

11th International Conference “Ohrid-Vodici 2023”

**CHALLENGES OF IDENTITIES, CULTURAL HERITAGE, THE ENVIRONMENT, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OR TOURISM RELATED TO THE NEW CRISES**

- Conferense Proseedings -



11-та Меѓународна конференција „Охрид- Водици 2023“

**ПРЕДИЗВИЦИТЕ НА ИДЕНТИТЕТИТЕ, КУЛТУРНОТО НАСЛЕДСТВО, ЖИВОТНАТА СРЕДИНА, ОДРЖЛИВИОТ РАЗВОЈ ИЛИ ТУРИЗМОТ ПОВРЗАНИ СО НОВИТЕ КРИЗИ**

- Зборник на трудови-

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**-Зборник на трудови-**

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**Рубин Земон**

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CRISES**

**-Conference Proceedings-**

Editor

**Rubin Zemon**

Ohrid, 18-19 January, 2023

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## **CHALLENGES OF IDENTITY IN KOSOVO AND METOHİJA IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN THE TWO WARS<sup>2</sup>**

**Abstract:** Crises affect our lives, research and work. In times like these, the question of identity is always considered, so I wanted to look into the past and return to the important topic of the population of Kosovo and Metohija. Wars often affect identities, and in my article I will deal with the period between two important wars in history. Archival sources, professional literature and the press will help me in this. Kosovo and Metohija had and still have a favorable geographical position, but also a very good geopolitical importance and foreign policy position. The identity of the people in this area was marked by the way of life, because all communities lived in economic and social units within which each member had a specific role. Members of the Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic religious communities dominated, and Muslims made up almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population. The customs and traditions that form the backbone of the identity of each nation were especially preserved in this area. They represented a feature of the overall situation in Southern Serbia, where modernization proceeded slowly. Education, healthcare, industrialization were lagging behind the rest of the country. Nevertheless, the traditional way of life that largely shapes the identity of the population continued to be respected, and they represent the backbone of many ethnographic and historiographical studies. Even today, customs and beliefs are applied that are significant as characteristics of the people they belong to.

**Key words:** Challenges, Identity, Kosovo and Metohija, The period between the two wars, Tradition.

### **Geographical and geopolitical significance of Kosovo and Metohija**

Kosovo and Metohija were located in the south of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and represented part of the province of South Serbia within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and then part of the Banovina of Vardar, Morava and Zeta within the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Natural wealth in the form of mountains, forests, rivers, gorges, as well as fertile land for cultivation in the Kosovo basin, determined the geographical importance of this

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part of the country. Forests covered 35% of Kosovo and Metohija primarily in the form of low forests (Slavković, 2013: pp. 75-93; Vojna enciklopedija IV: p. 653) The expanses of coniferous forests were reduced, mostly due to unorganized felling and grazing, and only those that were difficult to access and far away remained. In relation to the area of the region, the highest forest cover was in the region of Lab (68%), while the lowest was in Gračanica county (37.1%) (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p. 39). The mountains in the west, south and north rose steeply from the basin with deeply cut gorges (Rugovo, Dečane, etc.) (Beriša, 1973: pp. 13-16). The gorges were naturally suitable for robbery and bandit attacks, due to the huge rocks and forest cover, thus marking inaccessible passages (Urošević, 2009: p. 21).

The hydrographic node of Yugoslavia was located in Kosovo and Metohija, i.e. at the Drmanska Glava on the Nerodim mountain, the basins of the Black, Adriatic and Aegean seas met (Radovanović, 1937: p. 108). The rivers that came from Prokletije, Šar planina and other high mountains in the summer months were abundant with water, while in the plains of Kosovo and Metohija they flowed slowly through shallow and wide valleys, and during the summer many were dry (Beriša, 1973: pp. 33-42). The climate is moderately continental with a Mediterranean influence that permeates the Drim and Beli Drim valleys, so that Metohija has a milder climate than neighboring areas. Kosovo is more exposed to the influence of continental air masses and is located at a higher altitude. The climate and abundant rivers determined agricultural production, i.e. the cultivation of cereals to the greatest extent, and therefore the economic market (Beriša, 1973: p. 29).

