

Places of Reconciliation and Contestation:  
The Reconstruction and Protection of Serbian Orthodox Religious Sites in Kosovo

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30 July 2012

A Thesis submitted to  
the Board of Examiners  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of  
Master of Arts in Conflict Studies & Human Rights

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Jolle Demmers  
Date of Submission: 30 July 2012  
Programme trajectory followed: Internship (15 ECTS),  
Research and Thesis Writing (15 ECTS)  
Word Count: 14,894 words



## **Abstract**

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This thesis seeks to contribute to a stronger engagement with the spatial dimension of peacebuilding and reconciliation. Providing a culturally-geographic approach to the placemaking activities in contemporary Kosovo, it analyses the reconstruction and physical as well as legal protection of Serbian Orthodox religious sites with regard to their limits and challenges in producing a reconciliatory sense of place. Telling the story of exemplary churches and monasteries, it addresses the influencing factors of scale and timing, accessibility, public awareness, history, demography and personal attitude. Eventually, the thesis advocates a people-centred and interactional approach to reconstruction and protection, suggesting that enlivenment and exchange may provide the missing link between physical and societal transformations.

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## Abbreviations

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CoE	Council of Europe
ICO	International Civilian Office
EU	European Union
IRPP/SAAH	Integrated Rehabilitation Project Plan/Survey of the Architectural and Archaeological Heritage
KFOR	Kosovo Force
KPS	Kosovo Police Service
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RIC	Reconstruction Implementation Commission
SPZ	Special Protective Zone
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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## 1. Introduction

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“The ability of reconstruction projects to promote the idea of reconciliation is put to the test in multicultural societies emerging from civil war.”

Nicholas Stanley-Prince (2007: 10)

### *Background and problem area*

Kosovo is rich in cultural heritage, yet this richness has been and still is at risk. Besides a general neglect and lack of preservation, Kosovo’s cultural heritage has also come under direct attack before, during and after the conflict in the late 1990s, with religious sites chosen as an unfortunately common target of violence against architecture. Numerous mosques were damaged or destroyed in the Serbian military campaign, followed by a post-war retribution against Serbian Orthodox properties. To understand the significance of these incidents and their linkage to the political dispute over Kosovo, the following statement from the *Memorandum on Kosovo and Metohija* by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church (2004: 9) is particularly telling:

What Jerusalem is to the Jews, Kosovo is to the Serbs, and Kosovo, like Jerusalem, is not just geography or demographics. It is a matter of identity: national, spiritual, cultural, Christian and human, i.e. theanthropic. This is why the Serbian Orthodox Church is at this moment so deeply concerned about the fate of Kosovo and Metohija and with all who live there, and all the holy shrines that exist there.

Having published the memorandum’s first edition in 2003, they felt their worries confirmed when another thirty-four churches and monasteries fell victim to the violent riots in March 2004. This time, also international attention was high, leading to the consolidation of three policy responses with regard to the Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo, namely their reconstruction and their physical as well as legal protection through security arrangements and spatial planning. These measures are meant to act in concert in order to ensure minority rights and peaceful multiethnic coexistence. Just as the quote has shown that the destruction of cultural or religious sites cannot be understood as a mere geospatial project, neither can their reconstruction and

protection be approached solely from a technical point of view. In fact, these are conscious attempts of the international community to bind together physical and societal transformations, building on its financial and persuasive power.

### *Research question*

It is the aim of this thesis to scrutinise the reconstruction and protection efforts towards Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo and to come to an understanding of their place-making effects. In light of the proclaimed policy goals of fostering reconciliation and ensuring minority rights, it will be followed how these forms of geospatial engineering play themselves out socially in the post-conflict setting of Kosovo. In this, the thesis seeks to go beyond merely criticising the international community's rhetoric of a direct link between physical reconstruction and social reconciliation, but give an informed and analytical account of influencing factors. Thus, the guiding question will then be:

- What factors have limited the reconstruction and protection of Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo in producing a reconciliatory sense of place, against the stated policy expectations of the international community?

By asking this question, it is hoped to gain new insights about the workings of space and place in peacebuilding and reconciliation. Strengthening the engagement with this spatial dimension is of vital importance, as it is a very visible and tangible feature of post-conflict societies. At the same time, geography has only received limited attention in the study of violent conflict and, even more so, its aftermath (Starr 2003). As Ben Wisner (1986; see also Flint 2005) has pointed out, geography has historically been employed for military purposes and has kept this traditional preoccupation with the tactics and dynamics of war, while less effort has been made to understand peace from a geographical perspective. Similarly, accounts of physical destruction during war have usually fallen short of practical implications beyond calls for prosecution, criminalisation and prevention. Reviving the questions how to actually deal with war damage in the aftermath of violent strife in terms of reconstruction, preservation or assignation to a different usage serves to raise awareness of the intended and unintended consequences of interacting with geographical settings.

### *Central concepts and definitions*

Dealing with the meaning and effects of changes to the physical environment in post-conflict situations is an evidently interdisciplinary endeavour, tying together themes from conflict studies, geography, architecture, cultural studies and history. The research project takes its starting point in the ideas of space and place and seeks to bring them together with questions of social meaning, memory and collective identity. In order to bridge this divide between intangible concepts and their tangible expressions in the material sphere, the distinction sometimes made between *space* and *place* has proven particularly useful. Whereas space is seen as an abstract and detached category, places have acquired cultural meaning and emotive qualities through human as well as non-human activity (Anderson 2010: 37f.). Put shortly, “space becomes place when it is used and lived” (Cresswell 2009: 170). Rather than focusing on the physical landscapes and political territories ordering space in such forms as nation-states or borders, the emphasis on places hence complements objective factors of geographical location with a reflection on the *sense of place* and the related issues of identification, perception and belonging. Although it remains a debated and fuzzy concept, sense of place may be defined as the “[e]motive bonds and attachments, both positive and negative, that people develop or experience in particular locations and environments” (Foote/Azaryahu 2009: 96). According to Jon Anderson (2010: 39), “sense of place is the key way in which humans, culture and environment are united together”. Its production thus provides the missing link between physical and societal transformations, making it a core theme in the analytic framework of this thesis.

As in the present case, the promotion of particular place attachments is at times the stated objective of certain actors or policies and hence given the name placemaking. Placemaking can take various different forms and captures the “measures undertaken by interested parties to invest place with specific cultural characteristics” (Foote/Azaryahu 2009: 99). Where there is interest, there is also power at work and thus place becomes “both the outcome and mediator of politics” (Flint 2005: 6). Exercising control over place allows for the regulation of access and activities as well as the manipulation of imagery and symbolism, which serves to reify the personal claim and vision.

## *Methodology*

Topics that are as complex, intangible, sensitive and political as the one at hand are inviting a qualitative research approach (Ritchie 2003: 32f.). By exploring the nature of the link between the material environment, perceptions and societal transformations, the research serves a contextual function. Since it is also attempted to draw attention to and understand the diversity of place attachments in connection with their context, it is also explanatory to a certain degree. At the same time, the policy-related character of the guiding question shows the evaluative and generative components of the research project. Thus, it combines various functions of social investigation (ibid.: 26-31). Rather than grand theorising, the thesis seeks to give impetus to a rethinking of current post-conflict cultural policies regarding architectural war damage. This will not be done through generalising about best practices but by “identify[ing] and display[ing] range and diversity [...]” (Lewis/Ritchie 2003: 277). Thereby, the aim is to direct attention to the importance of context, give voice to the voiceless buildings and tell their stories in a theoretically informed yet lively fashion.

Since the main concern of the thesis is with spatiality, that is “[t]he effect of space on actions, interactions, entities, and theories” (Mayhem 2009), its analytical framework draws heavily on ideas and works of *cultural geography*. Thereby, it puts itself ontologically in line with structuration theory<sup>1</sup> and takes an interpretive epistemological position in favour of ‘understanding’ rather than ‘explaining’. As the question then arises how to actually gather these spatial interpretations and what data collection techniques to apply to this end, two of the methods commonly used in this sub-field of geography will be employed. In general, these are qualitative in nature, because qualitative methods are well-positioned to “help researchers gain access to the meanings ascribed to cultural traces and places” (Anderson 2010: 168).

For this purpose, interviews are “useful in finding out how people interpret their worlds, [...] either through reasoned analysis or less coherent ramblings” (ibid.: 169). The relevant respondents for the topic at hand can be generally grouped into two categories.

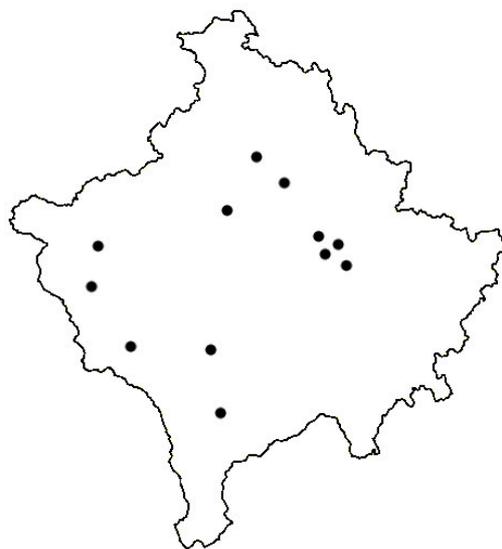
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<sup>1</sup> “Place is produced through action and action is produced in place through a constant reiterative process” (Cresswell 2009: 175). “[H]uman agency is enacted within the bounded and structured confines of particular places and times” (Gibson/Waitt 2009: 415).

On the one hand, interviews have been carried out with representatives of the various organisations who design or implement the reconstruction and protection efforts. On the other hand, contact has been made with the religious communities who present the target group of these policies. What is more, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the field of cultural heritage has been asked to provide its expert opinion. All errors remain my own.

