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7. The Life Stories on the Nation: Bringing Back instead of Containing Nationalism in Nationbuilding

Introduction

Understanding various perceptions of nation building among the local and international actors is essential for stabilizing, managing and preventing future conflicts. This chapter analyzes the different perceptions of nation building between and within local and international actors in the case of Kosovo and assesses the impact of differing perceptions on the everyday life of local individuals. It argues that the divergent perceptions of nation building as revealed by the life stories are in fact hindering the development of Kosovo as a state and a nation. Their negative impact is illustrated through life stories in which Kosovo Albanians encounter discrimination by internationals and local Serbians when they insist on maintaining their Albanian identity instead of adopting solely a Kosovar one, and on empowering themselves. This results for instance in local resistance toward international involvement in “everyday work life”. This chapter suggests that the containment of ethnic national identity hinders state, peace and nation building.

The word “nation” is often avoided since it is viewed as the most confusing and “tendentious” in the political science (Tilly, 1975, p. 6). Fukuyama theorises nations as including “communities of shared values, traditions and historical memory” (Fukuyama, 2006, p. 3). Others like Elden view the state as a “political unity” whereas the nation is a “grouping of people” (Elden, 2009, p. 202). Gellner argues that sharing a similar culture¹⁷⁶ represents elements of a nation and nationalism (Gellner & Breuilly, 2008, pp. 6–7). Amongst most important elements of nation is also the recognition of “each other [people] belonging to the same nation” (ibid). Smith argues that the nation state legitimates nationalism by various elements like “frontiers, capitals, flags, anthems, passports, currencies, military parades, national museums, embassies and usually a seat at the United Nations” (Smith, 1986, p. 228).¹⁷⁷ The case of Kosovo suggests that the elements of culture are neglected in the process of nation building since they are associated with nationalism, which presumably must be avoided in post conflict countries according to the international perspectives.

¹⁷⁶ ‘a system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating’ (Gellner & Breuilly, 2008, pp. 6–7)

¹⁷⁷ ‘They also have one government for the territory of the nation-state, a single education system, a single economy and occupational system, and usually one set of legal rights for all citizens, though there are exceptions [e.g. citizenship rights for all and sometimes communal rights for special communities]. They also subscribe, tacitly or openly, quietly or vociferously, to a single ideology which legitimates the whole enterprise - nationalism.’ (A. Smith, 1986, p. 228)

The notion of nation building is moreover differently understood by American and European academics (Fukuyama, Cynthia, Watson, Patterson). Nation building is associated with the process of state building (political and economic development) in the American scholarship, whereas reshaping the “society or citizens” refers to the European scholarship (Call, 2008b, p. 10). Call defines nation building as “actions undertaken, usually by national actors, to forge a sense of common nationhood” (Call, 2008b, p. 5).¹⁷⁸ He emphasize that national actors normally carry the process. This chapter assesses whether international actors contribute as well and whether and in what type they should do so.

The efforts to build nations after the 20th century focus mainly on civic nation building through promotion of common legal duties and rights for all members, a common economy with territorial mobility for all members, legal equality among members, territorial boundaries, historic territory, common civic culture and ideology (values and traditions). On the other hand, ethnic nation building is based on blood, descent with main features of national identity such as historic territory or homeland, common myths and historical memories and a common mass public culture, language and customs (Polese, 2011; A. Smith, 1991). These two different notions overlap with each other and with the state. For instance, elements of civic and ethnic nation building (or a combination of them) are used to construct new states, as it will be shown in the following sections.

The evidence from the life stories, in this case locals in Kosovo, show that in their examination of the process of nation building, they rely on various discourses. One group of locals focuses on supporting a two state solution due to the pressure from big powers and sacrificing the Albanian unification idea at least temporarily. The common belief as revealed by the life stories is that Albanian nation would unite in the European Union once both Kosovo and Albania have entered. They express this in many ways. State building is prioritized over unification. There are opposing views to this discourse. Other local groups prioritize their original Albanian identity acquired when they were born and aim to unite with Albania. They prioritize ethnic nation building over international state building and civic nation building. According to them, history has shown that the Balkans cannot overcome conflict easily. If these two states are not united, two semi functional states will remain in the Balkans. Furthermore the Albanian minority problems will remain and the Albanian influence will be minimized in Balkans. They view the European Union more as an imposer rather than as assisting in finding a solution. On the other hand, the Bosnian minorities envy the Albanian’s better situation to acquire two states.

¹⁷⁸ ‘(1) to overcome ethnic, sectarian, or communal differences; (2) to counter alternate sources of identity and loyalty; and (3) to mobilize a population behind a parallel statebuilding project’ (Call, 2008b, p. 5)

Compared to some local actors life stories, internationals focus mainly on European integration as the main tool for stabilizing the region. Nation building is understood as stabilization and prevention of direct wars between parties in the region. They reject the countries and parties that promote nationalism or identify further with ethnic national identities, which is not acceptable within the EU framework. On the other hand, they acknowledge Serbia's destabilizing role in the region through the manipulation of the minorities in the Republika Srpska and Northern Kosovo. This resonates with local concerns expressed by the local group's life stories supporting unification with Albania. The international community expects political changes in Serbia that would presumably result in a more realistic assessment of the situation. New talks about the region's political development are foreseen. This international perspective complements the group of locals supporting the EU as a main tool for achieving Kosovo's statehood, and possibly at a later stage the national unification under the EU umbrella. However, both lack a vision of how to deal with ethnic national identity and nationalism before and when entering into the EU.

Theoretically, the case of Kosovo illustrates the difficulties of creating and maintaining a multi-ethnic state in the 21st century and argues that ethnic national identity should not be suppressed but viewed as complementary rather than in competition with civic national identity. In Kosovo, the notion of a European identity had emerged primarily among local political elites life stories using EU integration as a tool for national unification. Lastly, proposals by Richmond and other scholars of post-liberal peace theory for a combination of liberal ideas with a respect for culture and local identities are observable to a limited extent. While the notions of respect for culture and identity seem to lack in practice by a group of international community, the utilization of liberal ideas for local purposes, achieving Albanian national unification through EU integration, appear nonetheless to be present among a group of local political elite.

The findings are based on several life stories with local individuals and interviews with international officials.¹⁷⁹ They assess the various perceptions on nation building, and in the case of the life story interviews, their everyday impact.¹⁸⁰ Therefore life stories are used to inform nation building in Kosovo. They provide the much-needed perspective from below, the view of the local actors. Not all life stories concerning nation building were used for this chapter given its limited scope. The choice fell on the ones exemplifying the nation building dynam-

¹⁷⁹ The life stories used for this chapter arose from a comparative process with the other 28 life stories during several years of fieldwork. There are several life stories that experienced the post war reconstruction in Kosovo, the most difficult post socialist period with several social, economic and legal challenges and successes. Accounts of several life story participants whose interviews were conducted over five to six hours are used for this chapter. A pseudonym is used to ensure anonymity for the participants. For more information, please see the methodology chapter.

¹⁸⁰ This has been explained in depth in the life stories section in the methodology chapter.

ics. Around nine life stories were chosen through snowball sampling, population criteria, involvement in post conflict reconstruction period, interaction with the international community, availability, access and grounded theory.¹⁸¹ According to grounded theory, a significant attention is given to theoretical sampling that aims to introduce new theoretical concepts to the current scholarship.¹⁸² Furthermore, life stories that offered the ability to transfer the main threads and were rich in details were used in this chapter. Artan's life story exemplifies issues of ethnic identity and territory. Fisnik's life story describes the issues relating to mystification of the Albanian identity and the role of small states in decision making. Ylber's life story expresses that ethnic identity continues to matter in a multi-ethnic state. Shkodran's and Gjin's life stories delve into the topic of differences between minorities and the Albanians and the double standards in their treatment. Faruk's life story describes the imposition of national symbols in Kosovo by the international community. Lastly, Vera's narrative exemplifies how the past biases against Kosovo Albanians still dominate the current nation-building agenda. These are contrasted with the international perspectives. The following sections analyze the international perspectives on nation building, local variations, local everyday responses to Albanian empowerment and resistance. In the last section I summarize the findings, which indicate that the containment of ethnic national identity hinders state, peace and nation building. The context of Kosovo is determined by international nation building. Ethnic nation building may instead be viewed complementary to civic nation building, which has been exclusively promoted in recent years.

