unit officers. The targeting of specific activists like Arsenijević represents, in opinion of NSI, an attempt to stifle and discourage public expression of dissent. This was extensively criticized by political actors and other NGOs for a blatant suppression of a fundamental right (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). Similar things happened in many other Serb-led municipalities, which has left many ethnic Serbs feeling sidelined, unheard and unrepresented, leading to sparked protests (Barre, 2024).

These protests escalated in late 2023, when the Orthodox monastery of Banjska became the site of violence between the Kosovar police and Serb militants that barricaded themselves inside the monastery heavily armed, resulting in the deaths of three of them and one policeman (Barre, 2024). Kosovo’s government accused Serbia of orchestrating the attack. Serbia denied it but escalated the situation by increasing its military presence along the border. The report of the incident by the EU Commission highlighted that both were partially responsible for it, which in the case of Kosovo included taking actions contrary to its obligations under the EU framework, like the closure of the Serbian Postal Bank and the Serbian Post offices (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025).

The city of Mitrovica is another example of the tensions between the communities. It is divided by the river Ibar, with the southern population being mainly ethnic Albanian and the northern predominantly Serb. International peacekeepers have been deployed there to oversee the situation. Even so, tensions and violence between the two groups on the bridge that separates the two halves of the city periodically come back (Barre, 2024). The Serb community lives constantly in political tension, with pressure from both the Kosovar government and the Serb one. The bridge is constantly monitored by the local police, and can only be traversed on foot, as they don't allow cars to cross. That leaves the two communities with practically no contact with each other, not leaving room for any type of dialogue. The only caveat to this situation is the youth that has managed to study in centers with members of the other ethnic group as classmates. Anastasija Djordjevic, a 21-year-old mathematics student in the University of North Mitrovica (the only university in Kosovo still part of the Serbian education system) gave some words on this matter to the news portal NZZ: "We Serbs don't really care who owns a business. We still cross the river to shop or eat a meal with Albanians" (Dugalic, 2025). At this point, there are some ethnic Serbs that don't care that much about Kosovo's legitimacy as an independent country, as not only do they feel abandoned by Belgrade, but also are beginning to question whether its influence on the region is truly beneficial for them or it only serves to keep the region in a state of instability. Djordjevic also said that the boycott of the local elections, that seemed a good idea at the start, gave them "a disastrous life", and said Kosovo Serbs needed to return to engage in politics and enter institutions if they wanted any kind of voice and relevance (Dugalic, 2025). At the same time, they feel the government in Pristina has never cared or seen them as civilians with the same rights as the rest, and they don't see the situation improving for them in the future. A Serb resident in north Mitrovica said: "it feels like we're caught between two worlds" (Barre, 2024).

On the topic of youth, an analysis published by the NGO YIHR KS in October of 2024 revealed that, despite developments previously mentioned in some areas, memories of war still have a significant impact on the attitudes of Kosovar youth, even if they themselves do not have war experience for the most part. The research, backed by surveys conducted with youth, revealed that there are big differences between Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serbs respondents when it comes to their insights on war, and their opinions on peace agreements and inter-ethnic relations. It also found out about the correlation between addressing the violent past and prosecuting war crimes by building trust, reconciliation and improving inter-ethnic relations, as well as the general lack of trust of participants to address crimes committed against the civil population of the other ethnicity if this work was not done. Generally, participants were not positive about the way schools imparted knowledge about war, and more often

relied on conversations with family members to know about the matter (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). This implies that a proper and sincere assessment of the past can help youth not to fall into Epistemic Injustice.

In regard to the Cycle of Violence, the Serb community feels violence towards them has increased in recent times in Kosovo. As an example of this, on February 17, 2025, a group of 12 Kosovo Albanians drove through Mitrovica waving Albanian flags and shouting “We have got a bullet for every Chetnik (a wartime slur for Serbs)” (Dugalic, 2025). Civil Society organizations reported that between January and February of 2024 Kosovo police conducted operations targeting facilities used by Serbian community in the Dragaš, Peć, Klina and Istok municipalities, with reports of them confiscating multiple documents, sealing buildings, and the temporary detention of staff in these four regions. Their reasoning was that the facilities were being used for illegal activities. In February of 2024, the police detained two postal workers in Gorazdec and summoned the manager for questioning. In July of the same year, Kosovo Serb employees of the Serbian-financed institutions were summoned to report to the Kosovo police and were later charged with “assault to the constitutional order” (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). To add to the tension, some acts of desecration towards sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church were reported recently, like the illegal dumping of waste at the Serbian Orthodox cemetery in Klina and at the protective zone of the Binač monastery in Buzovik in March of 2024. NGO AKTIV reported a robbery of a church by individuals known to locals with little response for local authorities despite these repeated incidents, raising concerns about institutional neglect, which is contributing to fear between the community of further property damage and escalated tensions between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs. In general freedom of religion is being undermined, with Kosovo authorities denying access to the country in May of 2024 to the current Patriarch of the Church to attend the Holy Assembly of Bishops at the Peć municipality, against the advice of the EU and The Quint. In January, several incidents affected more religious sites of non-majority communities, including the Orthodox but also the Catholic. Among them were attempted break-ins at Serbian Orthodox churches in cities like Silovo, Krushevë or Lipljan. AKTIV also denounced the operation of the Kosovo police in a Serbian medical clinic in January of 2024, where they detained the medical staff, seized an ambulance vehicle and accused the clinic of engaging in unauthorized medical activities. After the clinic clarified that its work involves supporting health services for non-majority communities and not direct medical care, the accusation remains doubtful. Other acts against non-majority centered health institutions included the entering of Kosovo Police officers equipped with automatic rifles to the Provisional Authority of the Municipality of Istok in the village of Osojane to close the Health Center, and the seizing of Serbian-made medications in

numerous pharmacies in Leposavić and Zubin Potok (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). On May of 2024, Kosovo police closed the offices of the Serbian Postal Savings Bank in the four northern municipalities and also conducted searches at the treasury administration offices of the Government of Serbia in Mitrovica, with European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) monitoring them. The searches were conducted without court orders, and even the on-call prosecutor was only informed after the operation began. The EU and the USA assessed these police operations as counterproductive of the ongoing dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025).

There is also a big problem involving the lack of translation to other languages other than the one used by the majority community, which affects the right for information of the Serb community. Civil society has noted that the number of judgements in Serbian language remains very low, and only with the support of UNMIK the numbers have increased a bit. To add to this, the number of specific laws having translation in Serbian is still very low, which is made worse by the fact that official commentaries are only held in Albanian, depriving Kosovo Serbs of equal access to information. This represents a violation of the national Law No. 02/L-37 on the Use of Languages, with the availability and quality of interpretation in court proceedings remaining a challenge for the country. In northern Kosovo, language rights have become a matter of debate, as Kosovo Serbs there feel they are only respected when it comes to Albanian. Following the replacement of Serbian-only signs for ones that contained both Serbian and Albanian, the new signs were vandalized. The government cleaned them, but the community noted that they didn't act the same way when the Serbian signs were defaced prior to this, which for many signified that language rights are being manipulated and use for political reasons in favor of the Albanian. This was exacerbated thanks to the campaign by some ministers of the government campaigning for the removal of Serbian symbols in cities like Zvečan. The Serbian flag was not removed from the Zvečan Castle, an important symbol for the community, but the campaign created a movement for the replacement or restoration of the flag, which ended up in confrontation in March of 2024, when a person attempted to remove the flag by himself and was subsequently pursued by a group. In the end, people were unharmed, but the flagpole was damaged, and the incident signified for Civil Society actors an example of how high-level actions can escalate local conflicts and tensions, creating violence that ends up hurting both groups (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). It also exemplifies how a political action that did not consider the opinion and view of the community affected generated violence.

For Kosovo Serbs, these various provocations serve as stark reminders that they are seen as outsiders in their own towns. Situations like this have led to a recent diaspora of the Serb community in Kosovo. Exact numbers are unknown, but a survey in 2023 found out that 84 percent of Kosovo Serbs knew someone who had fled Kosovo in the previous 12 months (Barre, 2024). This diaspora is a dreadful reminder of the 2004 riots, where thousands of Serbs and Roma were forced to leave their homes by an Albanian mob ((Dugalic, 2025). The recent 2025 Assembly Elections also sparked controversy in the Serb community, with some of them going as far as to say they are the most poorly organized ones to date, with systemic shortcomings that created a disadvantage to Kosovo Serbs, including insufficient access to electoral information in Serbian language, uncertainties regarding the voting outside of the country and lack of transparency in the general election management (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025).