In addition to in-depth interviews, it is also possible to analyse buildings and material objects as cultural texts or images by linking them to the context, motivations and assumptions under which they were produced and highlighting the kind of identities they promote (Anderson 2010: 171; Meusburger/Heffernan/Wunder 2011: 4-11). Thus, the fieldwork undertaken in Kosovo from May to July 2012 in connection to this research project has included various site visits to the Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries under observation (see map 1 and annex 8.2.). It has been attempted to take into account the diversity of these religious sites as concerns their geographic and demographic location, size, age and inclusion in the post-war policies under observation. Where possible, the site visits have also been seized as an opportunity to get in contact with the local priest, visitors or security guards for first-hand information and assessments. In accordance with common scholarly practice, the locations will be referred to by both their Albanian and Serbian name (Herscher 2010: xi; Judah 2008: x).

**Map 1:** Site visits undertaken as part of the fieldwork in Kosovo from May to July 2012



### *Case selection*

These methods are combined to form a case study of Kosovo or, more specifically, a specific class of architecture in Kosovo. As Anderson (2010: 174) puts it, case studies are “illustrative of the practices and traces that come together to constitute the cultural world”. To this end, the focus on Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo has been chosen for a number of reasons. Although the intentional destruction of the physical landscape is commonly said to have taken on a special intensity in the violent fighting in the former Yugoslavia, less attention has been paid to the case of Kosovo in comparison to Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia (Abtahi 2001: 1f.; Van der Auwera 2011: 1f.; Frulli 2011: 208). This is despite the fact that Kosovo holds a rich cultural heritage and has been subject to a wide range of rehabilitative and protective activities in the aftermath of the war. In light of the connection between the Serbian Orthodox religious sites and the fate of the Serb population in Kosovo, the thesis also touches upon the pressing issues of minority and human rights, usually derived from the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community in Article 27 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Thereby, the topic provides deeper insights into the cultural dimension of the ongoing statebuilding and nationbuilding processes.

### *Structure*

Chapter 2 deals with the destruction of cultural sites in the context of violent conflict, providing the general theoretical background to it and giving an overview over the scale, process as well as interpretation of cultural destruction in Kosovo. Chapter 3 then turns to the international reconstruction efforts as regards Serbian Orthodox religious sites, taking its starting point in representational theory of cultural geography. It goes on to present main actors and programmes in this field and builds on two examples to reveal flaws in their policy agenda of reconciliation. In Chapter 4, non-representational cultural geography is introduced and the protection measures awarded to Serbian Orthodox properties in both physical and legal form take centre stage, complemented by respective case studies. Chapter 5 completes the move to the level of everyday practices and illustrates their significance through the example of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, leading to general concluding remarks about the link between reconstruction, protection and reconciliation.

## 2. Destruction

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“Beyond monuments and heritage, it is memory  
and cultural identity that are being destroyed.”

Koïchiro Matsuura, UNESCO Director-General, 22 March 2004

It appears impossible to grasp the effects of the reconstruction and protection of cultural heritage sites without understanding the preceding phenomenon of their initial destruction or threat of destruction. Traditionally, attacks against architecture have received limited attention and only recently has there been a growing recognition in both politics and academia of the necessity to follow the logic behind this special form of violence and find more effective ways to prevent it.

### 2.1. Understanding destruction

Attacks on cultural sites during armed conflict have a long record in history and some authors go back to ancient times to trace their origins (Gerstenblith 2009: 19). However, the phenomenon is nowadays more readily associated with contemporary conflicts and understood as a means of warfare in these. Reviving new wars theory, damage to cultural sites is no longer regarded as the result of collateral damage or a mere disregard to these sites but as part of a conscious wartime strategy. The assaults are thus considered deliberate and intentional, targeting identity, which is the main object of contestation in new wars (Kaldor 2006: 7f.; Van der Auwera 2011: 2-5). While legal studies have mainly followed the evolution of a protection regime in international law (Gerstenblith 2009; Techera 2007), the special contribution of geographers has been to frame ethnic cleansing as a two-stage geopolitical project aimed at the “ethnicization of space” (Ó Tuathail/Dahlman 2011: 5f.). First, the contested territory is depopulated of the out-group and any evidence of its previous presence is erased. Second, a new order is imposed that justifies and reifies claims of belonging and ownership.

Although the targeting of both people and material structures form part of this practice, some scholars have hesitated or even expressed remorse over shifting attention from human misery to material effects (Bevan 2006: 7). Quite the opposite, Martin Coward (2006) has in fact blamed today’s study of violent conflict as well as social sciences in general for

being “anthropocentric”, attaching superior value to human life compared to its material environment. Thus, he has gone on to argue that offences against the built environment should be detached from the focus on population groups and treated as a distinct form of political violence in its own right. Accordingly, scholars who have done so have given different names to this phenomenon, including “urbicide” (Campbell/Graham/Monk 2007; Coward 2006; 2007), “architectural cleansing” (Adams 1993: 389), “cultural cleansing” (Bevan 2006: ch. 2) or even “cultural genocide” (Adams 1993: 390; Bevan 2006: 209f.).

Despite this increased engagement with the role of architecture, much of the how and why behind this aggression still remains contested. That is why the terms presented are not entirely synonymous, but carry different assumptions of what it is that actually comes under attack in violent conflict. Urbicide generally comprises direct and indirect attacks against urbanity at large and the built environment in its entirety, including the wartime destruction of cultural buildings as well as such mundane architecture as housing, shops and markets. These acts should thus be seen as directed against urbanity as such. Urbanity is not confined to the geographical space of the city, but embodies a shared spatiality which provides the conditions necessary for heterogeneous social life and interaction (Coward 2006; 2007). In contrast, many legal analysts have rather opted for a focus on cultural property or cultural heritage, seeing assaults on them as directed at a specific enemy and his identity (Abtahi 2001: 1; Barakat 2007: 29; Silverman/Ruggles 2007: 8; Stanley-Price 2007: 4-6; Van der Auwera 2011: 1). Although these two views might sound similar at first and should be seen as complementary rather than contradictory, they in fact present different approaches to the problem matter. It is the distinction between targeting either a particular (enemy) identity or the potential for a common identity. This linkage between identity, be it a common or a particular one, and the architectural environment has become a common academic narrative to come to terms with violence against physical structures.

However, the idea that the physical environment represents a mere container for different forms of presupposed identities has also been met with criticism. As Andrew Herscher (2010: 7) has argued, such accounts rely on attributing representational status and fixed meaning to architecture as its inherent qualities, hence failing to acknowledge “destruction [...] as a form of construction, irreducible to its supposed contexts and

productive of the very identities and agencies that supposedly bear on it as causes". For him, it is in fact the violence itself that forces meaning onto the physical environment, "render[ing] it significant and signifying" (ibid.: 18).

Herscher derives these ideas from his own engagement with the role of architecture in the Kosovo conflict. Yet, it has to be noted that the intentional destruction of material structures has occurred in settings as diverse as the Second World War, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Chechen wars and the Iraq War. As in the well-known case of the Buddha statues of Bamiyan in central Afghanistan and the very recent attacks on the ancient mausoleums of Timbuktu by Islamists illustrate, such acts of aggression are not limited to official times of war and often have a religious dimension to them.

## **2.2. Destruction of Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo**

Despite the wide range of examples in which the physical landscape in general and cultural heritage sites in particular have come under attack, the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s have come to be closely associated with this conduct, due to the sheer scale of destruction. The Old Town of Dubrovnik, the Old Bridge in Mostar and the National and University Library in Sarajevo are only three locations that are representative of the magnitude of cultural sites destroyed or damaged during this episode of violent fighting.

Telling the story of cultural destruction in Kosovo is a difficult endeavour, since any historical narrative invites accusations of bias, incompleteness and wilful omission. As this thesis centres on happenings which in fact followed after the Kosovo War, may it suffice here to give a brief account of the fate of cultural heritage in the decades leading up to these incidents. Nevertheless, being aware of this background is essential to put the offences against Serbian Orthodox religious sites into context by understanding them as part of "a genealogy of anticipated, threatened, inflicted, and remembered violence against architecture in Kosovo" (ibid.: 12). According to Herscher (2010: 12-15), the recent history of this architectural violence can be divided into three episodes. From the late 1940s onwards, significant parts of the rich cultural heritage in Kosovo, especially that dating back to the Ottoman era, fell victim to a rapid socialist modernisation, as it was portrayed to depict premodernity. The 1980s and 1990s then saw a rising political conflict which used architecture as a medium for ethnicisation and

culminated in the Serbian military campaign against the Kosovo Liberation Army. In addition to large-scale offences against secular and mundane architecture, Islamic buildings were also targeted during the attacks and “approximately 225 of Kosovo’s 600 mosques were vandalized, damaged, or destroyed during that campaign” (ibid.: 87). The 1999 intervention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) largely spared cultural sites, concentrating on buildings of strategic importance to its cause. The focus of this thesis then lies with the religious heritage sites that were attacked during the third episode of architectural violence which followed after the 1998-99 war.

Post-conflict violence was mainly directed against the Serb population around the country, including their places of worship, and portrayed as a form of retribution. “This was the afterwar, a time when the violence of war did not so much end as shift its direction” (ibid.: 124). In this post-war confusion immediately after June 1999, documenting offences against Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries was not only a difficult task, but it was also largely ignored by the international actors, namely the United Nations (UN) and NATO, who had already declared peace in Kosovo and sought to uphold this image (ibid.: 123f.). Attempting to assess the scale of destruction, one may resort to the documentation of the Serbian Orthodox Church who severely criticised the general neglect of this physical destruction and made news and photography available on their website as well as a publication called *Crucified Kosovo*. According to this booklet, seventy-six religious sites were looted, desecrated, burned, mined or completely destroyed between June and October 1999 (ERP 1999). Other estimates put the damage and destruction by the end of the year at approximately one hundred churches and monasteries (Herscher 2010: 131). While most of these target objects are located in rural areas, major Kosovar cities such as Prishtinë/Priština, Gjakovë/Đakovica and Ferizaj/Uroševac also saw attacks against their Serbian Orthodox churches during this time.