International Perspectives: Nation Building through EU Integration

Reluctance to Label the International Involvement as Nation Building

Both official sources and private conversations show scepticism about the international involvement in Kosovo and its contribution towards state and nation building. For instance, Rudolf argues that the EU mission is contributing to capacity building which, once Kosovo becomes a member of EU, can retrospectively be labelled as state building. The main reason for this is that state and nation building

concepts are too ambitious to relate to international peace support mission. We are contributing to rule of law, and we are doing it by helping them to create proper institutions, proper capacities, to enforce rule of law, and that is basically our job.¹⁸³

Similarly, Stahn shows that the UN refrains from framing the activities as nation building but in practice they are involved in nation building:

¹⁸¹ For in depth information on sampling, please see the methodology chapter, specifically the section on Initial and Theoretical Sampling.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Rudolf, p.1

the [UN] organisation generally avoided defining its responsibilities in the area of peacemaking in terms of nationbuilding. In some cases (e.g. Kosovo), the UN adopted measures which shaped the identity of a territory under administration (e.g. external representation, citizenship). Such measures were, however, primarily tied to functional goals of administration during the period of transition and not aimed at nationbuilding as such (Stahn, 2008, p. 406).

Similarly, Lemay Hébert argues that state building always implies nation building activities (Lemay-Hébert, 2009). All these assessments illustrate the difficulties and complexities of labelling the tasks of international missions, which appear differently in policy and on the ground. In Kosovo, the main international civil servants describe their indirect attempts to nation building as pursued by European Union and NATO.

However, Daryl, a high rank international official, reveals that in Kosovo there is a lack of Kosovar identity since international's created the civic nation, therefore locals "don't feel identified". The state's symbols stripped from the Albanian identity are represented as neo-colonial: "People here are Albanians first, not Kosovar first. Have you seen or heard a Kosovo Anthem, have you seen only the Kosovo flag? It's an embarrassment; it's a piece of neo-colonial (...) [fashion]". Despite main international officials denying involvement in nation building, Daryl claims that internationals, Americans, prepared the independence of Kosovo: "This declaration of independence, the document (...) the guest list, the speeches, the order of the people. It's all done by the Americans, how can you identify with that?". However this mainly seems to occur due to the lack of appropriate leadership in Kosovo:

you and your people are much too immature you don't know how to behave. You go about everything in as if you are fifteen. Grow up and do this right and you can be the best leaders of society but if you're going to be a bunch of anarchists, I don't want to have anything to do with you. I mean their tactics may be fascist at times, yes, but they have more in common with anarchists.¹⁸⁴

The EU Integration: A Tool for Managing Nationalism

The Balkan states, all the states including Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, Croatia are viewed in twenty-five years traveling freely as European citizens. Following this reasoning the local identities should be forgotten, and the priority must be given to promotion of European citizenry:

So forget about this (ethnicity) is medieval by now and simply focus on being an European citizen... you should be explaining people that this (is important), helpful if you would accept the situation, would easily grow out into a much better situation.¹⁸⁵

International civilian officials view the EU as a means to overcome nationalism in Kosovo and former Yugoslavia. That stems from the idea that the former Yugoslavia (FRY) was es-

¹⁸⁴ Daryl, p.3

¹⁸⁵ Rafael, p.8

essentially already a small type of multi-ethnic union, providing to some extent a collective identity based on tolerance and equality. According to Andreas, while the FRY “wasn’t the ideal”, it would have been very promising for the region if it had not been disintegrated. Essentially if

the Serbs had not been so overreaching and dominating the military and government, and if they had been adequate, decent civilization and Kosovo had been given the equal status like with the others, then Yugoslavia might have survived and it would have been very good.¹⁸⁶

Although the dissolution of the FRY led to several wars in Balkans, people’s perceptions of FRY are nonetheless mostly positive (see Tim Judah (2000) for more and the data below). Therefore Andreas proposes to frame EU ideals along the lines of a Yugoslav identity to Balkan population in order to succeed in EU integration: “a prestigious international country... was a decent [country] and that intellectual past is still there, so it was great nostalgia sort of a dream. Perhaps that dream could be sold by the EU”.¹⁸⁷

The main reason why this argument may not work is that risks are still present. The Balkan states have borders that are arbitrarily designed. They cut through ethnic groups, they leave minorities (Brubaker), and in particular, they are problematic in Kosovo. As Andreas says, it is still problematic in Kosovo since nationalism appears: “It is disappointing and it has an ethnic overtone, ... the borders are still arbitrarily drawn ... unless is all elevated to higher European integration”. Considering the remaining tensions in Bosnia, Macedonia and other parts of the Balkans, the only solution to mitigate nationalism and these risks is integration to the EU. He concludes that initial efforts were “naïve” in nation building and “no one wants to return to warfare that is obvious, [but it] is disappointing how nationalism has made such a way”.¹⁸⁸

The Role of Serbia: Hindering the Development of the Region and Integration

At the end of the war, Serbia did not recognize the separation of Kosovo. Serbia, the homeland state for the largest minority in Kosovo (Serbian), Kosovo and the international community negotiated Kosovo’s Declaration of Independence in 2008: “after four years of hard negotiations there was no alternative [than giving] to Kosovo people independence”.¹⁸⁹ The question arises in this case what Serbia got in return if they were involved in the negotiation, which still remains an open question. The independence of Kosovo has been negotiated by democratic states. The international official states that the Serbian leadership had been respectful of wishes of strongest democracies in the world including United States of America,

¹⁸⁶ Andreas, p.3

¹⁸⁷ Andreas, p.3

¹⁸⁸ Andreas, p.3

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

United Kingdom, Germany and Italy to allow Kosovo's independence. This resonates with the democratic peace theory where democratic states, in this case the US and the EU, engage in promoting liberal democracy, and even creating presumably a liberal democratic state of Kosovo. According to Andreas, upon the declaration of independence, Serbian leadership recognized that Kosovo was practically lost and would not become a part of Serbia. In practice, Serbia competes for Kosovo rhetorically and at the EU facilitated Dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.

Despite the successful negotiations, which allowed Kosovo to declare its independence, the nationalism of Serbia remains a major problem. Andreas says that the presence of KFOR is not required in Kosovo, but it remains due to the problems in the north related to "an element that comes from Belgrade", respectively "some nationalistic messages". The same elements reach Republika Srpska as well. The hope of Andreas is that political changes will follow government changes in Serbia. Even government change, which was hoped by international civil servants to change the situation, only led to the election of a "more nationalistic" leadership. Andreas points out that Serbia will have difficulties entering the EU unless "nationalistic messages" decrease. In other words, the EU no longer accepts members that are problematic and would receive Serbia only under the conditions that it becomes "a normal state and not a source of nationalism".

On the other hand, Kosovo is not progressing since Kosovars are locked in confrontation with Serbia and therefore "unable to govern themselves". Again, the anticipated solution is hoped to derive from the EU Dialogue, which aims at the normalization of relations between Kosovo and Serbia. The interviewee indicates that one of the primary goals towards this end is the removal of parallel institutions whose presence is in contravention with EU practice. Questions are also raised regarding whether Northern Kosovo will become "a frozen conflict", even though the international civil servant suggests that such a scenario cannot be allowed given the central geographical location of Kosovo in South Eastern Europe. With much depending on Serbia's political choices, the international community is seeking to prevent Northern Kosovo from becoming a frozen conflict through the current Dialogue. Still, the hope is for Belgrade to come to a more "realistic assessment of what Serbia needs in the future", which could lead to a new kind of "serious talks about the political regions".¹⁹⁰

Kosovo's Self Determination Party Inhibits its own Success with Unification Aims

On the ground, a political party still promotes Albanian unification, as for instance the Self-Determination (SD), which was originally a social movement. Rudolf regards the party as very promising, addressing national, economic and social issues (such as corruption, privati-

¹⁹⁰ Albert, p.4

zation, international interference). However, he identifies nationalism and the aim of reunification as inhibiting its success, which could be considerable “if they can turn this energy and creativity they have, specially as a street movement [...] to something positive and inclusive”. Somewhat contradictory, this international civil servant also argues that SD always fights “against something”. He points out that in the 21st century, nationalism is not acceptable and that the EU conditions countries to not pursue nationalist policies, which could already be seen in the internationals’ view on Serbia. This condition is mainly directed towards the mother state, the logic being that a mother state “would not sacrifice” EU’s membership for border changes for reunification.¹⁹¹

To conclude, the international perspective on nation building focuses mostly on the EU membership to contain nationalism in the region. Both Serbia and Kosovo display nationalist tendencies, as exemplified by the SD, interviews, Serbia’s aims and interfering politics through minorities in Northern Kosovo and the Republika Srpska. Regional development depends upon Serbia’s decision to move forward to the EU. However, it is important to recognize that the EU membership of Albania, Serbia and Kosovo is a long-term goal that may take decades. Geopolitical changes, EU failure to deliver its promises or Balkan countries failing to deliver may all compromise this strategy.