The situation of the electoral boycott by the Serb community is impressively comparable to what Fricker noted as an example of epistemic injustice by power dynamics acting passively. No social agent or institution prevented them from participating, but the complex societal and political tensions in the region, coupled with what they consider an unfair treatment and the sentiment that their voices are not going to be listened to regardless have had the result of Pristina's government being able to extend their dominance on the region and feed upon the existent power dynamics between the communities. In turn, this has raised ethnic tension, which has resulted in a comeback of violence. The link between Epistemic Injustice feeding into the Cycle of Violence seems clear. But outside of the personal sentiment Kosovo Serbs might have, what do International Organizations monitoring Human Rights have to say about the situation? Is it true that violence is reappearing in the region due to discrimination?

Civil Society and International Organizations remarks on Human Rights violations in Kosovo

There are cases of IO claiming violations of Human Rights towards the Serb minority and others in Kosovo in recent times. The 2022 US Human Rights Report claimed significant Human Rights issues in Kosovo, including credible reports of violence targeting ethnic minorities and other marginalized communities. It mentions the joint press release made by Kosovan Serb civil society organizations in

September 2022, where they expressed alarm over the criminalization of “the expression of political views, which is a universal human right guaranteed by international conventions, as well as the constitution and laws of Kosovo” (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2022, pp. 13). This was following the 3-year ban on entry imposed on ethnic Serb Nikola Nedeljkovic for inciting intolerance during the June 28 observance of the 1389 Kosovo Battle commemoration at Pristina, an important Serbian national and religious holiday. Witnesses said Nedeljkovic wore anti-Albanian clothes and chanted Serb nationalist slogans. The law in Kosovo states that ‘publicly inciting or spreading (...) hatred, discord, and intolerance between national, racial, religious, ethnic or other groups, or based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and other personal characteristics in a manner which is likely to disturb the public order’ is prohibited (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2022, pp. 13). Nonetheless, the application of this law seems not to be equal to all members of society, as the same Report noted that several other organizations stated a case where the Kosovo Police removed clothing from Kosovan Serbs at a checkpoint in northern Kosovo only because it had Serbian language on it. NGO NSI noted that there is a noticeable selectivity in the criminal prosecution of hate crimes that mostly affects Kosovo Serbs facing charges of inciting ethnic hatred, for expressing pro-Serbian views and messages, including in social media (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025).

Regarding systemic racial or ethnic violence and discrimination, according to the Ombudsperson Institution, despite its good legal framework on the protection of racial and ethnic minorities, some problems prevent an effective implementation and enforcement. Part of that is a lack of institutional capacity, but also because, in its view, societal violence and discrimination towards Kosovan Serbs and other ethnic minority communities. In this regard, the NGO AKTIV-established Rapid Response Civic Group (RRCG), and NGO founded in Mitrovica, reported in August 2022, 51 security incidents against ethnic Serb communities occurred between January and June of that same year, including physical attacks, thefts and property damages that targeted Serbian Orthodox church properties. In November of the same year, the director of AKTIV, Miograd Milicevic, a Kosovo Serb, stated that “a special police unit” in northern Kosovo had assaulted him physically and verbally. The civil society coalition Open Initiative called the incident one example of the multiple incidents caused by members of the special police forces in Kosovo, which had occurred in those months in Serb-majority areas of the north (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2022).

Additionally, the US report stated that ethnic minorities like Serb, Ashkali, Balkan-Egyptian, Bosniak, Turkish, Gorani, Croat and Montenegrin communities, continue to face varying levels of institutional

and societal discrimination in employment, education, social services, language use, freedom of movement, the right to return to their homes for displaced persons, and other basic rights. In almost all local and national institutions, the Ombudsperson Institution acknowledged discrimination in public sector employment. The Kosovar institutions and administrations, although complying on paper with the legal mandate that at least 10% of employees at the national level of government must be from ethnic minorities, maintain these persons in a limited representation and confined to low-level positions (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2022). This discrimination also involves language and communication. As we saw earlier, communication between ethnic Serbs and ethnic Albanians is very limited due to general disinterest in learning the other's language. In public institutions like courts, as well as national laws, a lack of or poor translation into minority languages remains a problem. Courts often fail to provide adequate translation and interpretation services to minority defendants and witnesses and failed to comply with the law in providing adequate translation of statutes and court documents. The EULEX also noted the lack of Serbian-speaking workers in prison facilities with predominantly ethnic Serb prisoners, which results in continuous communication problems between them. Additionally, they expressed that Kosovo police negatively affected the Mission's ability to implement its mandate by not providing relevant information about their operations in northern Kosovo, where both the EULEX and Kosovo Police produce joint security assessments in line with the Bratislava Agreement (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). On that note, AKTIV published a report in May 2022 citing a lack of political will, resistance by the Albanian community, lack of penalties, and an insufficient number of qualified translators as the reasons for this non-compliance with the framework on language rights, violated at all levels in their opinion (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2022).

Since 2021, a group of 37 NGOs conducts with the support of the UN Human Rights and the UNMIK a joint report on the situation of human rights in Kosovo (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2022). In its 2024 report, the aforementioned AKTIV found that, in their view, no significant improvement in human rights had happened compared to previous years, with hate-speech against non-majority communities remaining prevalent, with weak institutional responses and inflammatory rhetoric from Kosovo officials fueling tensions. One aspect they highlighted as problematic was the presence of special police units in checkpoints creating insecurity for ethnic minority groups. They showed the example of a driver reporting experiencing a tense encounter with special police that did not respect his right to communicate in Serbian, despite the guarantees the Constitution gives to it (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025).

Civil society organizations have also reported targeted attacks towards the Serb community. Through 2024, up to 17 members of the Serb community suffered attacks on their properties, including two separate incidents targeting the apartment of one Serb individual (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). During the year, one major achievement for the Serb community was fulfilled, being the implementation of the 2016 Judgement of the Constitutional Court regarding the monastery of Visoki Dečani. The Judgement ruled that 24 hectares of land were property of the orthodox monastery, which had been disputed by the government stating that the ownership of it was only thanks to a Slobodan Milosevic decision in 1997 (Kosovo Online, 2023). After years of advice from the international community, the Kosovo Cadastral Agency finally registered the land in the name of the monastery. Nonetheless, civil society actors noted that this only happened because it was a precondition to access the Council of Europe bodies, with the organism stating no progress would happen without the implementation of the Judgement by the Constitutional Court, as it would undermine the religious freedom of the Serb community (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo in Kosovo, 2025).

The national organizations in Kosovo seem to be increasingly hostile towards activists and organizations working on Human Rights issues, which has affected civil space. Several were targeted with threats and hate speech, with attempts to discredit or even intimidate them. Members of the Human Rights Network (HRN) condemned the expressions used by the Minister of Finance, Hekuran Murati, that in a Parliamentary session in May 2024 stated that the US Department of State report, that criticized current Human Rights developments, fell victim to “media disinformation, which is still part of the old guard, and even some civil society organizations that disguise themselves as such”. This exemplifies a recent trend in the country of politicians inciting campaigns against activists to discredit them (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025), and is another example of Epistemic Injustice.