This arrangement of mountains, rivers, valleys, gorges made it difficult for Serbs and Albanians to communicate, given the ethnic division of some villages and towns, given that the peasant was conservative and closed in his environment, and therefore slowed down is cultural and educational progress. Nevertheless, the most important Balkan traffic routes passed through the Kosovo basin, since Turkish times, as well as natural communications via rivers.

Also, during the ancient and medieval past, the significant historical role of Kosovo and Metohija contributed to this area being strategically held alongside Serbia. Until liberation from Turkish rule, the geopolitical framework was determined by the relationship of the great powers, which caused and encouraged inter-ethnic conflicts, primarily among Serbs and Albanians. Likewise, the beginning of the Great Albanian idea and its later expansion, as well as the proximity of the Albanian border, influenced the insecurity of the population. By joining the three banovinas (Vardar, Zeta, Morava), Kosovo and Metohija were divided, with which the Yugoslavian state wanted to calm the unstable region by dividing responsibilities between three administrations, while insisting on state and national unitarism, but also to solve the economic crisis, cultural and industrial backwardness.

## Religious occasions

In the Kosovo vilayet under Turkish rule, the Serbian population was mixed with Albanian and Turkish. There were areas with a completely Serbian population, as was the case in the mountain villages on Šar planina - in Sirinić and Sredska parishes and Stari Kolašin. During the period of Turkish rule, Albanians from central and northern Albania gradually settled, which went hand in hand with the Islamization of the Serbs, and then with urbanization. Many Serbs who did not want to accept Islam moved to the cities. Serbs made up the majority of the population in Peć and especially Prizren, but with the strengthening of the Islamization process, that number decreased. According to the 1910 census, there were 23,800 Muslims, 4,350 Orthodox Serbs, 950 Catholics, 725 Cincars and 460 Gypsies in Prizren. In Priština, which during the Turkish rule was the center of the Muslim beys, according to the 1910 census, there were 4,000 houses, of which 3,200 were Muslims, 561 Serbian, 65 Jewish, and the rest of the population was Gypsies and others. The Serbian population was constantly decreasing in the 19th century, of the 8,600 Serbian houses in Metohija, 1,876 remained, and in 1912, only 1,830 homes. The most drastic was in Đakovica and its surroundings, where Jovan Cvijić recorded that there were 4,000 Muslims and 70-130 Serbian houses in the city. During the period of Turkish rule, Islam was the ruling religion and the Albanians were privileged in relation to the Serbs and other Orthodox religions (Bataković, 1991; Bovan, 1983; Ivanić, 1903; Jagodić, 2009; Peruničić, 1988; Popović, 1987; Stanković, 1910; Stojančević, 1994).

After the Balkan Wars and the First World War, the dominant religions were Orthodox, Catholic and Islamic. In Kosovo and Metohija, according to the 1921 census, the majority were Muslims. According to the 1921 census, there were 349,028 (74.4%) Muslims in Kosovo and Metohija, 92,951 (21.7%) Orthodox Christians, 15,783 (3.7%) Catholics, 510 (1%) others, of which only 427 were Moses (Filipović, 1937: pp. 427-431). This was also shown by the census from 1931. According to the this state census, there were 552,259 inhabitants in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. Members of the Islamic religious nationality were 379,891 (68.9%), Orthodox 150,745 (27.3%), Roman Catholic 20,568 (3.7%), 114 Evangelical and 656 others (*Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva*, 1938: pp. 8-12). Muslims made up almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population. Most of the Orthodox were Serbs, while the rest were in smaller numbers Cincars (401) and Russians (30) (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p. 86). There were only Latins in Janjevo (mainly from Dubrovnik), their mother tongue was Serbian, but they were under the influence of Roman Catholic priests. There were Albanian Catholics in the vicinity of Prizren and in Metohija and they made up about 10% of the Muslim population (Urošević, 2009: pp. 164-165). Jews lived almost exclusively in urban areas, in larger towns (Urošević, 2009: p. 277).