Andreas, a well-informed and involved international official developing the future policy of the NATO and the EU administration, signalled new talks for the region. Still the Kosovo government’s sole focus on dialogues might further deteriorate the situation on the ground. The political apathy will continue. Population’s disappointments may increase their migration attempts to Europe. In addition, the EU talk rounds fatigue may inhibit their success. Furthermore, one of the civil servants claims that “EU is not effective”.¹⁹² Lastly, political changes occur very fast. Given the recent arisen interest of Russia and Turkey in Balkans, and specifically the Russian assertiveness in world affairs, the EU membership carrot may become contestable in keeping stability and managing nationalism in Kosovo and Serbia.

Local Variations

Albanian Nation and State Unification through European Union: Prioritizing State Building of Kosovo while Maintaining Nation Building as Albanian

The life stories of local elites supporting the state solution of Kosovo, which also abandoned the request to join Albania, realize that time has changed and adopt strategically the liberal point of view supporting Kosovo. Thus the viewpoints below resonate with parts of post-liberal peace theory, which suggests that local actors will adopt liberal ideas when it seems

¹⁹¹ Rudolf, p.5

¹⁹² Andreas, p.6

beneficial, if access is granted by the international community (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 766). Specifically, the hybrid local rather than local–local actors, use the language of hegemon and “these agencies may be more than mimicry, but they offer a politics less than local self-determination, and may reconfirm hegemonic power” (Richmond, 2010, p. 678). Local actors prioritizing Kosovo’s state building due to geopolitical necessities represent the hybrid local in Kosovo.

This group of locals as life stories reveal also abandoned the idea of a single nation state as the time has passed, they are no longer acceptable in international affairs and less likely due to migration. Therefore Kosovo Albanians should move with time: support Kosovo as a state and abandon the idea to join the Albanian territory. Similarly, Call suggests that multinational states have become more common and acceptable in global platforms and therefore nation building is no longer necessary for successful state building (Call, 2008b, p. 11). In addition, there are no longer nation states representing “homogenous ethnic community... that all the inhabitants of the state possess an identical culture” (A. Smith, 1986, p. 229). On other words, the single nation-states’ idea seems to decrease its significance in globalized world since different nationalities migrate. Following this line of argumentation, multiculturalism seems to prevail. The following sections describe the life stories of the hybrid local group, representing parliamentarians.

Ethnic Identity and Territory

Identities of citizens in Kosovo vary. Some identify themselves simultaneously as Kosovar and as Albanian. On the one hand, some feel both Kosovar and Albanian as Artan says “I am Kosovar but I am Albanian”.¹⁹³ The latter, Artan’s life story exemplifies the ethnic identity and territory issues. He was educated during the former Yugoslavian period. He was an Albanian student, political activist and held as a prisoner over several years. His close and extended family was persecuted during both world wars and afterwards. He joined the KLA in 1990s, and he focuses after the war mainly on politics. On the other hand, Edon’s life story provides many insights for this topic as well. He was educated in the former Yugoslavian system, taught in the Albanian system before the war and continued teaching at the university and held several political posts after the war. He acknowledges that “[y]ou cannot feel like an Albanian citizen since when we go there we feel as Kosovan citizens”. Still, he feels to belong to both identities: “we were born and raised with [it] and nobody can deny me that I am an Albanian. Now, we have Kosovan passports and we live in a territory that used to be the

¹⁹³ Artan, p.13

Northern part of Albania but for me it is [only] currently a country”. In the end, he feels “Albanian as well as Kosovar”.¹⁹⁴

Edon, from his work experience believes that a primary role should be given to the state and then the nation, where the latter will be united in the European Union. He points out that in practice Albanians “are already united, considering that the Kosovan citizen moves freely to Albania and vice versa without any documents or control, so it’s simply an administrative crossing rather than a border crossing”.¹⁹⁵ Artan highlights that he had been active as an MP “in the process of building bridges of cooperation with Europe and the world, with the aim to be part of it but while maintaining our traits, our identity and our dignity”.¹⁹⁶

Shkelqim based on his life story experiences suggests a combined integration of the economy, language and culture that can be achieved under the EU umbrella.¹⁹⁷ Shkelqim studied in the Yugoslav system, contributed to the Kosovo Albanian political awakening through creating the Albanian parallel education system and continued working on it after the war. Being now retired, his experience and life story provides many interesting insights. Arguments for a territorial reunification are therefore “absurd” because “nation formation is more ancient than a state formation” and relates to “a wider, deeper and more important feeling” that is not restricted in “time and space”. In contrast, the concept of the state formation is temporary and “narrow” since it is mostly concerned with elements of territory and borders. It includes also elements such as “symbols, constitution” and others. While the nation formation has the “history, tradition, culture, language, big personalities that gave importance to the so-called identity and personality of a population”.¹⁹⁸

On the other hand, Genc completed his studies (including a doctorate) in the West and returned before the war to assist the Albanian cause. He worked on reconciliation between Albanians, hosted Albanians and Serbs during the last war, and is now committed to fighting negative trends in Kosovo’s society through spirituality, while working for a religious organization. Being now almost retired, his experience and life story provides many interesting insights. Genc thinks that “it will be good for us [Albanians] to work on this prism”. According to him, a promotion of nation formation would lead to a more solid state formation process. If the nation is based on positive ideas, then that may contribute to the stability of the region: “as much as somebody is a good Albanian, he will be a good citizen of Kosovo or Albania, Montenegro or Macedonia. After all he is Albanian”. Recent attempts to weaken the Albanian

¹⁹⁴ Edon, p.27

¹⁹⁵ Edon, p.26

¹⁹⁶ Artan, p.13

¹⁹⁷ Shkelqim, p.24-25

¹⁹⁸ Shkelqim, p.24-25

identity are consequently viewed as dangerous through questioning the historical figures.¹⁹⁹ For Genc, state formation represents essentially a sub-question of nation formation. His hope is that Albanians cease questioning their national figures and begin investing in their national identity and

in the feeling of belonging to the Albanians. Via this feeling we enrich each other and enjoy the feeling: I'm Albanian and you are Albanian, so in this aspect you are a part of my life and I am the part of your life. The feeling of a common body, common history, common tradition, common culture, personalities, heroes, of the wonderful resistance that we had over centuries of our survival starting from back then until recently - I think that this should be the basis in which we form our identity and personality.²⁰⁰

The Kosovar identity in contrast is viewed as “a wrong invention to replace the national [one]”. Genc in fact views promoting Kosovar identity as a temporary phase in the decades while Serbia dominates in the region. In addition, he supports nation formation since borders were imposed by powerful states. If they did not exist, the world would be shared by all populations:

before the Albanian lands come together, heads and hearts should join first. Heads and hearts since the land is not divided. The whole earth is one, but people divided it, states divided it, rulers and dictators divided it and put up borders. These borders that we often have in our Albanian mind and hearts, we should tear them down, and we will tear them down when the head and the heart tears them down and when we go towards the spiritual and cultural unity on what is the nation dining table.²⁰¹

Of course, Genc still acknowledges the reality that state formation exists. Kosovo's state formed through democracy brought in fact freedom and benefits for all Albanians. In practice, one can now

go to Tirana, go to Pristina, go to Skopje, go to Podgorica or anywhere else, so it can be said that President Rugova's dream has been realized. Who would have imagined a Kosovo open towards both Albania and Serbia, where we can go to Tirana and Belgrade, willing to create a kind of equilibrium. Not that Albanians are the same with Serbs, but democracy opened streets and communication paths in work, society, economy with the whole world.

He views Kosovo as an actor that may assist the democratic processes in Western Balkan.²⁰²

Other life story interviews share Genc's solidarist view about the world borders, even though for other reasons. For instance, according to Edon whose life story was explained in the earlier chapter, the region's states are no longer “ethnically pure”. Serbia lost precisely because of this ideology. Since there will be no ethnically pure states, Kosovo should abandon the idea

¹⁹⁹ Genc, p.20-22

²⁰⁰ Genc, p.20-22

²⁰¹ Genc, p.20-22

²⁰² Genc, p.20-22

of unifying with Albania and focus on state building. Furthermore, many citizens of one state live in other states in Balkans:

A number of Bulgarians live in Serbia, a number of Bulgarians live in Romania, a number of Turks live in Bulgaria, a number of Romanians lives in Slovakia or vice versa - so there is no ethnically pure country. It would be desirable but it is not feasible.