Human Rights Violations in Kosovar Media

Moreover, generally, IO agree that Kosovo has a problem regarding freedom of media and expression. Theoretically, Kosovo’s Constitution protects media plurality; however, historically, official institutions have demonstrated an interest in eroding this right. In 2012, the government of Hashim Thaçi included an article in the proposed Criminal Code that allowed the imprisonment of journalists if they chose not to reveal their sources, and it was only rejected by the Kosovo Assembly after pressure from both media

and civil society (Abazi, 2021). Freedom House expressed in 2015 that “journalists have few professional rights, earn low wages, and often work without contracts, leaving them vulnerable to corruption and prone to self-censorship” (Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe, 2025). One serious problem seems to be disinformation. A report made by the National Democratic Institute showcased that traditional media outlets and online platforms like TikTok, Facebook or X have been weaponized to spread false narratives, intimidate individuals and manipulate public opinion. Out of 4859 articles and posts monitored, 996 of them contained information disorders and that correlated with more views and engagement, indicating the potential negative impact this can have. It also observed the emerging threat AI-generated content and deepfakes represent for spreading misinformation and amplifying political agendas by distorting public opinion on certain issues. On one particular example, Đorđe Bojović, a consultant for the politician Viola Von Cramon, faced online attacks with accusations of being an agent of Belgrade and Russia and of denying the violence in Kosovo in 1999, thanks to a video of 2015 edited to misrepresent Bojović’s statements. NGO YIHR KS defended him while emphasizing the importance of safe spaces for discussing sensitive issues as a way to protect freedom of expression. These attacks only contribute to create a tense atmosphere where the self-expression is undermined. Media needs impartiality and independence, but the current economic situation in Kosovo prevents them from achieving this goal, resorting to these problematic tendencies (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025).

Social media has also been used to spread nationalistic outlooks. According to AKTIV, in the past years, a trend on TikTok emerged, where members of the Kosovo Police were promoting Albanian ethno-nationalism, which would be contrary to the apparent neutrality and inclusivity that the Constitution of Kosovo fosters. They did a cumulative search of hashtags related to the Kosovo Police in the app, revealing over 14000 posts. The posts feature ethno-nationalistic music and portray the security apparatus as representatives of Albanian goals and not the protectors of the civic vision of Kosovo. The police members were using ethnic emblems, symbols, flags and gestures that identify them as members of their ethnicity. In some cases, even extrajudicial “justice” is glorified in these posts. The NGO claims not proper attention has been given to the potential harm these practices can cause, with no sanctions or condemnations being issued. The institution responsible for addressing these issues, the Kosovo Police Inspectorate, has seemingly failed to respond to this thread (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2021).

Media in Kosovo is in a challenging financial situation. IO have repeatedly shown its concern for its lack of professionalism, being very dependent on business groups and prone to political influence (Abazi, 2021). The UN noted in 2021 that Kosovo lacks sufficient implementation of relevant laws to safeguard journalists and press freedom and noted that strategic lawsuits against public participation increased (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2021). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation to the point that it put an end to the production of print editions in many newspapers (Abazi, 2021). The US Human Rights Report for 2019 claimed that “financial difficulties of media outlets put the editorial independence of all media at risk (...), those with fewer resources sometimes accepted financial support in exchange for positive coverage or for refraining from publishing negative stories harmful to founders’ interests” (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2019). But the problems are not only the financial situation of the media, but also its funding. The 2019 Report of the European Commission puts the example of the broadcaster Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK): “RTK remains directly state-funded, with its budget determined annually by the Assembly. This undermines its editorial independence, weakens its long-term sustainability, and leaves it prone to political influence” (Abazi, 2019). RTK has also being criticized for its lack of investigative journalism and political bias, with extensive coverage of the ruling party in each moment but significant lack of coverage to the opposition. This is explained thanks to the fact that RTK board members are elected in the Parliament by majority vote, thus linking them inevitably to the majority parties (Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe, 2025). The problem regarding funding also affects small media outlets, that do not receive as much support as bigger platforms, with the Independent Media Commission (an organization which is structure is going to be analysed further after) publishing that local televisions and radios only get around 10% of the budget of public companies from the State (Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe, 2025).

Kosovo dropped 8 places in the 2021 World Press Freedom Index from the previous year, ranking only 78 out of 180 countries (Abazi, 2021). In 2025, the decline continued, ranking 99, the worst out of the Western Balkans. Part of this decline seemed to be in relation to the boycott the Kosovar government imposed on private media outlets critical of them before the general elections held that year (KosovaPress, 2025). Reporters Without Borders had this to say regarding the drop of Kosovo in the ranking: “While the Kosovo media market is diverse, its development is limited by its small size and ethnic divisions. Media freedom is threatened by politicized regulation, gag suits, insufficient access to public information and serious risks for the safety of journalists” (Marusic, 2025). It also noted that journalists are often the target of insults, fake news on social media and sometimes “accused of

collaborating with the enemy” by political and religious groups (KOHA, 2025). In regard to the conflict between Pristina and Belgrade, RPW said that it influenced threats and physical attacks thrown at journalists due to the political tensions, with crimes being investigated by the police and prosecution, but with that often not resulting in criminal prosecution (KOHA, 2025). The Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) felt alarmed by the decline in the ranking but expressed that it was a “reflexion of a continuous active hostile policy towards media in the last two years by the government” (Marusic, 2025). In Serbia’s case, they ranked slightly better than in the year before, being 96th position, but the index said the high-quality journalism that is present in the country is caught between rampant fake news and propaganda (Marusic, 2025).

Another example of these political pressions in Kosovo is the suspension of the business certificate of the media outlet Klan Kosova in 2023, apparently because the residential address of the owner is supposedly registered as Peje-Serbia and Gjakove-Serbia, which would be a violation of one of the most basic principles of the Constitution (European Western Balkans, 2023). This was seen by the AJK as a form of media censorship and a threat to freedom of speech, and organised with other journalists, cameraman, and other activists a manifestation in front of the government to denounce the situation. In March of 2024, the Commercial Court approved the lawsuit Klan Kosova filled against the Business Registration Agency, affirming that the suspension of the certificate was unjustified and confirming the business licence of the outlet to operate without restrictions (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025).

One of the bodies responsible for monitoring the work of media in Kosovo is the Independent Media Commission (IMC), responsible for licensing public and private broadcasting, and controlling their work regarding the Code of Conduct. The IMC should, in theory, reflect gender equality and multiethnicity, but has been accused many times of being politicized (Abazi, 2021). A recent Draft Law for this organism was approved by the government the 23 of December of 2023, which draw official criticism by the Council of Europe. The Organization raised concerns about the new Law lacking legal clarity, proportionality, and deviating from EU and Council of Europe standards. Particularly, the Draft Law placed obligations on the protection and promotion of the rights of the most vulnerable solely on the IMC but not on the independent audiovisual media services. In opinion of the Council, media services should be obliged to protect minors, defend multi-ethnicity, and provide accessible content for people with disabilities, but this was not included in the Draft Law. Additionally, they also re-remarked the concerns over the politicization of the IMC, stating that the fact its appointment is entirely carried out by the

Parliament is not in line with practice in regions where civil society plays a significant role in the nomination of a fixed proportion of the membership of the governing boards of regulators. The biggest problems they found were how the Draft Law enable the Parliament to elect the Chairman of the IMC, and the existence of a provision that enables it to entirely dismiss the organism in case it does not approve of its annual report. Alarmingly, this provision also included an arbitrary tool in which the Parliament could remove and replace the IMC, basing it on “vague and non-defined criteria” (LEX/FoE, 2024). Measures to counterattack politicization of the organism were also removed from the Draft Law, like the removal of a specific article that prohibited political ownership of the media. The review of the Council considered this to be a backward slide in terms of alignment with high-level standards of media legislation and noted that at the level of the EU, the politicization of media represents a key risk to its pluralism. The Draft Law included a proposition to introduce a fund to support the media but failed to provide a clear purpose for it. The Council considered that funds are generally only acceptable when they have the objective of promoting media pluralism and quality journalism, and asked Kosovo to clarify the meaning of the fund. Finally, they noted that according to European standards and practices, the Draft Law should include reasons to believe the fund would be administered in a non-discriminatory and transparent manner by a body enjoying functional and operational authority, such as an independent media regulatory authority, that should publish annual reports on the use of public funds to support media actors. The Review asked the government to follow a series of recommendations for improving the role of the IMC, such as conducting meaningful consultations with stakeholders like media operators, civil society members and regulatory bodies to ensure transparency and inclusivity in the legislative process and adding minimum standards in outlining criteria for threats to media pluralism and risks of media ownership. In this sense, the reintroduction of the prohibition of political ownership of the media was also asked to prevent politization and ensure media independence (LEX/FoE, 2024). Currently, the Constitutional Court of Kosovo is reviewing the legality of the Law, with a final decision pending (Amnesty International, 2024).