It took months until troops of the Kosovo Force (KFOR), the NATO-led peacekeeping mission, were deployed at Serbian Orthodox religious sites, in accordance with UN resolution 1244. Finally, 151 churches, monasteries and other patrimonial sites came under military protection, either through fixed position or regular patrols. For some locations, however, there were already only ruins or rubble left to be looked after (ibid.: 136). When KFOR started in 2001 to exchange its fixed guard posts for patrols and

hand over protection responsibilities to the international police force and the local Kosovo Police Service (KPS), the process was far from unproblematic and some locations witnessed renewed security incidents and violent attacks. Following delays and suspensions, fixed guard posts of KFOR remained at only twenty-six Orthodox sites by the summer of 2003 (ibid.: 138-140). In March that year, a fact-finding mission had still found the cultural heritage in Kosovo, including its Orthodox architecture, “in a precarious and most vulnerable situation” (UNESCO 2003: 8).

Despite this sporadic violence lingering on since 1999, the riots that erupted in March 2004 came as a surprise to both international observers and the local community. Aided by the lowered level of protection, Serbian Orthodox sites also came under attack once more, along with the houses and property of the small remaining Serb population. This time, the renewed fighting did produce an international outcry and missions for damage assessment were quickly deployed. Overall, accounts of the exact number of Serbian Orthodox buildings that were damaged or destroyed within those two days range from thirty to thirty-six (Herscher 2010: 142; ICG 2004: i). Again, these localities of architectural violence were spread across the country, exhibited different levels of damage and may have already suffered earlier in 1999. Although many of these sites were still under KFOR protection, the soldiers were often outnumbered or held back by their mandate. In other cases, they merely opted to give up the church or monastery buildings in favour of saving the lives of the local priests, monks or nuns. Despite the massive critique voiced against KFOR, it should be noted that further violent attacks were in fact mitigated in some cities such as Gnjilane/Gjilan (ICG 2004).<sup>2</sup>

The March riots have gone under the labels of an “event”, “revolt” and “pogrom” (Herscher 2010: 146-148), reflecting different interpretations of them. Especially the Serbian Orthodox community adopted the previously described argument for a direct people-place relationship in order to make sense of this violence, seeing the destruction of its churches and monasteries as a systematic attack on Serb identity and placing it in the context of a campaign of ethnic cleansing.<sup>3</sup> However, it is important to recall the social-constructivist theoretical position presented and keep in mind the particular role

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<sup>2</sup> Adding to the genealogy of reciprocal violence, Serbia’s last two Ottoman mosques, located in the cities of Belgrade and Niš, were set on fire only days after the incidents in Kosovo (Bevan 2006: 204f.).

<sup>3</sup> Interview, Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pejë/Peć, 19 July 2012; see also ICG (2004: 10f.).

of religion in Kosovo. While “[b]eing Serb today derives from being Orthodox” (Judah 2008: 17), there are Muslim, Catholic and, to a lesser extent, Orthodox Albanians. In general, they are very secular people, bound together first and foremost by language. Thus, “what makes an Albanian an Albanian stands in direct contradiction to what makes a Serb a Serb, a Bosniak a Bosniak, and a Croat a Croat” (ibid.: 9). This point is key in understanding the large-scale destruction of religious architecture in Kosovo. While there are competing narratives about the historical origins and religious roots of some Orthodox churches and monasteries, the recent violence against them has also had a performative function in detaching these sites from Albanian identity and intensifying its fusion with the Serb sense of belonging. This has evident implications for the recovery phase and the issue of reconstruction, as it raises the question what entity the reconstructed sites are meant to represent.

### 3. Reconstruction

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“What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

*Build anyway.*”

Kent M. Keith, *The Paradoxical Commandments* (extract)

The previous chapter has tried to show that dealing with the destruction of and damage to cultural heritage sites in the context of violent conflict and designing appropriate policy responses cannot be treated as a merely technical task. As one Kosovar Serb woman put it very clearly, “it is horrible if you only think about a church as an object”. In fact, the term *re*construction is in itself misleading, as it gives the impression of mere restoration and a return to the status quo ante. Instead, it is the aim of this thesis to show the political and productive nature of these and other acts of physically reshaping the urban landscape, forming a battlefield for the struggle over the taking and making of place that continues long after the official end of a conflict. In order to grasp the emotive effects and cultural productivity of this engagement, the thesis draws on concepts and ideas from the discipline of cultural geography.

#### 3.1. Cultural Geography and Representation

Although the roots of cultural geography, which is sometimes considered either a synonym for or a sub-field of human geography, date back to the 18th and 19th centuries, the true consolidation of the discipline is usually associated with Carl Sauer and the Berkeley School in the early 20th century. In opposition to the prevailing environmental determinism, their works turned away from positivist theorising, were inspired by anthropology and empiricism rather than the natural sciences and focused attention on the geographies of cultural landscapes. Prompted by external political, economic and social changes, the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of new ways of thinking, based on critical and post-structuralist theories. The main departure from earlier culturally geographic thinking was a move from rural and historical to urban and modern cultural landscapes as well as from cultural artefacts to the processes of cultural production.<sup>4</sup> When the “cultural turn [...] stretched across the humanities and social

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<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive history of the discipline, see Anderson (2010: ch. 2 and 3) and Nayak (2011: ch. 5).

sciences from the late-1980s” (Nayak 2011: 98), this ‘new’ cultural geography had its breakthrough and proposed a reconceptualisation of culture. While superorganic notions of culture were left behind in an acknowledgement of human agency and productiveness, “geographers recognised that cultural products are not just important in terms of the form and function of the things themselves [...] but function as signs, and it was up to geographers to decode their meaning” (Anderson 2010: 27).

It was against this background that the idea of *place* began to occupy a central position in cultural geography, as it was regarded to signify a coming together of “materialities *and* mental associations; [...] both the substantive and symbolic” (ibid.: 28). As such, places are characterised by three constituent and complimentary elements – location, locale and sense of place. According to Tim Cresswell (2009: 169),

Location refers to an absolute point in space with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances from other locations. [...] Locale refers to the material setting for social relations – the way a place looks. Locale includes the buildings, streets, parks, and other visible and tangible aspects of a place. Sense of place refers to the more nebulous meanings associated with a place: the feelings and emotions a place evokes.

It is the latter approach to place that is of special interest to anthropologists and cultural geographers as well as the topic of this thesis (Starr 2003: 4). From a structural point of view, such place attachments or senses of place can be either individual or collective, personal or shared (Anderson 2010: 39; Cresswell 2009: 169). In the absence of scholarly literature on its substantial elements, the following dichotomies have been applied to access the meanings ascribed to the places under observation and design the question guide to be used in the interviews:

- (a) inclusive – exclusive
- (b) consensual – contested
- (c) meaningful – meaningless
- (d) personal – impersonal
- (e) safe – endangered

In addition to this operationalisation, five features of place and sense of place are especially important to point out in relation to the research project at hand. First, place assumes a central role in identity formation and the construction of memory, as people define themselves and the past in relation to physical environments (Anderson 2010: 40f.; Meusbürger/Heffernan/Wunder 2011: 4). That is why place is highly vulnerable to become contested territory and subject to a power struggle over its normalisation and inscription with meaning and value (Anderson 2010: 28). Second, just as place provides the background for the development of attachments and affiliations, people are constantly involved in the (re-)production or transformation of places, making their relationship a two-sided one. Third and consequently, places are dynamic localities and should be understood as an “*ongoing composition of [cultural] traces*” (ibid.: 5; emphasis in original). Fourth, places exist at different levels and, similarly, one’s sense of place extends across different scales from the local to the national and beyond. What is more, this sense of place is as much a scalar as a cultural identification which interact to produce complex patterns of affiliation. It is hence more appropriate to speak of multiple senses of place which may either reinforce or contradict one another (ibid.: 3, 119-131). Fifth, various actors are involved in the continuous remaking of place, both consciously and unconsciously. As in the case of the Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo, each of these place-makers has his own vision and claims of how a certain place should be, hence at times resulting in competition and acts of resistance. Various scholars have dealt with the different stakeholders engaged in the process of reshaping localities which include the international community, political authorities of the nation-state and the local subjects themselves (Anderson 2010: 10-12; Appadurai 1995; Duffield 2010; Ignatieff 2003).

Seeing this inscription of landscapes and architecture with various meanings and cultural ideas, they were considered to be a form of social text that could be read and interpreted by cultural geographers. The underlying objective of such a textual analysis then is “to study the meanings of these ‘texts’, work out the meanings attached to them, the politics underpinning them, and how these were (re)produced” (Anderson 2010: 29). Although the field has already seen new theoretical advances which will be discussed later, representational cultural geography is still far from being considered obsolete and thus it is worth to take a while, in order to apply its ideas to the Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo.

### 3.2. Reconstructing Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo

Interestingly, the example of a church has in fact been employed to illustrate certain theoretical assumptions in the field of cultural geography. As Cresswell (1996: 13 in Anderson 2010: 28) has put it: “A church, for instance, is a place. It is neither just a particular material artefact nor just a set of religious ideas; it is always both”. The upcoming chapters will follow this line of thought by treating the Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo as *places*. Thus, they will be seen as “particular location[s] that ha[ve] acquired a set of meanings and attachments” (Cresswell 2009: 169) as well as “ongoing composition[s] of traces” (Anderson 2010: 5; emphasis removed) to which destruction, reconstruction, protection and other forms of human practice contribute. Since the cultural productivity of destruction has already been discussed above, the reconstruction efforts will be dealt with in a next step.

