

## COST Photo Project in Kosovo

8-13.9.2011

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#### 1. Discussion about the functioning and legitimacy of the state in Kosovo

During our trip through Kosovo, we engaged in many intensive discussions about the nature of the state in Kosovo, its legitimacy and functioning. This was based on striking observations, but also on the research interests of Hani and James. Especially from the perspective of our colleague Hani Zubida from Israel, Kosovo was a very weak, nearly non-existing state. Although Kosovo declared independence in 2008 and has been recognized by over 80 countries by now (but even more states did not recognize it by now), one could claim that it is a state without a state – a “fake state” so to say.

What stroked us (and especially Hani) was the extremely low public visibility of the state. Looking at the spread of Kosovar state flags, for example, a clear symbol of the state, we observed that there are virtually no places (besides those places in which internationals work) where the Kosovar state flag is exposed on its own. Instead, you find the Albanian state flag with the black double headed eagle on red colour, which is also the ethnic and national symbol of Albanians, or a combination of both. The reluctance to show the Kosovo flag might be linked to the low legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its citizens, but it is most likely also linked to the low legitimacy of the design of the flag itself: on blue ground, it shows the territory of the state in yellow colour, which is in itself very unusual for a state flag. There are furthermore six yellow stars above the territory, which are meant to symbolize the six major ethnic groups in the country. The colours and stars of the flag remind on the EU flag (but also of the flag of Bosnia-Herzegovina), and therewith resemble the wish of most Kosovo Albanians to become a member of the EU. However, most Kosovar Albanians criticize that the flag does not bear any ethno-national Albanian symbols, which makes it necessary for them to display the Albanian flag, as well. Unofficially, there is also the saying that the six stars represent the six states, in which Albanians live “autochthonously”: Kosovo, Albania, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina – therewith going beyond the state territory displayed on the flag.

Next to the lack of the disposal of state flags, we observed also a lack of police presence to implement state laws, and a lack of state involvement in various other realms more generally.

Let's look at the example of traffic conditions, which we experienced and discussed a lot while being on the road for hours each day: Most roads in Kosovo are in rather bad conditions and are very curvy and badly secured. This is not at least the result of the actions of the former traffic minister, who had received this position in order to improve the street conditions, but who was later taken to court for corruption affairs, in which he was accused to have taken advantage of the building of the highway by defalcating public money to build roads on costs of their quality. Disregarding these bad roads, however, drivers are speeding and taking over in all possible situations, therewith endangering themselves and others. Still, there is no police that is fining this behaviour and implementing a standard of rights and duties. Instead, it seems that the size of the car also defines one's rights.

But the absence of the state in regulating the traffic is also striking in another sense: There are nearly no traffic lights or road signs, which made it quite a challenge for us to find your destinations. Even to the most famous national pilgrim site in memorial to the Kosovo hero of the Liberation War Army, Adem Jashari, there was no sign to show the way, but we had to ask passers by.

Evaluating this and many other observations, Hani came up with the provoking conclusion that you can do what ever you want in Kosovo, be it speeding, consuming, trafficking, smuggling, building, as long as you have enough money to do this. That especially Hani was so struck by the situation in Kosovo might be related to the fact hat this absence of state authority is very different from Israel, where the state is very present and visible and has a disciplinizing, militaristic character. Still, the lack of presence of the state in Kosovo was obvious and it was very inspiring to discuss and theorize about it.

For my own research on transnational family solidarity of Kosovo Albanians, these discussions on the nature of the state in Kosovo and its legitimacy and functioning are also very stimulating, as it is extremely important to link the family to the state and understand the functioning and values of the family within the state(s). What I also find extremely interesting is the question of (non-)identification with the state from the side of its citizens. While after the war and then again with the declaration of independence, Kosovar Albanians were extremely enthusiastic about their state project, most citizens seem to be quite disappointed and have lost trust in the state, which affects also family relations.

## 2. The establishment of social boundaries

But not only can the implementation of laws create legitimacy for the state – also the state provision of social security and investments in public goods can create a common basis for the citizens, enhancing equality and social integration. However, access to state social provision for all citizens is lacking in Kosovo, and income and lifestyle differences are widening enormously. This creates social boundaries which are well observable in Kosovo, and one of our goals during the Photo project was to face these increasing social gaps.

Generally, while travelling through Kosovo, we observed very limited investments in the public good and saw no functioning industry. At the same time, we saw extremely booming investments in the private sector: like all kinds of posh cars, huge houses and lots of service and trade oriented businesses (like huge petrol stations, car-wash services, glamorous wedding saloons, swimming pools, brick and furniture shops and all kind of other shops). Referring to his research, James explained us the reasons for it: the decay of the industrial sector was linked to the slow processes of privatization of formerly socially owned enterprises, and to the “Dutch disease”, meaning that money coming from migrants was spent on consumption and service oriented businesses was not invested into industry. Another source of financing private businesses was money received by international organisations, smuggling and trafficking and the Kosovo state (via corruption).

One outcome of this economic state was extreme social and economic differences between the citizens of Kosovo. While parts of the population were visibly well off, we also visited areas and saw houses which were in rather poor states, and people who reacted with distrust and discontent with the state.