The legal position of confessions in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was regulated by laws: the Law on the Serbian Orthodox Church was passed on 9 November 1929, the Law on the Jewish Religious Community on 14

December 1929, the Law on the Islamic Religious Community on 5 February 1930, the Law on Evangelical - Christian churches on April 16, 1930 (Dimić, 1996: p. 465).

At the beginning of 1931, there were 126 Orthodox churches in the territory of Old Serbia. With 21 churches each, Gnjilane and Šar planina counties led the way, followed by Nerodimlje, which had 20 churches. Gora county was without an Orthodox church, while Kačanik and Podgora counties had one church each. Before the beginning of the Second World War, 2,004 inhabitants attended one church in the Raška-Prizren diocese. Considering the total number of population, Šar planina county had the most churches, one per 488 inhabitants, then Nerodimlje, where there was one church for every 654 Orthodox, and Kačanik county, where there was one church, but only 699 Orthodox. In 1932, the organization of church municipalities was carried out in the Raška-Prizren diocese (Isić, 2009: p. 415).

Albanians were Islamized in the 17th century, due to which they had a privileged position in the Ottoman state, and were treated the same as Muslim Turks (Jevtić, 1997: p. 574). After the Balkan wars, the Serbian state passed decrees related to Muslims, and each region got its mufti, who was paid by the state. With the Treaty of Saint-Germain, the Yugoslav state undertook to take care of mosques, cemeteries and other religious institutions of Muslims, to provide them with Sharia law and to appoint a reis-ul-ulema as the supreme leader of all Muslims in the country (Gligorijević, 1997: p. 443). During the personal regime of King Alexander, the law on the Islamic Religious Community of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was passed on January 30, 1930. According to that law, the Islamic Religious Community could publicly profess its faith and independently manage and regulate its religious, religious-educational and endowment affairs (Gligorijević, 1997: p. 447).

After the end of the First World War, the Muslim population was faced with a large number of demolished and destroyed mosques, so in the territory of Old Serbia at the end of 1930, there were 185 mosques in rural municipalities, and 114 in town municipalities. In Šar planina County, not a single rural municipality had a mosque, in which a total of 20,245 Muslims lived, but that is why in Prizren there were 45 mosques per 12,184 inhabitants (Isić, 2009: p. 498).

Catholics were not ethnically homogeneous in Kosovo and Metohija, even though they were few in number. On the eve of the First World War, there were most of them in the Đakovica and Peć parishes, in Janjevo and Prizren. Their number increased with the immigration of officials and businessmen from the Catholic regions of Yugoslavia and Catholic families from Dalmatia, Croatia and the Slovenian Banovina (Slavković Mirić, 2018: p. 417). With the increase in the number of Catholics, Roman Catholic churches and monasteries were built. The Monastery of the Sisters of Mercy was built in Prizren. The Monastery of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Prizren had five sisters and ran a school with the Albanian teaching language. Roman Catholic churches were also built in Đakovica, Zlokućani, Mitrovica, Janjevo, Uroševac (Žutić, 2000: p. 15). Thanks to the action of Catholics before the Second World War, the number of Catholics increased compared

to the situation before the First World War. Nikola Žutić cites data that in the diocese of Skopje there were 30,236 Roman Catholics, 963,288 Orthodox, and 790,810 Muslims. At most, there were about 15,000 Albanians, and there were also about 10,000 Albanian hypocrites (Žutić, 1999: pp.105-113).

### **Customs and tradition as one of the guardians of identity**

The patriarchal regime prevailed in Kosovo and Metohija, which showed that the population had its own moral concepts, an original way of understanding life, social and economic organization and artistic feeling expressed in poetry and ornamentation. The most obvious feature of the patriarchal regime was the social and economic organization in the form of tribes, brotherhoods and cooperatives (Cvijić, 1931: p. 122).

