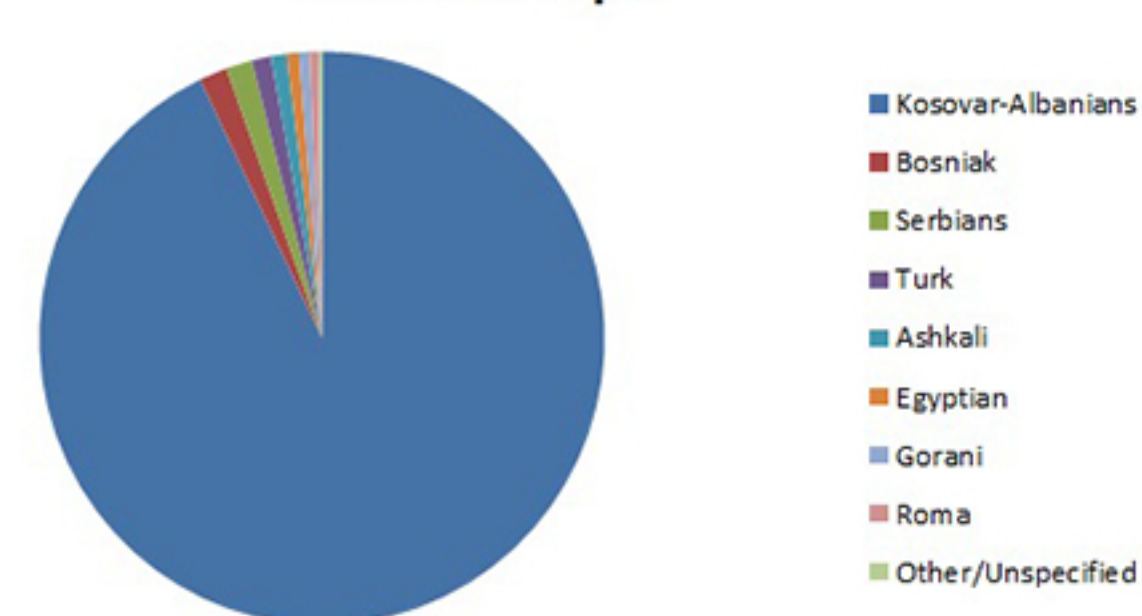


## Introduction

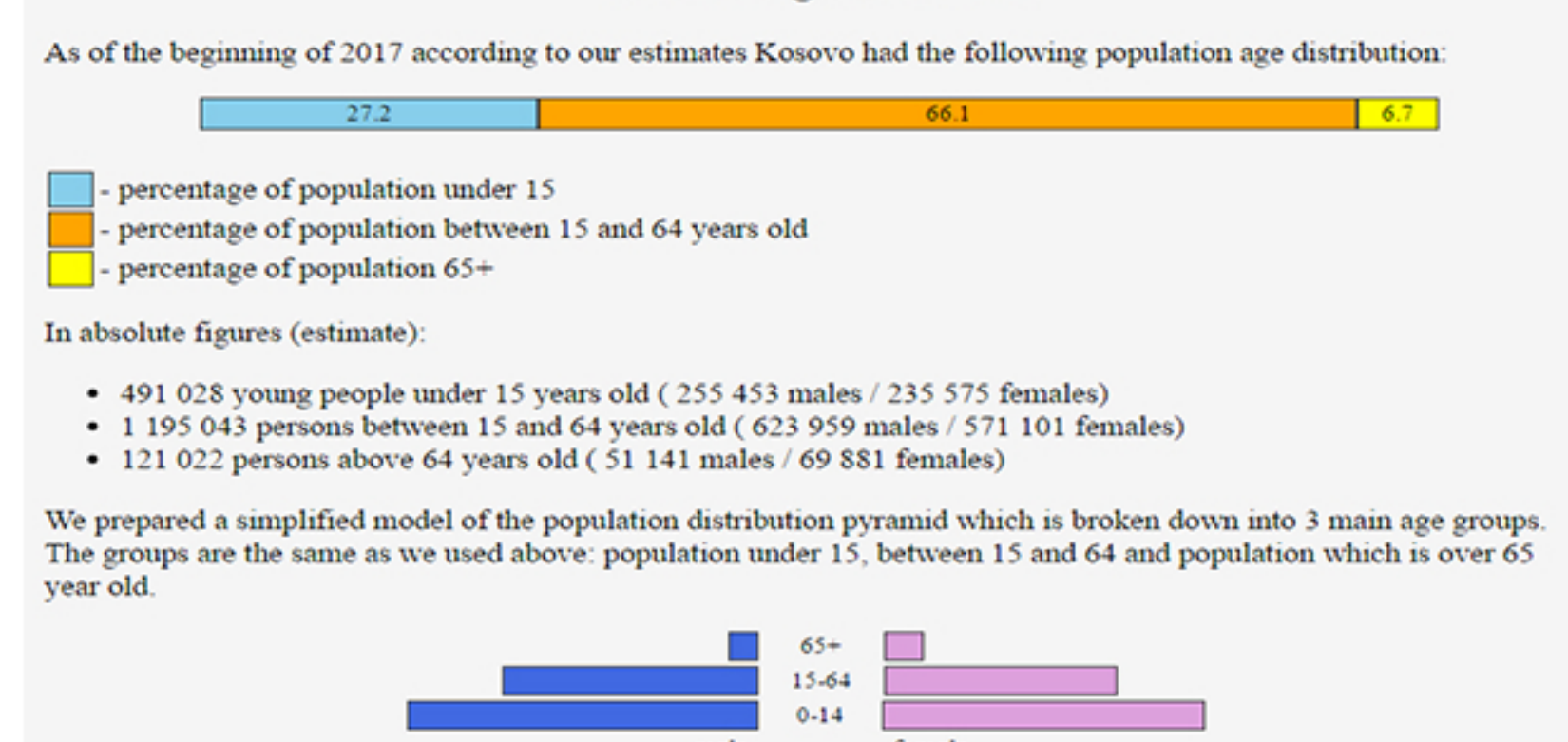
This study concerns the challenges of living in post-war divided societies, more specifically the divided city of Mitrovica in Kosova. The Kosova-Serbia war ended in 1999 with the intervention of NATO. After 1999 more than half of the Serbian population in Kosova left (IICK 2000). The majority of those remaining were located in the city of Mitrovica. With a population of 1.8 million, 92.9% are Kosovar-Albanians, while 1.5% are of the Serbian ethnicity.