Some actions have been taken from the Council of Europe and the EU to try to promote Freedom of Expression and media in Kosovo, such as the 2021 thematic training on access to information and freedom of expression on internet, were 63 judges and prosecutors from different courts and judicial institutions attended, including those from Serbian community (Council of Europe, Freedom of Expression: News, 2021). During it, information was given on thematic areas such as the concept of right to access to information and the international instruments that guarantee this right, coupled with knowledge about the different Conventions. Additionally, the jurisprudence of the European Court of

Human Rights on the right to access public documents was thoroughly discussed, and they had a focus day on the right to freedom of expression online (Council of Europe, Freedom of Expression: News, 2021). This was in line with one of the recommendations issued by the UN in 2021, as they thought the judiciary needed to obtain more training on the ECHR (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2021). These types of initiatives are very positive by themselves, but without the support and commitment of the central government the efforts of IO may not give results. As we will see later, Serbian journalists still do not have easy access to official documents as often they are not translated into their language, limiting their and their readers' right to information. More alarmingly, in 2024 Kosovo's bid to become part of the Council of Europe was stalled, as the Committee of Ministers delayed its vote on their membership after Kosovo refused to follow a request by some member states of establishing an association of Serb-majority communities, something that had been previously agreed between Serbia and Kosovo in the 2013 Brussels agreement (Amnesty International, 2024). This deprived Kosovo's citizens of being able to access the European Court of Human Rights, leaving them vulnerable to human rights violations without clear means of receiving justice.

The government has also attacked freedom of media using new technologies. In 2022, the AJK reported that they were targeted by several digital smear campaigns for defending journalists and criticizing the government. They counted at least 29 instances of government officials, political leaders, judicial staff, business interests, community and religious groups physically assaulting or verbally threatening/cyberattacking journalists (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2022). The Association also criticized the police for unprofessional behaviour impacting freedom of expression after they arrested in February 2022 the cameraman Albion Selitaj while he was filming a police action in Suhareke. Staff of online investigative news *Insajderi* reported in 2024 receiving death threats after they wrote news about a man arrested by the Kosovo Police for alleged fraud and money laundering (Human Rights Watch, 2024). In September of 2024, the Mitrovica Basic Court sentenced a man to several months of prison for threatening a crew of the Balkans Investigative Reporting Network that reported on a proposal of building a Catholic church in the village of Gornja Klina in February (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Regarding northern Kosovo, Reporters Without Borders called on police and security forces to provide better security for journalists after attacks on media crews between November and December 2022 (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2022).

There is a considerable pressure on journalists that refrain from critical investigative reporting due to fear of losing their jobs or being physically harmed. According to the NGO INDEP, self-censorship is on the

rise because of the permeability of the editorial independence in the face of advertisers, adding to the political pressure through the close links between media owners and politicians and the dwindling global media revenues regarding written press. The dependence of the media outlets on big advertisers -many of them state funded, as Kosovo lacks strong private advertisers- leads them to self-censorship when their interests are at stake (Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe, 2025). The journalists reported receiving offers of financial benefits in exchange for positive reporting or for abandoning investigations, and said media owners and managers prevented them from publishing or broadcasting stories critical of the government (especially regarding reports on high-level governmental corruption), political parties, or officials (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour, 2022). Historically, around 20 cases of this kind of intimidation are recorded annually in Kosovo, although physical violent attacks have rarely been present (Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe, 2025). The first case of a person being sentenced for attacking journalists occurred in 2023, when Dalibor Spasic received a six-month jail term that was converted into a fine as he was found guilty of participating in a crowd that attacked journalists that were reporting clashes between NATO peacekeepers and ethnic Serbs protesting against the newly appointed Albanian major in Zvecan (Bami, 2025). The journalist Burim Zariqi was told not to film the conflict, and after he refused, they attacked him. During the protests, AJK reported around 30 cases of attacks against journalists, with protesters throwing rocks and eggs at them, pushing, forcing them to delete footage, verbally assaulting them and stealing their cameras (Bami, 2025). In general, job security in media is not guaranteed, with cases of breach of contracts often not reported to the authorities or to the public out of fear of losing the job (Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe, 2025). Some think public discourse in Kosovo is influenced by far-right extremist political views targeting vulnerable communities and spreading nationalism, but the media is considered ill-prepared to establish editorial filters to prevent the dissemination of these ideologies (Ahmeti, 2025). In Mitrovica, social media posts in Albanian called for a nationalist protest in 2023, with Kosovo Police having to issue a warning against attending the protest, confirming many of the profiles supporting the protest were suspicious and had malicious intent (Ahmeti, 2025).

Epistemic Injustice in Kosovar Media

All this paints a dire picture for freedom of media in the country, and all of that is exacerbated when looking at the situation of media outlets from ethnic minority groups. The 2024 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression reported concerns raised by the Serbian-language media during its visit to Kosovo about the country's serious economic problems, which affected their ability to operate as independent outlets or even survive at all. The reports included information about public officials, politicians, businesses, and religious groups engaging in activities like intimidating media representatives of these outlets. The report concluded more support to Serbian-language media is needed, and raised practical concerns related to impunity for crimes against journalists, the lack of media pluralism and the not sufficient support to minority languages (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). Alarmingly, instances like this are not exclusive from Kosovo's side in the conflict, as in 2023, Serb media outlets operating in Kosovo reported receiving anonymous online video campaigns against them, allegedly from Serbia, accusing them of "defending Shiptar (an offensive way to refer to Albanians) terrorists and broadcasting NATO commercials", a campaign that coincided with another one aimed at online media critical of the government of Serbia.

On a few occasions, official debates in the Assembly of Kosovo were not interpreted into Serbian. In 2024, a conference in North Mitrovica called by the Minister of Internal Affairs was not translated to Serbian, and only when journalists pressed the Minister he accepted answering in Serbian (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2024). For interlocutors, this hampered media coverage and jeopardized the effective participation of the non-majority community in the political space (Khan, 2024). In addition, the cases of several missing and murdered media journalists between 1998 and 2005 have not been resolved yet, against the interests of the Association of Serbian Journalists in Kosovo. For them, this represents a clear sign that the institutions have no clear intention of protecting them. A journalist in an online portal said: "A case of an attack on the editorial office has not been resolved. And what is the message? The message is that if something happens to you, nobody will be able to protect you" (Dapic, 2021). The position of Serbian language media in Kosovo is not considered to be on equal footing with the media produced in Albanian, with fewer production capacities, types, and quantities of content they make daily. Their financing is even more precarious than in the rest of the country, as they partially depend on Serbian funding, which in many cases is not transparent, producing inequalities in the position of media houses (Dapic, 2021). It is divided between media funded by Kosovo (limited ones) and Serbia, and media completely dependent on project finance, which affects all aspects of work, from the selection

of topics and manner how they are dealt with, sources of information and availability of key political protagonists important in informing about key events regarding the Serb community (Dapic, 2021). Serbian media still lacks any representatives in institutions and central authorities from independent media, and Serbian journalists claim they still face difficulties in obtaining information of local institutions. In addition to this, central-level institutions still don't always give (or give poorly translated ones) official documents in Serbian language.