The opportunities in the society between the two world wars did not favor the maintenance of customs as they were during the Turkish rule, because the new civil society had no regard for the old patriarchal relations. The school, through its teachers and professors, as well as the church, through its clergy, acted in the direction of changing customs (Bovan, 2004: pp. 172-173). However, the people of Kosovo and Metohija lived conservatively, primarily in rural areas, they were slow to change and difficult to accept new things, and they were preoccupied with various customs and beliefs that were maintained until the Second World War. Social life in Kosovo and Metohija attracted the attention of ethnologists who collected valuable material about it, and the folk rules attracted attention - hospitality, family organization and life in it, family cooperative, family tribal life, artificial kinship (godfatherism, fraternity, stepparenthood), the village community and its role in life (Vlahović, 2004: pp. 220-228; Vlahović, 1988: p. 134).<sup>3</sup>

Folk customs and beliefs were almost always accompanied by many mysterious and mystical actions that the people did on various occasions and for various reasons, so they are considered as one concept (Darmanović, 2004: pp. 167-179). The production cycle (plowing, digging, sowing, harvesting, beekeeping, sheep shearing, etc.) was accompanied by many customs whose goal was to ensure economic existence (Vlahović, 2004: pp. 220-228). They believed in the divine value of nature (Nikolić-Stojančević, 2003: pp. 83-102). Both Serbs and Albanians believed in supernatural beings, angels, witches, fairies, devils and more, and all of this had elements of pagan religion (Nikolić-Stojančević, 2003: p. 138).

In the house and family, it was the woman who kept the customs, religion and tradition. A woman should host, be moral, respect tradition, all religious holidays and rituals (Vukanović, 1986: p. 133). Almost exclusively women's jobs were fortune-telling, witchcraft and care of the sick, as well as taking care of the dead (Filipović, 1937: pp. 460-462).

The celebration of „slava“ (the Saint day) was of great importance in

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<sup>3</sup> An extensive bibliography is published in the book „Kosovo i Metohija u svetlu etnologije. Prilog bibliografiji“ which lists journals and books older than 150 years to the latest editions related to this field. (Jovanović 2004).

Kosovo and Metohija. *Slava* was one of the most characteristic Serbian customs when friends and relatives gathered, «then those who quarreled were reconciled and the poor were remembered.» (Nušić, 2021: pp. 170-176). Each house had two *slavas*, one in spring (*preslava*) and the other in autumn or winter (*slava*). Those who celebrated the same *slava* were considered as kindred. At the celebration, folk songs about Serbian heroes and historical figures were sung and fiddles were played. During the feast, the host and the men served bareheaded and never sat down (Vlahović, 1930: pp. 574-577).

Family *slava* was a custom followed by Catholic Serbs and Catholic Albanians, and there were traces of it among post-Muslim Serbs as well, not taking into account that Albanians originating from the tribes of northern Albania had traditions that they celebrated glory while they ancestors were Christians. Albanian Catholics celebrated the feast in the same way, except that they did not cut the *slava* bread (Filipović, 1937: pp. 462-475). Also, Muslims went to celebrate with their neighbors and acquaintances who are Orthodox Serbs (Vlahović, 1931: pp. 48-51).

The celebration of certain holidays during the year was accompanied by various rituals. Christmas was celebrated as the biggest holiday and was celebrated most solemnly. Serbs of the Muslim faith, as well as Albanians and Turks, celebrated Christmas (Filipović, 1937: pp. 462-475). The cult of saints was very developed. The holiday Mladenci were celebrated, who were also celebrated by Muslims under the name «Sultan Nevrus» (Vlahović, 2004: pp. 220-228). Easter was especially celebrated, as was St. George's Day, which was the biggest public holiday in the spring. If the drought lasts in the summer days, then the «dodols», girls who went around the village and called for rain, would gather (Filipović, 1967: p. 71). Mitrovdan was celebrated not only by all Serbs, but also by Albanians and Turks, since that holiday was considered the beginning of the winter half of the year and many deadlines were attached to it. Muslim Serbs, in addition to the holidays they celebrated like the Orthodox, also celebrated Ramadan and Kurban Bayram (Filipović, 1937: pp. 462-475).