To begin with, it might be useful to throw some light on the main programmes in this field, in order to make sense of the complex network of actors, activities and sites. Besides private or bilateral projects, the reconstruction of the Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries around Kosovo is mainly carried out by the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) through the following three initiatives:

- the joint EU/CoE programme “Integrated Rehabilitation Project Plan/Survey of the Architectural and Archaeological Heritage” (IRPP/SAAH)
- the joint EU/CoE programme “Support to the Promotion of Cultural Diversity in Kosovo”
- the UNESCO programme “Safeguarding the Cultural Heritage of Kosovo”

The IRPP/SAAH is part of the Regional Programme on Cultural and Natural Heritage in South East Europe which covers the entire Balkan region except Greece and was launched in 2003. While its other two components focus on institutional capacity building and local development projects, the IRPP/SAAH aims at heritage rehabilitation and management through the identification of priority monuments and sites as well as the “elaboration of politically and technically viable programmes for rehabilitation” (CoE n.a.: 3). Overall, 186 religious and vernacular sites have been placed on the

national Priority Intervention Lists. In the case of Kosovo, its 2008 list comprised twenty-six sites, out of which nine were Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries. Only one of these, the monastery in Deçan/Dečani, suffered from lack of maintenance rather than war-associated damage. However, none of the Orthodox sites has been chosen as a Consolidated Project for which funding has been attracted under the so-called Ljubljana Process from 2008 onwards (CoE n.a.; 2009). With the programme's official end of mandate in 2010, national representatives have agreed to continue its activities and methodology through the transitional operational framework of the Ljubljana Process II under the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Council.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to the regional and comprehensive approach of the IRPP/SAAH, the international actors launched another narrower initiative in 2004, in direct reaction to the devastation of the March riots (CoE 2011: 7-15). Following intensive negotiations, they managed to establish the Reconstruction Implementation Commission (RIC), an implementation tool and decision-making body tasked with programming and supervising the reconstruction works on those thirty-four Serbian Orthodox religious sites that had been attacked during the March riots.<sup>6</sup> Although mainly funded by the Kosovo authorities, the commission was composed of members from the CoE, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Ministry of Culture and the Serbian as well as Kosovar Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments. In 2009, the RIC mechanism was integrated into a new joint programme of the EU and CoE, thereby combining the reconstruction with measures to ensure capacity building, economic development and public awareness. Similar to the IRPP/SAAH, the mandate of RIC came to an end in 2010 and, despite unfinished tasks, there has not yet been reached an agreement on its potential continuation. Because of its clear focus on Serbian Orthodox properties and the large-scale reconstruction works already undertaken within the scope of its mandate, RIC is the most important programme in relation to the topic of this thesis. Between 2005 and 2010, thirty-two sites have benefitted from rehabilitation and conservation efforts, with exterior works completed on nineteen churches (ibid.: 5, 18).

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<sup>5</sup> The Regional Cooperation Council is a regionally owned framework that succeeded the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. Its headquarters are located in Sarajevo and the responsible Task Force on Culture and Society is based in Cetinje (Montenegro).

<sup>6</sup> The mechanism also included the atelier and open gallery of Agim Cavdarbasha in Čaglavicë/Čaglavica as a non-religious but cultural site that was accidentally damaged in the riots.

In parallel to the RIC process, UNESCO (2005a) organised an international donor conference in May 2005 in support of the protection and restoration of cultural heritage in Kosovo. Based on the earlier damage assessment mission reports, the donors were presented a list of seventy-five sites, including forty-eight Byzantine or Serbian Orthodox, fourteen Islamic and thirteen secular ones. The former group encompassed both churches and monasteries that were endangered by lack of conservation and those attacked in either 1999 or 2004. Seven Serbian Orthodox sites were among the monuments which the responsible expert committee recommended to be restored during the programme's first two years (UNESCO 2005b). However, all but one of these sites were, in fact, also part of the RIC mechanism. While two of them were fully handed over to UNESCO in 2008, it has also carried out smaller interventions on various other Serbian Orthodox buildings, mainly in the form of architectural and wall paintings restoration (CoE 2011).

The contribution of UNESCO to the RIC process and vice versa illustrates how the international reconstruction programmes in Kosovo are complimentary and interconnected. Not only do they at times work on the same locations, but they also share a common rhetoric to justify their engagement. On the one hand, there is repeated reference to similar underlying core values such as democracy and human rights, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue as well as commitment to a common European heritage and standards. On the other hand, the policy objectives are similarly expressed in a language of sustainable development and peacebuilding. In this, cultural heritage is used to serve as “a factor of reconciliation” (UNESCO 2005b) or, more elaborately, “as a means to promote reconciliation, intercultural dialogue and socio-economic development for society” (CoE 2011: 7). The idea behind this reasoning is that the rehabilitation of cultural sites helps to “promot[e] the understanding of heritage as a *shared* source of remembrance, understanding, identity, cohesion and creativity” (ibid.: 4; emphasis added). Thus, changes in the physical environment are linked to perceptive and social effects that unite rather than separate the Kosovar communities.

In light of the double nature of these stated policy goals, judging the outcome of the reconstruction efforts must thus also take into account both the material and immaterial results. However, the project documentation itself usually relies on numbers to illustrate achievements, be it in terms of investments or a count of the beneficiary buildings. This

is not to say that the scale of physical reconstruction should not be acknowledged as a significant progress, but real success runs deeper and depends on a change of public attitude towards these sites. When asked whether a reconstructed church was embraced by the people as their common cultural heritage or only perceived as the exclusive heritage of one particular ethnoreligious group, none of the respondents explicitly confirmed the former standpoint and, in fact, most of them strongly took up the latter position. As will be shown later, this does not indicate that Serbian Orthodox sites are meaningless to the Albanian population, but the perceptions of and attachments to these places are not as shared by all communities as hoped for by the donors. In this context, it is interesting to note the different assessments of this situation. While representatives of the involved international organisations would express dissatisfaction over the narrow identification and consider it as a remaining task for the future to break the rigid people-place relationship, a Serbian humanitarian worker characterised this condition as both normal and natural. Correspondingly, she described her own feelings towards a mosque by saying that “you don’t feel that it is something that belongs to you”.<sup>7</sup>

These difficulties echo the findings from other case studies in which physical reconstruction has not in and of itself led to societal reconciliation, such as in the well-known and highly-symbolic example of the Old Bridge in Mostar (Ignatieff 2003). However, it will now be the aim to go beyond showing this gap between expectation and reality and explore some of the reasons behind it. Such common themes which are said to have made a difference have been extracted from the interviews and will be illustrated by presenting some of Kosovo’s Serbian Orthodox religious sites in greater detail.

### **3.3. Gjakovë/Đakovica: To Reconstruct or Not to Reconstruct**

Gjakovë/Đakovica is a city in southwestern Kosovo that used to possess two Serbian Orthodox churches, the Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin and the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity. Both sites were completely destroyed – the former was demolished in March 2004 along with its parish house, while the latter was already destroyed in summer 1999 and the March riots eventually saw the removal of the ruins from the site

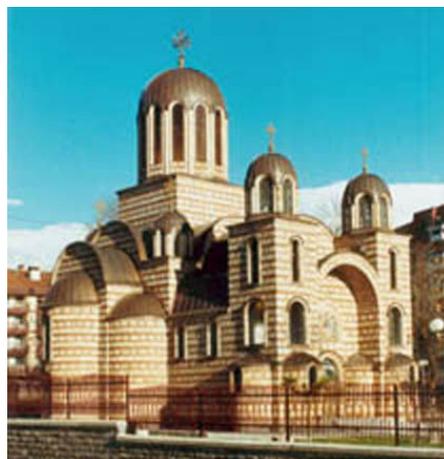
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<sup>7</sup> Interview, Serbian humanitarian worker, Graçanicë/Gračanica, 5 June 2012

(CoE 2011; UNESCO 2005a). Although these two churches are both part of the RIC process and to be found on the UNESCO list for the protection and preservation of cultural heritage in Kosovo, their post-destruction fate has differed markedly.

The Church of the Holy Assumption of the Holy Virgin has seen the complete reconstruction of the church building as well as its parish and guest houses since 2007 (CoE 2011: 123). In contrast, no rehabilitative interventions have been carried out on the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity and it has become subject to a municipal counter-initiative that envisaged the construction of a park over the remains of the church and its adjacent area (BalkanInsight 2008; OSCE 2012: 20). Against the criticism of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the international community, the local authorities went through with their plan and the place has now been altered completely, with no remainder of its previous occupation through a religious structure. Quite the opposite, the new city park hosts a war memorial to the Kosovo Liberation Army and a large Albanian flag in the former location of the church (see figures 1 and 2).

**Figure 1:** Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Gjakovë/Đakovica before destruction



**Source:** Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church (2004)

It is not only the reconstruction of cultural sites that may give new meaning to a place, but also an absence of reconstruction works or even its assignation to a different usage gives new impetus and can spark dispute, as in the case of Gjakovë/Đakovica. It is important to note that the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity is only one out of many

examples of Serbian Orthodox religious sites which were destroyed from 1999 onwards and have not yet been restored (ICO 2011: 17). Most often, this is the case of those properties that came under attack in the immediate aftermath of the Kosovo War, since none of them is covered by the RIC mechanism and only a small number is part of the IRPP/SAAH and UNESCO programmes.

**Figure 2:** Location of the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in Gjakovë/Đakovica in 2012



In addition to the absence of reconstruction work on the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity and the factual erasure of its presence, also the restoration of the Church of the Holy Assumption of the Holy Virgin has not resulted in good inter-community relations. This is evidenced by attacks on visitors of the church as well as the fact that the four elderly Serb nuns at the site still live under 24 hour protection of the Kosovo Police, are escorted on any travel outside of its walls and have no contact with the majority community (OSCE 2011a). According to scholars and respondents, *history* has played a major role in influencing whether or not to embrace reconstruction and has come in threefold form: the history of the site, the history of prewar place attachments to it and the wartime history of the city at large. First, the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity was a

concrete construction built in the late 1990s on the foundations of an earlier church. While Serbs thus consider it a historical object, Albanians see it as a political church that was part of Slobodan Milošević' Serbification campaign (Herscher/Riedlmayer 2000: 110f.). Since “[t]he construction of the building [...] [already] gave rise to controversy” (UNESCO 2005a: 15), it appears only natural that also its reconstruction would. Second and consequently, the attitude of the majority population towards the church was already negative before the outbreak of hostilities. A heritage report of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (2005: 262) describes these feelings as follows:

This is a 20th century church that represents the torture and horror of the 1998–99 war to the local Kosovo-Albanian population. Many Gjakovar families say they lost their loved ones in that church. Built in 1998 with municipal funds as a memorial to Serbian troops, [...] it has [now] been totally demolished. For most people in Gjakova it was just a relief to be rid of what they see as a symbol of terror. It is not very likely that it will ever be reconstructed.