Demographics in Kosova  
Ethnic Groups



Kosova is a country with a very young population, and the youth in Mitrovica are often times seen as agents of change from reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives.

Kosovo age structure



**This ethnographic work investigates:** How do Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth perceive and experience the division in their city?

**Overall Argument:** In spite of challenges of living amidst division, a minority of Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth manage to creatively subvert social barriers and reconciliation projects in order to create neutral spaces to socialize.

## Research Methods

Ethnography through participant observation, formal interviews, and archival research.

Participant observation consisted of 50 young adults of Kosovar-Albanian, Serbian, and Bosnian ethnicity.

Formal interviews consisted of 30 out of 50 participants.

Limitations: The ratio of male to female participants, with females representing a lower number.

## Research Questions

1. How do Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth in Mitrovica experience the division?
2. What roles do governance actors have in Mitrovica and how do the youth understand and relate to them?
3. How do the youth interpret the situation they are in and how do they envision life in Mitrovica?

## Findings

### City In Context; “We Live in a Lie, That’s Our Reality”

Youth in Mitrovica believe that the authorities governing the city are the creators and backbone of their division.

- a) The presence of the international peacekeeping community, as voiced by the youth, hinders their lives. As a result, youth distrust the international community and their missions.
- b) While Kosova lacks authority in the North and is entirely focused on getting the membership in the European Union, youth feel they are abandoned by their state that is supposed to protect them.
- c) As a result of a lack of law enforcement in the north segment of the city, there is a widespread tax evasion, corruption, and unregistered businesses, all of which contribute to the establishment of the black market. Participants of this illegality known as “The Mafia” are the informal authority recognized by the citizens of Mitrovica.

### Life In The City of Mitrovica: “Friends During The Night, Enemies During The Day”

Youth in Mitrovica live in continuous struggle between fear of ethnic conflict and an attraction towards the other side.

- a) The present infrastructural setup of the city keeps Kosovar-Albanians and Serbians divided, which reproduces relations of war, and provokes memories of war. Afraid of ethnic conflicts, families from both sides share memories of war as a way to prevent youth from socializing.
- b) The Serbian and Kosovar-Albanian communities to which the youth belong are another informal authority that often times use threats and physical aggression to prevent youth from socializing.
- c) Although the majority of Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth do not socialize with each other, for a minority cultural differences in their lifestyles raise a curiosity and a desire to explore the other side and establish relationships.

### Interactions Across Divisions: Coffee, Weed, and Cigarettes

NGO projects are the only safe way for youth to socialize, but are sometimes perceived to perpetuate stereotypes of ethnic intolerance between Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth.

- a) Some of the youth from both segments of the city are grateful to NGO projects for managing to bring youth together, especially those that have never met a Serbian or a Kosovar-Albanian before
- b) Regardless of the NGOs good intentions, some Kosovar-Albanian and Serbian youth believe that NGO initiatives of peace and reconciliation are based on inaccurate assumption about them.
- c) Since the youth in Mitrovica are still dependent on the work of NGOs, they subvert these projects into neutral spaces to socialize

## The Ibar Bridge



## Graffiti in the North and South



## International Peacekeepers



## Conclusion

The evidence that youth are trying to escape this situation in order to create neutral spaces to socialize shows that peacebuilding initiatives are not based on what people need in order to reconcile. The goals of these institutions do not match with the goals of the divided people. This unfolds contradictions within peacebuilding and peacekeeping missions:

- Peacekeepers, assume that the only way to establish and maintain peace is by keeping people separate. The results of this preconceived notion are:
  - a) The rise of ethnic tension
  - b) Mistreatment from the peacekeepers towards the divided people
  - c) The creation of the illegalities which further abuses human rights.

- The mediation of the European Union for the normalization of relations/reconciliation occurs between the states of Kosova and Serbia. By keeping negotiations in the level of political power, reconciliation between people is being ignored.

### Importance:

Peacebuilding and reconciliation is only possible when people are given the space and time to test out new forms of sociality. Youth in Mitrovica show that there should be less emphasis on institutions, and more emphasis on informal spaces through which they try to find a commonality that makes social cohesion possible.

This indicates that one of the main reasons why people in divided societies hesitate to reconcile is the fact that the genuine socialization common to humanity is inaccessible.



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