Media representatives from both ends of the conflict state that there is a lack of reporting about life in other communities or examples of mutual cooperation (Dapic, 2021). Diversity of media forms is exclusive to the majority community, as Serbian media in Kosovo cannot compete with big media houses. To add to this, the banning of Serbian goods made by the government also affected the print of Serbian media. According to the NGO NSI, the Serbian newspapers were unavailable to vendors in Kosovo after the restrictions were put into place, which affected the rights of Kosovo Serbs to freedom of expression and information (Civil Society Report on Human Rights in Kosovo, 2025). Moreover, some journalists in the only newspaper printed in Serbian in North Mitrovica expressed their discontent about the privatization of the outlet that forced the eviction of their premises. There are still loads of inaccessible sources of information for ethnic Serbs in Kosovo due to the small number of translated texts. This is not a small problem, as they present a great interest in being informed on the issue of resolving Kosovo's status, as it's directly linked to their position in the society and their rights. Moreover, in a study made by CBS, it was found that citizens in general have less confidence in local media than in media coming from Serbia, which goes to show how little confidence the population has on budget-financed information (Dapic, 2021). Regarding hate speech, the same study found that it also comes primordially also from budget-financed information, but this time coming from Serbia. The observed hate speech was predominantly related to members of the Serb community who don't agree on common political views or when they express a different opinion on cooperation with members of other communities, claiming them as "traitors" or accusing them of being paid by the international community (Dapic, 2021). The group "Corridor" frequently targets 'traitors of the nation', referring to Serbian citizens working for local or central Kosovar institutions (Ahmeti, 2025). This rivalry between members of the Serb community has even sparked violent acts, with the PSC sentencing in 2024 four Kosovo Serbs -Nedeljko Spasojevic, Marko Rosić, Zarko Jovanović and Dragisa Marković- for the murder in 2018 of Oliver Ivanović, a Kosovo Serb politician that was at the time part of the opposition in North Mitrovica. Sentences ranged from four to 10 years (Human Rights Watch, 2024). This also represents, in its own way, a case of Epistemic Injustice, but on the other side of the conflict.

The vulnerability of Serbs working on media outlets has also been denounced, as they work in environments where everyone knows everyone, and the positions of their families are easily accessible. Some of them expressed their concern regarding the security of their loved ones, with examples of subtle pressures being given to journalists (Dapic, 2021). In addition, in 2024, there were several cases noted which affected Serbian journalists to conduct their work on reporting and coverage of certain events. The NGO NSI reported that in January of 2024, Kosovo authorities restricted a Serbian journalist from Tanjug Agency to enter the country to cover the visit of the current Patriarch of the Orthodox Church. Another example of this happened the 2 of February 2024, were a team of journalists from Radio Goraždevac, the only Serbian outlet working in the municipality of Peć, were stopped by Kosovo police with their vehicle searched despite having presented valid credentials. In the opinion of civil society organizations, these events undermine the rights of journalists to cover important events freely, which is especially important for minority groups, and help to foster a climate of hostility with Kosovar authorities (Civil Society Report on Human Rights, 2025).

This represents a clear case of silencing based on ethnicity. Not only is the general media coverage in Kosovo very damaged in general by constant pressures from the institutions (that harness the power to prevent criticisms via intimidation) but also are particularly targeting ethnic minority outlets to silence any other view of the conflict contrary to the majority community. On the other hand, Serbia also uses political pressure and intimidation on media outlets to denounce those ethnic Serbs living in Kosovo for cooperating with the Albanians, labelling them with derogatory adjectives and insults. Using Fricker's expressions, the "Other" is being controlled by structural operations of power formed to preserve a social given order.

Final Remarks: Kosovo is still suffering from the consequences of the war 20 years ago. It has a strong Constitution and legal framework, but its implementation is problematic, especially for its ethnic Serb population, caught in the middle of the political tensions between Pristina and Belgrade. The two communities live completely segregated from one another, with only some young people interacting sporadically with members of the other group. Serbia still has some control over the northern municipalities of the country, but after the electoral boycott of the Serb List in 2023, the Kosovar authorities were able to put ethnic Albanians in charge, which has made life harder for the local communities. The acts of discrimination against the Kosovo Serb in the last five years, corroborated by both International Organizations and civil society actors, include banning Serbian goods, taking out the

Serbian Dinar in favor of the Euro without giving proper explanations or time, the unequal treatment of police authorities, cases of slurs being thrown at them or acting against their right to peaceful protest by arresting Kosovo Serb politicians without proper reason. The tensions escalated in 2023 with the fight between Kosovo police and Serb militants in the Monastery of Banjska, resulting in the deaths of 4 people. Moreover, cases of the Minister of Finance belittling Serbian NGOs from Kosovo as nationalistic and harmful for not complying with the situation of the community after the new Albanian majors in the North were appointed exemplifies the Epistemic Injustice they're suffering, as their opinions and denounces are seen as less valuable simply because they allegedly don't want the independence of Kosovo from Serbia.

This Epistemic Injustice is also seen in Kosovar media. In general, media outlets in Kosovo already are in a precarious position, with financial problems and lack of independence due to political pressure, which encourages journalists in a culture of self-censorship and tension. Disinformation and the dissemination of false narratives are increasing due to the rise of social media like TikTok or Instagram. This has even extended to official organisms, with cases of members of Kosovo Police spreading nationalistic outlooks on this Apps. All of this has led Kosovo to dramatically decline positions in the official World Press Freedom Index in the last five years. For Serb media outlets in Kosovo, the situation is even worse. Their funding is divided between media outlets that still depend on Serbia and those integrated into the Kosovar system, which fosters segregation and lacks transparency. Adding to the financial problems, the lack or poor translation of official reports to Serbian language damages the work of journalists and the right of ethnic Serbs for information. Additionally, for them discrimination also comes from Serbia, as there have been reported cases of online campaigns against them with accusations of defending "Albanian terrorists". The cases of missing journalists and murdered media journalists between 1998 and 2005 have not been resolved yet, which went against the interests of the Association of Serbian Journalists in Kosovo. This inability to address these safety issues make Kosovo Serb journalists face real vulnerability, with no real representatives in institutions and central authorities. In fact, in 2024, they were reported several cases of Kosovo authorities restricting the access to Serbian media to acts like the visit to the country of the current Father of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In general, the diversity of media forms is limited to the majority community, and the general media landscape of the region prevents the outlets of making coverage of stories of cooperation between ethnicities. This represents a case of Epistemic Injustice based on silencing.

Chapter 3: How understanding the Other can bring possible solutions

Now that the issues have been outlined, this chapter will focus on the possible solutions taking notice of these dangerous signs can bring to the table. The first part will focus on how the acknowledgment of the injustice by the Albanian community can help Serbs feel heard, with one example of an Albanian major that chose to have a more dialogue-driven relation with the Serb community in its town. The second part will be centered on the importance that International Organizations must still have in Kosovo as mediators between the communities, with multiple recent examples of inter-ethnic initiatives in Kosovo led by them that made communication and interaction possible in a segregated society. The last part will delve on the importance of meaningful dialogue in peacebuilding operations, and the dangers that can occur when that dialogue has goals other than understanding the other part

Acknowledging the injustice

The first measure that would help alleviate the atmosphere in Kosovo is the acknowledgement of the Albanian community of the reality of the discrimination faced by the Serbs. They don't have to forgive the crimes of the past, but they do have to take notice that repeating the same patterns of discrimination towards the other community is not going to bring peace nor economic wealth to the country. Thankfully, some pushback to the most questionable policies of the institutions is starting to arrive. The way the government is treating the ethnic Serb community has been criticized by some Albanians too, predominately by the opposition party Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK). In 2023, a member of this party, the major of the town of Peja, Gazmend Muhaxheri, compared Kurti's approach in northern Kosovo to that of Serbia's in the 90s (Dugalic, 2025). After heavy criticism, he defended himself saying that even if Kurti wasn't as bad as Milosevic, he is still "inhumane". The Serb population in Peja has acknowledged Muhaxherri for its commitment to keep lines of communication open for them, inviting them to weigh in on local development plans. Some of them even noted that they began voting for the LDK instead of the Serb parties thanks to his leadership. One ethnic Serb citizen told NZZ that she has become good friends with several Albanians, and even than some of them offered to help her when the Serb dinar was banned (Dugalic, 2025). This shows peaceful livelihood and direct communication are still very much possible with a less forceful and more dialogue-oriented approach. It might seem basic

as a principle to say that the majority community and the governmental institutions must understand their wrong doings, but it is a necessary first step. This can only happen by accepting the Other's perspective as valid.

However, there have been cases on the other end of the spectrum too. In 2023, after the tensions in North Mitrovica raised due to the electoral boycott of Serbs and the introduction of the Albanian administrators, a group of 100 ethnic Albanians gathered in the Ibar river bridge, unfurling Kosovar and Albanian flags and chanting slogans in favor of the Kosovo Liberation Army and against Serbia (TRT World, 2023). The case of the Albanian Minister of Finance belittling ethnic Serb civil society organizations in the North as not credible sources represents a signal to be worried. Calling the perspective of the minority group as less valuable than that of oneself is the first step towards Epistemic Injustice, and once that is done, violence and dehumanization seems like a more plausible option. This may be showing that Kosovo society is still not entirely prepared on its own to accept, respect and understand that the other side can also have a point in feeling discriminated against. As many Civil Society actors have affirmed during the years, the country still needs the support and presence of International Organizations and their initiatives to create a more inclusive, non-discriminatory and peaceful country that can stand on its own feet.