In this regard, the Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin was slightly better placed, as it was a construction from the 19th century on the site of an older 16th century foundation. However, the social effects of its reconstruction have also been hampered by the third problematic aspect of history, namely the wartime happenings in Gjakovë/Đakovica. The city has seen an exceptionally high level of destruction and violence, with many people still missing up to the present day. Such personal painful memories greatly complicate the quest for reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, complete destruction as in Gjakovë/Đakovica has been the exception rather than the rule during the March riots and hence the question is more likely when rather than if reconstruction will take place. While this section has highlighted how the *scale* of reconstruction works and the place-related *history* can lead to disagreement and revive painful memories, the next example will thus focus on the matter of *timing*.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview, NGO representative in the field of cultural heritage, Prishtinë/Priština, 11 July 2012

### 3.4. Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje: Too Little, Too Late?

Standing outside the fence of the Church of Saint Nicholas on the main street of Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje (see figure 3), we had apparently attracted the attention of the local priest's little son and, as he came toddling towards us, also his father's. The priest kindly let us in, showed us the inside of the church and thereafter explained to us over a cup of Turkish coffee how they were still waiting for the allocation of funds towards the completion of the reconstruction works.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the church building was affected by fires set in the lobby area and the altar place in March 2004 and, although UNESCO (2005a: 17) judged the situation to "require minor repairs only", no interventions have been carried out since the initial protective measures of 2005. Thus, repairs to the church and the restoration of its wall paintings are still needed (CoE 2011: 87).

At a later occasion, I asked one Serb woman who was part of the Serbian Orthodox community of Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje whether she thought that the church was still going to be reconstructed. She replied the following: "What does it matter? The people are gone". While accurate population statistics are unfortunately not available for Kosovo, the municipality has indeed seen a large decrease of its minority communities, including Kosovo Serbs, and "a considerable number is still displaced" (OSCE 2011b: 1; see also ECMI n.a.). Recent estimates put the size of the Serb community in the municipality between two and four per cent of the total population, mainly living in the villages of Kuzmin and Brecë/Bresje. The Serbs of the town of Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje have already adapted to this situation by holding their weekly liturgy in the nearby Church of Saint Catherine in Brecë/Bresje.

What this example shows is the crucial importance of *timing*. Long delays have both symbolic and pragmatic consequences, leading to a general disillusionment among the local Serb population and making it unlikely for the reconstruction to feed into the return process of displaced persons. At the same time, the local Serbian Orthodox community will inevitably search for alternatives to live their religious life and, as these alternatives turn into routine, so does the reversion to the earlier state of affairs become

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<sup>9</sup> The Church of Saint Nicholas is part of the RIC process. As its mandate came to an end in 2010 and the initial funds have been exhausted, the completion of reconstruction works depends on the political agreement over the programme's continuation.

a thing of the distant future. *Timing* and *scale* are the most general factors governing the reconstruction process, with *history* playing itself out in the background. Having provided these first insights into the social effects of physical reconstruction, the thesis will now turn to the complimentary protection measures.

**Figure 3:** Church of Saint Nicholas in Fushë Kosova/Kosovo Polje



## 4. Protection

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“Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offence.”

Robert Frost, Mending Wall (extract)

Much of the analysis so far has focused on the Serbian Orthodox architecture itself by studying it as a form of text and embedding it in its social context, in alignment with representational cultural geography. However, attention also has to be paid to the activities surrounding and interacting with the buildings. To this end, the following chapter will deal with the protection efforts in their twofold shape of security measures and urban planning, thereby reproducing the wider move in cultural-geographic theory from representation to performance.

### 4.1. Cultural Geography at the Intersection of Representational and Non-representational Theory

During the last decades, there has been a shift in cultural geography from representational to what has been termed post-, non- or more-than-representational theory. In essence, this advance is based on a critique of the representational orthodoxy for relying too heavily on “textual accounts of the immediate worlds” and “discursive approaches through interviews, focus groups and the analysis of documents” (Nayak 2011: 284). Its preoccupation with “*theories* and *things*” (Anderson 2010: 30) is said to have resulted in a neglect of other important aspects of existence, namely emotions, actions and embodiment.

This “focus on practices, on the *experiences* rather than the *things* that constitute our world” (ibid.: 32), carries implications with regard to both content and methodology. On the one hand, temporary events, everyday routines and affective actions have taken centre stage in the studies inspired by the non-representational rethinking of cultural life. On the other hand, the practices and feelings under examination are considered to be “*before* or *beyond* conventional linguistic representation” (ibid.: 31) and thus need to be approached through embodied geographies. This is to say that, under the given

theoretical assumptions, geographic research practice is based on the participation and sensuous observation of the researcher.

Although it has been acknowledged that there is much value in a stronger engagement with actions and performativity to understand worldly experiences “in their moments of creation” (ibid.: 32), non-representational theory has also been met with criticism. Mainly, it is argued that, even in dealing with intangible sensations, one cannot escape the use of language and the written word – “the world of representation” (ibid.: 33) – in order to communicate such feelings and findings. What is passed on are thus always experiences put into words rather than the experiences themselves. In light of these weaknesses, most authors see non-representational theory as “something of a cult pursuit rather than mainstream practice” (Nayak 2011: 291) and argue for a synthesis with instead of a renunciation of representational thinking. The following chapters will make use of these ideas in order to understand the effects of the protection measures provided for Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo.

#### **4.2. Protection through KFOR and the Kosovo Police**

On 10 June 1999, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1244 on the situation relating to Kosovo. At its core, it authorised the establishment of an international civil and security presence, placing Kosovo under interim administration by the UN and the protection of a NATO-led peacekeeping force. Acting under Chapter VII, this military presence was tasked, *inter alia*, to “deter renewed hostilities”, “establish a secure environment” and “ensure public safety and order” (UNSC 1999: 3). Within the resolution, the only explicit mention of Serbian Orthodox properties is made in annex 2 which envisions that “[a]fter withdrawal, an agreed number of Yugoslav and Serbian personnel will be permitted to return to perform the following functions: [...] maintaining a presence at Serb patrimonial sites [...]” (ibid.: 6). Although this provision has never been implemented, KFOR troops were eventually deployed to 151 churches, monasteries and other patrimonial sites in the weeks and months following the official end of the Kosovo War (Herscher 2010: 136).

In 2001, KFOR began to downsize the security measures and hand over the responsibility for protecting Serbian Orthodox religious sites to the Kosovo Police. This

process, however, lost momentum in 2003, in reaction to complaints of the Serbian Orthodox Church about violent offenders who took advantage of the lowered security levels. The incapability of KFOR to prevent the large-scale destruction of the March riots only a year later revived debate about need for strong security measures. The Ahtisaari Plan of March 2007, officially called the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement, dedicated its entire annex V to religious and cultural heritage, in which it reaffirmed that the main responsibility for ensuring its security lay with the domestic law enforcement agencies, especially the KPS. However, KFOR was still tasked with providing security for eight Serbian Orthodox monasteries as well as the Gazimestan memorial monument<sup>10</sup>, “until such time as the IMP [International Military Presence] [...] decides that conditions have been met for transfer of these responsibilities to the KPS” (UNSC 2007: 39). When this time came in mid-2010, the decision of NATO’s North Atlantic Council was heavily criticised by members of the Serbian Orthodox Church and Serbian politicians, claiming that the majority-Albanian police force could not secure the safety of the holy sites and, in fact, had itself been involved in their targeting during the March riots (BalkanInsight 2011). Against these objections, the guarding tasks were transferred in a phased manner, beginning with the Gračanica Monastery in August 2010. Most recently, the Dević Monastery has seen the shift of responsibility, leaving only the monastery in Deçan/Dečani and the Peć Patriarchate under the auspices of KFOR (2012: 14).

Reverting to the theoretical introduction, the protection efforts have produced their very own security architecture as well as performances. On the one hand, fences and walls have been erected, signs have been put up, barbed wire has been installed and security booths have been put in place (see figures 3, 4 and 5).<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, guard posts carry out passport controls as a matter of routine and barriers are being complemented by regular patrols which leave a temporary rather than permanent imprint in those places. The main concern of all these measures is naturally with enhancing security. There is both an objective and a subjective dimension to this policy goal, as exemplified by the statement of Serbia’s former Minister for Kosovo and Metohija Goran

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<sup>10</sup> Gazimestan is a monument north of Prishtinë/Priština which commemorates the historical Battle of Kosovo. On the occasion of its 600th anniversary on 28 June 1989, Slobodan Milošević delivered a controversial speech at this scene (Judah 2008: 67).

<sup>11</sup> This is broadly similar to the “increasingly permanent architectural footprint” of the international aid industry as described by Mark Duffield (2010: 455).

Bogdanović (2010; emphasis added) that “[t]he KFOR decision [...] adds additional fuel to the *sense of insecurity and mistrust* among the Serbian people in the province”. Objectively, there has been a general decline in security incidents involving cultural and religious heritage sites. Nowadays, most of these acts comprise theft and vandalism (ICO 2011: 18; OSCE 2012: 19f.). Subjectively however, there is a persisting threat perception among the protected group of Kosovar Serbs and, even more so, it is interesting for the present purpose of this thesis to explore the wider placemaking mechanisms of the security arrangements, including their intended and unintended subjective effects for the Albanian population.

**Figure 4:** Security booth at the Church of the Birth of the Holy Virgin in Obiliq/Obilić



In cultural-geographic terms, the measures taken by KFOR and the KPS in order to fulfil their mandate have to be understood as forms of “cultural ordering and geographical bordering” (Anderson 2010: 41). Exercising control over both behaviour and access, they do not only regulate whose place this is but also reify this view of what activities and people are welcome, thus producing patterns of inclusion and exclusion as well as the categories of insiders and outsiders. “As traces order our sense of belonging,

barriers, frontiers, walls and wire reinforce this order through physically imposing limits to movement, people, and places” (ibid.: 42).