The topics of income differences, the widening of the social gap and the widespread exploitation and distrust in the state are also interesting for my own research on family solidarity, as it is questionable in which way these aspects bear on the functioning of the family and the solidarity in kinship networks. In my own research, I also consider historical legacies of mistrust in the state and withdrawal into family networks.

## 3. National symbols in Kosovo and their links to the state

While the Kosovo state seems generally largely absent, we discussed what constitutes the community of the Kosovar Albanians, and what is the basis of the Kosovar Albanian identity (also in delineation from other nations).

Visiting the Adem Jashari memorial site in his native village as well as seeing other memorials of the war in 1999 on walls, corners and junctions, it became clear that these are national shrines and that war memorials are the most important public sites in Kosovo. We asked us however, in which way they represent the state, and in which way they unite or threaten or even disintegrate the state by creating social, ethnic and political boundaries.

While I suppose that these memorials are paid with public money, there were often no state symbols exposed at the memorials. At the memorial remembering the murder of Albanians in the village in Racak in January 1999, for example, there was the Albanian flag exhibited, but no Kosovo state flag. Same applied to the memorial of Adem Jashari. Only at the gravestone of Adem Jashari we saw the presence of the state in the form of two Kosovo police men, who are stationed there day and night and who established a guard of honour, therewith linking the state to the war memorials and the Kosovar national identity. We discussed about this observation a lot and in a way, it seemed to me that the state could not dare to be absent here, as this would question its legitimacy even more.

But the presence of a police guard was not the only astonishing moment at the Adem Jashari memorial. It was also the immense size of the memorial complex which stroke our attention, and the well arranged public space, in which everything was in order and functioning - even the watering of the flowers was functioning automatically. Hani explored that only at this memorial site, a public space functioned perfectly, while other public spaces in Kosovo seemed to be more or less in decay, without interest for the state.

The Adem Jashari complex was last but not at least astonishing in another aspect: I found it striking that display of wealth and modernity of the public memorial did not necessarily correspond with the display of private wealth of the living successors of the Jashari family. While other war hero families in Kosovo often live in phantasy castles and exhibit their wealth, this family seemed to exhibit (relative) modesty and morality - at least in my eyes. In this way, the Adem Jashari family might have received even more legitimacy and also sets a counterpoint against the corrupt state and many of the politicians working for and being financed by the state.

Our short trip to Macedonia and there especially to the capital of Skopje has provided us with a different example of the functioning of the state, as the state appeared to be much more visible and integrative. There were more state flags on exposal which seemed to symbolize also the national identity of its citizens. We observed also more investment in public goods (like the quality of the roads). Still, as in Kosovo, there is a large (and even larger) investment in the creation of a national identity via historical monuments which serve as a

legitimizing of the nation state, but which at the same time inhibits that the money is spent on social goods.

The observations that major investments were done in national symbols and war memorials and not in social goods are also inspiring for my own research on social security. While it is highly questionable if the family comes in when the state is absent, one can also ask who will be privileged from the state when the solidarity is not all-encompassing. In the Kosovo case, those privileged are mainly those who fought in the war (on the “right side” ) and who can claim KLA membership. For my own research, this inspired me to ask for the special position of families of war heroes, and the special privileges of clientelistic networks close to politicians. It also inspires me to explore in which way patriarchal family values still create solidarity and order, establishing a kind of moral order, and in which way patriarchal values of male authority and the authority of elders are fragmented and transformed, considering the fact that Kosovo is a highly globalized society, in which most households have internet, and are depending (at least in part) on money send from migrants.

#### 4. The question of citizenship and the exploration ethnic boundaries inside the Kosovar controlled state territory

Coming across such national symbols and the reminders of the history of recent violent ethnic conflict, like destroyed Serbian houses which we saw on the way to Mitrovica and in Prizren, we also discussed about the constituency and nature of citizenship in Kosovo – especially also in comparison to the Israel case – thanks to many insights and explanations from the two colleagues from Israel, Hani and Liron, and thanks to the research insights of Hani, who engages in research on citizenship in Israel and the cases of non Jewish citizens as well as migrants.

In Kosovo, as in many other states, among them Israel, there are two conflicting notions of citizenship: the one is mainly ethnically/nationally defined and seems to be favoured by most Kosovo Albanians, and one which is human rights oriented and which is supported by internationals (who are quite powerful in Kosovo, based on the UN resolution from 1999), but which is losing ground in every day actions.

The conflict between these two notions of citizenship is visible in the Kosovo flag, which highlights the various major national groups in Kosovo and therewith puts them in an equal position, but which has a low acceptance by most Kosovar Albanians, precisely because it does not show a national symbol and does not privilege the Albanian nation group.

In fact, during our trip through Kosovo, the boundaries based on nationality and ethnicity were very visible – and not only on the border of the Serbian controlled regions in the north of Kosovo, but also inside the Kosovar controlled state territory, and on various levels.