International Organizations initiatives

Even if the effectiveness of UN missions have taken a dip in the last decades, Kosovo still needs the presence of this organization and other actors like the EU to give additional support to the government to follow human rights legislation and international standards of quality. Initiatives from international actors like the mentioned thematic training on access to information and freedom of expression on the internet held in 2021 are essential to foster an inclusive, multi-ethnic atmosphere to calm the society after the 2023 violent incidents in the northern municipalities, all while helping train Kosovar professionals in human rights standards and ways to achieve them.

Another initiative that seems a step in the right direction was the two-phased project training of municipal officials and municipalities in Kosovo held in 2024 about ways to detect discrimination and hate speech, created by the UNMIK, UN Human Rights and the Council of Europe in collaboration with the Office for Good Governance, Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Non-Discrimination within the Office of

the Prime Minister of Kosovo. The UN acknowledged that hate speech had become one of the most prevalent ways of spreading divisive rhetoric through digital technologies in the region, and that it had been rising for some time. The project had in the first half of 2024 trained and strengthened the data collection, monitoring and reporting skills of 97 anti-discrimination officers from 27 municipalities across all 5 regions of Kosovo (including the North) to increase reporting to central institutions. It focused on supporting the reporting lines and interactions between municipal anti-discrimination officers and central institutions, which aimed to create a more integrated human rights architecture in the country (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2024). The project also supported the preparation of the government's Annual Report on Protection from Discrimination by holding the first drafting session. They enrolled 44 municipal, ministerial officials, Justice Academy, Agency for Free Legal Aid, and civil society representatives in the new Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) platform course on non-discrimination. Additionally, small grants were awarded to eight local Civil Society Organizations for awareness-raising, elaborating research papers and fostering human rights education. The feedback on the training was quite positive, with participants considering it to have a lasting impact thanks to the ability to share stories about discrimination issues and challenges (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2024). Additionally, in 2024, the Council of Europe developed the platform HELP, that aimed to create the necessary tools for legal professionals, academics and civil societies to tackle the hate speech and discrimination within their communities. The platform offers a range of online courses about different topics like data collection and protection. The platform was available in both Albanian and Serbian. A panel discussion was held where participants offered insight and strategic approaches in countering hate-speech, which underscores the importance of collaborative efforts between institutions and civil society members in creating a culture of tolerance and respect between the communities and institutions (United Nations, 2023). These are the types of initiatives that have the ability to bring people together, as they ensure dialogue and constructive criticism and create opportunities for anti-discrimination officers to keep in touch with international standards on the matter. A good sign moving forward would be for the government, the current one and the ones to follow (regardless of which political party), to create these types of trainings on their own initiative without the support and encouragement of the UN. Nonetheless, until that happens, international actors have to ensure the continuation of these measures so as not to lose what they have already achieved.

There also have been programs focused on strengthening media in the region. The 2024 capacity-building activity held in Pristina, organized thanks to the joint efforts of the EU and the Council of Europe in its program "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey", aimed to support media monitoring

practices during election periods, dedicated to the local regulatory authority, the IMC (Council of Europe: inclusion and anti-discrimination, 2024). As we saw earlier, the institution has been criticized for its lack of neutrality and politicization. The training sessions featured comprehensive discussions on the role of media regulators in elections, emphasizing transparency in media operations, particularly concerning pricing for paid media time. It was focused on deepening the understanding of participants about the legal frameworks that govern political advertising and explored both regulatory requirements and what are considered best practices. Defamatory campaigns seem to be increasing in recent times thanks to the rise of social media. As such, sessions highlighted strategies for identifying and managing these campaigns and addressed potential legal gaps in election media coverage. To add to this, special focus was given to the specific responsibilities of media regulators in monitoring online campaigns. It also reinforced the electoral rights, with a significant aspect of the training involving joint sessions with the Central Elections Committee (CEC), where those participating discussed best practices for monitoring and enforcing electoral silence rules and communication strategies for the public and relevant stakeholders during elections (Council of Europe: inclusion and anti-discrimination, 2024).

Another topic tackled by International Organizations programs has been studying and fostering inter-ethnic dialogue between the youth. The UN Migration Agency, International Organization for Migration (IOM) had carried out activities with a focus on youth development and inclusion, equipping young Kosovars with life and soft skills to enable them to strengthen their resilience to social exclusion and extremism, to “become agents of change in their local communities” (IOM UN Migration Agency, 2020). The aim is to create a more inclusive society in Kosovo fostering Social Inclusion backgrounds by improving the socio-economic situation of disadvantaged members of minority communities supporting initiatives aimed at inter-ethnic dialogue and cooperation. This is quite important, as young people seems to be the part of the society most open to dialogue and friendship with ethnic minority groups like the Serb, but their vision may be biased by influence of their families and elders who lived through the war.

The IOM also created a survey on social inclusion in Kosovo funded by the British Embassy of Pristina. The survey was conducted in many municipalities of the country, including Pristina, Prizren, and North Mitrovica, with youth composed of members of the Kosovo Albanian and Serb communities, among others. It studied existing trust-deficit and hampering of inter-ethnic dialogue and reconciliation at community level. It gathered information on respondents’ profiles, contact with the other ethnic communities, opinions of the ethnic communities towards each other and Kosovo as a country, and their level of engagement in social inclusion programs.

To establish a positive relation and trust with the local population, and to avoid problems due to the language barrier between the staff responsible for the survey and the respondents, IOM engaged into the project its implementing partners (the Pristina Alpine Club and J Coders) and teachers who had been the focal points from schools where beneficiaries and general respondents were selected. In this way, teachers and implementing partners approached respondents and their legal guardians in an ad hoc manner to explain the purpose of the survey (IOM UN Migration Agency, 2020). The survey was translated into Albanian, Serbian and, after the request from the Mamusa and Prizren school administrators, into Turkish for that community too. Additionally, a cover letter explaining the survey was also created in these 3 languages and shared with potential beneficiaries prior to the survey (IOM UN Migration Agency, 2020).

The results showed that most respondents knew persons from other ethnic communities in Kosovo, but that they were less likely to be public about having friends from other ethnicities, especially Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs. While both groups reported significant differences in culture, traditions, moral values and even physical appearance, none of the respondents described their interaction with members of other ethnic communities as negative. Kosovo Serbs and other minority communities were much less likely to report trust in existing systems and institutions and believed that they were discriminated and did not enjoy equal rights as other ethnic communities, while Kosovo Albanians tended to have higher levels of trust in state systems and believed the rights they enjoy are shared with the rest of communities. As expected, non-majority communities were more likely to have attended social inclusion activities than the rest of the respondents. The report states there has been a lack of participation in IOM's activities of inclusion by the general population, with the reason seeming to be the fact that they are less likely to choose an NGO or an international organization as their first choice of activity organizer. For that, the first choice to be the preferred organizer for multi-ethnic activities was the schools. It was also found in the survey that around 68% of Kosovo Albanians and approx. 61% of Kosovo Serbs did not participate in any social inclusion activities before IOM introduced them to. According to the survey, the primary reason for joining a social inclusion activity organized by the IOM was to gain new skills, being closely followed by simply socializing. This information helps to understand the conflicted perspective of the young generation: on the one hand, they cannot affirm that they have had an all-around bad experience with other communities, but they seemingly see a supposed difference in their cultures as a way-out to not socialize with them. Nonetheless, the project found problems in allocating teams of participants in the activities organized by the IOM, as it was not possible to make all of them ethnically mixed due to problems due to school schedule conflicts and the distance

between participants' residences. This meant the interaction between communities was limited in some cases (IOM UN Migration Agency, 2020).