In fact, it is exactly the intention behind the security architecture and performances at the Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo to deter ill-minded people. However, these protective measures have been overachieving in terms of their deterrent effect, extending their sphere of influence to the normal population. For example, a local NGO representative reported that he was not allowed to enter the Visoki Dečani Monastery in 2005, for the sole reason of being Albanian and despite his employment at an expert organisation in the field of cultural heritage. He described the military presence at these sites as “intimidating” and thus judged the handover of guarding tasks to the KSP as a positive development in terms of improving public perception.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the Episcopal Church of Saint George in Prizren, it is also stated that the removal of provisional protective elements has improved the urban integration of the church (Montañés 2012: 10).

All this is not to say that there have not been reasonable grounds for setting up protective structures and performing security rituals. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the deterrence of the regular Albanian population has been an unfortunate side-effect that has worked at cross-purposes with the goal of fostering reconciliation. *Accessibility* is a crucial factor for promoting positive place attachments, for how are Albanians supposed to embrace these Serbian Orthodox buildings as their own cultural heritage if they are denied entry or only permitted under the watchful eyes of armed soldiers or policemen?

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, NGO representative in the field of cultural heritage, Prishtinë/Priština, 11 July 2012

**Figure 5:** Gate and barbed wire at the Church of Saint Saviour in Prizren



**Figure 6:** Patriarchate in Pejë/Peć



**Figure 7:** Visoki Dečani Monastery



### 4.3. Pejë/Peć and Dečan/Dečani: Overwhelming historical significance

It might seem paradox that two sites, namely the Patriarchate in Pejë/Peć and the Visoki Dečani Monastery, which “ha[ve] not been damaged by the military conflict” (UNESCO 2005a: 7) nor the March riots are currently awarded the greatest level of protection. However, the monastery in Dečan/Dečani was inscribed on the UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 2004, which was extended in 2006 to include the Peć Patriarchate, the Gračanica Monastery and the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviška in Prizren under the new collective entry as “Medieval Monuments in Kosovo”. Jointly, they were placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger at the same occasion (UNESCO 2004; 2006b). It is interesting to note that these properties are inscribed as Serbian cultural heritage and there have been repeated attempts to change this inscription to ‘Kosovar’, although Kosovo is not a member state of UNESCO. This “diplomatic war” (B92 2011) shows the intrinsic connection between questions of status, power and ownership.

While the heritage inscription is mainly based on the artistic and architectural value of the sites, they are also of extraordinary importance to the Serbian Orthodox Church (see figures 6 and 7). The Peć Patriarchate originated in the 13th century and has been the centre of the church for decades, following its upgrade from an archbishopric to a patriarchate in 1346 by Tsar Dušan. Only two centuries earlier, his father King Stefan of Dečani had decided to construct a monastery where he would later be buried and which now carries his name. Both sites host a large collection of frescos, icons, relics, books and manuscripts (Dečani monks 2007; Petković 2009).

Correspondingly, when asked about the meaning of these places, respondents have described them as “very important and part of Serb identity”<sup>13</sup> or restated their symbolism for Kosovo as the “cradle” of the Serbian nation and church.<sup>14</sup> The representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church has been especially eager to point out that this historical and spiritual significance is felt by the whole Serb nation and not

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<sup>13</sup> Interview, Serbian humanitarian worker, Gračanicë/Gračanica, 5 June 2012

<sup>14</sup> Interview, Advisor to the EUSR in Kosovo, Prishtinë/Priština, 30 May 2012

Interview, Representative of the Cultural Heritage Unit at the International Civilian Office, Prishtinë/Priština, 15 June 2012

only Kosovar Serbs.<sup>15</sup> It shows how “culture, and specifically, architecture, was –and remains– the symbolic centerpiece of Serb nationalist claims to [sovereignty over] the province” (Herscher/Riedlmayer 2000: 109). What has, however, been even more interesting to learn is that these sites are also not meaningless for other religious communities and the Albanian population in general. As a Catholic priest highlighted, the master builder of the monastic church of Visoki Dečani was Fra Vita, a Franciscan friar from Kotor in present-day Montenegro.<sup>16</sup> On a more private level, it has been a common narrative in many interviews that also Albanian people used to visit the monasteries in such locations as Deçan/Dečani and Pejë/Peć, in order to take a walk, have a picnic or even to pray, regardless of their own confession.<sup>17</sup> In his account, the representative of the Kosovar Islamic Community went as far as to interpret the relative absence of violent attacks against these sites as a sign of their protection through the local majority-Albanian population.<sup>18</sup> A similar statement can be found in an advisory report to UNESCO (2006a: 143), saying that the “Gračanica and Peć Patriarchate monasteries were not damaged during the war in Kosovo, largely because of respect of local communities of all ethnic origins”.

Providing positive counter-examples to the churches in Gjakovë/Đakovica, the medieval monasteries in Kosovo can build on an overwhelming *historical significance* and the *personal history* of people-place relationships. If positive place attachments were also in place at an earlier point in time, it appears more likely to successfully revive this “thread of continuity” (Stanley-Prince 2007) rather than attempting to inspire those affirmative feelings from scratch. Since they also appear to receive more international and Albanian visitors nowadays than most regular churches, the workings of history may even be able to overcome barriers of accessibility.<sup>19</sup> Nowadays, one still has to get past a passport control and pass through an area marked by walls, armed soldiers and military vehicles in order to enter (see figure 8). What is more, beauty and sacredness have not allowed the sites to escape violent assaults completely. It presents a

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<sup>15</sup> Interview, Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pejë/Peć, 19 July 2012

<sup>16</sup> Interview, Catholic priest, Prishtinë/Priština, 14 June 2012; see also Dečani monks (2007: 16).

<sup>17</sup> Interview, Representative of the Cultural Heritage Unit at the International Civilian Office, Prishtinë/Priština, 15 June 2012

Interview, Representative of the Council of Europe Office, Prishtinë/Priština, 25 June 2012

Interview, Representative of the Kosovar Islamic Community, Prishtinë/Priština, 26 June 2012

Interview, NGO representative in the field of cultural heritage, Prishtinë/Priština, 11 July 2012

<sup>18</sup> Interview, Representative of the Kosovar Islamic Community, Prishtinë/Priština, 26 June 2012

<sup>19</sup> Interview, Representative of the Council of Europe Office, Prishtinë/Priština, 25 June 2012

paradox that the world heritage site of Visoki Dečani Monastery has also been the scene of the most serious security incident involving Serbian Orthodox property since the March riots, facing an attack with a rocket-propelled grenade in March 2007 which fortunately left no significant damage (ICO 2011: 24). In the Peć Patriarchate, verbal offences are said to take place on a regular basis.<sup>20</sup> Such incidents illustrate the difficulty of generalising about the feelings of the Albanian population towards Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo. Even where a majority might share positive attachments, there is still a minority that adopts hostile attitudes against them and is at times even willing to commit violent acts.<sup>21</sup> It is this extremist minority and the deficient rule of law that still leave feelings of insecurity on the Serb side and led a church representative to state that the protective arrangements are “still needed” nowadays. Interestingly, he also drew this conclusion with reference to a prewar incident in 1981 when a fire burned down a guesthouse (Herscher 2010: 47-53).<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 8:** First entrance gate to the Patriarchate in Pejë/Peć



<sup>20</sup> Interview, Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pejë/Peć, 19 July 2012

<sup>21</sup> Interview, Representative of the Council of Europe Office, Prishtinë/Priština, 25 June 2012

Interview, Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pejë/Peć, 19 July 2012

<sup>22</sup> Interview, Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pejë/Peć, 19 July 2012

This section has largely focused on the present-day security arrangements at Serbian Orthodox religious sites in their most powerful form of KFOR protection. It has been analysed how the corresponding physical barriers and safety routines limit the *accessibility* of these locations and, consequently, the possibility for personal place experience and interreligious encounters. *History* has again shown to influence the eventual social effects in either a positive or negative direction, by inspiring people to overcome the deterrent appearance of the military presence and by extending the long shadow of the past into the present.

#### **4.4. Protection through Spatial Planning**

A third complementary element of the international rehabilitative and protective activities has been the establishment of Special Protective Zones (SPZ) around certain cultural heritage sites in Kosovo, including a number of Serbian Orthodox places. The Ahtisaari Plan, which was adopted by the Kosovo Assembly following its declaration of independence in 2008, named forty churches and monasteries to be granted this special form of protection, while six additional ones were to be included in the Protective Zone for the Historic Centre of Prizren. Setting up such SPZs is a common tool in urban planning and by no means unique to the context of Kosovo. The idea behind them is summarised in the Ahtisaari Plan (UNSC 2007: 40) as follows:

To provide for the peaceful existence and functioning of these sites to be protected; preserve their historical, cultural and natural environment, including the monastic way of life of the clergy; and prevent adverse development around them, while ensuring the best possible conditions for harmonious and sustainable development of the communities inhabiting the areas surrounding such sites.

To this end, certain construction or development activities are listed as prohibited, while others require the agreement of the Serbian Orthodox Church and may be referred to the newly-established Implementation and Monitoring Council for dispute resolution.<sup>23</sup> Such actions do not only apply to new building projects but also “public gatherings, recreation and entertainment” (ibid.: 40), thus performances. As outlined above, the

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<sup>23</sup> At the time of writing, the Implementation and Monitoring Council has only been functioning on the basis of an exchange of letters rather than regular meetings.

policy objectives seek to regulate activities within the protected areas with regard to both the emerging physical structures and the sense of place. To give a crude example, the spirituality and sacredness of a church are most likely to be endangered by the construction of a bar or night club in its vicinity, just as a nearby motorway or swimming pool would negatively affect the calm and seclusion of a monastery.