In the future, there will not be also a country populated by only one population or one ethnic group. According to Edon, this is the main reason why the international human rights regime was established: to guarantee the rights of minorities and other ethnicities in a foreign country.²⁰³

The development of a common language is significant for nation building processes as it is one of the central claims to a nation's uniqueness. There are fears that the Albanian nation might dissolve due to frictions in the language. In practice, these frictions have existed for a long time thus the threat of the language dissolution is low despite the coming changes in the region. But Albanians fear its dissolution since the Greek language disappeared long time ago. Shkelqim argues therefore that

language must make a progress and we should work to progress it. We must have a unified language, a very flexible culture, the organization of the joint activities [which are] not imposed, different competitions and festivals, the Albanian anthem and the single Albanian economical market. Like this, the nation is created itself.²⁰⁴

Exaggerations and The Myth of the Albanian History

Some life story interviewees argue that history has magnified Albanians, and hence they demand nation building, which does not match with the actual realities. Therefore state building of Kosovo is a good alternative to the Albanian nation state building. Albanians lack “a written history”, with present accounts representing an “ideological and emotional history” with different variations, but not based on facts. Fisnik’s life story is salient for this understanding. He was educated in the former Yugoslavian period, worked for the liberation of Kosovo through the peaceful political movement, LDK, and continued after the war being involved in politics in various political positions. His life story exemplifies the everyday challenges arisen from discussions when dealing with politics in Balkans. For instance, he brings forward his frequent joke about the Albanian bravery myth:

Skenderbeu damaged us, leaving us with the heritage of bravery, while in fact we are not as brave as it is thought we are. We glorified ourselves more than we should have and this has some negative repercussions in our behavior and in relation to the organization of the society and our families.

²⁰³ Edon, p.27

²⁰⁴ Shkelqim, p.24-25

Therefore he rejects the “clichés” and “stereotypes” as “there is not only black and white” such as “no heroic or non-heroic people or populations”. He argues that people are all the same, depending on the situation they find themselves, on the organizations they have taken part, the nature of the state organization, the environment, education and all the others things.

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However these are seen as recent attempts to weaken the Albanian identity, which are consequently viewed as dangerous. This refers in particular to attempts to deconstruct national Albanian hero figures such as Gjergj Kastriot Skenderbeu and Nena Tereze. Challenging Skenderbeu’s role might be very problematic as it is

the tie that binds [Albanians across] all centuries. This tie is our Christianity, culture and civilization as European Christians. Like it or not, it is our cradle in which we were born. Nobody is saying to go back to the cradle, but this is the cradle.

The questioning of Skenderbeu or Mother Teresa as Albanians constitute consequently “untruths and wrong dilemmas”, which are problematic as they may damage any future progress: “it sways our roots and we cannot have healthy branches if roots fluctuate or are damaged”.²⁰⁶

Fisnik views Albanians as having lost time and therefore calls them “a delayed nation”, a late bloomer. They also made “big mistakes” in the past as they entered and finished some processes a little bit later than the others in the region. Furthermore, Albanians are presented as very weak nation during peace period:

We are a strong nation, but we resist only in times of misfortune. In peace we don’t know how to behave, we are a bit wild, we become something different and this hurts to me a lot. We are not capable of appreciating what we have, we don’t appreciate what we have, where we were and where we are now.²⁰⁷

Big Powers Decide for Small States

Fisnik points out the role of big powers in drawing borders and therefore suggests promoting state building in Kosovo as currently state building in international community’s agenda. According to him

[W]e should know that first of all Albanians as a nation are a small nation, regardless of our conviction and imagination that we are an old nation, with a tradition and descendent from the Illyrians etc. Historical political developments have shown that we are a small nation. We can magnify ourselves in song, in poetry, in literature but the international political reality throughout various periods has shown that we are small. The fate of small nations lies in the hands of the big nations. Because at the end of the day political maps are determined in various big international summits where small nations don’t participate but only the big ones.

²⁰⁵ Fisnik, p.21-22

²⁰⁶ Genc, p.20-22

²⁰⁷ Fisnik, p.21-22

However, some of the Albanian literature criticizing various local regimes has been written in exile by authors like Faik Konica, Naim Frasheri and others (Elsie, 2001, 2012). Literature is viewed as a lens of people's history. Still, Fisnik believes in realism and the power politics. According to him, Albania was unfortunate after the Second World War to fall in the isolated Communist block while Kosovo in his view fortunately fell in the more moderate communist part. Currently, since the European Union is ready to accept various groups, he supports a two state solution:

At this moment, I think it is more reasonable to create two states than to strengthen the nation. Because the political developments in Europe are such that everybody wants to be integrated into Europe. I think that our nation's unification should happen after we join the European Union.²⁰⁸

Prioritizing Albanian Unification

However some local actors including parliamentarians, retirees and NGO representatives, resonate with the primordial theory of nation building which views ethnicity as fixed, and prefer ethnic nation building over civic and/or at least inclusion of ethnicity in the civic nation as the following section shows. Ylber's life story expresses it. He was educated in the former Yugoslavian period and was a student and political activist. He was held for several years in prison. After the war, he continued to contribute to Kosovo's formation through a social movement. Recently he joined a political party. Therefore his life story is very important for providing further insights from another perspective, respectively an activist perspective. He in inquiring his own identity rejects the type of nationalism that says "firstly I am a man then an Albanian", thus the solidarist view expressed by some interviewees above. Instead, he maintains to be "firstly Albanian and a human". Ylber opposes the other type since people differ:

Human rights fundamentalists are fascinated with the ocean of red babies in maternity, when they have been born, endlessly, all cry alike, some kind of impersonal solidarity. Imagine maternity, around 200 babies are crying identically, and you say: we are all the same, we all are people. But later on they differentiate into Albanians, Serbians, Dutch, British, Irish, French, German. Look now how they are, are they the same?

To describe further the concept of difference, he compares the death of a baby with that of an older person:

I cannot have respect for a person that is twenty years old in the same way as for a three days old baby. I do have more respect for a twenty-year-old man. When the baby dies, I don't feel more sorry than when a twenty years old dies, isn't it so?

He concludes that the human rights concept is subversive, as human beings develop differently depending on the locality:

²⁰⁸ Edon, p.26

This "I am a human first and then an Albanian" paradoxically, in the name of human rights, that seems to be something to which a lot of importance needs to be paid... as a being of a higher order. You are born and become, you cannot have the same respect for the seed as for the pear. I'm interested to eat the pear, but I'm not interested in what you planted three years ago, you know.

In other words, his argument is that "those who want to emphasize human rights in fact, end up somehow violating them conceptually". He describes the first moments of his life in an Albanian family to illustrate his connection to the Albanian identity:

I think when I have been born; I have been born in the hospital of Prishtina, here. After my mother took me, she started to bring me up, she dangled me, two Albanian parents - "Open your mouth". I was a frail child; I passed much of my childhood in hospital... I don't remember myself, but my grandmother, my mother and pictures tell me. And, namely, I already have been Albanian, the lullabies - "Nina nëna", the language. When in an Albanian family a child is born, and, the Albanian language, rituals, customs, that children is already an Albanian on my conviction.

According to him there are three stages of human development. Firstly, there is birth when all babies are "monsters", then they grow up as Albanians in their families, and finally, in the last stage, they develop through individual initiative:

But over the years when I become ten years old, I said: I have to learn English a bit because it's interesting, the language, music, movies. Then I learned Serbo-Croatian, English. "Ah..." I said, "if I could read these books in English, in the original version", you know, Shakespeare. And I started learning to read, and I saw that being Albanian is not enough. And, I think that later on I became a man, because as an Albanian I was almost like a "monster". There is a certain analogy between the transfiguration of baby and a monster, there is something very abnormal there, you know, and so I think that as a baby, as a child I've been Albanian but I've been like a monster, and now with my efforts, I try to be human. That is to say, humanization is an effort of mine, and I don't know if I reached it yet.

Put simply, humanism emerges thus from the insufficiency of being Albanian:

which is in the level of a given fact, that you cannot change it. I cannot change it that I am Albanian, but not simply because of the blood ... I do not believe on that stuff, "Albanian blood..", I don't know what does that mean, but because of the language, customs, habits and the place where I live, and because of a kind of historic consciousness of the nation I belong to. However that's not enough to me.