In Europe there have also been initiatives centered around building intercultural learning in conflict transformation. In July of 2025, the European Youth Centre of the Council of Europe hosted the Youth Peace Camp 2025, where 55 young participants of conflict-affected regions lived and made activities together to share their experiences of conflict, engage in dialogue and provide them with the experience of having intercultural contact with other young people. The Camp understood that young people affected by war and violence can develop great trauma, which can negatively influence their opinions and behaviors towards other communities. The objective is to redirect these views into dialogue with these other communities and engage them in constructive initiatives. Said dialogue has to be based on empathy and respect for the other, with a strong tie to the concept of human dignity. The program tries to enable participants to learn from each other, using a variety of non-formal working methods that support exchange with other young people from the considered "other side" of the conflicts. They are expected to develop by the end of the Camp strategies as peer leaders and multipliers in the field of conflict transformation. Respect for human rights is at the core of the approach. Participants from Kosovo were appointed, and the approach for them focused on the relation with Albanian and the Serb communities (Council of Europe, 2025).

The NGO Reconciliation Empowering Communities (REC) has also created their own Youth Peace Camps inside Kosovo, in the framework of the EU funded project Harmony Talks: Fostering Inter-Ethnic Understanding among Youth. In 2025, three of these camps were made in winter, which gathered more than 100 individuals from different communities of towns like Mitrovica. One of the participants, a young Kosovo Serb, had this to say about her participation: "The reason I joined the camp was to socialize more, to overcome interethnic and interfaith differences, which are often exploited for political purposes. In reality, these differences do not exist because every family has its own struggles and difficulties, and sometimes help comes from unexpected places" (WeBalkans.eu, 2025). The Camps had a strong impact thanks to enabling the participants to spend a good amount of time together and thoroughly understanding everyone's background. Another participant had this to say: "Such initiatives are incredibly important, because they help us foster understanding, not just discuss it. They encourage us to actively contribute to peace and dialogue" (WeBalkans.eu, 2025). In addition to the camps, The Harmony Talks project carried other initiatives to foster relations and empathy among youth. Among them were structured discussions tackling some of the most important issues for minority communities in Kosovo, including

reconciliation and civic activism. To raise awareness on matters related to peacebuilding and attract public discourse, the project created some Op-Ed Articles, which allegedly had an impact on the social debate in Kosovo regarding reconciliation, peacebuilding and civic activism. These initiatives are helpful to give space for young people to grow out of their comfort zone and help understand people from the “enemies” side. They are especially helpful for the case of Kosovo, as they help both bridge the gap between extremely isolated communities and give young people the opportunity to be put in the shoes of persons from other ethnic groups. In a way, it enables them to get out of their epistemic perspective and start thinking about the needs, issues and injustices people from the other group suffer. REC’ executive director Besnik Uka highlighted the importance of financial backing for said initiatives: “Support from the EU and UNPD has been vital in making this project possible. Through their funding, we have created safe spaces where young people from different communities have had the opportunity to get to know each other, share experiences and work together for a better future” (WeBalkans.eu, 2025). As we can see, there are the civil society organizations themselves the ones advocating for the continued support of International Organizations. REC itself has been characterized by promoting equality and social justice using an approach based on citizen empowerment and building strong cooperation networks, which help address the core social issues of Kosovo. Young generations show again that, despite their separate upbringing, they are the most willing to bridge the gap between communities. But it is important to show them a different perspective to the conflict different to what they have been told by their families to prevent dehumanization and violence towards other communities.

The overall importance of international organizations regarding peacebuilding in Kosovo is still big. UNMIK reported that in 2024 they supported 36 programmatic activities and 23 community trust-building projects, that highlighted sustainable peace and inclusion by supporting vulnerable groups and fostering social cohesion, which in opinion of the organization demonstrates how peace is strengthened when diverse voices are engaged in decision-making and dialogue. It is an impressive number of activities, and this only represents one institution (United Nations Mission in Kosovo, 2025). Even if there was the same commitment from the national government to foster all these initiatives, it is unlikely that they would have the resources to make it happen.

The positive (and negative) outcomes of dialogue in peacebuilding operations

As we saw in the case of South Africa, political involvement in peacebuilding projects centered around bringing together separated groups of people engaged in violence is key to make them successful. It is true South Africa still has issues in that regard, but in that case, they stem more from an insufficient knowledge of why violence exists in the first place than from lack of political will, which cannot be said for Kosovo. While the government largely cooperates in operations organized by international actors, there is a feeling that they do it more out of necessity (to not lose the chance to enter European institutions like the Council of Europe) rather than from a real wish to create a safe environment for Kosovo Serb and other ethnic minority communities. Dialogue is important, but not any kind of dialogue. Dialogue is more than just another form of communication; it has an emotive and relational function (Inceri-Théry, 2016).

According to Inceri-Théry, results in dialogue-driven peacebuilding can only happen if the goal of the dialogue is understanding. Understanding has positive effects in building relations and trust with the interlocutor. When dialogue is used to reach other goals other than that its effectiveness is undermined. In the traditional way of understanding it, peacebuilding is more than the absence of direct, structural and cultural violence.

For that we must understand the concept of structural violence, which is the product of destructive results, embedded in social structures and is thus an indirect form of violence (Inceri-Théry, 2016). In that regard, epistemic injustice is a form of structural violence. On the other hand, we have cultural violence, embedded in cultural aspects such as language, art, ideology, religion and science. Cultural violence does usually support structural violence and portray it as valid (Inceri-Théry, 2016). Peacebuilding should also aim to erase structural and cultural violence, which has not happened in Kosovo. When the government doesn't openly recognize the discrimination towards the Serb community, it creates a situation in which many of the examples of structural violence against them seen in Chapter 2, like Kosovo police arresting Serb politicians for blowing a whistle, are not seen as unacceptable. Real, meaningful dialogue can help prevent these situations. If some of the goals of peacebuilding are reconciliation and resolution of trauma, dialogue can help us reach that goal as it helps people to understand the view of the other. Nonetheless, dialogue in Kosovo is limited, not only between the general population, segregated into groups that rarely interact with one another (and when they do, surveys show some of them don't want to make it public), but also between Serb NGO's and public institutions. In that case, communication is getting even more sparse and problematic than before, with

politicians like the Minister of Finance putting into question their work and interests. Kosovo authorities may need to eliminate these types of expressions if they truly want to integrate the Serb community into society. Otherwise, it only creates a hostile environment in which Serbs prefer to leave the region altogether, as seen by their diaspora in recent times.

Peacebuilding cannot happen without relationships between communities. According to the scholar on international peacebuilding Jean Paul Lederach, a sustainable peacebuilding is dependent on creating relationships between every level of a networking society: from the political leaders to the grassroots levels and the mediators in between, and this includes relationships with what was once “the enemy”. For him, flexibility and the capacity to adapt to changing social environments are key in peacebuilding. Strict frameworks do not work forever (Incerti-Théry, 2016). Having separate systems between the northern municipalities of Kosovo and the rest of the country and separating the ethnic groups while the trauma of war was still recent did make sense at the time, but now it only helps distance people and makes initiatives like the IOM survey even harder. Approaches like the REC’s, focused on building strong networks of cooperation, seem the way forward.

Effective dialogue can only happen when we are able to take the perspective of the other. That can facilitate the reconciliation of traumas, by generating trust, safety, visibility, cooperation, and building relationships between participants. That type of dialogue does not have a purpose or agenda by itself, and its objective is not to analyze things, win an argument or merely exchange opinions without reason, but listen to all of those opinions equally and share a synthesis of the meanings. However, for the author Mesa-Vélez (2019), dialogue has been traditionally used in international peacebuilding to introduce the concept of “sustainable change”, trying to impose colonial ideals into post-conflict societies. This interventionist logic would break one of the most important requirements in dialogue for peacebuilding, the equity of the participants. In that case, the results of the dialogue are dependent on how it’s framed: the contents, participants, people excluded, and objectives are decided beforehand, which makes it impossible for all the voices to be heard. The term has a vagueness and abstractive nature that has made it possible for some to use it as a controlling discourse. In those cases, the invitations to “dialogue” are in reality forcing the other to make concessions in silence, while controlling them (Mesa-Vélez, 2019).