There has already been significant progress in translating the provisions of the Ahtisaari Plan into domestic law, as exemplified by the Law on Special Protective Zones from 2008 and the recent laws on Hoça e Madhe/Velika Hoča and the Historic Centre of Prizren. However, the process of passing this legislation has been a difficult one and, as so often, major problems remain in its implementation and enforcement (ICO 2011). Violations are not only common but also under-sanctioned, which has led some respondents to consider Kosovo's Serbian Orthodox sites more endangered by uncontrolled development in its physical surroundings than by the threat of violent attack.<sup>24</sup>

A recent report of the International Civilian Office (ICO 2011: 13f.) on the implementation of SPZs in Kosovo lists three common misunderstandings of this tool of spatial planning which have hindered progress in this field and given rise to irritation, resentment and even open dispute. First, "Special Protective Zones are not extra-territorial zones where Kosovo's institutions do not exercise their legitimate authority, as often misperceived. [...] The Church does not have extra-territorial control in SPZs" (ibid.: 14). Second, a restriction of public access is neither part of the legal provisions nor in the interest of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Third, individual land owners in the SPZs are still able to use their land and develop activities, as long as they observe the laws. The violations and misunderstandings of SPZs are often the result of a *lack of awareness* among the public as well as local authorities. Since the Serbian Orthodox Church is, in contrast, perfectly acquainted with the protective rights of its property, they have been quick to point out numerous illegal activities within the SPZs, as in the case of Zoqishtë/Zočište.

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<sup>24</sup> Interview, Representative of the Cultural Heritage Unit at the International Civilian Office, Prishtinë/Priština, 15 June 2012  
Interview, NGO representative in the field of cultural heritage, Prishtinë/Priština, 11 July 2012

#### **4.5. Zoqishtë/Zočište: The misunderstanding of Special Protective Zones**

The Monastery of the Holy Healers Cosmas and Damian is an interesting case for a number of reasons, even beyond its status as a SPZ. First, it is one of the few Serbian Orthodox places which were gutted and destroyed in 1999 and have been reconstructed, despite the international focus on the sites of the 2004 riots. Reconstruction works on the monastery started in 2004, as the result of a private rather than international initiative, and were financed by the Serbian Coordinating Centre for Kosovo and Metohija.<sup>25</sup>

Second, the monastery is a Special Protective Zone, in accordance with both the Ahtisaari Plan and the corresponding domestic law. A legal dispute arose in 2011, when the municipality of Rahovec/Orahovac undertook work to rehabilitate and extend the road just below the monastery without consulting the Serbian Orthodox Church, in violation of the Law on Special Protective Zones as well as the Law on Expropriation. Due to the location of the monastic complex on the adjacent hill, church representatives also raised concern over potential landslides caused by the widening of the road. This case illustrates the general neglect of the legal provisions on SPZ by the local authorities and their failure to properly implement them, resulting in renewed tensions and outcries of the Serbian Orthodox Church. At the same time, the resolution of this dispute also shows the importance of functioning relations between the local religious and political actors. According to the ICO<sup>26</sup>, Zoqishtë/Zočište is an “example of good cooperation between both sides”, which has led to a peaceful settlement based on an exchange of lands and the construction of a supportive fence. On another positive side note, controversial projects can also strengthen inter-community relations and cooperation, as a joint petition of the Zočište monastery and the Kosovo Albanian residents of the village against the planned opening of a nearby quarry illustrates (OSCE 2011a: S-44f.).

To mention a third interesting point about the place of the Monastery of the Holy Healers, its old bell tower used to carry a Serbian flag at its very top which, due to the

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<sup>25</sup> Interview, Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pejë/Peć, 19 July 2012; see also CoE (2009: 77-79).

<sup>26</sup> Interview, Representative of the Cultural Heritage Unit at the International Civilian Office, Prishtinë/Priština, 15 June 2012; see also ERP (2011) and UNSC (2011: 10f.).

monastery's elevated position, could be seen over a long distance. The flag sparked a dispute, as the local Albanian population took an offence in it yet the monks refused to remove it, even when asked to do so by the international authorities (UNMIK 2007). Although the display of flags is widespread all around Kosovo, most commonly showing the Albanian double-headed eagle on red ground, it was considered inappropriate and provocative for a religious complex to brace itself with the state flag of the Republic of Serbia. Eventually, this symbol was exchanged for a flag of the Serbian Orthodox church, with the national cross rather than the coat of arms at its centre (see figure 9). In this regard, it is important to recall the misunderstanding of SPZs as extra-territorial entities and understand how the politicised use of symbols may have contributed to nurturing this myth. The flag dispute draws attention to the small things in life and their influence on public perceptions as well as the normalisation of inter-religious relations.

**Figure 9:** Bell tower of the Monastery of the Holy Healers in Zoqishtë/Zočište



## 5. Everyday performances

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“What is a church?” – Our honest sexton tells,  
" 'Tis a tall building, with a tower and bells.”

George Crabbe, *The Borough*

It has been shown that the protective measures towards Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo are an object of study which has to be placed at the intersection of representational and non-representational cultural geography. On the one hand, they have produced their own security architecture or sought to control changes in the physical environment. On the other hand, their functioning also relies partially on carrying out daily routines while restricting other temporary practices. To truly capture the importance of such performances, this last chapter will complete the move towards the level of the everyday.

### 5.1. Place and Practice

Recalling the definition of place, enlivenment is a key element in making and shaping localities. This close relation between place and practice is best understood by looking at the following lines by Tim Cresswell (2009: 170):

Places are continuously enacted as people go about their everyday lives – going to work, doing the shopping, spending leisure time, and hanging out on street corners. The sense we get of a place is heavily dependent on practice and, particularly, the reiteration of practice on a regular basis. Space becomes a place when it is used and lived. Experience is at the heart of what place means. Materiality, meaning, and practice are all linked.

As the quote makes clear, the emphasis of a performance-based approach to place is not so much on outstanding historical events than on the everyday mundane activities, in which we take part routinely “without really having worked out why” (Anderson 2010: 32) and “that are not as ‘thought through’ as the creation of architectural edifice” (ibid.: 31).

Combining these thoughts with the research topic at hand, it needs to be acknowledged that the mere reconstruction and protection of the Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo is, by itself, insufficient and needs to be complemented by a subsequent regeneration in order to breathe new life into these physical structures. What matters is not only the “production” of place but also its “consumption” (Dixon 2010: 399; Gruffudd 2003: 239). In fact, some policy documents already rudimentarily feature such ideas and show an appreciation of the need for a normalisation of religious practice by incorporating them into the stated policy objectives. For example, the final RIC report lists its achievement in terms of reconstruction and repairs in direct connection with “promoting the opportunity for these sites to have a future and positive functional uses once more within the communities in which they stand” (CoE 2011: 18). In a similar line, a UNESCO report (2006a: 143) has stated with regard to the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviška that “[w]hen sufficient safety is ensured, it is intended that the church will once again function as a place of worship”.

Seeing a church as a place of worship is possibly the most straightforward answer to the question for its function. In this understanding, the enlivenment following reconstruction thus rests first and foremost with the revival of monastic or religious life, especially in the form of liturgy. However, this thesis has also developed a keen interest in the ringing of the church bells as an act of placemaking which acoustically reveals the presence of a Christian minority. This is of special importance in a country like Kosovo, where the Islamic call to prayer can be heard five times a day. In general, a church should not only serve the religious needs of the Serbian Orthodox believers, but also engage in a regular interaction with the local community more generally.

## **5.2. Mitrovicë/Mitrovica: What makes a church a church**

There stands a church in southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, the Church of Saint Sava. Dating back to the end of the 19th century, the interior of the church complex was completely destroyed by fire in March 2004 and the parish house was burned down. Following immediate protective interventions in 2005, the site was handed over to UNESCO in 2008 who carried out the reconstruction and restoration works through a financial contribution of the USA. According to reports, the first phase was finalised in

2010 and the church opened for the public at Easter that year (CoE 2011: 57, 163; OSCE 2011a: 38).

**Figure 10:** Church of Saint Sava in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica



Outside of this rare occasion, the beauty of the reconstructed building can only be taken in from a distance, standing behind an iron fence (see figure 10). Since the parish house and belfry still need to be restored, no priest has been assigned to the church yet, no weekly liturgy is being held and there is no ringing of church bells to be heard. Arguably, religious services have been held at the Church of Saint Sava at special occasions, in particular to celebrate Orthodox Easter or Christmas (OSCE 2011a: 38f.). However, these gatherings are specially organised and intentional, and thus cannot be seen to represent banal day-to-day practice. More often than not, the Serb attendees of such special liturgies have been escorted to the southern part of the city by KFOR or the KPS, which is another indicator to show that this lived geography reaffirms the abnormal rather than normalised state of affairs in Mitrovicë/Mitrovica.

Keeping in mind Prys Gruffudd's (2003: 239) remark that "there's a danger of allowing the facade to overwhelm any kind of functional understanding", there is, in fact, a pragmatic logic behind the relative absence of religious life at the Church of Saint Sava. Following the events of March 2004, the new Church of Saint Demetrios was built on a hill on the northern side of the river Ibar and consecrated in 2005 (BBC 2007). This is where Bishop Artemije, head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo, told hundreds of Serbs on the eve of Kosovo's declaration of independence that "[w]e are all expecting something difficult and horrible" (Reuters 2008). This is where his successor Bishop Teodosije served the Easter liturgy this year (B92 2012). This is where the weekly religious service for the local religious community is held.