Among the Serbs in Kosovo, the name day was celebrated on the holiday that coincided with the name. They didn't celebrate birthdays because there were many of them in the family, so they thought that then «we wouldn't have bread to eat». After the war, birthday celebrations began in the urban areas of Kosovo, which were received by immigrants from various parts of Yugoslavia, both officials and workers and colonists (Filipović, 1967: pp. 182-183).

The traditional folk costume from Kosovo and Metohija stood out for its beauty and diversity.<sup>4</sup> The costume fit into the geographical and climatic environment, indicating the economic activity and well-being of the community. The forcing of traditional clothing was in the service of building national consciousness and integration at the national level. Settlers abandoned their costumes and behaved almost identically to the natives. The costume emphasized

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4 The Museum of Kosovo and Metohija had a collection of folk costumes from different regions in its ethnographic collection (Kozarac, Vukanović, Halimi, 1956).

strict regional and group endogamy, indirectly indicated the social status of individuals, age, religious affiliation, and the regional and ethnic characteristics of the national costume remained until the Second World War when a kind of unification of it began (Jovanović, 2011: pp. 563-564). In areas where Serbs and Albanians lived mixed, as well as in areas that were in contact with Albanians, the so-called ethnic mimicry, primarily in men's costumes (trousers made of white cloth -chakshires, red belt, waistcoat worn over a shirt (jamadan or talagan), instead of the jurdin (short sleeve jacket) worn by Albanians and white *qeleshe*) (Vlahović, 2004: pp. 220-228). In the Sredska parish, the old Serbian costume has been preserved, which was particularly studied.

In the period between the two wars, sewing and knitting machines penetrated many villages. The courses were held in town settlements, among which the ones in Peć stood out, which were attended by girls from all over Kosovo. Tailors („terzias“) in the villages accepted machine sewing (Vukanović, 1986: pp. 95-111). In Sredska parish, the costume began to disappear under the influence of the city of Prizren, because the city began to replace the national costume with its own products. The cultural influence of the city penetrated not only from the immediate surroundings but also together with *pečalbari* (workers abroad) and from various distant cities. Pečalbari returned to their homeland and opened shops that did not exist in this area until then. However, the broad masses of Muslims were reluctant to abandon their traditional clothing (Jovanović, 2011: pp. 564-565).

## Conclusion

The identity of the population in Kosovo and Metohija is determined by the daily life of Serbs and Albanians as the two most important peoples in this area. The geographical and geopolitical importance of this area determined and still determines the importance of this area. Kosovo and Metohija are characterized by mountain, forest, river and lake wealth, as well as a favorable climate. However, the arrangement of mountains, rivers, valleys, and gorges made it difficult for Serbs and Albanians to communicate, given the ethnic division of some settlements. Then, considering that the peasant was conservative and closed in his environment, cultural and educational progress was also slowed down. Three dominant faiths, Orthodox, Muslim and Catholic, determined the life of the inhabitants of this area. Churches, mosques and Catholic churches could be seen in one city, so the population of all three faiths lived in the same conditions. Customs and traditions were jealously guarded, and even when the modern way of life began to penetrate the cities. Folk costumes were preserved for a long time in everyday clothing, especially in the countryside, but they also began to fall out of fashion under the onslaught of industrial products. Nevertheless, the traditional way of life that largely shapes the identity of the population continues to be respected, and they represent the backbone of many ethnographic and historiographical studies. Even today, customs and beliefs are applied that are significant as characteristics of the people they belong to.

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