Thus because of this insufficiency, he became interested in other languages, cultures, and histories and consequently became a man. The concept of the nation seems to him as a certain given situation in which the individual embraces the nation and at the same time "it's not sufficient for him". He expresses a tension between his various identities as a man-citizen, activ-

ist, and a member of a particular nation. Although they seem to coexist, they are “also a sequence of things”.²⁰⁹

Ylber points out that the diaspora gives positive impulses for change in Kosovo, their exposure to the rest of the world being an asset. This encourages them to look into the future, to become as equal as possible and comparable with developing nations and to forget the past. However, some citizens are already satisfied that there are no longer “constant killings”, meaning that the status quo is good. Ylber for instance aims for Albania/Kosovo to become a flourishing state in some decades that is comparable to EU nations. He finds it unjust that other small nations have better lives than Albanians. For instance, he draws a comparison between Denmark and Kosovo. He then raises the question “[W]hy they have to live so well and we so badly? Why don’t we live like them, why? What do they have more than us?” When he expresses this dilemma to others, his friends’ usual response is that one should not complain as things are fine compared to the time of Milosevic and Serbia, them being “glad to have survived”. However, he disagrees and aims for Kosovo to be as developed as some EU nations in a couple of decades. Put differently, his focus lies on “the equality with other nations rather than the slight positive difference to the bitter past”.²¹⁰ Ylber supports the unification of Albania and Kosovo since “they have a common background, one culture, one tradition and one language”.²¹¹

Shkodran’s life story reveals in depth insights regarding minorities, politics and other events of discrimination. He is a human rights activist with a judicial education. He is involved with protecting human rights of vulnerable communities and documentation of abuse, respectively the abuse of Kosovo Albanian human rights before the war and the Serbians and few Kosovo Albanians after the war. He worked and continues to work for the NGO sector. According to Shkodran, the issue of Albanian minorities living in Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia will remain problematic as long as the Albanian issue is unresolved. Currently, their rights are in his view not taken into account. Main countries such as Serbia (for Serbs) and Albania (for Albanians) must demand a respect for the minority rights in other countries (i.e. Macedonia, Montenegro, etc). But since Albania is a weak state with its own challenges, it cannot support Albanians living in other countries. According to Shkodran, other states in the region are taking advantage of Albania’s weakness and lack of unity by violating minority rights:

Serbia is taking this advantage by massively violating the human rights of Albanians in Preshevo Valley, by cleaning that part from Albanians. Montenegro on the other hand, in a repressive way is doing ethnic cleansing of Albanians after their independence even though Albanians were instrumental in Montenegro’s independence. Without the vote of Albanians, Montenegro

²⁰⁹ Ylber, p.28-30

²¹⁰ Ylber, p.35

²¹¹ Shkodran, p.13-14

would never get its independence. Because there was such a small difference between those who wanted Montenegro to become an independent state and those that wanted to stay with Serbia. You can see in Macedonia too that Albanians factually are divided, they more easily agree with a Macedonian party than among themselves. It is not that they do not understand each other but there is a kind of animosity between them. I am talking about BDI and PDSH²¹². And Macedonians are taking advantage of it.²¹³

Shkodran also believes on the Albanian unification since “it is a problem for Kosovo to exist as a state”.²¹⁴ Thus for regional stability

only Kosovo joining Albania guarantees stability, and without this neither Albania nor Kosovo will become a strong state. They will remain among the semi functional states, and will economically always depend on others like an ill person relies on his doctor.

They draw this conclusion from the Balkan’s, and more specifically Albanians complicated history in Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.²¹⁵ Shkodran also views the Albanian division as a geopolitical issue, comparable to the divisions seen in the past in Germany and Vietnam.²¹⁶ According to him, since the consequences may be dangerous, it is important for Kosovo to join Albania to secure the functionality of both territories.²¹⁷

The Role of the EU: “Imposer”

Shkodran says that the EU conditions Albania to remain silent about the Albanian problems in the region and the possibilities for unification. This is problematic since if Albania was strong, “it would be like a guarantor, defender and supporter of the unification of all Albanians”. Currently, however, Albania is very weak, supporting its minorities abroad only superficially and through media while lacking a genuine interest in Kosovo. The EU, in contrast, is regarded as playing

a dirty game with Albanians by putting conditions on Albania to be constructive regarding the issue of Kosovo in order to be part of the integration processes. To be constructive means that Albania does not defend Kosovo and Albanians in Macedonia and the Preshevo Valley, and they accepted it.²¹⁸

There are already reported concerns that Kosovo may not join the EU because of Serbia’s position on the issue and its possible blockade in the EU voting system. In addition, there are concerns that Albanians might not be able to join the EU due to their Muslim religion, despite that most parts of the population are not practicing it. Shkodran has concerns that Christian

²¹² BDI [The Democratic Union for Integration] and PDSH [Democratic Party of Albanian] are political parties in Macedonia.

²¹³ Shkodran, p.13

²¹⁴ Shkodran, p.20

²¹⁵ Shkelqim, p.25

²¹⁶ Shkodran, p.13-14

²¹⁷ Shkodran, p.13-14

²¹⁸ Shkodran, p.13

Europe may continue refusing non-Christian members, already not accepting Turkey, which “has conditions better than some European states”. He says that “the EU wants to minimize the Islam factor in Balkan’s and increase the Christian factor”. A unified Kosovo and Albania would result in eight million Albanians in one state, which would then “become a factor. They do not want for us to become a factor since a majority of Albanians are Muslim. Now they are calling on some kind of Islamic war and they qualify you according to your religion”.²¹⁹ This as well shows how some Albanians see themselves as Muslims.

The Albanian Effect on Minorities

After describing how internationals and locals perceive Kosovo as a nation, this section explains how others [minorities] understand it. A Bosnian interviewee that shared his life story, born and living in Kosovo, has experienced the political changes in the region. Gjin has been educated in higher universities in Yugoslavia and after the war in Europe and Asia. He created a family, found a job in Kosovo’s public sector and finalized his education before the war. After the war, he continued with education, worked for the public sector and created a private enterprise. He contributes to the minority group through organizing and participating actively in political, educational and cultural activities. He also maintained a political post. According to him, Bosnians made “big mistakes” in history, “especially recently because we insisted at the religious component”. He claims that others pressured Bosnians to prioritize religion over the national component: “we are Muslims, we are brothers”. He looks upon the Albanian case with admiration and as an example to be emulated:

Look what the Albanians did! They always put at the first place the nation, and now we should learn from the Albanians, because for them the nation was more important than the religion. Now they have won, they have two and a half states, Albania on the one hand and Kosovo on the other, and a half state in Macedonia.

He stresses the fact that this was achieved in a short time, namely “a period of 100 years”. This contrasts notably to Fisnik’s belief shown earlier that Albanian nation is a delayed one. Bosnians thus feels treated unfairly and blames Bosnians: “With the religion element, we haven’t won anything”. This illustrates how other minorities may follow the Albanian path to promoting nation and state building. For Gjin, state and nation building processes were mutually reinforcing. According to Gjin, Bosnia has been divided for 100 years given that “when everyone formed the state and the nation, we could not”.²²⁰ On the other hand, Serbs treat Kosovo as a territory that has been separated from Serbia, where they continue to live despite the separation. However they do not feel connected to Kosovo as a new nation, but to Serbia as a nation. Mira accepts the political circumstances, which have led to the territorial separation,

²¹⁹ Shkodran, p.20

²²⁰ Gjin, p.12-13

and lives there. Yet she argues that history is repeating meaning that injustices towards Serbs continue. Therefore there seems to be a hope that once injustices towards Serbs decrease, Kosovo may be returned to the Serbian nation.

Local Everyday Responses to Albanian Empowerment and Resistance: Towards Containment of the Albanian Identity

When it comes to solving the national problem, the international community has reached a consensus that both Serbia and Kosovo must be integrated in the EU. The EU integration would dampen down their need to have a strong state as they could achieve all what they aspire through the EU. Among local actors, two competing understandings through life stories were revealed, one group pursues state building primarily and then nation building under the European Union, whereas the other group pursues nation building primarily and then state building. The latter's claim is that pursuing state building while suppressing nation building is unsustainable. Therefore now we turn to the theory of everyday peace, which deals with local everyday responses to the international actions. While local-international interactions are analysed in the literature on peace and state building process, critical theorists (especially the ones dealing with post liberal peace) have still not dealt with these interactions when discussing nation building. The interactions presented in this theoretical approach extend not only to state and peace building but also to the nation building processes. Richmond's concept of "everyday peace" may come about if people locally and gradually resolve their conflicts. The everyday life of citizens shows that locals remain silent to continue working or since they are "muted by international dominance and a liberal aversion to non-liberal symbolic productions" (Richmond, 2010, p. 686). Richmond proposes to focus on activities of everyday life for the international community and local actors which in turn would represent "a move from subjects to active citizens, from de-politicisation to self-government and self-determination" (Richmond, 2009a, p. 571). The local resistance is viewed as a result of the tension between liberal state building and democracy. According to the "local turn" literature, critical perceptions can be identified by local agency manifested in small-scale mobilization in everyday tasks (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013).²²¹ The next section provides some cases illustrating the interactions between and within locals and internationals and the local everyday responses to the competing claims on nation building, which resonate with the post liberal peace theory.