Located in the Serb-dominated area of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, the church is still on a KFOR patrolling route but can operate without disturbance. The construction and use of the Church of Saint Demetrios shows that the Serbian Orthodox Church has pragmatically adapted to the post-war reality in Kosovo. In light of these new conditions, reconstruction cannot be a return to the status quo ante, because it is bound by *population changes* and the *local demographic composition*. The city of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica has been almost completely ethnically divided since the 1999 conflict and, although there is a significant number of Albanians in the northern part, very few Serbs live on the south side of the river (ECMI n.a.; OSCE 2011c). In its 2005 report, UNESCO (2005a: 18). refers to this demographic fact in order to argue for the imperative to reconstruct the Church of Saint Sava: "As Mitrovica is divided by the

river in two parts, it is important that the southern part be restored to ensure a balance in the historical memory of the two communities”. Others, however, have come to question the value of such an initiative, even openly in exchanges with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church.<sup>27</sup>

From an optimistic point of view, there is still hope that life will return to the Church of Saint Sava on a regular basis. Other more positive examples show that the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood does not in itself determine the prospects for reconciliation. In Prishtinë/Priština and Prizren, the newly reconstructed churches of Saint Nicholas and Saint George serve weekly liturgies and let their bells be heard twice a day, despite an estimated Serb population in the respective municipalities well below one per cent (OSCE 2011d; 2011e). This is even the case for Gjakovë/Đakovica, where weekly service is provided in the Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin by the monks from Visoki Dečani Monastery, although “almost no Serbs remain in the municipality” (ECMI n.a.).<sup>28</sup>

However, holy liturgy is no panacea and does not yet establish ties to the non-Serb population, as the example of Gjakovë/Đakovica with its remaining tensions illustrates. This is where the second challenge comes in, that is to engage in an exchange and dialogue with the local community. In comparison to Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and Gjakovë/Đakovica, the churches in Prishtinë/Priština and Prizren have two major advantages in this regard. First, they can build on a multiethnic history of the cities before the fighting of the 1990s. Second, their parish houses are home to a priest and his family. Local priests are the outreach programme of the Serbian Orthodox Church at the grass-roots level. This is why a recent mission report on the remaining tasks within the RIC process has stressed the need to rebuild parish houses and inhabit those which already have been restored (Montañés 2012: 50). According to an ICO representative, the priest of Prizren even leaves the church complex at times to walk around the nearby streets and is greeted kindly by the people.<sup>29</sup> Although this sets a beautiful example for conciliatory trivial practice, it is evidently dependent on a permissive as well as safe environment and possibly aided by the location of the Episcopal Church of Saint

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<sup>27</sup> Interview, Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pejë/Peć, 19 July 2012

<sup>28</sup> Interview, Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Pejë/Peć, 19 July 2012

<sup>29</sup> Interview, Representative of the Cultural Heritage Unit at the International Civilian Office, Prishtinë/Priština, 15 June 2012; see also ERP (2011) and UNSC (2011: 10f.).

George in the very centre of the city. Unfortunately, freedom of movement is the exception rather than the rule for Serbian Orthodox priests, monks and nuns in Kosovo (OSCE 2011a).

Where this is the case, exchange can still take place within the church premises and international organisations well as NGOs have already had a role to play in fostering such dialogue by organising site visits and cultural heritage tours as part of their educational and public awareness campaigns. Not only do such activities provide the opportunity for the non-Serb population to experience the spirit of the churches and monasteries in person, but also to engage in direct contact and overcome stereotypes. Since such initiatives are heavily dependent on curiosity on the part of the potential visitors and openness on the part of the host, *personal attitudes* are a last but immensely important factor whether reconstruction will result in reconciliation. Although attitudes are not static and open to appeals to all sides to be open-minded and welcoming, changing mentalities and mindsets is a sensitive and complex issue, especially in the aftermath of violence, making them possibly the strongest barrier. Reconstruction and protection efforts in themselves only serve to ensure the physical presence of the Serbian Orthodox religious sites and the Serb minority in Kosovo, but it takes place experience and time to go one step further towards reconciliation. However, without the former there would never be the latter.

## 6. In Lieu of a Conclusion: Reconstruction, Protection and Reconciliation

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“When traumatised people fail to play out our script of reconciliation, we tend to blame them, rather than our own wishful thinking.”

Michael Ignatieff (2003: 38)

Cultural destruction is an unfortunately common feature of contemporary conflict. Beyond condemnation and grief, this raises the very practical issue how to proceed with such damaged sites in the aftermath of architectural violence. Although taking its starting point in understanding the intentional targeting of cultural places, this thesis has focused on exactly those follow-up policies and their relation to the overall goals of peace and reconciliation. In particular, the reconstruction and protection of Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo have taken centre stage in the research and provided a concrete set of placemaking initiatives from which to study the linkage between physical and societal transformations in a bounded setting. As they are interconnected and express shared policy objections, three components of the international engagement with these special sites have been taken into consideration: their reconstruction, their physical protection through military or police personnel and their legal protection through reasonable spatial planning.

While these undertakings may appear merely technical tasks at first sight, they are, in fact, highly sensitive and value-laden, because religious sites are meaningful and contested at the same time. That is why the thesis has built on a comprehensive analytic framework based on ideas from cultural geography. First and foremost, the churches and monasteries under investigation have been treated as places, signifying that they have intangible characteristics beyond their geographical location and material surface. Second, the meanings and feelings attached to them are subject to a dynamic process of intentional and unintentional changes, to which the reconstruction and protection efforts have contributed. Third, the direction of this transformation has been contrasted with the stated policy goals to establish shared attachments and thereby improve intercommunal ties.

As inter-group relations remain fragile in Kosovo and the reconstructed and protected Serbian Orthodox religious sites have not been embraced as the common cultural

heritage of all people in the country, it has been the aim to move beyond merely showing this gap between rhetoric and reality and come to an understanding of the conditions behind it. The personal site visits as well as common themes and narratives brought up during the interviews have allowed for the compilation of a list of influencing factors that have made a difference to the nature of the locally-produced sense of place. In the course of the analysis, these issues and their effects have been illustrated through the presentation of specific case studies. To begin with, the *scale* and *timing* of reconstruction have been discussed in relation to their potential for sparking public and political dispute, giving rise to feelings of disillusionment and being undermined by the setup of pragmatic alternatives. In their attempt to ensure safety, physical security measures have been shown to mainly influence the degree of *accessibility* which is decisive for the production of personal place experiences and enabling interreligious dialogue. Currently, uncontrolled urban development is often perceived to pose an even greater danger to Serbian Orthodox sites in Kosovo than physical violence and thus violations of the legal protection regime in terms of spatial planning have been the cause of a heated debate. Unfortunately, many of these contestations are rooted in a *lack of knowledge and awareness*.

Essentially, *history* has been an underlying theme throughout the entire research project. Although it might not come as a surprise that history matters, the analysis has unfolded three important aspects why it does. The history of a religious complex in terms of its age and origins plays a major role in detaching its reconstruction or protection from current political debates. While this artistic or spiritual significance often has its roots in the distant past, recent prewar and wartime history shapes personal attitudes towards the places. These existent sentiments, feelings and memories are vital to a successful societal transformation, as they are the real target of the reconstruction and protection campaigns. In a wider context, also the degree to which the city and its population have been affected by the war at large may influence the general perceptions of the 'other'. What is more, wartime happenings do not only have symbolic and emotive effects, but they also produce very real consequences by initiating *population changes* and altering *demographic patterns*. While these new sensitivities and demographic realities are not necessarily linked directly to architecture, they provide a conducive or impedimental background to the endeavour to mobilise the material sphere in support of reconciliation.

None of the issues raised should be understood as ultimately determining the prospects of improving intercommunal relations, since they interact with one another and each site brings together these factors in its own individual and characteristic combination. Successful reconciliation cannot be programmed into placemaking programmes, as the unexpected and the human keep changing the course of action. What has, however, proven useful is to rethink the direct connection that is commonly drawn between physical reconstruction and societal reconciliation, in order to add *enlivenment and interaction* as the missing links. It is my firm belief that much fear of the ‘other’ stems from a lack of exchange, experience and dialogue. Taking such a people-centred and interactional approach towards the role of cultural sites in post-conflict situations has explicit policy implications for following up the reconstruction and protection efforts and reanimating the Serbian Orthodox religious sites in Kosovo. On the one hand, it means that religious or monastic life needs to be restored and normalised for the sake of Serb population. On the other hand, Albanians should be encouraged to receive a personal impression by visiting the churches and monasteries. While this may be aided through organised trips or seminars, most of all, it requires the people themselves to break with their habits and jump over their own shadow.

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## 8. Annexes

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### 8.1. List of interviews

30 May 2012	Prishtinë/Priština	Advisor to the European Union Special Representative (EUSR) in Kosovo
5 June 2012	Graçanicë/Gračanica	Serbian humanitarian worker
14 June 2012	Prishtinë/Priština	Catholic priest
15 June 2012	Prishtinë/Priština	Representative of the Cultural Heritage Unit at the International Civilian Office
25 June 2012	Prishtinë/Priština	Representative of the Council of Europe Office
26 June 2012	Prishtinë/Priština	Representative of the Kosovar Islamic Community
29 June 2012	Prishtinë/Priština	Representative of the Department of Human Rights & Communities at the OSCE Mission to Kosovo
11 July 2012	Prishtinë/Priština	NGO representative in the field of cultural heritage
19 July 2012	Pejë/Peć	Representative of the Serbian Orthodox Church

## 8.2. List of site visits

### *Bellopolë / Belo Polje*

Church of the Presentation of the Virgin

### *Deçan / Dečani*

Visoki Dečani Monastery

### *Fushë Kosova / Kosovo Polje*

Church of Saint Nicholas

Church of Saint Catherine

### *Gjakovë / Đakovica*

Cathedral of the Holy Trinity

Church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin

### *Graçanicë / Gračanica*

Gračanica Monastery

### *Llaushë / Lauša*

Monastery of Saint Joanikije / Deviç Monastery

### *Mitrovicë / Mitrovica*

Church of Saint Sava

### *Obiliq / Obilić*

Church of the Birth of the Holy Virgin

### *Pejë / Peć*

Church of Saint John the Baptist

Patriarchate of Peć

### *Prishtinë / Priština*

Church of Saint Nicholas

*Prizren*

Church of the Holy Virgin Ljeviška

Church of Saint Nicholas

Church of Saint Saviour

Episcopal Church of Saint George

*Vushtrri / Vučitrn*

Church of Saint Elias

*Zoqishtë / Zočište*

Monastery of the Holy Healers Damian and Cosmas