The main marker of difference between Albanians and Serbs is the language, which manifests itself for example in the practice that Serbian names on road and settlement signs are crossed out. Religion as a national marker in Kosovo is however less important, as there are also Catholic Albanians. Still, we observed that the Serbian Orthodox monastery in Gradjanica had to be protected by a new wall, and could not be used as in pre war times, precisely because it was seen as a marker of the Serbian nation.

Taking the Israel case in comparison, I learned from the discussion with Hani and Liron that that in Israel, the main marker for citizenship is Jewishness, and Jewishness is a condition to receive full rights, which inhibits migrants as well as Arabs from receiving full rights, as they are most often non-Jewish, but Christian or Muslim.

In Kosovo, this national based citizenship effects that Serbs (and other minorities) have less rights – although not necessarily on paper, but in the implementation of rights, and partly in one basic right: the right of being secure, as they feel not necessarily protected in Kosovo. As explained by James, it is again the internationals who invest in the protection of Serbs and other minorities, for example by installing (signs for) a video-cameras in Serbian settlements and therewith monitoring the public space in order to prevent Albanians driving by from attacking Serb civilians working on their land or similar. On the other hand, as Hani has observed in the case of the Serbian orthodox monastery in Gradjanica, at least parts of the Serbs who live in the Albanian controlled parts of Kosovo adhere to the Kosovo state laws, as they hope that this gives them protection. Albanians, on the other hand, do not obey the state, as they do not feel a need to do it and as they do not trust the state anyway.

But not only Serbs are marginalized in Kosovo. As we have observed in the ethnically mixed town of Janjevo, also Croats and Roma are set aside and live often in difficult conditions. In the south of Kosovo, we also explored that Gorani, a Slavic speaking Muslim minority which lives on both sides of the Kosovo-Macedonian state border, are marginalized, not at least because they live in the southern edge of Kosovo, surrounded by state borders. In both regions, emigration is seen as the main way to escape the dire conditions. James research on Gorani also highlighted that many Gorani are discriminated in Kosovo and therewith left the country in search for a better future in the EU.

In my own research on family solidarity among Kosovo Albanian families, the social and economic marginalization of Kosovar Albanian villages is one important aspect and I want to

explore in which way villagers react upon that. As outmigration is one of the most important ways to escape the marginalization of villages, a strong focus is also laid on the exploration of migration perspectives. For this, also the research of James is very interesting, as he recently explored that Albanian changed their names in Greece in order to economically integrate easier. We discussed also why migrants abroad continue to support their family members at home, and in which way this is linked to family values attached as well as to household forms.

##### 5. The complexity of political, ethnic and economic borders in Kosovo

Last not at least, we explored the political and ethnic borders in Northern Kosovo which in part fall together with the boundaries of ethnic settlement. We explored that in Mitrovica, Serbs effectively created a border between the two parts of the city which are ethnically divided, as nearly no one crosses the border, which is demarcated by a bridge over a river, which divides the two sides of the city. On both sides, the bridge was also full of graffiti with nationalistic slogans and signs. On the Serbian side, there were graffiti showing the four “c” – seeming: “only the unity of Serbs will save the Serbs”), and the date 1389, demarcating the Kosovo battle, in which “Serbs” lost against the Ottomans, but which still reminded Serbs as the heavenly promise that they will rule one day, as well as the graffiti of the organisation “Obraz”, which is a right wing, Serb nationalist organisation.

Many Serbs in the northern part of Kosovo also seem not to accept the Kosovo state authorities, as you do not find any Kosovo state symbols, but the streets were packed with flags of the Serbian state, as well as with announcements which said “This is Serbia!” The cars were either without number plates or with Serbian number plates, therewith showing their disobedience to the Kosovar state. Furthermore, not the Euro is the currency in use there, but the Serbian Dinar. At the same time, however, there is a clear social and economic marginalization going on in this region, which is visible in the still “socialist” look of the Serbian part of the town, the high unemployment, and the feelings of insecurity for the future expressed by the citizens.

At the northern border between Kosovo and Serbia, in the mainly Serbian inhabited region of North Kosovo, it is striking that Kosovo Albanians not able to control their state border (as such an attempt created violent demonstrations on the Serbian side), while Serbs do not accept this border as an international border at all. In this situation, KGOR established a kind of provisional border some meters in front of the official border checkpoint. The KFOR checkpoint was erected in order to stop the smuggling which had been very widespread in the

region. Based on the fact that the Serbian state did not accept the border, and because most policemen of the Kosovo state were Serbs in this region and also complied with the Serbian regime, lorries from Serbia with petrol and other goods could enter Kosovo without paying taxes, and could sell their goods with good profit. In fact, it is said that these (Serbian) policemen receive a double salary from Prishtina as well as from Belgrade, as Belgrade does not accept Kosovo as a state.

Visiting this border, we also observed that KFOR had succeeded in stopping the traffic through this border check point more or less completely, which is a threat to the Serbs in the region, who depended on products from Serbia, but especially also to the many smugglers and mafia members, who earned their money with these illegal transactions. However, there were still various unofficial border crossings, which truck drivers from Serbia used in order to enter Northern Kosovo. What follows is that the legitimacy of the Kosovo state is highly questioned without functioning political borders, and economic transfers can not be controlled.