International Imposition of the Multi-ethnic State

Multi-ethnic states have several shortcomings. Smith, for instance, suggests that there is a paradox of nation building. Ethnic divisions always can become a source of tension that may

²²¹ For more information, please see the Local Turn section on Post Liberal Peace theory chapter.

lead to violence and/or war.²²² The life stories below confirm his point and show furthermore that this will be the case not only when the majority needs to accommodate to the minority groups preferences, but even when the majority has the power legally but still needs to accommodate heavily to the minority group due to the pressure of international community. The life story of Shkodran, an activist committed to defending human rights regardless of ethnicity provides some insights on the shortcomings of the multi-ethnic state. He has documented the Serbian and Kosovar war crimes before, during and after the war, including crimes committed against Roma and Serbs. He finds the idea of a multi-ethnic Kosovo to be “absurd”. Serbs would not be willing to return to Kosovo, as he concludes from his experience of registering them:

I was visiting them more than fifty times, I registered the displaced Serbs by saying to them, come back to Kosovo, you have your own place. But they always had excuses like, ‘no we will come back when Serb police and military comes back’.²²³

Since Kosovo is 90 per cent Albanian, he claims that it should not be a multi-ethnic state. However, it should fully respect the rights of minorities. He brings forward the idea that double standards have been introduced in Kosovo, saying that “there is no state in Europe that is a multi-ethnic state”:

It is without logic. For example, Kosovo has 92 per cent Albanians and to say that Kosovo is multi-ethnic state of Albanians, Serbs. No, my brother, Kosovo is a state of Albanians and other citizens that have all the rights according to international standards, according to minority [rights]. It should be like that.²²⁴

He points out that neither regionally in Balkans nor in Europe, multi-ethnic states formally exist. The case of a multi-ethnic Kosovo has been established due to dependency. Even the constitutions of the regions confirm homogeneity:

Serbia is Serb owned, and that’s it. Macedonia is a state of Macedonians, Montenegro of Montenegrins. Why Kosovo then is a state of communities? They do not do that for example that in their state, while they put that like a standard here.

Other Balkan states have a high number of minorities and are mono-ethnic states, while Kosovo has the lowest number of minorities, and is still established as a multi-ethnic state: “for example, Serbia has 30, up to 35 percent minorities. Macedonia has 40 percent Albanians and others, giving us less than 50 percent Macedonians. They could be multi-ethnic states rather

²²² “According to him, societies should in theory be homogenous, but in practice states take many shapes, with the international system of states being satisfied with a kind of ‘declaration of intent’ to stay unified (A. Smith, 1986, p. 229). Ethnic divisions in such states can be a source of antagonism, when the largest group needs to accommodate a smaller group (A. Smith, 1986, p. 229). These divisions can result in violence and war”. For a more detailed description of this argument, see mainstream state and peace building chapter p. 60.

²²³ Shkodran, p.20

²²⁴ Shkodran, p.16-17

than Kosovo. But they take advantage of our dependence”. According to Shkodran, this logic seems to fail since he claims that Kosovo is the most homogenous country in Europe regarding ethnical structure, more homogenous even than Poland, Slovenia and other states. This also reflects the high development of power sharing at least in law compared to the rest of the other states in the region. In practice, this reflects the risen tension from the usage of words in the Constitution. The Kosovo Constitution stipulates that The Republic of Kosovo “is a state of its citizens” and “is a multi-ethnic society consisting of Albanians and other Communities” (preamble and Art. 3) (*The Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo*, 2008). However the Constitution of Serbia stipulates that it is a state of “Serbian people and all citizens” residing emphasizing Serbian ethnicity but not referring to the state as multi-ethnic (*Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*, 2006). This is despite that the number of minorities is similar with Kosovo’s case, since out of 7,498,001 total population, 6,212,838 are ethnic Serbs in Serbia (OSCE, 2008). This reflects the imposition of double standards on “multi-ethnicity” in the constitution of Kosovo by the international community. Theoretically this critique exemplifies the challenges already presented by the post liberal peace theory.

Double Standards on Minority Integration

An important part of the nation building efforts is the integration of all citizens without any discrimination or favoritism. Yet, we notice that the locals highlight the different standards used by international community regarding minority integration. More specifically, Serbian police officers boycotted the Kosovo institution. When Kosovo declared its independence, they resigned and did not perform their work since Serbia instructed them to withdraw from the Kosovo Police Service. Meanwhile, the government of Kosovo continued monthly payments for a year despite their absence. This example, revealed from Shkodran’s life story, was the topic of a personal conversation between Shkodran and a German official working in Kosovo. Shkodran argued that officers should have been laid off, while in fact after a year they were “begged” to return to their work. He asked the German official for his opinion:

He [the German official] said: ‘No, for us this is unacceptable, it cannot happen. I [Shkodran] asked him, ‘Why are you then saying to us to return Serbs that resigned while they [Serbs] say ‘We do not want to return to Kosovo since they declared independence, we serve only Serbia’, and hire back those persons?’ ‘It’s politics’, he [the German official] said.²²⁵

There are several responses from the international community, which are aimed at suppressing this local perspective or resistance. Shkodran personally, upon rejecting this standard, was categorized as being “against minorities” – an assessment which he rejects. Another very important element toward minority integration is the Serbian resistance toward integration. So

²²⁵ Shkodran, p.17

far a group of Serb minority employed the strategy to remain isolated in the North from the international community and Kosovo government. Similarly, the international community rejects their resistance and is negotiating the accession of North (granting them an association with more autonomy) within Kosovo in order to integrate in the nationalizing state, Kosovo. Similarly this critique exemplifies the challenges already presented by the post liberal peace theory.

Double Standards on Kosovar Identity

Shkodran life story also mentions a discussion with the former French Ambassador to Kosovo, Jean-Francois Fitou about the Kosovar identity. The international community attempts to strengthen the Kosovar identity and diminish the Albanian identity since 2008, after the declaration of independence. The following dialogue is very interesting because it shows how the locals tend to dissect the duplicity, real or imaginary, in the push of internationals for an solely Kosovar identity, excluding Albanian identity. Fitou, the French Ambassador claimed then that “now the Kosovo Albanians should not be recognized [meaning called] like Albanians but as Kosovar”. In turn, Shkodran replied “Fitou say that you are not French but a Chinese or German, then I will say that I am not Albanian but Kosovar”. Fitou in turn replied “No, I am French”. Shkodran explains “He [the ambassador] was feeling powerful like I am French”. Afterwards, Fitou called Shkodran “nationalist and imposing”.²²⁶ Shkodran claims that he is not nationalistic but “can’t fulfil any political request to Serbs if that is in contradiction to the Kosovo constitution or laws”. He can only help on human rights issues, employment and better services. There have also been other responses from the international community, international organizations, donors and embassies, such as stopping the funding schemes to NGOs:

if they disagree with you in something or they specify you as an organization that is against them, for example, since they communicate among themselves and share a common attitude. They never say that we are blocking it for this or that reason, and they give always a reason like, ‘No, there are no funds’ or ‘Our policies have changed’.

He says that he never became submissive regardless of any situation.

International Imposition on National Symbols and Borders

Faruk’s life story is salient on understanding the politics of national symbols. He was educated in the former Yugoslavian system and was as a student activist for Albanian rights. He served in jail and joined the peaceful movement to liberate Kosovo, LDK, and remained actively involved in politics since then. The life story of Faruk, who was actively involved in the independence of Kosovo, reveals the imposition of international actors on national sym-

²²⁶ Shkodran, p.17

bols as shown by his interactions with international community. Still using the Albanian ones in his own office, he states that the selection of the state symbols of Kosovo was

a unique challenge... with all the major obstacles. There was an extremely big pressure... starting from the national anthem, the national flag, the emblem, and in a way, I can realistically say a type of pressure that the symbols that only recognize the feelings of the majority will not be able to pass.

They created an international competition with set criteria for the creation of Kosovo's flag. The Presidency was the only institution that could keep its preferred symbols, regardless of the chosen flag. The flag of Dardania was used earlier in Kosovo, which was already used during Rugova's times.²²⁷

Another life story that is relevant for the topic is Shkodran's story. He explains the role of internationals in Kosovo as follows:

For example if you are in the car with me and I am driving it, I am the one that directs the car not you. You can advise me to go this way or that way but still I am the one that decides which way to go. And here they have the brakes in their hands... While for us it is a state issue, they come and say take it or leave it.