Conflict is born out of the pursuit of different groups of people of needs that seem incompatible with one another at first. To stop conflict, one must find a solution to such needs, and that can only happen via negotiation. Kosovo authorities cannot force the assimilation of their ethnic Serb citizens into the system without proper dialogue that makes it possible to grant solutions to the myriads of problems they are

facing. Otherwise, they are going to continue to motivate the migration of their own population to Serbia or worse, feed into the resentment of those that still live there and spark violence again, which is already happening. That dialogue must be open-minded, good-willed and based on cooperation, not on interests. There are many ways to structure and approach dialogue. For it to be fruitful it should not happen with any coercion or pressure, be placed in a safe space for all the parts implicated to eliminate any possible fears or threats, and every part has to be in an equal footing with the rest, without any power imbalance (Mesa-Vélez, 2019). It is right to say that the responsibility of making that type of dialogue possible should not lie solely in Kosovo's hand. Serbia also must participate. Almost 20 years after Kosovo's declaration of independence, it seems hard to think of them achieving their claim over the territory, but they still can improve the situation of their ethnic group there via negotiating the best way to structure the governance of the northern municipalities. All possibilities should be open, be it their integration into the rest of Kosovo's system or granting them a special status, but the emphasis should not be on either of the countries' concerns, but on what is best for the population.

Final Remarks: There are three possible recommendations presented that could improve the climate of resentment and tension in Kosovo:

- 1) **Acknowledgement:** Kosovo government and authorities must admit the poor situation the Serb community is facing, listen to their contributions and establish the necessary actions to stop more structural discrimination. The root of the protests and tensions in northern Kosovo stems not only from the resentment caused by the war, but also thanks to a lack of willingness to engage and listen to the Serb communities' needs. Examples like the one of the mayor of Peja should serve as the basis of how to deal with these issues.
- 2) **Continuing to foster International Organizations initiatives:** Support from international actors like the UN and the EU is still essential to maintain peace in Kosovo. They remain the principal organizations that foster activities that create bridges between the communities and allow some interaction. Through initiatives like the ones organized by the IOM, Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians can interact between them, and thanks to its survey we can understand with data what is the inter-ethnic sociability of the region. Other activities can also create the necessary legal defenses against hate-speech and discrimination and help improve the media sphere. Kosovo authorities should still help organize these activities and assimilate its results in the creation of their own policies.

- 3) **Create a meaningful dialogue:** Dialogue can be a very powerful tool for peacebuilding, but only if it's used in a sincere way. The objective must be to understand the position and needs of the other, not to use dialogue as a “necessary evil” to be able to enter organizations like the Council of Europe. It must be a dialogue of three in a safe space between the Kosovar and Serb government and representatives from the northern municipalities to create the necessary actions for the de-escalation of the tension and what would be best for Kosovo Serbs moving forward.

Conclusion

Kosovo finds itself in a dangerous trajectory. The country has successfully developed progressive and strong legal frameworks, but its ability and willingness to effectively put them into practice has been problematic. The segregation between the Albanian and Serb communities after the war is still present, and tensions are rising in the North due to the entrance of Albanian administrators after the electoral boycott of the Serb parties in 2021. This caused cases of deadly violence between Kosovo Serb extremists and the national forces of Kosovo, which forced NATO to send more troops to the country to help monitor it. The important sentiment shared is that if International Organizations were to leave the country to self-manage, major violence could break again.

Part of the issues lie in the epistemic injustice Kosovo Serb population suffer. The data collected suggests ample discrimination towards them from some Albanian citizens and from Kosovo institutions, including cases of police inequity and abuse. Regardless, instead of listening to Serb civil society organizations putting forward this information, the government is belittling them as agents of Serbia, despite International Organizations having corroborated the issues. We must remember what Fibieger said about the conditions for Epistemic Injustice. That, for a group to suffer from epistemic injustice, they must also suffer from other social injustices. The act that caused the violence in the North, the electoral boycott of the Serbs in 2021, is a case of epistemic injustice acting passively. They felt so unheard and misrepresented that they did not believe participating in the democratic institutions could improve their situation. In the end, that mentality did not benefit them, but it's a testament of their vulnerability that what they thought was the only way to get listened to was to protest against those institutions.

The media landscape is also a terrain where the epistemic injustice unfolding is evident. Media in Kosovo is in a tough situation in general, with the country rapidly decreasing in the World Press Freedom Index in the last 4 to 5 years. The institutions have, for now, failed to create an environment where journalists have the freedom to express criticisms against public institutions. The reports have shown that they are motivated to not do investigative journalism due to political pressures. The principal institution that monitors the work of the media, the IMC, has been itself politicized to the point where its appointment is entirely carried out by the Kosovo Parliament. But the ones most affected by this poor state of the discipline are, again, Kosovo Serbs outlets. Their financial situation is even more precarious than the majority Albanian outlets, and they have received pressures coming from Serbia, accusing them in online hate campaigns of collaborating with what they consider the enemy only for doing their work in Kosovo. Moreover, official institutions in Kosovo like the judiciary make their job harder by not always translating their official reports in Serb language, which constitutes a case of silencing based on ethnicity. It represents an issue that diminishes the right of Kosovo Serbs to receive information. In addition, ethnic Serb journalists are in an even bigger state of vulnerability, with cases of missing workers not being solved for 20 years. They are in a small environment where the familiarity and closeness between them makes it easier to target their loved ones if they publish something critical of a powerful individual or institution. There have been cases of Kosovo institutions limiting the ability of Kosovo Serb media outlets to cover certain events without proper reasoning, which has in turn created a climate of hostility between the two.

Analyzing the Epistemic Injustice baked into the society and structures, the first step to improve the situation should be for the institutions to acknowledge what they could improve on. A compromise with the Serb community that they are going to take the necessary steps to not repeat the mistakes is needed. Building closer relationships with them is essential to find what are their most urgent needs and the best way to tackle them. Finding examples of this already happening has proved to be difficult, but the one found has shown that in that case the relation with the Serb community significantly improved, increasing their engagement with the rest of the society, including Albanians, and their willingness to participate in political elections, even to vote for Albanian parties over Serb ones.

The continued support of international actors like the UN, the EU and the Council of Europe is still key to help create activities that close the social gap and segregation between communities, as well as to foster the growth of Kosovar institutions in inclusivity, multi-ethnicity, media coverage and respect for international standards in human rights. In this regard, we can highlight initiatives like the two-phased

project created by the UNMIK to train officials in ways to counter hate speech and discrimination, which gathered positive feedback from participants after they were able to share with each other stories about discrimination. The activities created by the IOM have also fostered inter-ethnic communication, and with their survey in 2020 they gave information about issues difficult to measure in the current social context, like the real social contact between Albanians and Serbs. In the coming years, it is necessary a more active participation of the Kosovar government in these activities, as the efforts of International Organizations cannot bear fruit if the citizens don't see the same commitment from their institutions.

As of now, the sentiment is that Kosovo has supported these externally funded activities seemingly out of obligation to not lose the chance of entering institutions like the Council of Europe. But a more active participation from them could foster a much-needed dialogue with their Serb community and with the nation of Serbia at large. Dialogue is a powerful tool for peacebuilding, but only if used correctly. Dialogue based on understanding the other creates trust and relationships between the participants. On the other hand, dialogue that is based on agendas and coercion has limited range and creates further resentment. In peacebuilding, relationships are key to sustaining the network between civilians, mediators and the government. There are almost no relationships in this regard in Kosovo. The citizens continue to be segregated, and the government does not trust all civil society organizations. The situation is not sustainable. Specifically, the stagnation of the conflict in the North must end, and that can only happen if Kosovo and Serbia change their approach, cooperate and put their differences behind in favor of their population. The solution is not clear, but a change of direction is needed.

It is hard to know for sure the trajectory of the future. Another war breaking is implausible while the support of international organizations is still there, but it is uncertain what could happen once they leave. After 20 years, people are still separated, cities divided, protests are common, and acts of violence are starting to rise. The youth seem to be taking some steps towards a more connected outlook, but their ability to engage with one another remains limited and it is hard to determine what the percentage of them is that have in fact put their differences behind. The Cycle of Violence is being monitored, but it has not disappeared. To comprehend this more studies centered around understanding the link between epistemic injustice and violence should be made. Without properly engaging with what was once seen as the enemy, proper reconciliation can never happen.

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