This shows the awareness of an identity imposed over local actors as well as the awareness of the disagreement with the internationals. Thus there is no ownership on this subject. In reaction to this patronizing governing style, Shkodran points out that changes are not possible to the national identity:

Natural Laws cannot be stopped [...]. What god created is permanent and forever. We cannot make it rain whenever we like, make it snow whenever we like, we for example can make an artificial track or lane with snow for hundred or two hundred meters but it is not real, same happens with this.²²⁸

Shkodran's rejection is motivated by the fact that the Albanian issue in the Balkans remains unresolved referring to Albanian minorities located outside the borders of Albania in Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro that are still struggling to claim and some maintain their minority rights. In addition, once Albanians defend themselves, so he claims, they are being patronized: "They [the international community] should have been protecting the independence since at least I am Albanian. They should solve the Albanian issue [...]. When we are defending it, they are trying to take our eyes out".²²⁹

Shkodran's personal stance was treated as problematic and nationalistic. The knowledge that he gained in decades of work protecting minorities in his state, can be regarded as "subjugated knowledge" in Foucault's terms which is regarded as less favourable, valuable and credible, in this case for internationals (Foucault, 1980). Upon rejecting the idea of a multi-ethnic

²²⁷ Faruk, p.6

²²⁸ Shkodran, p.17

²²⁹ Shkodran, p.17

Kosovo and the new Kosovar identity, and seeing the integration of police forces as a double standard, his person was discredited as being “against minorities” and “nationalist”. More concretely, the international community may stop NGO funding, thus forcing their closure since NGOs are donor driven in Kosovo. In Kosovo, it is very difficult to survive without international funding. Shkodran’s perspective, which he derived from decades of experience and knowledge in the human rights field, was discredited. His ambition to resolve the Albanian issue in Balkans is viewed as problematic even nowadays. However, despite the arrogant and dismissive international responses, he continues his resistance. Currently, there are no attempts to look at the factors behind the lack of progress and the possibilities for long-term solutions in Kosovo. This analysis suggests that in order to support the locals that have been subjugated, it is important to acknowledge the social impact of the international state building models and the possibility of resistance. Shkodran’s resistance is being contained by the local and international agendas.

Theoretically, Shkodran’s story reflects Lemay Hébert’s concept of the “bifurcation of the two worlds” which addresses the legitimacy gap debate between international and local actors (Lemay-Hébert, 2011). He argues that in post conflict countries, a social and political gap is created by the arrival of international actors, which provokes local resistance. More specifically, the aspect of legitimacy concerns the relations between internationals and locals as illustrated by Shkodran’s and Faruk’s life stories. They reflect the gap and contradiction in the perceptions of nation identity with some local actors holding an Albanian identity and international actors opposing it. Questions can be raised on whether this represents double standards since international actors do not themselves accept to be called differently, but insist and impose upon locals an alien representation despite resistance. As Lemay-Herbert, argues this gap produces further resistance, which is illustrated by Shkodran’s actions of claiming the right to Albanian identity in private and public conversations, despite the restriction of foreign funds for his NGO. These NGOs must engineer international actors’ plans. Lemay-Hébert argues that local resistance shows that the international administrations are losing legitimacy “hinting at a paradox of state builders being deliberately and firmly isolated yet highly visible at the same time” (Lemay-Hébert, 2011, p. 1824). Furthermore, denying local agency assists to maintain the current liberal order that is beneficial to the North (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 779). Lemay-Herbert questions whether it is inappropriate to address post-conflict challenges through international governance since it undermines its legitimacy. He suggests to counter the resulted social backlash or “social anomie” (Lemay-Hébert, 2011, p. 1827) with a more genuine consideration of impact and treatment of locals with respect (Lemay-Hébert, 2011, pp. 1833–37). Thus, the sections above substantiated the means to achieve local inclusion and respect as post liberal peace theories argue, such as by incorporating the historical identities (ethnic) in the nation symbols.

Inter-Ethnic Local Discrimination

Vera's life story explained in depth in the chapter earlier, a human rights activist, represents a similar set of challenges as she was also denounced as a "nationalist" upon trying to emancipate and promote the Albanian identity. Differently from Shkodran's story, however, the backlash came from Serbian citizens who are considered to belong to the liberal and educated strata of society. Vera grew up during the Yugoslav time where she learned how to work, travel and learn foreign languages. She finalized her education in Kosovo and she has worked with regional organizations in the region since she became an adult, the exception being the time when she studied abroad. The latter she did after the war in several Western universities in US and Europe on the field of human rights and politics. Upon return, she realized that Kosovo needs "to deal genuinely with the transitional justice" and the past, thus founded an NGO. Among her main motivations was to prevent others, and especially the Serbian government from speaking for Kosovo in regional platforms and to contribute to the Kosovar identity. However, she faced challenges both regionally and locally to open the NGO:

It was like a war on two sides. One inside, to establish the organization and to start with this kind of advocacy in order to convince people why we have to deal with this thing that in fact is a very difficult one. And on outside to say to the region, 'Stop! Kosovars will deal with Kosovo.' You did your job and thank you. We will cooperate in certain issues but leave us to do our job.

Vera's perspective is that civil society and generally citizenship needs to be developed from below as only local people know what the situation requires. In other words, it cannot be developed externally. To this, she has experienced various obstructive responses. The first were mainly for practical aspects such as securing appropriate amounts of funding. Organizations from the region initially felt threatened as there are too many. Her new organization thus threatened the funding of regional organizations, especially in Serbia, as their main focus lies on Kosovo and Bosnia:

Yes, Serbia. Just take into consideration how many organizations and NGOs basically survive from Kosovo. Kosovo is their bread and butter. Kosovo is everything to them. The majority of Serbian NGOs would not survive if Kosovo did not exist... Since you take a piece of cake [referring to funds], and that was when I saw that people are more donor-driven then... This is the way how they think, in terms of funds, power... since you take the power from them.

Other obstacles came more from the belief system that local Kosovars are unable to work for themselves, and thus the Serbian NGOs work for them: "There are organizations that see Kosovo and Bosnia too as a mind set now [mind set referring to they are identical]... We have to think for you since you do not know. We have to work for you since you do not know". This mind set created resistance and the desire among Kosovo Albanians to speak for themselves in regional platforms. Vera was sometimes able to change the dynamics in what she calls "sweet victories", even though "the war is still ongoing". She exerts pressure to prevent oth-

ers from speaking on behalf of Kosovo by showing that it has its own identity, which is different from the rest of region:

They do not want to accept it. They take it very hard. But this is a process as well. It was a challenge for me since it will take time for them to understand, that with Kosovo, Kosovars will deal with it... That is why I consider it to be a victory, a small but sweet victory. Since we achieved to get Kosovo into the process, we achieved to speak on our behalf. We achieved to make pressure such as when others used to speak on our behalf, we were stopping the work. And when they saw that we are stopping the work then they turned toward us. Kosovo is not Bosnia, neither Croatia, we have a different identity.

This occurs when some NGOs wish to control the region and therefore treat the rest of the organizations as unable and do their job. However, she rejects this attitude: "Sorry, we can take the best of you, we can take advices on this project, but you cannot do my job". Negative responses to her resistance towards prejudices by leading NGOs and her wish to emancipate Kosovo Albanians in regional platforms were present on a personal level as well. A very close friend of hers from the region considered that she was "becoming nationalist": "[The friend] considered that I'm not that liberal Vera as I used to be. And I am still liberal, extremely liberal. When I said that I have to do something since this is my identity".²³⁰ Vera's story shows that negative responses in the region arise when Kosovo Albanians decide to invest in their identity and speak for themselves.

In the literature, this life story could be understood as an attempt towards achieving local ownership. However, the idea of local ownership faces resistance not only by internationals as shown by Shkodran's and Faruk's stories, but also from the other ethnicities in the region. Similar to Shkodran, Vera's aim to contribute to the Albanian identity was understood by a Serbian intellectual friend as "becoming nationalist". These obstacles seem to be present for two main reasons, namely practical reasons such as competing NGOs wanting to secure more funding and prejudices that used to be present already before and during the Milosevic regime. They seem to persist nowadays, portraying Kosovo Albanians as uneducated and thus unable to speak for themselves, and as requiring to be represented by others. Vera's personal perspective was treated as a problematic turn to nationalism. The neglect of prejudices held by both regional and international actors suggests that there is still a presence of biases towards Albanians or Kosovars in the region. The Kosovo Albanian identity and the quest for local ownership seems to remain a problem for regional actors which still aim to suppress them by speaking on their behalf and doing their work. Resisting such prejudices is difficult. As Vera puts it, "[i]t is a permanent [underground] war". She acknowledges that obstacles are placed at all levels, but she continues to be motivated in her work. However, other individuals in Kosovo seem not interested to resist prejudices because "people are motivated to get a sala-

²³⁰ Vera, p.10-15

ry at the end of the month and that's it".²³¹ Vera's story is thus exceptional, and while her resistance may last, she points out that few others share her commitment. The life stories show consequently that social prejudices are still operating against the Albanian identity in the Balkans and that they influence local ownership over state building processes. This represents a serious challenge in solving the long-term problems in Kosovo and the Balkans more generally. Vera's story suggests therefore that it is important to find ways of acknowledging the ramifications of prejudices and the possibility of resistance. If local ownership is not acknowledged, cleavages will be reinforced between the different ethnicities in the region or between internationals and Kosovo Albanians.

This resonates with the post liberal peace theory arguing for inclusion of local voices. It also resonates with the "need for any locally legitimate state to be grounded in its context" (Richmond, 2014a, p. 1). It also substantiated how the local nation building is being negotiated and mediated on the local context with the example of rising inter-ethnic discrimination and resistance when ethnic national identities are emphasized. These theoretical perspectives together with the life stories show that approaches to nation building must be grounded in context.

Conclusion

The life story experiences in Kosovo inform theoretical discussions of ethnic nation building and civic as well. The "Western myopia" equating state and nation building as one process, successfully in England and France, was later mirrored in Eastern Europe and the Third World. Tilly showed that these cases were very violent. The life stories illustrate that there are pre-existing fixed identities and social prejudices against Albanians. Smith argues that the Western model "cannot be transplanted" since ethnic homogeneity and institutions lack in these countries (Smith, 1986, p. 230). Nationalism is challenged "when ethnic homogeneity and cultural coextensiveness become desirable goals themselves" (Smith, 1986, p. 230). The well-educated citizens are nationalistic as well "even if only tacitly, through exclusion and self-differentiation" since they lack knowledge of viable alternatives of "culture and political existence... [therefore there is] no possibility of returning to a pre-nationalist era" (Smith, 1986, p. 230). The empirical evidence, namely life stories, illustrate a growing will among Albanians toward maintaining and empowering the ethnic national identity as well as a growing resistance towards this process by the international community and other ethnicities. This rejection or marginalization of the Albanian ethnic national identity has provoked private and public resistance. As Smith acknowledges, nationalism will remain, therefore space needs to be given to ethnic national identities, as they cannot be erased.

²³¹ Vera, p.10-11

This goes against the modernization theory claim that “successful states required a citizenry that identified itself with the state over other ethnic or religious allegiances” (C. Call & Wyeth, 2008, p. 11). Many theories move beyond nationalism, such as cosmopolitanism, theories of global politics and regional identity (e.g. European).²³² Globalization and the rise of technology change national and cultural identities transnationally. For instance, the European identity that surpassed the old animosities is being promoted currently with Europeanisation efforts of Balkans. However, many social groups may perceive universal and regional notions negatively due to their incomprehensiveness and insensitivity to local cultures. Therefore when transplanting notions, special attention needs to be paid to the local context such as by including the ethnical national identities in nation building process.

The life stories show that both the international perspective and the local group supporting a two state solution fail to acknowledge these problems. They focus on security and power politics, a realist approach towards world politics rather than identity [national] and culture. In other words, in practice, security and institution building including EU integration are seen as the most significant issues by the internationals and the local group supporting a two state solution, whereas other locals supporting unification with Albania deal more with the problems of identity faced in everyday life. The latter resonates with a constructivist understanding of politics. Furthermore the current situation in Kosovo seems to be far removed from the tenets of post liberal peace theorists. They propose a combination of various streams of theory, amongst others realist and constructivist, to be used in post conflict situations as explained: “[Post liberal peace] may include a mix of some liberalism, some context, some version of the state, etc., which collectively address security, rights, needs, identity, custom, culture and institutions” (Tadjbakhsh & Richmond, 2011, p. 222).

The image of common perceptions and beliefs that arose from the international interviews support the EU integration as a solution to not only nation but also peace and state building, whereas the image of common perceptions that arose from everyday life stories show additional disputes in the nation building process between local and international actors and between various local ethnicities. An interesting pattern is observed among both groups, international and local (elite) respectively, where Albanian empowerment and local ownership is labelled as “nationalist”. This indicates containment of the Albanian ethnic identity over a regional or Kosovar civic identity, which may have counterproductive consequences on local empowerment and ownership and unintended consequences such as strengthening radical na-

²³² For more on cosmopolitan and global citizenship theories, see Gibernau on local citizenship; ‘*Defining European Identity and Citizenship*’ (Delanty, 1996, 1997); Eyben, R. and S. Ladbury (2006), ‘*Building effective states: taking a citizens perspective*’, Centre for Citizenship, Participation and Accountability; ‘*Democracy, Citizenship and Global City*’ (Isin, 2013) and ‘*Constructing a Global Polity*’ (Corry, 2013).

tionalism. The containment strategy silences local actors through humiliation or the cutting of donor funds. The silencing of the Albanian identity in the local population in Kosovo may result in a vulnerable nation building as well as European integration.

The last dilemma concerns whether the containment of Albanian national identity in everyday life and work by other ethnic groups and internationals, where the latter are assumed to be intellectual, will produce further nationalism among Albanians and Serbs in this fragile situation. It also raises questions about the actual impact of high levels of foreign interference on nation and state building. Strong local objections are observed about the multi ethnic form of the state and its symbols. In light of the foreign impositions, Albanian everyday containment, growing nationalism in Serbia and the rest of the region, Russia's assertiveness in global affairs as shown with attacks in Ukraine, the far away prospect of EU membership, and the instability in Turkey, it is questionable whether European Union integration can deliver in stabilization and nation building in that region.

Given this question on whether containing the Albanian ethnic national identity would produce negative peace or unintended consequences such as radicalization needs to be posed. Space needs to be given for this question. The life stories show that nation building is difficult to be reconstructed, as Walker Connor argued that neglecting ethnicity in nation building processes results in failure (Connor, 1972, 1993). Van Evera argues that ethnic identities cannot be easily reconstructed since they are reinforced when literacy rates are achieved. They are also reinforced by violent conflict and identities of non-immigrant ethnic groups are far more firmly fixed than immigrant identities. However alternatively the international community instead of marginalizing the Albanian identity may try to reshape it as Van Evera argues "while ethnic identities can seldom be transformed into new identities, they can often be made more benign and efforts in this direction can bolster peace" (Van Evera, 2001, p. 1). This chapter also incorporates post-liberal peace theory, which suggests a combination of liberal peace theory with local cultures and identities, proposing to include nationalism amongst local culture in nation building process. For instance, elements of ethnicity could contribute to national anthems, flags, etc.

Lessons may be drawn from the historical peaceful coexistence of Albanians of different religions for the relations between ethnicities in today's Kosovo. Shifting the policy focus towards peaceful ideas such as "religious peaceful coexistence: may promote a more moderate understanding of "Albanianism" and mitigate the unintended consequences of the current containment strategy of the ethnic national identity. This also moves beyond the categorizations of Albanians during the war as "victims", "criminals" and others. Lastly, the recent demonstrations in Macedonia drew together Macedonian and Albanian ethnicities against the quasi-authoritarian regime of Macedonia despite attempts of the government to deepen cleavages and spark violence by attacking an Albanian family in Kumanovo. Furthermore, lessons

may be drawn from the findings that indicate a balanced nation building by including ethnic national identity culture represented by the national ethnic symbols, anthems, tradition and language. Furthermore, the life stories show that history must as well become part of nation building dialogue in order to reshape the already existing strong myths about identities. This illustrates that ethnic nation building may be viewed complementary to civic nation building. Taking into account all these aspects, a starting point could be to promote mild forms of ethnic national identity of Albanians, complementary to the civic national identity of Kosovars. This is mainly since one group of local actors accepts both identities, civic and ethnic. Promoting and accepting simultaneously the ethnic national identities of Albanians and Serbs and the civic national identity of Kosovo may allow the reconciliation of local identities and cultures with the new national civic identity of Kosovo. Marginalization of the local voices, respectively the ethnical national identities, does not guarantee successes as shown by growing empirical evidence on local resistance. Thus pursuing ethnic nation building as complementary to the civic nation building may contribute to sustainable nation building and peace. A mix of these could ensure that within states, societies coexist without falling back to war. In other words, nationalism is not bad per se, including important aspects such as culture, identity, tradition, language, which all can contribute positively to nation building. Still, it becomes negative when connotations of hate and discrimination are attached. Better social, economic and political situations in fragile countries could also prevent a falling back into destructive patterns of nationalism. In such a context, state building, nation building and peace building could be pursued in tandem. To conclude, the methodology of life stories provides new angles on nation building, identified as one of the main challenges by the local community, which were so far unexplored in theoretical and policy debates.